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Come in...and be captivated...

"Our Stories"

We have decided to devote a portion of our magazine to non-fiction. These are stories of things that have happened serendipitously being in the right place at the right time or just heartfelt musings, thoughts, and feelings on life. Join us in our non-fiction section. These stories speak to anyone and everyone and are told by anyone and everyone who has a story to tell.



"Street Lamp and Red Leaves" Christopher Woods; www.moonbirdhillarts.etsy.com

Birthday Wish

By Noelle Sterne

Shortly after my divorce, in the lingering details of final separation, I went to the basement of the now-for-sale house to get my last cartons. The new bittersweet freedom nudged me to reawaken my old dream of writing, and files of half-finished manuscripts rested here, waiting for resuscitation. I descended the stairs with an unpleasant mix of familiarity and no longer belonging. Rummaging in the half-dark, I pushed away discarded furniture and half-used paint cans.

My cartons were wedged in a corner, and my eye caught a box marked "Mom." During her final illness, having thrashed through the inevitable generational battles, my mother and I became close. After clearing out her apartment, I kept some of her things.

I sat on the damp cement floor, hardly remembering what was in the box, and opened it. On the top, tied with gritty string, lay a packet encrusted with dust like old frosting. I brushed it off and broke the string.

In my hands separated two music scores. Their blue-gray covers had faded in spots to yellowed patches, and they emanated the musty, sweet smell of old books, victims of disuse and little air.

The scores were for a Brahms symphony and the Mendelssohn violin concerto. They were the size of small paperbacks, meant to fit easily into a briefcase or suit pocket when you went to a concert. You held them unobtrusively near the seat lights to follow the orchestra. I'd often seen my father slip a score into his jacket before he and my mother went to their New York Philharmonic subscription concerts.

I opened one of the scores. Inside the front flap, with a start I recognized my mother's handwriting. Attending to her affairs in her last frail years, I'd gotten very used to her hand. The script, written decades earlier, was exactly the same, letters thin and wobbly like a child's:

April 5

Many happy birthdays, Darling.

J.

Darling? Were these the parents I knew? She'd never called him that in all the years of my growing up. I could just make out by the faded year that they'd been married for two years, five years before their first child, my brother. The bloom was still on, and the hope.

Like every new couple, they'd started out full of wedding sparkle and family's beaming smiles. The unaccustomed feelings of love, they must have felt sure, would activate the magnificent aspirations each had held close long before they'd ever met. He would be the great violinist, she the great painter. And during the first two years that prompted my mother's dust-caked birthday wish, those dreams still crackled bright as virtuoso cadenzas.

But soon the "happiness," veneer at best, couldn't conceal my mother's frantic attempts at perfect wifhood, thwarting her creative needs, or my father's despair at the corrosion of his life's potential. In single young manhood, his dream propelled him to walk miles uphill to school to save the bus money for music lessons and work nights to buy his first third-hand violin. His fierce desire thrust him further—to the miracle of acceptance at Juilliard and dared hope of the dream reaching life.

Yet, as with so many couples, the jolts of adulthood insinuated and took over. And here he was, freighted with wife, children, and deadening administrative job that just supported the newly congratulated four-bedroom split-level.

Even so, he tried to regain the dream, practicing the Mendelssohn furiously on Sunday mornings and losing himself in the pocket scores at two-hour concerts. But neither they nor my mother—nor certainly the annoyance of children—could salve his psychic wounds.

These surfaced in many ways. He was tall, always a little too heavy, and, as my wide child eyes beheld him, a great stone edifice. His thunder-threatening countenance permeated the household, face blackened sky. He wielded no physical threat, but his colossal silences and bullying rages kept my brother and me frozen inside the house and out as much as we could manage. My mother took refuge in women friends, religion, Bach cantatas, and the furtive easel and

palette set up in the guest room closet.

Shortly before she died, she told me that sex had gone in six months, and "Darling" soon after. The rest was endurance. They stayed together as casualties of social etiquette, inertia, fear, and inbred precepts of loyalty. Locked in the struggle against each other, they denied themselves, took it out on their children, and lived the façade of suburban contentment. Until one May night, a month past his fifty-third birthday, after a harsh exchange and complaint of heartburn, he collapsed at midnight on the master bathroom floor.

My mother too paid her dear prices. She discovered early, contrary to what she'd been taught, that love and martyrdom do not conquer all. Yet she stumbled through her marriage, as if more cooking, tasteful curtains, clean children, placemats from Bloomingdale's, and constant attempts at placation would assuage his great hole of despair and somehow atone for her own "selfish" need to create.

Although she cheered the rising women's movement, it came too late to penetrate her upbringing. So she spent the entire twenty-four years of table-setting and Sunday pot roasts denying her artist's soul, until released by the last phrase of the vow.

After my father died, for the rest of her life, my mother avoided all possibility of another relationship, sure any other man would again stifle and drain her. Depriving herself of male companionship, maybe even love, instead she took a few painting classes, went out with women friends, listened to more Bach cantatas, and clung to her swallowed rage.

For many years, she seemed unaffected, but the rage demanded payment. It festered, spread, and weakened her beyond medical reclamation. In her last month, at 79, she finally voiced it. "I was angry at him all our married life. I never really forgave him."

Overtaken by these memories, I sighed as I sat on the cold floor in the dank basement air. Yes, the scores evoked bitter recollections, but now, with their shocking tender birthday wish, they felt precious in my hands. I thought of the emptiness I would now face and pain of my failed relationship. I thought of my ex-husband, his thwarted desires for success, and my own history of undeclared dreams and secret resentments. Could I somehow transmute the litany of

wrongs done me and still-raw anger into forgiveness of him? And recognition of my part in our debacle?

I had to. My mother's choices had ensnared her, and the only way to disinherit was to face myself. Only then might I still nurture my writer's soul, even find a true Darling. And on today's saner terms, beyond the old sacrosanct roles of woman and wife, which, as my mother sadly proved, could be lethal. Maybe this, and not her household items and few pieces of jewelry, was her real legacy.

I brushed off the scores, tucked them into my handbag, and closed the carton. Then I walked back upstairs and left the house. Maybe I'd return for the rest of my things, maybe not. I knew I'd recovered the most important of them and, with moist eyes, silently thanked my mother for her birthday wish.

US Navy Literary Life

By Don MacLaren

I would walk and walk and walk when we were in port – exploring around San Francisco or Oakland or Berkeley or San Diego... Navy pay was low for an E-2 or E-3 (a lower echelon enlisted man). But it didn't cost anything to walk if I was broke, and anyway doing anything outside, away from the Navy was preferable to being on the ship – broke or not. When I did have money I still walked all over the place. But I would often stop in a restaurant or a café, where I would read until my eyes couldn't stay open anymore. Then I would order coffee and read some more. I would write till I couldn't hold my pen anymore; then I would go back to reading till I could write again.

I would go to cheap Greek restaurants, cheap Filipino restaurants, cheap Korean, Polish and Italian restaurants. Chinatown in San Francisco, Chinatown in Oakland, Japantown – where I had spent my first night in San Francisco before checking onboard the aircraft carrier USS Coral Sea. I taught myself how to use chopsticks. I taught myself how to read Shakespeare and James Joyce. I taught myself the physical layout of the Bay Area and what buses and trains to take to get to Golden Gate Park, the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, and the Red Vic Movie House in Haight-Ashbury. I learned how to read a book standing up at Cody's Books in Berkeley – in five installments – three chapters at a time. I learned to stomach the coffee in Zim's restaurant, corner of Market and Van

Ness, San Francisco, open 24 hours; coffee notwithstanding, a good place to be alone and write and listen to the dialogue coming from the hookers, pimps, homeless, pensioners and cops that inhabited the place late nights/early morns – much of the dialogue in the form of soliloquy. I learned to avoid the portals of McDonald's and Burger King – "through those portals pass souls on their first step into the bowels of Hades" I wrote in one of my notebooks. I wrote about the homeless people I talked with in San Francisco and Berkeley, the mural on the building next to People's Park in Berkeley depicting Vietnam, The Free Speech Movement, demonstrations, riots, the National Guard, and a hungry hippy in SF bumming change. The murals on Telegraph Avenue in Oakland and Berkeley, the murals in the Mission District, the graffiti in Berkeley bathrooms: "Question: What genocide program took 500 years and 100,000,000 lives? Answer: The genocide of Native Americans by Europeans." "You think you're alive, but we're really just on Channel 7. Guess what happens when they change the channel?" A free concert in People's Park on a Sunday afternoon. A homeless man I'd struck up a conversation with who told me he'd been raised by wolves. Five minutes later I saw him running wild toward people sitting on the grass as they listened to a Jimi Hendrix clone smoking a joint as he played "Foxy Lady" on his guitar and a chick with a shaved head sang. The wolfman got down on his hands and knees and howled after the people scattered. Later, I saw the same wolfman in Mendocino in the midst of a soliloquy until he interrupted his conversation to tell me he remembered me from People's Park and could I spare some change? A woman on the phone in Mendocino in a bookstore talking about people's skewed concept of time as I waited and waited to pay her for *Writings and Drawings* by Bob Dylan. Moonies on Market Street. The shipmate from Virginia with tattoos on his chest, going through people's dungarees in the berthing area, looking for money; another shipmate and I crossing the border into Tijuana during one of our port visits to San Diego. He was getting laid with a Tijuana bargirl while I was waiting for him in the bar downstairs, drinking beer, watching another bargirl striptease on stage. "Don't tell my wife," he told me after he was done. Later, we ate lunch and a pretty waitress served us. "Do you think she understands English?" he asked me. "Do you speak English?" he asked her. "No," she said. "I love you," he said. With her blush she betrayed that she was lying. She did speak English. Back on the ship sleeping in fits and starts while at sea, General Quarters – a drill in which we have to man battle stations – interrupting the little sleep time we're allotted. Quotes by Herman Hesse, quotes by Norman Mailer, quotes by D.H. Lawrence, quotes by Henry Miller, quotes by Boris Pasternak, quotes by Abraham Lincoln and Jesus of Nazareth. Passages from the San Francisco Chronicle, National

Geographic, the New York Review of Books, TIME magazine, the small press and student newspapers of the Bay Area. My sexual fantasies, perversions, obsessions, compulsions, hang-ups, fears and frustrations. All this and more dutifully recorded in my notebooks.

Some of the books I read were Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*, Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales and Poems*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception*, George Orwell's *1984*. In addition to these well-known works of literature, I read books by rock musicians: Bob Dylan's *Tarantula* and Patti Smith's *Babel*. I also re-read William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* – three times.

I read *The Outsider* by Colin Wilson and in it Wilson describes the Russian dancer Vaslav Nijinsky keeping notebooks in which he wrote anything that came to his mind, trying to transcend through his writing, and writing like a madman. Indeed, Nijinsky did go mad – or at least that is what society labeled him. But I admired him for having the courage to be different from what was expected of him, and tried to emulate his writing technique. The French poet Arthur Rimbaud said that a poet becomes a seer by undergoing a complete derangement of the senses. All of this I tried to do – in my writing and in my life away from the ship.

I probably wrote more prolifically my first year in the Navy than I ever had in my life. In Radio School and since being stationed on the Coral Sea I had filled up several notebooks. At first I used the light blue Navy notebooks sold in the Navy Exchange on base. Then I began to buy spiral notebooks in stores off base and write in them. I didn't really have time to organize my thoughts and write essays or stories.

As I mentioned, I tried to follow Vaslav Nijinsky's method of writing anything that came to mind. Jack Kerouac and the Beats said one should write without editing, letting one's mind run free and wild. William Burroughs said one should not concern oneself with storytelling or plot. Life does not move in a linear fashion, he said, and neither should one's writing. "There is only one thing a writer can write about: what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing," was a quote from Burroughs that I wrote down at the beginning of one of my notebooks. Much of the writing came out as garbled gobbledygook, but some of it was worth keeping and there were times it was humorous. I liked to think of

what I wrote as intense. Most of what I wrote I called poetry, but there might not have been a name for it.

The Coral Sea was scheduled to begin a deployment to the Western Pacific in November 1979. In the military you are allowed 30 days of vacation per year, which is called "leave." I took ten days leave, and decided to spend five days in Michigan, then return to Northern California and spend a few days in Mendocino, a small town and artists' colony on the coast, north of San Francisco.

I collected all my precious writing and the 40 or so books I had bought and read since being stationed on the Coral Sea, put them in my Navy issue seabag and checked it as baggage for my flight from San Francisco International Airport through to Grand Rapids. When I got off the flight in Grand Rapids I found that my seabag had not arrived, and I reported it as missing to the airline. I also found that a group of Iranians had taken over the US embassy in Tehran.

After a few weeks, when I was out at sea, I opened a letter from my mother. "The airline says they can't recover your seabag and that it's probably stolen," she wrote. It was like reading that my future wife and child had been stolen.

I put the letter back in the envelope and sat on the deck, in front of my locker, with my head in my hands. Meanwhile the Coral Sea steamed toward the coast of Iran and prepared itself for war.

Snapshots

By Denise Bouchard

Some people hate Disney World, some love it. We're in the latter category.

The Disney Institute is just a memory now but how we loved Eisner's idea.

At the turn of the century there were resorts and spas that also held classes on everything from cooking to poetry. That is what the Disney Institute modeled itself on and we absolutely loved it. You got to pick what courses you wanted and your cottage as well. We chose a cottage in the pines by a lake. When I saw that our bedroom had a writing desk, I felt blissfully

complete. There were also villas and tree house/townhouses.

On our first day we took our classes together as a family; the first of which was movie make-up. We were taught to make stitches and blood look real. My husband, daughter and I walked out looking like we needed a hospital. Very cool to our twelve-year-old daughter.

We then took a cooking course and found ourselves cooking beside actor Drew Carey, who was also taking the class. Pan-seared scallops were on the menu over buckwheat linguine. Lots of laughter ensued as we all tried to keep up with the experts. Drew Carey proved to be just as likable a person as he is on TV. He was down-to-earth and friendly.

Afterward, we headed for a course on animation which can be far more painstaking than it looks.

As the class went on, my husband began to feel ill but thought he could hold out. Suddenly, he started experiencing waves of nausea.

He ran out of the building- imagine now- he still had the make-up of Frankenstein after a car crash on his face. My daughter and I looking like Frankenstein's bride and spawn were chasing after him. He was bending over now with dry heaves which even sounded like a monster's agonized growls.

Children and parents alike backed up against the buildings and just watched horrified as we passed by.

We got him safely back to our cottage and a doctor came in to give him something for his stomach. It turned out that he was allergic to buckwheat.

We had planned on going to the parks in the afternoon, but of course that was ruled out. My daughter and I went to the pool for awhile, but came back shortly to make sure Frankenstein was ok. But that got a little boring... so as my husband lay deeply asleep, we decorated him with our daughter's Disney outfits while he snored away.

He became Prince Aladdin with a round white roll around his head with many scarves flowing upon the pillow above him. He became a hula girl

from our night at a luau, the lei near his neck, the skirt on his head. He was also a medieval princess and in his hand were placed flags of different countries.

Now you might think this was mean to use him in this way and no one was more surprised than he was when the pictures were developed. The truth is, that although we saw big band music the next evening and light displays the evening after that with gourmet restaurants and spas in between, those pictures live on in infamy as one of our happiest days ever (my husband sharing in that opinion). Sometimes the silly moments are the most fondly remembered- especially if you have our sense of humor.

My Father, "The Packer"

By Pat Greene

I've never told my father that I love him and neither have I ever heard it from him, that he loves me. I do love my father and I have no doubt that he feels likewise about me. In the old days, (as they say) children were raised tough and so prepared for a tough life. It was widely believed back then, that you would be doing more harm to a child, by telling them that you love them and thus giving the child the notion, that love alone would remedy all of life's hardships. Everything about love, in the Ireland that I grew up in, we learned and understood from pure instinct and deep searching glances. Love was always there within reach but it would be wrong of you, to have to reach out and grab at it. To be honest, it never really bothered me back then, that my father never openly confessed his love for me. There are people today that would make light of my childhood, knowing that I never found the need then, to be told by anyone, that they loved me.

Very little remains of the Ireland, where my childhood took place. In many ways my father and I shared childhoods very similar to one another. The Ireland of the 1960's and 70's was not very different at all to the Ireland of the 1930's and 40's when my father was growing up. There was an understood distance between father and son in both my father's and my own childhood. We never considered this ancient Irish custom to be wrong in any way and I can honestly say that I never felt deprived of love in my childhood. I have no problem telling my two sons that I love them and I shower them openly with my unfaltering

love for both of them. I have adapted well to the times that we live in but I feel sad in many ways that my dad was never able to appreciate the joy of telling his children that he loved us.

At an early age, I learned to channel my love of people and things through my private writings and my natural gift for telling stories. It was never thought unfashionable to talk about love, if it was love, belonging to other people - especially strangers. I was a huge daydreamer, as a child but I never once wished to have been born into a different life or to have other parents. We were as poor as hell and back then there was a wretched class system in Ireland, that made most childhoods miserable to live through. Class distinction in Irish society as a whole and especially the schools was rampant and it really didn't matter how smart you were. If you were from a poor family, most school systems considered it a complete waste of time, educating the next breed of poverty in Ireland. I too could have buckled, very easily under such demeaning pressure but I was lucky in the sense that I held high hopes for my future. There was never much time for self pity'ers back then, so we learned quickly to accept our lot in life and get on with it.

My father loved gardening and greyhounds and I loved reading and writing. I liked gardening too but my father was never shy in telling me that I was born with a black thumb. I loved watching my father use a spade. It was something amazing to feast your eyes upon and I grew up wanting to be as graceful as my father was, with a spade in his hand. He was a hard worker and he harbored a very deep and delicate pride in his work. He was difficult and contrary to work alongside and he was lousy in the praise department, so when you worked with him and he was silent, you knew you were doing good. My father was a hummer and I was a diddle-dyde-dee-er and we would be off in different sections of the garden - my father in the patie stalks and I amongst the scallions and "the masons apron" would be getting it, helter-for-skelter.

I call him dad. He calls me Patrick and he is the only person that uses the full title of my name, without it bothering me. I prefer to be called Pat and when anyone else calls me Patrick, they might as well call me "Abukahimabilinjad". My father was the caretaker of Ballinlough cemetery, so every time there was a funeral, my dad dug the grave and me and my brothers helped him. One time we dug this grave where a daughter wanted to be buried in the same grave as her mother, so the coffin was exhumed to make the grave deeper. In the process of exhuming the coffin, the lid came loose. To our horror, we discovered, that

while the interior velvet cladding was almost as good as new, most of it was ripped to shreds and I was shocked to find out that the person buried in that casket, was actually buried alive. I blame finding out something like this at such a young age, on I having a huge fear of enclosed spaces now and I want to be cremated when I die.

I come from a long line of card players and my father was a master "45" player. "45" is a game played with six players..... three sets of two. Each player gets dealt five cards and it takes watching the high pairing and a great memory to be good at the game. Each trick is equal to five and there is a best trump, which is equal to ten. The first pairing to reach "45" wins the game. My grandfather, Neddy Greene and his brother Tom were two of the finest card players ever to grace a "45" table and because of them, the Greene's got the nickname..."the packers" Every Christmas, of my childhood, that I can recall, my father, my six brothers and myself, would win multiple turkeys and smoked hams, tins of biscuits and cakes, bottles of whiskey and Harveys bristol cream sherry and a batch of Christmas puddings. There was many a night that a final would never have to be played out as there would be three sets of "the packer Greenes" sitting at that final table.

Dad is seventy nine years old now and he and my mother will be celebrating fifty four years of marriage this year. He still lives in Kiltely, my childhood home, although not in the same house that I grew up in. I have been living in New York city for over eighteen years and in the years since, I have not been great at going home to visit. There was a spell there where I did not go home for ten years and this I blame on my failed marriage. For as much as I tend to believe that I am a man of the future, my basic principles have a hard time forgiving me, for not paying enough attention to my marriage and making more of an effort to making it work. Mam and dad used to come visit me here but now that they are older, the journey is too much for both of them. I know that I would be a very lonely old man if my sons were to shut me out of their lives, so from now on, I will be going home more often.

A time comes in every son's grown life when he will have to search for his father in himself. I used to think that I was very different from my father and I am but there is also so much of my father in me. I think about going home to take a long slow walk with him. I would like to tell him that I love him and at the same time give him the opportunity to unload his love for me off his chest. I don't want this unsaid feeling to be something between us that only gets taken care

of, at a dying bedside.

My father and I, might well be from a dying breed but we both have some unfinished business to take care of.

It is time.

Jerusalem

By Michelle Kennedy

Part One

Most people of Jewish descent are familiar with the phrase, "Next year in Jerusalem", which, conceptually, is the greatest hope a Jewish person could have. The idea, I believe, is to move to Israel, within the next year; but for many Jews, the opportunity to travel, and see Israel, is a substantial fulfillment of those words.

Stepping off of the plane, onto the ladder, the first thing that hit me was the arid heat. It literally seemed to suck the air out of me and replace it with a hollowed out, scorched emptiness. Welcome to Israel, I thought. I stood there for a few seconds, getting my bearings and learning to breathe again.

I wanted to fall in love with the country immediately, but I didn't. Instead the heat continued to wreck havoc on my temper and I became as moody as I was sweaty. A taxi was waiting for us, to whisk us to Jerusalem, our first stop. My mother and sister excitedly talked the whole way, but the thirteen year old in me was tenacious. I was miserable and planned on staying that way.

The taxi driver was a friendly man, who spoke English very well. He pointed out trees that Americans had given money to plant, described the classic stone found in Jerusalem (a type of limestone), pointed to tanks along the way that we used in the Six Day War and we stopped to view a miniature replica of Jerusalem. Slowly, my grip on being obstinate started to fray. The taxi driver's love, and pride, for his country was infectious.

A few miles before we entered into Jerusalem we started to see the walls of

Jerusalem and I sensed that I was entering a place like no other. The taxi driver suddenly stopped the car and told us to get out. He grabbed a bible and put on a yamaka. I figured we were not about to be murdered, so I got out first and asked him what was going on. He said, "Before a traveler enters Yeru-sah-lyim for the first time, it is only proper to recite a prayer."

Well, my family was not religious, so I suddenly found myself nervously tapping my foot, looking at my mother and wondering what we were going to do. "Excellent idea!", she said. So, there we were, bowing East, towards the Ark and Jerusalem, with our taxi driver uttering words in our ancient tongue - Hebrew. To my surprise, I actually felt a small tremor in my heart....I was moved.

A chord had been touched within me and it resonated beautifully.

Part Two

I first saw it at dusk, towering above me, perfect and majestic. After a few twists and turns, through the narrow streets of Old Jerusalem, we emerged, steps away from the Kotel, or Western/Wailing Wall. Rich in history, it was a sight to behold: layer upon layer of stone, drenched in the rose and gold tone of sunset.

On one side men and boys, davaning (bowing in prayer) fervently, on my side, the women and girls. At first the separation consumed my thoughts, but I decided to let it go; I had come for the experience and not to judge. As I breathed in the atmosphere, I noticed little details, such as the small pieces of paper, as well as green, long grass, protruding from spots here and there. The wall was alive and breathing, on both sides, everywhere. Its tendrils of inspiration pulled me in.

Before I knew it, I was standing there, fingers outstretched, touching this ancient wall, the sole remnant of the Holy Temple. My one small motion suddenly, and irreversibly, connected me to my history, my culture and my people. I literally swayed in awe. As a young girl of thirteen, I knew this moment was transforming me. I knew that I would look back on this moment, often, and reflect on what it meant to me.

The funny thing was, in the moment, I was not sure of what it meant. I just knew that my mind, body and spirit were being drawn in, pulled by an invisible string, into the heart of this magnificent wall.

Tears welled up in my eyes. I said a silent prayer, clinging to the wall and the tiny piece of paper I was going to add to it. I knew that I would return one day. I knew many things and nothing at all.

Looking back, I reflect on many aspects of the experience, but give pause to the idea of separation. In one way, the wall was unifying, and therefore, there was no true separation. Yet, the wall divides two neighboring religious communities. Men and women. People. Thoughts. Emotions. Walls do, do that. Frost wrote a poem entitled "Mending Wall", which I often think about in connection to the Kotel.

There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors'.

.....He moves in darkness as it seems to me~
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

What I have come to think of is that differences are acceptable. Spirituality for women and men may, indeed, be different, and similar, at the same time. Same with all creatures, great and small. We must embrace, and respect, this notion. Yet, the grass grew on both sides of the Kotel... and so, likewise, we must look for that which brings us together, as well.



"Inventing the Skateboard" by Nawa; Copyright 2009

Inventing the Skateboard

by Mark Barkawitz

I was born in a place called Kew Gardens, New York. Back in the early '50s, before the invention of the skateboard, we rode scooter-boxes. A scooter-box was made by taking apart a steel-wheeled skate, then affixing the wheels under the ends of a two-to-three-foot long 2"x4". On the nose of the 2"x4", a wooden, fruit crate was nailed upright on its end. And on top of

that, two wing-like, wooden handles were secured for steering. Then to customize our scooter-boxes, we nailed or glued bottle caps all over the fruit crate. Daddy made me one when I was just a little fart. And because we owned a small delicatessen in Astoria on Long Island—above which we lived in an equally small apartment—there was a bevy of assorted bottle caps to trick-out my ride.

In 1957, we moved across the country to Pasadena, California. I didn't notice any west-coasters riding scooter-boxes, so I figured it was an east coast thing. In '59, my parents bought our house on Mar Vista Avenue for \$12,500. And like most north/south streets in Pasadena, it was hilly. I figured a scooter-box would be fun to ride downhill, but I'd left mine behind in New York (no room for it on the propeller-driven commercial airline). So my little brother Bruce and I—six and eight, respectively at the time—borrowed one of my little sister Cyndi's metal skates and went out to the garage to build one. We couldn't find any 2"x4"s or a fruit crate of any kind. So while Bruce took apart Cyndi's skate, I improvised our building supplies with what was available: a four-foot long, six-inch wide piece of dog-eared, cedar fencing. When I nailed the skate-ends on the bottom, the eight-penny nails stuck up through the top side, so I bent them over with the hammer. But they still looked dangerous. So we used scissors to cut a carpet fragment to fit atop the cedar board and affixed it with 1/2" roofing nails.

We stood back to admire our work.

"It's pretty long," Bruce said.

"Let's see if we both fit."

I sat over the back wheels, my knees scrunched up into my chest; Bruce sat likewise in front of me. We wobbled and put our hands down to steady ourselves.

"Just like a sled," I said. We'd ridden a sled together during our last winter

back east.

“What are we gonna use for brakes?” he asked.

“Turn onto the parkway grass.”

Together we carried our two-man, box-less scooter-box up to the corner. We sat on it—he in front of me—and used our hands to steady ourselves on the downhill sidewalk until we got rolling. We crashed every couple of houses until we got our leaning in sync. After a few runs, we made it all the way down from Claremont Street to the parkway in front of our house, where we rolled onto the St. Augustine grass, crashing and tumbling to a stop under the old oak tree, laughing our guts out. We started experimenting with different riding positions: both on our knees, one sitting and one kneeling, one sitting and one standing behind, et cetera. It was a lot of fun. Other kids on the block watched us enviously. David, one of the bigger kids who lived on Claremont, came over to check out our ride as we prepared for another run.

“What is that?” David had started a fist-fight with me right after my family moved onto the block. He threw nine punches at me; I blocked them all—the advantage of having a brother with whom to fight daily. Then he said he heard his mom calling him and went home. That was our fight.

“It’s kinda’ like a scooter-box without the box,” I said.

“For two,” Bruce added.

“Scooter-box?” David didn’t seem to know what I meant. “What kinda’ wheels?”

“We took apart one of our sister’s skates,” I explained.

Bruce flipped-over the board.

David looked closer. “Huh. So it’s more like a board-skater.”

“Somethin’ like that,” I agreed.

“For two,” Bruce added again.

A few months later, David’s family moved to Venice Beach. Back then, Bruce and I thought that was some place in Italy. But it was actually just forty miles away on the coast just south of Santa Monica, where years later with the invention of the polyurethane wheel, the Z-Boys skateboarding team would revolutionize the sport by riding empty swimming pools.

But back in ’59, it was my little brother Bruce and I who were the revolutionary innovators. Oh sure, lots of people claim to have invented the skateboard in one way or another around that same time. But it was the Barkawitz Boys who invented the tandem skateboard. Unfortunately at six and eight years-of-age, we lacked the marketing skills and manufacturing capabilities of Wham-O and missed out on creating a family fortune. And we got grounded for ruining our sister’s stupid skate. As with any revolution, its practitioners pay a steep price for progress.

He says, “Good Luck”

By Judy Marcellot

My friend, Mary-Ann, says we tell stories for lots of reasons – to laugh, to teach, to reflect and, as in my case, to clean and dress the wound so it can heal. My story is a reminder for me to “keep my karma current,” because

the universe doesn't always allow do-overs.

The call came at 11:00 pm. "Moua's in the hospital," said our youngest daughter, "and it doesn't look like she's going to make it."

But let me begin at the beginning.

In 1970 I founded a social service agency serving English to accommodate the second language needs of non and limited English-speaking adult immigrants to the city of Providence, RI. For the first five years or so of the program most of the students were Spanish speaking, which is the population we originally targeted. I am Spanish speaking, having spent various periods in Mexico both as a high school and college student and taking most of my undergraduate courses in the language. In the mid-seventies, refugees from the Vietnam era started showing up in Rhode Island and elsewhere around the country. Groups of Khmer from Cambodia, Ethnic Lao, Vietnamese who had made it to the refugee camps in Thailand and Hmong from Laos were re-settled in Providence by church and other social service groups. Providence at the time had a thriving factory economy and refugees could find a job without having to learn too much English. Though it wasn't an easy life by any means. Many survivors arrived suffering with tremendous symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The Hmong were left to collect their families, trek through the jungle, cross the Mekong River, dodge the bullets of the Thai army, and make it to the UN refugee camps. It was this last group, the Hmong, who changed the lives of my husband and I forever, when they arrived in Providence and started attending English language classes at my agency.

There has been a lot of cross-cultural misunderstanding between the Hmong and other Americans (it was the underlying theme of Clint Eastwood's recent movie "Gran Torino"). After years of cultural upheaval and personal sacrifice, the Hmong continue to experience prejudice. Although many of them have integrated into the larger American society and prospered in ways that we as a people consider successful – good jobs, successful children, etc. - prejudice and suspicion remains on both sides.

Years ago, one Hmong friend asked my husband, "Why do Americans hate us?" That question broke my heart then and it breaks my heart now. But that's not my story. My story is one of personal heartbreak, regret and self-forgiveness. My story is a reminder to myself to keep my karma current.

So, the Hmong started arriving in Providence while I was still directing the English-as-a-second language agency I founded in 1970. One particular agency grant targeted recent Vietnamese, Hmong, Lao and Cambodian refugees who came to Providence, Rhode Island by way of the refugee camps in Thailand. In the late 1970's my husband and I were vegetable gardening and not much else (we later started a plant nursery.) The Hmong were an agricultural slash-and-burn people in their homeland in the mountains of Laos. They had lost so much, like so many forced refugee groups, and we grew close to a lot of the adult students and their families. At one point, we offered the use of some of our land to anyone who wanted to plant it. Several extended families took us up on the offer and soon raised beds thick with tomatoes, squashes, cucumbers and mustard greens grew up in our backfields. We loved walking through the beds and meeting gardeners of all ages, from toddlers to old folk. We started attending all sorts of Hmong celebrations in nearby Providence, not understanding too much but enjoying the energy of large families working together with everyone occupied. Like some sort of a well-oiled wheel with a certain amount of chaos thrown in. It was impressive to see how a people who had lost so much of their underlying identification through horror and hardship regrouped to create a new version of their lives.

One day, Sai, the father of one of the gardening families, came to us with a question: "Would you take one or two of my daughters to live with you for a year or two or maybe the rest of their lives?" The Hmong live in extended family networks, clans, and in their pre-war peaceful agrarian communities, this arrangement wasn't that strange to them. We don't know why but it never sounded strange to us either. "Sure", we said. There was a ceremony/party at which we think we were sort of adopted into the clan but aren't really completely certain. There was a lot of ritual drinking, toasts, and advice. And everyone gave us a dollar. The girls were too little (six and seven) to really know what was being said.

And, to this day, although bilingual in Spanish and French, we are ashamed to say that we have learned very little Hmong . After each long oration, our translator would turn to us and say, "He says, 'Good luck'." That began a life-long association with members of the Vang and Thao clans that continues to this day, although not in as intense a form as it was when the girls were little and the families lived fifteen minutes away.

Moua and See lived with us during the week and went home for the weekends and summer vacations to Providence. We experienced the things "normal" families do, except our family was much larger and very diverse viewpoints had to be honored. For instance, when the girls were little, their mom, Blia, asked us not to let them play outside at dusk as that was a time when spirits might come and cause them to become sick. The mind is such a big part of creating one's reality who were we to say that couldn't happen? Although there are huge parts of the Hmong culture we will probably never really understand because of the language barrier, we expanded our acceptance of things "real" and "unreal". So the girls didn't leave the house at dusk. Shamanic healing also was a big part of our expanded views.

When the girls got sick, the shaman was called in and a ceremony performed. The girls also saw Western doctors. Although we were perfectly willing to try herbal remedies first (we had recently started an herb farm) they took an awful lot of antibiotics as children. It was important for their families to adapt to the ways of the current country of residence. So they thought. At least, so we thought they thought. The shaman was called in for emotional crisis as well and ceremonies were held for a wide spectrum of issues. Often if the girls misbehaved, we had family meetings with the offender and four adults.

Life for Moua was always harder than it was for See. From the beginning, Moua was harder to get close to. She stiffened up when she was hugged, for example, while See would reach for your hand to hold even as a teenager. I would find all sorts of soggy food in the washer – nuts, raisins and other treats Moua would stick in her pockets and not eat – a behavior I thought must have originated in the jungle and Thai camps where hoarding was a common activity, necessary to insure food for the next day. Later, I would find rolls of stamps under her bed. Then money.

One Sunday night when they were still little, the girls were late arriving home, after a weekend with their family and other home. Blia had given Moua twenty dollars and Moua had lost it. The family spent several hours looking for the twenty-dollar bill before bringing the kids out. I later saw Moua with the twenty dollars and knew she had hustled her mom. Truth was subjective with Moua, but it is for lots of kids, including me when I was young. When my mother would ask me where I was going with friends I never considered actually telling her the truth, even when it didn't matter in the slightest. "Going to the drugstore" when I was headed to the library. "Going uptown," when I was headed to the beach. So Moua's white lies didn't bother me all that much. She consistently didn't tell the truth so, for the most part, there was a pattern and a way to figure out the things that really mattered.

On so many other levels, Moua was just a wonderful human being. Even as a small child, she was extremely articulate, perceptive and kind. She had lots of friends. In her natural family, she easily and happily cared for the younger kids, all their cousins, and their cousins' cousins. Children loved her. She also related easily to adults. I would often see her talking with adults in supermarkets, at the post office, just about everywhere we went. She and I would have animated, wonderful conversations each morning while driving to the parochial girls' school that we thought would "straighten her out". I would say to her, "you're such a brilliant human being. I can't wait for you to grow up and we can have great adult conversations". I loved her so much! Parochial school didn't last long. It wasn't easy for Moua to reconcile the Hmong animistic viewpoint with her new lessons about original sin.

The girls' dad had a pretty hard time of it in their new country as well. Sai had undergone difficult training and had also been injured several times in the war. He was in constant physical pain from the shrapnel that remained in both legs and in mental pain from the events that remained in his head. He drank himself incoherent on many occasions and self-medicated with opium as well. The girls were clearly impacted by this. But the Hmong, like everyone else, often circle the wagons and retreat into silent denial behaviors. Our shared children had a lot on their plates.

When Moua became a teenager, she would arrive home in lovely new outfits. "Moua, you look great," I'd say. "Where'd you get that outfit?" "One of my friends gave it to me". "Wow, what a nice friend," I'd reply. It never once occurred to me that she was either shoplifting or stealing from both her families to buy her new clothes. The stealing from her families did not stop. It escalated as she got older. In addition to the stealing and lying, add skipping school to the behaviors we had no idea how to re-direct.

This brings me to the heartbreak and regret part of my story.

My husband and I started our plant nursery on a wing and a prayer. An eight hundred dollar tax return, a little money here and there from landscape side jobs and not much else. We were attempting to follow the bliss that Joseph Campbell speaks of, although the bliss was accompanied by very little money in those days. Like many of our friends, we had hoped, expected really, that doing what you love would be followed by "the money", as a lot of the self help new age books of the day promised. In the business world, however, this can translate as "undercapitalized," as it did in our case. Basically, we were broke most of the time, heating our leaky 1790 New England cape with wood, and doing the best we could to feed the kids, pay the mortgage, and keep body and soul together. Every penny counted. In fact, we often rolled pennies to buy food. Sometimes Blia would offer me some of her food stamps. I hated to take them. I thought Blia needed them more, but more than that, it was embarrassing. I was sure that anyone who saw us at the grocery checkout was wondering to themselves, "Why are two healthy-looking young people ripping off the government? Why don't they just get jobs?" It was a new experience for both my husband and me as we had come from solid middle class families in which good schools and lots of travel was the norm. As much as we needed them, I tried to avoid Blia when she had food stamps in her hands.

One morning, while gathering up the girls' clothes to wash them, several checks slipped out from between Moua's sweaters. There were six of them, all made out to our nursery and totaling maybe a hundred dollars – a large amount of money to us in those days. Each check had been hand endorsed by Moua and she had obviously tried, and been unable, to cash them. When

I write about this so many years later it doesn't seem like such a big deal. Sure, Moua stole. Moua consistently stole. But then, it was a monumental deal. The money would have fed all of us for several weeks and I guess I had reached some sort of boiling point about the stealing. When Moua came home from school I was ready.

It's funny. It's taken me months to write this paragraph. I have danced around it, over it, under it. I asked my husband to write it. And the fact is, I can't remember much of it, only images. Moua sitting on the couch as I let loose and yelled. Me grabbing her arm and yelling "I'm so mad at you! How could you take this money when you know we need it so badly?!" And I slapped her across the face. Once. But once was enough to shock us both. "You're going home. You can't live here anymore," I shouted. And with that we threw our daughter out of our home, her home.

That night will forever be the darkest, most painful experience in my life. Moua and I were both sobbing. The ride into Providence was as silent as the grave, only broken once when Moua turned to me and said, "When I grow up and get better I'll come back and we'll live together again." I can't even remember what we said to Bliia and Sai. Did we bring Moua's clothes, her things? I have no idea. Did we hug her goodbye? I've asked my husband and he says he has no memory of that night.

How hurt and angry Moua became evident several days later. Moua and her sister were seeing a counselor at a local community-based agency. We originally took the girls to counseling because, as I said earlier, they had a lot on their plates – family addiction, Moua's stealing, living part time in twentieth century Anglo America and part time in a formally nomadic, shamanistic culture trying to hold on to itself, and probably a whole lot more. Two days after we took Moua back to Providence I received a phone call from her counselor. "I just want you to know you've been reported to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for child abuse". "Excuse me?" I said. Moua had called to report my slap. The counselor went on to say that if I refrained from further abuse no action would be taken against me. "There's a record somewhere of me as a child abuser?" I asked. "Yes," she said, but nothing would be done unless there were further complaints. Since Moua's

habitual lying was one of the reasons we had initiated counseling to begin with, I wondered why the counselor hadn't called me to ask for my version of events. As it turns out, this "act first, ask questions later" was contrary to agency policy and, to make a long story short, my record as a child abuser was expunged with an apology from the agency. Blia and Sai asked us to withdraw See from counseling. They didn't want to risk any such institutional terror reigning down on their heads.

Moua's choices for the next six years took her down paths we would call "every parent's nightmare." She quit school, took drugs, and threw herself into crazy, dysfunctional relationships, at one point getting restraining orders against every new boy she dated, basically because she could. She briefly moved to Miami and in with a Cuban drug dealer. Moua had studied Spanish in school and we practiced a little together off and on. 'At least her Spanish is improving,' my husband and I would say to each other, a dark humored attempt to lighten the reality of our daughter living with a drug dealer in Miami.

While we still saw our Hmong family, the relationship faded to the back burner for a while. See was needed at home to help care for the younger children. But it was more than this. They didn't want See here. There was a definite rift in the relationship. We all needed time to heal from the wound. Their anger at us became very clear when there was an issue with See at the private school where she was enrolled, and where she had received a full scholarship as the first Hmong in the school. See was living back in Providence but the school knew us to be the contact people. "There's a problem with See," said the caller. "I know her family doesn't want you involved but we think she needs some help". It was a minor incident. See had left school without permission, but the school felt there were other issues as well. The words "the family doesn't want you involved" felt like a pistol shot to the stomach.

Gradually, over the next several years, the relationship softened and we became a part of the family's life again. When there were academic or other problems in high school, we became the go-to family. We all happily watched See go off to an excellent college on a full scholarship.

In 1991, the family packed up and moved to Minnesota to join other clan members who had resettled there and were able to buy cheap land to farm. Moua stayed behind, living with an aunt in Providence. She would stop by often for dinner, to spend the night, or just to visit. Often her visits were accompanied by her current friends, young women working in the strip clubs and their gun-carrying boyfriends. Well, at least she's alive, we said to ourselves, although we always expected to get the call saying she was not.

About two years later, Moua decided to join her family in Minnesota. It was the best decision she ever made. Back in the fold of the family and clan Moua received her high school equivalency diploma, graduated from college, and worked in a series of jobs as a high powered, highly respected advocate of the rights of Asian women. If you "Google" my daughter, you will find many references to her work. She counseled both Asian and Anglo women and helped teenage prostitutes get off the street. She traveled all over the country, attending conferences and giving papers on women's issues to both government and private agencies. Moua was a fierce advocate for the rights of the disenfranchised.

"Moua's in the hospital and she's not expected to make it".

There it was. Every parent's worst case scenario-the call we expected to get fifteen years ago, not now when her demons had been laid to rest. Moua and her mom had been driving when Moua was suddenly stricken with unbearable chest pain. They found a clinic in the nearest town and a cardiologist, who was only at the clinic once a month and was there that day, arranged for immediate helicopter transport to the nearest hospital in Sioux City, South Dakota, as it turns out. She was sedated for the pain and able to speak. By the time she arrived at the hospital Moua's brain had suffered two mini-strokes. The aorta in her beautiful heart had dissected and there was no brain activity. Moua was removed from life support when all her family had gathered and it was clear that there was no possible reversal of her condition. Moua was gone before our travel arrangements could be finalized. No last kiss for us.

It has taken me many months of starts and stops to chronicle our story, my story, about Blia's and my beloved daughter. I often think of Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken". Two roads diverged in a yellow wood... I wish I could go back and take the other road. I wish we had never taken her home that fateful night. I wish I had told her that that day was the worst of my life. I wish we could sit together and have tea one more time. I wish. I wish. I wish.

One of my favorite lines from a movie is the one George Burns spoke as God in *Oh God*, when one of the characters asked him why he allowed evil and bad things to happen in the world. "I never could figure out how to make a top without a bottom," he said.

I realize there will be no mutual acknowledgment of that day with Moua. No crying, hugging, and forgiving. Moua is gone and I live with the moments of peace and acceptance of our shared story that repetitive self-forgiveness brings. I am eternally grateful for our time together.

Post Script:

When I began to write about Moua's life and death I was looking for a way to forgive myself about the night we returned her to her Hmong family. I couldn't get past my regret, my pain. I couldn't even say the words "returned her to her family." I would refer to it as "that awful night." In the eleven months since her passing, I've naturally thought a lot about Moua and the life she chose. Sometimes people tell me stories about their own children and the difficult lives they've chosen, difficult for their parents, at any rate. Often I say to them. "I know how hard it is to see a child make what we as parents consider mistakes and bad decisions. But, I truly believe there are no mistakes. Every road my daughter walked and every decision she made, decisions we and her natural parents would have changed in a heartbeat had we the ability to control another human being, made up the fabric of her life. And when she died at the age of thirty-four she had dipped her toes into every pond she came to. She had experienced life from all

sides.” And that was a fine thing. These days, when I think of my daughter, I think of a brilliant star going nova, a life well-lived, indeed.

Several weeks after Moua’s death I found the following poem written by a Lao American poet about her, in memory to her, on the internet. It reminds me how large my daughter’s life was, how far she traveled and how much she lived.

Incandescence

What passes from the earth? Everything living.
What remains? Ordinary days

Punctuated by the rising of the sun,
the waking of souls, the roots of nightfall.

Some, we'll witness together.
Some, separated by miles, the flux of atoms, the quirks of perspective.

All lives are brief among mountains, among constellations
Who hang a million light years away.

But even the briefest life of a Hmong woman
Born among our secret wars and uncertain futures

Can spark transformations
As meaningful as the first smile of a child,
The last story of an elder who never lost hope,
Or the bright thread between friends saying goodbye.

Bryan Thao Worra



"First Falls" by Newa; Copyright 2009

WAVING GOODBYE

by Mark Barkawitz

Kurt Gnewuch aka the artist Newa—
gentle soul, hard-working carpenter,
good friend, and generous tipper.

(The waitresses will miss him, too.)

A veteran, goofy-foot surfer,
who lived by his simple mantra:

“When there’s no work,
it’s my job to surf.”

In Memoriam of a true free spirit
9/30/’51— 8/14/’09

Last Paddle-Out — 9/12/’09

First Falls

by Mark Barkawitz

There used to be two ways to get up to First Falls in Eaton Canyon. You could start at the Nature Center and hike 1.1 miles up the canyon trail to the White Bridge, then drop down to the creek and continue hiking for another half-mile up the switch-back canyon into the mountains. Or you could get dropped off on Pinecrest Drive in Altadena and take the short-cut down the Mt. Wilson Toll Road. Then at the White Bridge, likewise drop down into the canyon and follow the creek on the winding, dirt trail that parallels and criss-crosses it. The mountains are steep on each side back there, making it impossible to see ahead or behind the next switch-back turn.

Spring’s the best time to go, when the winter run-off fills the creek. But be careful off-trail, where the poison oak is lush. You don’t want to mess with that stuff.

I still remember the first time I hiked up there with my little brother Bruce and our St. Philip the Apostle classmates Dick Alfano and Pat Lawrence, who wore coke-bottle eyeglasses and his hair parted down the middle. As we hurried around turn after turn, we began to wonder if there really was a waterfall—as we'd heard through the grammar school grapevine—within walking distance of our Pasadena homes. As we tired, we slowed and complained, laying blame on each other for this wild water chase. But then a faint, rumbling sound gradually became audible. It grew louder as we continued deeper into the mountains. Once again, we quickened our pace. Suddenly, there it was: a real, live waterfall! Admittedly, it was no Niagara Falls. But the creek water above cascaded thirty-or-so feet down into a swimming pool-sized pond that was plenty deep enough for swimming where the coarse-sand bottom graduated deeply towards the waterfall. We stripped down to our boxer shorts, stepped cautiously over the rocks in the shallows, and waded out into the cool water, taking turns dog-paddling under the pounding falls for as long as we each could stand it. We laughed and dunked one another. We climbed a dead tree that leaned conveniently against the wall, then hung and dropped from its only limb into deep water. When the afternoon sun passed across the top of Razorback—the southwestern mountain peak—it cast us in cool shadows. We shivered with goose-bumps and dressed while still wet, and then ran back down the canyon, vaulting ourselves off boulders, our feet soggy in Jack Purcell tennies and JC Penney desert boots.

As we grew into our later teens, we brought our girlfriends, backpacks full of munchies, and dogs up into the canyon for a day of fun and passing sun at First Falls.

But some things have changed since my youth. The Mt. Wilson Toll Road is now closed due to landslides from heavy rains years ago and has remained so due to our state's budgetary constraints. The chain-link gate on Pinecrest Drive that guards the road's entry is securely pad-locked and razor-wire loops atop the fencing. On the Eaton Canyon Trail, road directions are now affixed on metal posts like street corner signs, making it seem less an adventure, merely an enjoyable hike. North of the White Bridge, where the switch-backs isolate its visitors, many of the large

boulders—stoic remains of melting glaciers at the end of the Ice Age—are now defaced with gang graffiti. The park rangers do their best to prime out the offending tags—the spray-painted fingerprints of bangers—with a rock-colored gray. It's safe enough up there when the foot traffic is heavy. But like the rattlesnakes that occasionally sun themselves on a hot summer day, you need to be aware of their presence. I usually take along my dogs (which the dogs appreciate) and strap a big, hunting knife conspicuously on my side. Like the Boy Scouts—I'm prepared. That tree limb-walking stick I hunt up when I'm deep in the canyon—it isn't really for walking at all. Know what I mean, jellybean?

And that old, dead tree that used to lean vertically, conveniently against the wall at First Falls has disappeared completely, no longer accommodating the dare-devil antics of adolescence.

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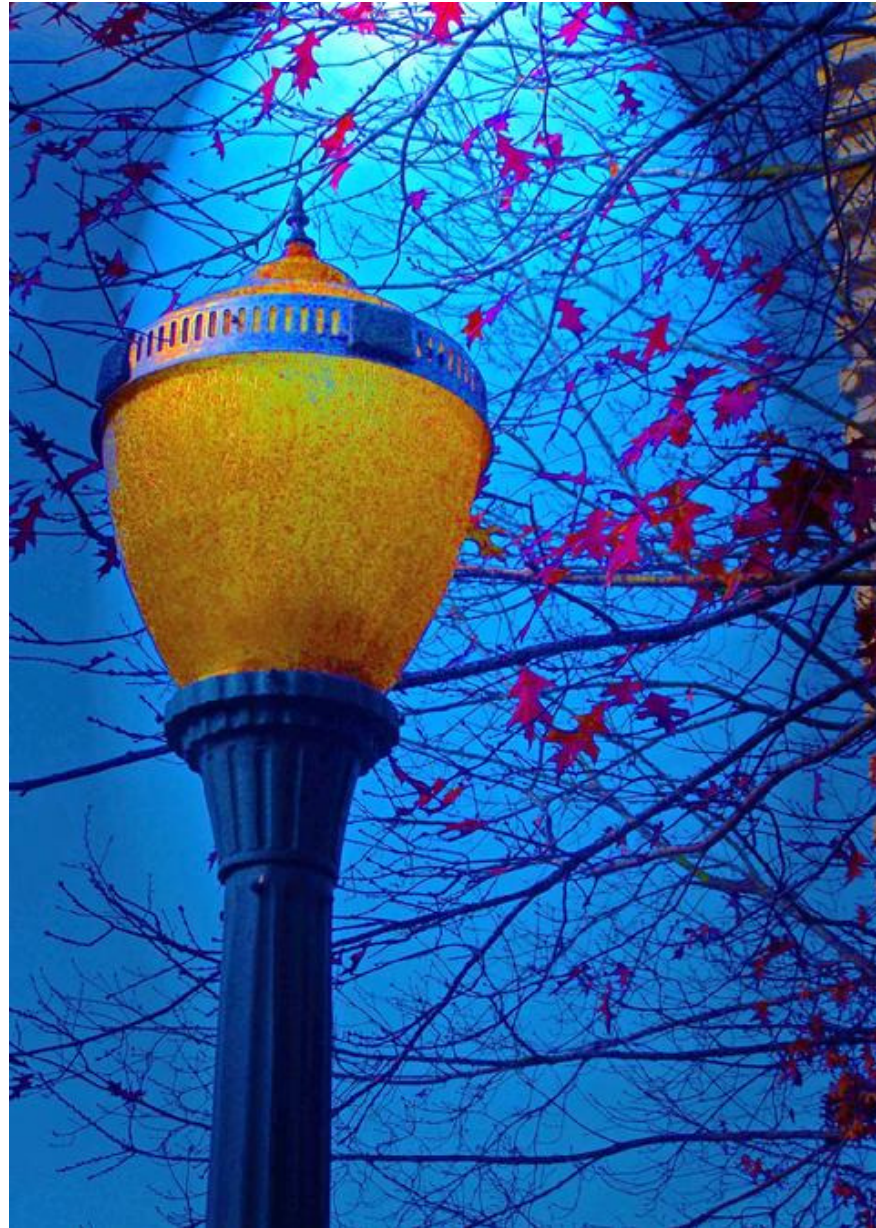
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Come in...and be captivated...

"Our Stories"

We have decided to devote a portion of our magazine to non-fiction. These are stories of things that have happened serendipitously being in the right place at the right time or just heartfelt musings, thoughts, and feelings on life. Join us in our non-fiction section. These stories speak to anyone and everyone and are told by anyone and everyone who has a story to tell.



"Street Lamp and Red Leaves" Christopher Woods; www.moonbirdhillarts.etsy.com

Birthday Wish

By Noelle Sterne

Shortly after my divorce, in the lingering details of final separation, I went to the basement of the now-for-sale house to get my last cartons. The new bittersweet freedom nudged me to reawaken my old dream of writing, and files of half-finished manuscripts rested here, waiting for resuscitation. I descended the stairs with an unpleasant mix of familiarity and no longer belonging. Rummaging in the half-dark, I pushed away discarded furniture and half-used paint cans.

My cartons were wedged in a corner, and my eye caught a box marked "Mom." During her final illness, having thrashed through the inevitable generational battles, my mother and I became close. After clearing out her apartment, I kept some of her things.

I sat on the damp cement floor, hardly remembering what was in the box, and opened it. On the top, tied with gritty string, lay a packet encrusted with dust like old frosting. I brushed it off and broke the string.

In my hands separated two music scores. Their blue-gray covers had faded in spots to yellowed patches, and they emanated the musty, sweet smell of old books, victims of disuse and little air.

The scores were for a Brahms symphony and the Mendelssohn violin concerto. They were the size of small paperbacks, meant to fit easily into a briefcase or suit pocket when you went to a concert. You held them unobtrusively near the seat lights to follow the orchestra. I'd often seen my father slip a score into his jacket before he and my mother went to their New York Philharmonic subscription concerts.

I opened one of the scores. Inside the front flap, with a start I recognized my mother's handwriting. Attending to her affairs in her last frail years, I'd gotten very used to her hand. The script, written decades earlier, was exactly the same, letters thin and wobbly like a child's:

April 5

Many happy birthdays, Darling.

J.

Darling? Were these the parents I knew? She'd never called him that in all the years of my growing up. I could just make out by the faded year that they'd been married for two years, five years before their first child, my brother. The bloom was still on, and the hope.

Like every new couple, they'd started out full of wedding sparkle and family's beaming smiles. The unaccustomed feelings of love, they must have felt sure, would activate the magnificent aspirations each had held close long before they'd ever met. He would be the great violinist, she the great painter. And during the first two years that prompted my mother's dust-caked birthday wish, those dreams still crackled bright as virtuoso cadenzas.

But soon the "happiness," veneer at best, couldn't conceal my mother's frantic attempts at perfect wifhood, thwarting her creative needs, or my father's despair at the corrosion of his life's potential. In single young manhood, his dream propelled him to walk miles uphill to school to save the bus money for music lessons and work nights to buy his first third-hand violin. His fierce desire thrust him further—to the miracle of acceptance at Juilliard and dared hope of the dream reaching life.

Yet, as with so many couples, the jolts of adulthood insinuated and took over. And here he was, freighted with wife, children, and deadening administrative job that just supported the newly congratulated four-bedroom split-level.

Even so, he tried to regain the dream, practicing the Mendelssohn furiously on Sunday mornings and losing himself in the pocket scores at two-hour concerts. But neither they nor my mother—nor certainly the annoyance of children—could salve his psychic wounds.

These surfaced in many ways. He was tall, always a little too heavy, and, as my wide child eyes beheld him, a great stone edifice. His thunder-threatening countenance permeated the household, face blackened sky. He wielded no physical threat, but his colossal silences and bullying rages kept my brother and me frozen inside the house and out as much as we could manage. My mother took refuge in women friends, religion, Bach cantatas, and the furtive easel and

palette set up in the guest room closet.

Shortly before she died, she told me that sex had gone in six months, and "Darling" soon after. The rest was endurance. They stayed together as casualties of social etiquette, inertia, fear, and inbred precepts of loyalty. Locked in the struggle against each other, they denied themselves, took it out on their children, and lived the façade of suburban contentment. Until one May night, a month past his fifty-third birthday, after a harsh exchange and complaint of heartburn, he collapsed at midnight on the master bathroom floor.

My mother too paid her dear prices. She discovered early, contrary to what she'd been taught, that love and martyrdom do not conquer all. Yet she stumbled through her marriage, as if more cooking, tasteful curtains, clean children, placemats from Bloomingdale's, and constant attempts at placation would assuage his great hole of despair and somehow atone for her own "selfish" need to create.

Although she cheered the rising women's movement, it came too late to penetrate her upbringing. So she spent the entire twenty-four years of table-setting and Sunday pot roasts denying her artist's soul, until released by the last phrase of the vow.

After my father died, for the rest of her life, my mother avoided all possibility of another relationship, sure any other man would again stifle and drain her. Depriving herself of male companionship, maybe even love, instead she took a few painting classes, went out with women friends, listened to more Bach cantatas, and clung to her swallowed rage.

For many years, she seemed unaffected, but the rage demanded payment. It festered, spread, and weakened her beyond medical reclamation. In her last month, at 79, she finally voiced it. "I was angry at him all our married life. I never really forgave him."

Overtaken by these memories, I sighed as I sat on the cold floor in the dank basement air. Yes, the scores evoked bitter recollections, but now, with their shocking tender birthday wish, they felt precious in my hands. I thought of the emptiness I would now face and pain of my failed relationship. I thought of my ex-husband, his thwarted desires for success, and my own history of undeclared dreams and secret resentments. Could I somehow transmute the litany of

wrongs done me and still-raw anger into forgiveness of him? And recognition of my part in our debacle?

I had to. My mother's choices had ensnared her, and the only way to disinherit was to face myself. Only then might I still nurture my writer's soul, even find a true Darling. And on today's saner terms, beyond the old sacrosanct roles of woman and wife, which, as my mother sadly proved, could be lethal. Maybe this, and not her household items and few pieces of jewelry, was her real legacy.

I brushed off the scores, tucked them into my handbag, and closed the carton. Then I walked back upstairs and left the house. Maybe I'd return for the rest of my things, maybe not. I knew I'd recovered the most important of them and, with moist eyes, silently thanked my mother for her birthday wish.

US Navy Literary Life

By Don MacLaren

I would walk and walk and walk when we were in port – exploring around San Francisco or Oakland or Berkeley or San Diego... Navy pay was low for an E-2 or E-3 (a lower echelon enlisted man). But it didn't cost anything to walk if I was broke, and anyway doing anything outside, away from the Navy was preferable to being on the ship – broke or not. When I did have money I still walked all over the place. But I would often stop in a restaurant or a café, where I would read until my eyes couldn't stay open anymore. Then I would order coffee and read some more. I would write till I couldn't hold my pen anymore; then I would go back to reading till I could write again.

I would go to cheap Greek restaurants, cheap Filipino restaurants, cheap Korean, Polish and Italian restaurants. Chinatown in San Francisco, Chinatown in Oakland, Japantown – where I had spent my first night in San Francisco before checking onboard the aircraft carrier USS Coral Sea. I taught myself how to use chopsticks. I taught myself how to read Shakespeare and James Joyce. I taught myself the physical layout of the Bay Area and what buses and trains to take to get to Golden Gate Park, the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, and the Red Vic Movie House in Haight-Ashbury. I learned how to read a book standing up at Cody's Books in Berkeley – in five installments – three chapters at a time. I learned to stomach the coffee in Zim's restaurant, corner of Market and Van

Ness, San Francisco, open 24 hours; coffee notwithstanding, a good place to be alone and write and listen to the dialogue coming from the hookers, pimps, homeless, pensioners and cops that inhabited the place late nights/early morns – much of the dialogue in the form of soliloquy. I learned to avoid the portals of McDonald's and Burger King – "through those portals pass souls on their first step into the bowels of Hades" I wrote in one of my notebooks. I wrote about the homeless people I talked with in San Francisco and Berkeley, the mural on the building next to People's Park in Berkeley depicting Vietnam, The Free Speech Movement, demonstrations, riots, the National Guard, and a hungry hippy in SF bumming change. The murals on Telegraph Avenue in Oakland and Berkeley, the murals in the Mission District, the graffiti in Berkeley bathrooms: "Question: What genocide program took 500 years and 100,000,000 lives? Answer: The genocide of Native Americans by Europeans." "You think you're alive, but we're really just on Channel 7. Guess what happens when they change the channel?" A free concert in People's Park on a Sunday afternoon. A homeless man I'd struck up a conversation with who told me he'd been raised by wolves. Five minutes later I saw him running wild toward people sitting on the grass as they listened to a Jimi Hendrix clone smoking a joint as he played "Foxy Lady" on his guitar and a chick with a shaved head sang. The wolfman got down on his hands and knees and howled after the people scattered. Later, I saw the same wolfman in Mendocino in the midst of a soliloquy until he interrupted his conversation to tell me he remembered me from People's Park and could I spare some change? A woman on the phone in Mendocino in a bookstore talking about people's skewed concept of time as I waited and waited to pay her for *Writings and Drawings* by Bob Dylan. Moonies on Market Street. The shipmate from Virginia with tattoos on his chest, going through people's dungarees in the berthing area, looking for money; another shipmate and I crossing the border into Tijuana during one of our port visits to San Diego. He was getting laid with a Tijuana bargirl while I was waiting for him in the bar downstairs, drinking beer, watching another bargirl striptease on stage. "Don't tell my wife," he told me after he was done. Later, we ate lunch and a pretty waitress served us. "Do you think she understands English?" he asked me. "Do you speak English?" he asked her. "No," she said. "I love you," he said. With her blush she betrayed that she was lying. She did speak English. Back on the ship sleeping in fits and starts while at sea, General Quarters – a drill in which we have to man battle stations – interrupting the little sleep time we're allotted. Quotes by Herman Hesse, quotes by Norman Mailer, quotes by D.H. Lawrence, quotes by Henry Miller, quotes by Boris Pasternak, quotes by Abraham Lincoln and Jesus of Nazareth. Passages from the San Francisco Chronicle, National

Geographic, the New York Review of Books, TIME magazine, the small press and student newspapers of the Bay Area. My sexual fantasies, perversions, obsessions, compulsions, hang-ups, fears and frustrations. All this and more dutifully recorded in my notebooks.

Some of the books I read were Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*, Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales and Poems*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception*, George Orwell's *1984*. In addition to these well-known works of literature, I read books by rock musicians: Bob Dylan's *Tarantula* and Patti Smith's *Babel*. I also re-read William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* – three times.

I read *The Outsider* by Colin Wilson and in it Wilson describes the Russian dancer Vaslav Nijinsky keeping notebooks in which he wrote anything that came to his mind, trying to transcend through his writing, and writing like a madman. Indeed, Nijinsky did go mad – or at least that is what society labeled him. But I admired him for having the courage to be different from what was expected of him, and tried to emulate his writing technique. The French poet Arthur Rimbaud said that a poet becomes a seer by undergoing a complete derangement of the senses. All of this I tried to do – in my writing and in my life away from the ship.

I probably wrote more prolifically my first year in the Navy than I ever had in my life. In Radio School and since being stationed on the Coral Sea I had filled up several notebooks. At first I used the light blue Navy notebooks sold in the Navy Exchange on base. Then I began to buy spiral notebooks in stores off base and write in them. I didn't really have time to organize my thoughts and write essays or stories.

As I mentioned, I tried to follow Vaslav Nijinsky's method of writing anything that came to mind. Jack Kerouac and the Beats said one should write without editing, letting one's mind run free and wild. William Burroughs said one should not concern oneself with storytelling or plot. Life does not move in a linear fashion, he said, and neither should one's writing. "There is only one thing a writer can write about: what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing," was a quote from Burroughs that I wrote down at the beginning of one of my notebooks. Much of the writing came out as garbled gobbledygook, but some of it was worth keeping and there were times it was humorous. I liked to think of

what I wrote as intense. Most of what I wrote I called poetry, but there might not have been a name for it.

The Coral Sea was scheduled to begin a deployment to the Western Pacific in November 1979. In the military you are allowed 30 days of vacation per year, which is called "leave." I took ten days leave, and decided to spend five days in Michigan, then return to Northern California and spend a few days in Mendocino, a small town and artists' colony on the coast, north of San Francisco.

I collected all my precious writing and the 40 or so books I had bought and read since being stationed on the Coral Sea, put them in my Navy issue seabag and checked it as baggage for my flight from San Francisco International Airport through to Grand Rapids. When I got off the flight in Grand Rapids I found that my seabag had not arrived, and I reported it as missing to the airline. I also found that a group of Iranians had taken over the US embassy in Tehran.

After a few weeks, when I was out at sea, I opened a letter from my mother. "The airline says they can't recover your seabag and that it's probably stolen," she wrote. It was like reading that my future wife and child had been stolen.

I put the letter back in the envelope and sat on the deck, in front of my locker, with my head in my hands. Meanwhile the Coral Sea steamed toward the coast of Iran and prepared itself for war.

Snapshots

By Denise Bouchard

Some people hate Disney World, some love it. We're in the latter category.

The Disney Institute is just a memory now but how we loved Eisner's idea.

At the turn of the century there were resorts and spas that also held classes on everything from cooking to poetry. That is what the Disney Institute modeled itself on and we absolutely loved it. You got to pick what courses you wanted and your cottage as well. We chose a cottage in the pines by a lake. When I saw that our bedroom had a writing desk, I felt blissfully

complete. There were also villas and tree house/townhouses.

On our first day we took our classes together as a family; the first of which was movie make-up. We were taught to make stitches and blood look real. My husband, daughter and I walked out looking like we needed a hospital. Very cool to our twelve-year-old daughter.

We then took a cooking course and found ourselves cooking beside actor Drew Carey, who was also taking the class. Pan-seared scallops were on the menu over buckwheat linguine. Lots of laughter ensued as we all tried to keep up with the experts. Drew Carey proved to be just as likable a person as he is on TV. He was down-to-earth and friendly.

Afterward, we headed for a course on animation which can be far more painstaking than it looks.

As the class went on, my husband began to feel ill but thought he could hold out. Suddenly, he started experiencing waves of nausea.

He ran out of the building- imagine now- he still had the make-up of Frankenstein after a car crash on his face. My daughter and I looking like Frankenstein's bride and spawn were chasing after him. He was bending over now with dry heaves which even sounded like a monster's agonized growls.

Children and parents alike backed up against the buildings and just watched horrified as we passed by.

We got him safely back to our cottage and a doctor came in to give him something for his stomach. It turned out that he was allergic to buckwheat.

We had planned on going to the parks in the afternoon, but of course that was ruled out. My daughter and I went to the pool for awhile, but came back shortly to make sure Frankenstein was ok. But that got a little boring... so as my husband lay deeply asleep, we decorated him with our daughter's Disney outfits while he snored away.

He became Prince Aladdin with a round white roll around his head with many scarves flowing upon the pillow above him. He became a hula girl

from our night at a luau, the lei near his neck, the skirt on his head. He was also a medieval princess and in his hand were placed flags of different countries.

Now you might think this was mean to use him in this way and no one was more surprised than he was when the pictures were developed. The truth is, that although we saw big band music the next evening and light displays the evening after that with gourmet restaurants and spas in between, those pictures live on in infamy as one of our happiest days ever (my husband sharing in that opinion). Sometimes the silly moments are the most fondly remembered- especially if you have our sense of humor.

My Father, "The Packer"

By Pat Greene

I've never told my father that I love him and neither have I ever heard it from him, that he loves me. I do love my father and I have no doubt that he feels likewise about me. In the old days, (as they say) children were raised tough and so prepared for a tough life. It was widely believed back then, that you would be doing more harm to a child, by telling them that you love them and thus giving the child the notion, that love alone would remedy all of life's hardships. Everything about love, in the Ireland that I grew up in, we learned and understood from pure instinct and deep searching glances. Love was always there within reach but it would be wrong of you, to have to reach out and grab at it. To be honest, it never really bothered me back then, that my father never openly confessed his love for me. There are people today that would make light of my childhood, knowing that I never found the need then, to be told by anyone, that they loved me.

Very little remains of the Ireland, where my childhood took place. In many ways my father and I shared childhoods very similar to one another. The Ireland of the 1960's and 70's was not very different at all to the Ireland of the 1930's and 40's when my father was growing up. There was an understood distance between father and son in both my father's and my own childhood. We never considered this ancient Irish custom to be wrong in any way and I can honestly say that I never felt deprived of love in my childhood. I have no problem telling my two sons that I love them and I shower them openly with my unfaltering

love for both of them. I have adapted well to the times that we live in but I feel sad in many ways that my dad was never able to appreciate the joy of telling his children that he loved us.

At an early age, I learned to channel my love of people and things through my private writings and my natural gift for telling stories. It was never thought unfashionable to talk about love, if it was love, belonging to other people - especially strangers. I was a huge daydreamer, as a child but I never once wished to have been born into a different life or to have other parents. We were as poor as hell and back then there was a wretched class system in Ireland, that made most childhoods miserable to live through. Class distinction in Irish society as a whole and especially the schools was rampant and it really didn't matter how smart you were. If you were from a poor family, most school systems considered it a complete waste of time, educating the next breed of poverty in Ireland. I too could have buckled, very easily under such demeaning pressure but I was lucky in the sense that I held high hopes for my future. There was never much time for self pity'ers back then, so we learned quickly to accept our lot in life and get on with it.

My father loved gardening and greyhounds and I loved reading and writing. I liked gardening too but my father was never shy in telling me that I was born with a black thumb. I loved watching my father use a spade. It was something amazing to feast your eyes upon and I grew up wanting to be as graceful as my father was, with a spade in his hand. He was a hard worker and he harbored a very deep and delicate pride in his work. He was difficult and contrary to work alongside and he was lousy in the praise department, so when you worked with him and he was silent, you knew you were doing good. My father was a hummer and I was a diddle-dydle-dee-er and we would be off in different sections of the garden - my father in the patie stalks and I amongst the scallions and "the masons apron" would be getting it, helter-for-skelter.

I call him dad. He calls me Patrick and he is the only person that uses the full title of my name, without it bothering me. I prefer to be called Pat and when anyone else calls me Patrick, they might as well call me "Abukahimabilinjad". My father was the caretaker of Ballinlough cemetery, so every time there was a funeral, my dad dug the grave and me and my brothers helped him. One time we dug this grave where a daughter wanted to be buried in the same grave as her mother, so the coffin was exhumed to make the grave deeper. In the process of exhuming the coffin, the lid came loose. To our horror, we discovered, that

while the interior velvet cladding was almost as good as new, most of it was ripped to shreds and I was shocked to find out that the person buried in that casket, was actually buried alive. I blame finding out something like this at such a young age, on I having a huge fear of enclosed spaces now and I want to be cremated when I die.

I come from a long line of card players and my father was a master "45" player. "45" is a game played with six players..... three sets of two. Each player gets dealt five cards and it takes watching the high pairing and a great memory to be good at the game. Each trick is equal to five and there is a best trump, which is equal to ten. The first pairing to reach "45" wins the game. My grandfather, Neddy Greene and his brother Tom were two of the finest card players ever to grace a "45" table and because of them, the Greene's got the nickname..."the packers" Every Christmas, of my childhood, that I can recall, my father, my six brothers and myself, would win multiple turkeys and smoked hams, tins of biscuits and cakes, bottles of whiskey and Harveys bristol cream sherry and a batch of Christmas puddings. There was many a night that a final would never have to be played out as there would be three sets of "the packer Greenes" sitting at that final table.

Dad is seventy nine years old now and he and my mother will be celebrating fifty four years of marriage this year. He still lives in Kiltely, my childhood home, although not in the same house that I grew up in. I have been living in New York city for over eighteen years and in the years since, I have not been great at going home to visit. There was a spell there where I did not go home for ten years and this I blame on my failed marriage. For as much as I tend to believe that I am a man of the future, my basic principles have a hard time forgiving me, for not paying enough attention to my marriage and making more of an effort to making it work. Mam and dad used to come visit me here but now that they are older, the journey is too much for both of them. I know that I would be a very lonely old man if my sons were to shut me out of their lives, so from now on, I will be going home more often.

A time comes in every son's grown life when he will have to search for his father in himself. I used to think that I was very different from my father and I am but there is also so much of my father in me. I think about going home to take a long slow walk with him. I would like to tell him that I love him and at the same time give him the opportunity to unload his love for me off his chest. I don't want this unsaid feeling to be something between us that only gets taken care

of, at a dying bedside.

My father and I, might well be from a dying breed but we both have some unfinished business to take care of.

It is time.

Jerusalem

By Michelle Kennedy

Part One

Most people of Jewish descent are familiar with the phrase, "Next year in Jerusalem", which, conceptually, is the greatest hope a Jewish person could have. The idea, I believe, is to move to Israel, within the next year; but for many Jews, the opportunity to travel, and see Israel, is a substantial fulfillment of those words.

Stepping off of the plane, onto the ladder, the first thing that hit me was the arid heat. It literally seemed to suck the air out of me and replace it with a hollowed out, scorched emptiness. Welcome to Israel, I thought. I stood there for a few seconds, getting my bearings and learning to breathe again.

I wanted to fall in love with the country immediately, but I didn't. Instead the heat continued to wreck havoc on my temper and I became as moody as I was sweaty. A taxi was waiting for us, to whisk us to Jerusalem, our first stop. My mother and sister excitedly talked the whole way, but the thirteen year old in me was tenacious. I was miserable and planned on staying that way.

The taxi driver was a friendly man, who spoke English very well. He pointed out trees that Americans had given money to plant, described the classic stone found in Jerusalem (a type of limestone), pointed to tanks along the way that we used in the Six Day War and we stopped to view a miniature replica of Jerusalem. Slowly, my grip on being obstinate started to fray. The taxi driver's love, and pride, for his country was infectious.

A few miles before we entered into Jerusalem we started to see the walls of

Jerusalem and I sensed that I was entering a place like no other. The taxi driver suddenly stopped the car and told us to get out. He grabbed a bible and put on a yamaka. I figured we were not about to be murdered, so I got out first and asked him what was going on. He said, "Before a traveler enters Yeru-sah-lyim for the first time, it is only proper to recite a prayer."

Well, my family was not religious, so I suddenly found myself nervously tapping my foot, looking at my mother and wondering what we were going to do. "Excellent idea!", she said. So, there we were, bowing East, towards the Ark and Jerusalem, with our taxi driver uttering words in our ancient tongue - Hebrew. To my surprise, I actually felt a small tremor in my heart....I was moved.

A chord had been touched within me and it resonated beautifully.

Part Two

I first saw it at dusk, towering above me, perfect and majestic. After a few twists and turns, through the narrow streets of Old Jerusalem, we emerged, steps away from the Kotel, or Western/Wailing Wall. Rich in history, it was a sight to behold: layer upon layer of stone, drenched in the rose and gold tone of sunset.

On one side men and boys, davaning (bowing in prayer) fervently, on my side, the women and girls. At first the separation consumed my thoughts, but I decided to let it go; I had come for the experience and not to judge. As I breathed in the atmosphere, I noticed little details, such as the small pieces of paper, as well as green, long grass, protruding from spots here and there. The wall was alive and breathing, on both sides, everywhere. Its tendrils of inspiration pulled me in.

Before I knew it, I was standing there, fingers outstretched, touching this ancient wall, the sole remnant of the Holy Temple. My one small motion suddenly, and irreversibly, connected me to my history, my culture and my people. I literally swayed in awe. As a young girl of thirteen, I knew this moment was transforming me. I knew that I would look back on this moment, often, and reflect on what it meant to me.

The funny thing was, in the moment, I was not sure of what it meant. I just knew that my mind, body and spirit were being drawn in, pulled by an invisible string, into the heart of this magnificent wall.

Tears welled up in my eyes. I said a silent prayer, clinging to the wall and the tiny piece of paper I was going to add to it. I knew that I would return one day. I knew many things and nothing at all.

Looking back, I reflect on many aspects of the experience, but give pause to the idea of separation. In one way, the wall was unifying, and therefore, there was no true separation. Yet, the wall divides two neighboring religious communities. Men and women. People. Thoughts. Emotions. Walls do, do that. Frost wrote a poem entitled "Mending Wall", which I often think about in connection to the Kotel.

There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors'.

.....He moves in darkness as it seems to me~
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

What I have come to think of is that differences are acceptable. Spirituality for women and men may, indeed, be different, and similar, at the same time. Same with all creatures, great and small. We must embrace, and respect, this notion. Yet, the grass grew on both sides of the Kotel... and so, likewise, we must look for that which brings us together, as well.



"Inventing the Skateboard" by Nawa; Copyright 2009

Inventing the Skateboard

by Mark Barkawitz

I was born in a place called Kew Gardens, New York. Back in the early '50s, before the invention of the skateboard, we rode scooter-boxes. A scooter-box was made by taking apart a steel-wheeled skate, then affixing the wheels under the ends of a two-to-three-foot long 2"x4". On the nose of the 2"x4", a wooden, fruit crate was nailed upright on its end. And on top of

that, two wing-like, wooden handles were secured for steering. Then to customize our scooter-boxes, we nailed or glued bottle caps all over the fruit crate. Daddy made me one when I was just a little fart. And because we owned a small delicatessen in Astoria on Long Island—above which we lived in an equally small apartment—there was a bevy of assorted bottle caps to trick-out my ride.

In 1957, we moved across the country to Pasadena, California. I didn't notice any west-coasters riding scooter-boxes, so I figured it was an east coast thing. In '59, my parents bought our house on Mar Vista Avenue for \$12,500. And like most north/south streets in Pasadena, it was hilly. I figured a scooter-box would be fun to ride downhill, but I'd left mine behind in New York (no room for it on the propeller-driven commercial airline). So my little brother Bruce and I—six and eight, respectively at the time—borrowed one of my little sister Cyndi's metal skates and went out to the garage to build one. We couldn't find any 2"x4"s or a fruit crate of any kind. So while Bruce took apart Cyndi's skate, I improvised our building supplies with what was available: a four-foot long, six-inch wide piece of dog-eared, cedar fencing. When I nailed the skate-ends on the bottom, the eight-penny nails stuck up through the top side, so I bent them over with the hammer. But they still looked dangerous. So we used scissors to cut a carpet fragment to fit atop the cedar board and affixed it with 1/2" roofing nails.

We stood back to admire our work.

"It's pretty long," Bruce said.

"Let's see if we both fit."

I sat over the back wheels, my knees scrunched up into my chest; Bruce sat likewise in front of me. We wobbled and put our hands down to steady ourselves.

"Just like a sled," I said. We'd ridden a sled together during our last winter

back east.

“What are we gonna use for brakes?” he asked.

“Turn onto the parkway grass.”

Together we carried our two-man, box-less scooter-box up to the corner. We sat on it—he in front of me—and used our hands to steady ourselves on the downhill sidewalk until we got rolling. We crashed every couple of houses until we got our leaning in sync. After a few runs, we made it all the way down from Claremont Street to the parkway in front of our house, where we rolled onto the St. Augustine grass, crashing and tumbling to a stop under the old oak tree, laughing our guts out. We started experimenting with different riding positions: both on our knees, one sitting and one kneeling, one sitting and one standing behind, et cetera. It was a lot of fun. Other kids on the block watched us enviously. David, one of the bigger kids who lived on Claremont, came over to check out our ride as we prepared for another run.

“What is that?” David had started a fist-fight with me right after my family moved onto the block. He threw nine punches at me; I blocked them all—the advantage of having a brother with whom to fight daily. Then he said he heard his mom calling him and went home. That was our fight.

“It’s kinda’ like a scooter-box without the box,” I said.

“For two,” Bruce added.

“Scooter-box?” David didn’t seem to know what I meant. “What kinda’ wheels?”

“We took apart one of our sister’s skates,” I explained.

Bruce flipped-over the board.

David looked closer. “Huh. So it’s more like a board-skater.”

“Somethin’ like that,” I agreed.

“For two,” Bruce added again.

A few months later, David’s family moved to Venice Beach. Back then, Bruce and I thought that was some place in Italy. But it was actually just forty miles away on the coast just south of Santa Monica, where years later with the invention of the polyurethane wheel, the Z-Boys skateboarding team would revolutionize the sport by riding empty swimming pools.

But back in ’59, it was my little brother Bruce and I who were the revolutionary innovators. Oh sure, lots of people claim to have invented the skateboard in one way or another around that same time. But it was the Barkawitz Boys who invented the tandem skateboard. Unfortunately at six and eight years-of-age, we lacked the marketing skills and manufacturing capabilities of Wham-O and missed out on creating a family fortune. And we got grounded for ruining our sister’s stupid skate. As with any revolution, its practitioners pay a steep price for progress.

He says, “Good Luck”

By Judy Marcellot

My friend, Mary-Ann, says we tell stories for lots of reasons – to laugh, to teach, to reflect and, as in my case, to clean and dress the wound so it can heal. My story is a reminder for me to “keep my karma current,” because

the universe doesn't always allow do-overs.

The call came at 11:00 pm. "Moua's in the hospital," said our youngest daughter, "and it doesn't look like she's going to make it."

But let me begin at the beginning.

In 1970 I founded a social service agency serving English to accommodate the second language needs of non and limited English-speaking adult immigrants to the city of Providence, RI. For the first five years or so of the program most of the students were Spanish speaking, which is the population we originally targeted. I am Spanish speaking, having spent various periods in Mexico both as a high school and college student and taking most of my undergraduate courses in the language. In the mid-seventies, refugees from the Vietnam era started showing up in Rhode Island and elsewhere around the country. Groups of Khmer from Cambodia, Ethnic Lao, Vietnamese who had made it to the refugee camps in Thailand and Hmong from Laos were re-settled in Providence by church and other social service groups. Providence at the time had a thriving factory economy and refugees could find a job without having to learn too much English. Though it wasn't an easy life by any means. Many survivors arrived suffering with tremendous symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The Hmong were left to collect their families, trek through the jungle, cross the Mekong River, dodge the bullets of the Thai army, and make it to the UN refugee camps. It was this last group, the Hmong, who changed the lives of my husband and I forever, when they arrived in Providence and started attending English language classes at my agency.

There has been a lot of cross-cultural misunderstanding between the Hmong and other Americans (it was the underlying theme of Clint Eastwood's recent movie "Gran Torino"). After years of cultural upheaval and personal sacrifice, the Hmong continue to experience prejudice. Although many of them have integrated into the larger American society and prospered in ways that we as a people consider successful – good jobs, successful children, etc. - prejudice and suspicion remains on both sides.

Years ago, one Hmong friend asked my husband, "Why do Americans hate us?" That question broke my heart then and it breaks my heart now. But that's not my story. My story is one of personal heartbreak, regret and self-forgiveness. My story is a reminder to myself to keep my karma current.

So, the Hmong started arriving in Providence while I was still directing the English-as-a-second language agency I founded in 1970. One particular agency grant targeted recent Vietnamese, Hmong, Lao and Cambodian refugees who came to Providence, Rhode Island by way of the refugee camps in Thailand. In the late 1970's my husband and I were vegetable gardening and not much else (we later started a plant nursery.) The Hmong were an agricultural slash-and-burn people in their homeland in the mountains of Laos. They had lost so much, like so many forced refugee groups, and we grew close to a lot of the adult students and their families. At one point, we offered the use of some of our land to anyone who wanted to plant it. Several extended families took us up on the offer and soon raised beds thick with tomatoes, squashes, cucumbers and mustard greens grew up in our backfields. We loved walking through the beds and meeting gardeners of all ages, from toddlers to old folk. We started attending all sorts of Hmong celebrations in nearby Providence, not understanding too much but enjoying the energy of large families working together with everyone occupied. Like some sort of a well-oiled wheel with a certain amount of chaos thrown in. It was impressive to see how a people who had lost so much of their underlying identification through horror and hardship regrouped to create a new version of their lives.

One day, Sai, the father of one of the gardening families, came to us with a question: "Would you take one or two of my daughters to live with you for a year or two or maybe the rest of their lives?" The Hmong live in extended family networks, clans, and in their pre-war peaceful agrarian communities, this arrangement wasn't that strange to them. We don't know why but it never sounded strange to us either. "Sure", we said. There was a ceremony/party at which we think we were sort of adopted into the clan but aren't really completely certain. There was a lot of ritual drinking, toasts, and advice. And everyone gave us a dollar. The girls were too little (six and seven) to really know what was being said.

And, to this day, although bilingual in Spanish and French, we are ashamed to say that we have learned very little Hmong . After each long oration, our translator would turn to us and say, "He says, 'Good luck'." That began a life-long association with members of the Vang and Thao clans that continues to this day, although not in as intense a form as it was when the girls were little and the families lived fifteen minutes away.

Moua and See lived with us during the week and went home for the weekends and summer vacations to Providence. We experienced the things "normal" families do, except our family was much larger and very diverse viewpoints had to be honored. For instance, when the girls were little, their mom, Blia, asked us not to let them play outside at dusk as that was a time when spirits might come and cause them to become sick. The mind is such a big part of creating one's reality who were we to say that couldn't happen? Although there are huge parts of the Hmong culture we will probably never really understand because of the language barrier, we expanded our acceptance of things "real" and "unreal". So the girls didn't leave the house at dusk. Shamanic healing also was a big part of our expanded views.

When the girls got sick, the shaman was called in and a ceremony performed. The girls also saw Western doctors. Although we were perfectly willing to try herbal remedies first (we had recently started an herb farm) they took an awful lot of antibiotics as children. It was important for their families to adapt to the ways of the current country of residence. So they thought. At least, so we thought they thought. The shaman was called in for emotional crisis as well and ceremonies were held for a wide spectrum of issues. Often if the girls misbehaved, we had family meetings with the offender and four adults.

Life for Moua was always harder than it was for See. From the beginning, Moua was harder to get close to. She stiffened up when she was hugged, for example, while See would reach for your hand to hold even as a teenager. I would find all sorts of soggy food in the washer – nuts, raisins and other treats Moua would stick in her pockets and not eat – a behavior I thought must have originated in the jungle and Thai camps where hoarding was a common activity, necessary to insure food for the next day. Later, I would find rolls of stamps under her bed. Then money.

One Sunday night when they were still little, the girls were late arriving home, after a weekend with their family and other home. Blia had given Moua twenty dollars and Moua had lost it. The family spent several hours looking for the twenty-dollar bill before bringing the kids out. I later saw Moua with the twenty dollars and knew she had hustled her mom. Truth was subjective with Moua, but it is for lots of kids, including me when I was young. When my mother would ask me where I was going with friends I never considered actually telling her the truth, even when it didn't matter in the slightest. "Going to the drugstore" when I was headed to the library. "Going uptown," when I was headed to the beach. So Moua's white lies didn't bother me all that much. She consistently didn't tell the truth so, for the most part, there was a pattern and a way to figure out the things that really mattered.

On so many other levels, Moua was just a wonderful human being. Even as a small child, she was extremely articulate, perceptive and kind. She had lots of friends. In her natural family, she easily and happily cared for the younger kids, all their cousins, and their cousins' cousins. Children loved her. She also related easily to adults. I would often see her talking with adults in supermarkets, at the post office, just about everywhere we went. She and I would have animated, wonderful conversations each morning while driving to the parochial girls' school that we thought would "straighten her out". I would say to her, "you're such a brilliant human being. I can't wait for you to grow up and we can have great adult conversations". I loved her so much! Parochial school didn't last long. It wasn't easy for Moua to reconcile the Hmong animistic viewpoint with her new lessons about original sin.

The girls' dad had a pretty hard time of it in their new country as well. Sai had undergone difficult training and had also been injured several times in the war. He was in constant physical pain from the shrapnel that remained in both legs and in mental pain from the events that remained in his head. He drank himself incoherent on many occasions and self-medicated with opium as well. The girls were clearly impacted by this. But the Hmong, like everyone else, often circle the wagons and retreat into silent denial behaviors. Our shared children had a lot on their plates.

When Moua became a teenager, she would arrive home in lovely new outfits. "Moua, you look great," I'd say. "Where'd you get that outfit?" "One of my friends gave it to me". "Wow, what a nice friend," I'd reply. It never once occurred to me that she was either shoplifting or stealing from both her families to buy her new clothes. The stealing from her families did not stop. It escalated as she got older. In addition to the stealing and lying, add skipping school to the behaviors we had no idea how to re-direct.

This brings me to the heartbreak and regret part of my story.

My husband and I started our plant nursery on a wing and a prayer. An eight hundred dollar tax return, a little money here and there from landscape side jobs and not much else. We were attempting to follow the bliss that Joseph Campbell speaks of, although the bliss was accompanied by very little money in those days. Like many of our friends, we had hoped, expected really, that doing what you love would be followed by "the money", as a lot of the self help new age books of the day promised. In the business world, however, this can translate as "undercapitalized," as it did in our case. Basically, we were broke most of the time, heating our leaky 1790 New England cape with wood, and doing the best we could to feed the kids, pay the mortgage, and keep body and soul together. Every penny counted. In fact, we often rolled pennies to buy food. Sometimes Blia would offer me some of her food stamps. I hated to take them. I thought Blia needed them more, but more than that, it was embarrassing. I was sure that anyone who saw us at the grocery checkout was wondering to themselves, "Why are two healthy-looking young people ripping off the government? Why don't they just get jobs?" It was a new experience for both my husband and me as we had come from solid middle class families in which good schools and lots of travel was the norm. As much as we needed them, I tried to avoid Blia when she had food stamps in her hands.

One morning, while gathering up the girls' clothes to wash them, several checks slipped out from between Moua's sweaters. There were six of them, all made out to our nursery and totaling maybe a hundred dollars – a large amount of money to us in those days. Each check had been hand endorsed by Moua and she had obviously tried, and been unable, to cash them. When

I write about this so many years later it doesn't seem like such a big deal. Sure, Moua stole. Moua consistently stole. But then, it was a monumental deal. The money would have fed all of us for several weeks and I guess I had reached some sort of boiling point about the stealing. When Moua came home from school I was ready.

It's funny. It's taken me months to write this paragraph. I have danced around it, over it, under it. I asked my husband to write it. And the fact is, I can't remember much of it, only images. Moua sitting on the couch as I let loose and yelled. Me grabbing her arm and yelling "I'm so mad at you! How could you take this money when you know we need it so badly?!" And I slapped her across the face. Once. But once was enough to shock us both. "You're going home. You can't live here anymore," I shouted. And with that we threw our daughter out of our home, her home.

That night will forever be the darkest, most painful experience in my life. Moua and I were both sobbing. The ride into Providence was as silent as the grave, only broken once when Moua turned to me and said, "When I grow up and get better I'll come back and we'll live together again." I can't even remember what we said to Bliia and Sai. Did we bring Moua's clothes, her things? I have no idea. Did we hug her goodbye? I've asked my husband and he says he has no memory of that night.

How hurt and angry Moua became evident several days later. Moua and her sister were seeing a counselor at a local community-based agency. We originally took the girls to counseling because, as I said earlier, they had a lot on their plates – family addiction, Moua's stealing, living part time in twentieth century Anglo America and part time in a formally nomadic, shamanistic culture trying to hold on to itself, and probably a whole lot more. Two days after we took Moua back to Providence I received a phone call from her counselor. "I just want you to know you've been reported to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for child abuse". "Excuse me?" I said. Moua had called to report my slap. The counselor went on to say that if I refrained from further abuse no action would be taken against me. "There's a record somewhere of me as a child abuser?" I asked. "Yes," she said, but nothing would be done unless there were further complaints. Since Moua's

habitual lying was one of the reasons we had initiated counseling to begin with, I wondered why the counselor hadn't called me to ask for my version of events. As it turns out, this "act first, ask questions later" was contrary to agency policy and, to make a long story short, my record as a child abuser was expunged with an apology from the agency. Blia and Sai asked us to withdraw See from counseling. They didn't want to risk any such institutional terror reigning down on their heads.

Moua's choices for the next six years took her down paths we would call "every parent's nightmare." She quit school, took drugs, and threw herself into crazy, dysfunctional relationships, at one point getting restraining orders against every new boy she dated, basically because she could. She briefly moved to Miami and in with a Cuban drug dealer. Moua had studied Spanish in school and we practiced a little together off and on. 'At least her Spanish is improving,' my husband and I would say to each other, a dark humored attempt to lighten the reality of our daughter living with a drug dealer in Miami.

While we still saw our Hmong family, the relationship faded to the back burner for a while. See was needed at home to help care for the younger children. But it was more than this. They didn't want See here. There was a definite rift in the relationship. We all needed time to heal from the wound. Their anger at us became very clear when there was an issue with See at the private school where she was enrolled, and where she had received a full scholarship as the first Hmong in the school. See was living back in Providence but the school knew us to be the contact people. "There's a problem with See," said the caller. "I know her family doesn't want you involved but we think she needs some help". It was a minor incident. See had left school without permission, but the school felt there were other issues as well. The words "the family doesn't want you involved" felt like a pistol shot to the stomach.

Gradually, over the next several years, the relationship softened and we became a part of the family's life again. When there were academic or other problems in high school, we became the go-to family. We all happily watched See go off to an excellent college on a full scholarship.

In 1991, the family packed up and moved to Minnesota to join other clan members who had resettled there and were able to buy cheap land to farm. Moua stayed behind, living with an aunt in Providence. She would stop by often for dinner, to spend the night, or just to visit. Often her visits were accompanied by her current friends, young women working in the strip clubs and their gun-carrying boyfriends. Well, at least she's alive, we said to ourselves, although we always expected to get the call saying she was not.

About two years later, Moua decided to join her family in Minnesota. It was the best decision she ever made. Back in the fold of the family and clan Moua received her high school equivalency diploma, graduated from college, and worked in a series of jobs as a high powered, highly respected advocate of the rights of Asian women. If you "Google" my daughter, you will find many references to her work. She counseled both Asian and Anglo women and helped teenage prostitutes get off the street. She traveled all over the country, attending conferences and giving papers on women's issues to both government and private agencies. Moua was a fierce advocate for the rights of the disenfranchised.

"Moua's in the hospital and she's not expected to make it".

There it was. Every parent's worst case scenario-the call we expected to get fifteen years ago, not now when her demons had been laid to rest. Moua and her mom had been driving when Moua was suddenly stricken with unbearable chest pain. They found a clinic in the nearest town and a cardiologist, who was only at the clinic once a month and was there that day, arranged for immediate helicopter transport to the nearest hospital in Sioux City, South Dakota, as it turns out. She was sedated for the pain and able to speak. By the time she arrived at the hospital Moua's brain had suffered two mini-strokes. The aorta in her beautiful heart had dissected and there was no brain activity. Moua was removed from life support when all her family had gathered and it was clear that there was no possible reversal of her condition. Moua was gone before our travel arrangements could be finalized. No last kiss for us.

It has taken me many months of starts and stops to chronicle our story, my story, about Blia's and my beloved daughter. I often think of Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken". Two roads diverged in a yellow wood... I wish I could go back and take the other road. I wish we had never taken her home that fateful night. I wish I had told her that that day was the worst of my life. I wish we could sit together and have tea one more time. I wish. I wish. I wish.

One of my favorite lines from a movie is the one George Burns spoke as God in *Oh God*, when one of the characters asked him why he allowed evil and bad things to happen in the world. "I never could figure out how to make a top without a bottom," he said.

I realize there will be no mutual acknowledgment of that day with Moua. No crying, hugging, and forgiving. Moua is gone and I live with the moments of peace and acceptance of our shared story that repetitive self-forgiveness brings. I am eternally grateful for our time together.

Post Script:

When I began to write about Moua's life and death I was looking for a way to forgive myself about the night we returned her to her Hmong family. I couldn't get past my regret, my pain. I couldn't even say the words "returned her to her family." I would refer to it as "that awful night." In the eleven months since her passing, I've naturally thought a lot about Moua and the life she chose. Sometimes people tell me stories about their own children and the difficult lives they've chosen, difficult for their parents, at any rate. Often I say to them. "I know how hard it is to see a child make what we as parents consider mistakes and bad decisions. But, I truly believe there are no mistakes. Every road my daughter walked and every decision she made, decisions we and her natural parents would have changed in a heartbeat had we the ability to control another human being, made up the fabric of her life. And when she died at the age of thirty-four she had dipped her toes into every pond she came to. She had experienced life from all

sides.” And that was a fine thing. These days, when I think of my daughter, I think of a brilliant star going nova, a life well-lived, indeed.

Several weeks after Moua’s death I found the following poem written by a Lao American poet about her, in memory to her, on the internet. It reminds me how large my daughter’s life was, how far she traveled and how much she lived.

Incandescence

What passes from the earth? Everything living.
What remains? Ordinary days

Punctuated by the rising of the sun,
the waking of souls, the roots of nightfall.

Some, we'll witness together.
Some, separated by miles, the flux of atoms, the quirks of perspective.

All lives are brief among mountains, among constellations
Who hang a million light years away.

But even the briefest life of a Hmong woman
Born among our secret wars and uncertain futures

Can spark transformations
As meaningful as the first smile of a child,
The last story of an elder who never lost hope,
Or the bright thread between friends saying goodbye.

Bryan Thao Worra



"First Falls" by Newa; Copyright 2009

WAVING GOODBYE

by Mark Barkawitz

Kurt Gnewuch aka the artist Newa—
gentle soul, hard-working carpenter,
good friend, and generous tipper.

(The waitresses will miss him, too.)

A veteran, goofy-foot surfer,
who lived by his simple mantra:

“When there’s no work,
it’s my job to surf.”

In Memoriam of a true free spirit
9/30/’51— 8/14/’09

Last Paddle-Out — 9/12/’09

First Falls

by Mark Barkawitz

There used to be two ways to get up to First Falls in Eaton Canyon. You could start at the Nature Center and hike 1.1 miles up the canyon trail to the White Bridge, then drop down to the creek and continue hiking for another half-mile up the switch-back canyon into the mountains. Or you could get dropped off on Pinecrest Drive in Altadena and take the short-cut down the Mt. Wilson Toll Road. Then at the White Bridge, likewise drop down into the canyon and follow the creek on the winding, dirt trail that parallels and criss-crosses it. The mountains are steep on each side back there, making it impossible to see ahead or behind the next switch-back turn.

Spring’s the best time to go, when the winter run-off fills the creek. But be careful off-trail, where the poison oak is lush. You don’t want to mess with that stuff.

I still remember the first time I hiked up there with my little brother Bruce and our St. Philip the Apostle classmates Dick Alfano and Pat Lawrence, who wore coke-bottle eyeglasses and his hair parted down the middle. As we hurried around turn after turn, we began to wonder if there really was a waterfall—as we’d heard through the grammar school grapevine—within walking distance of our Pasadena homes. As we tired, we slowed and complained, laying blame on each other for this wild water chase. But then a faint, rumbling sound gradually became audible. It grew louder as we continued deeper into the mountains. Once again, we quickened our pace. Suddenly, there it was: a real, live waterfall! Admittedly, it was no Niagara Falls. But the creek water above cascaded thirty-or-so feet down into a swimming pool-sized pond that was plenty deep enough for swimming where the coarse-sand bottom graduated deeply towards the waterfall. We stripped down to our boxer shorts, stepped cautiously over the rocks in the shallows, and waded out into the cool water, taking turns dog-paddling under the pounding falls for as long as we each could stand it. We laughed and dunked one another. We climbed a dead tree that leaned conveniently against the wall, then hung and dropped from its only limb into deep water. When the afternoon sun passed across the top of Razorback—the southwestern mountain peak—it cast us in cool shadows. We shivered with goose-bumps and dressed while still wet, and then ran back down the canyon, vaulting ourselves off boulders, our feet soggy in Jack Purcell tennies and JC Penney desert boots.

As we grew into our later teens, we brought our girlfriends, backpacks full of munchies, and dogs up into the canyon for a day of fun and passing sun at First Falls.

But some things have changed since my youth. The Mt. Wilson Toll Road is now closed due to landslides from heavy rains years ago and has remained so due to our state’s budgetary constraints. The chain-link gate on Pinecrest Drive that guards the road’s entry is securely pad-locked and razor-wire loops atop the fencing. On the Eaton Canyon Trail, road directions are now affixed on metal posts like street corner signs, making it seem less an adventure, merely an enjoyable hike. North of the White Bridge, where the switch-backs isolate its visitors, many of the large

boulders—stoic remains of melting glaciers at the end of the Ice Age—are now defaced with gang graffiti. The park rangers do their best to prime out the offending tags—the spray-painted fingerprints of bangers—with a rock-colored gray. It's safe enough up there when the foot traffic is heavy. But like the rattlesnakes that occasionally sun themselves on a hot summer day, you need to be aware of their presence. I usually take along my dogs (which the dogs appreciate) and strap a big, hunting knife conspicuously on my side. Like the Boy Scouts—I'm prepared. That tree limb-walking stick I hunt up when I'm deep in the canyon—it isn't really for walking at all. Know what I mean, jellybean?

And that old, dead tree that used to lean vertically, conveniently against the wall at First Falls has disappeared completely, no longer accommodating the dare-devil antics of adolescence.

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