

## [The Write Place At the Write Time](#)

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### "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.



"Peaches, December" by Christopher Woods; <http://christopherwoods.zenfolio.com/>

### Tilt-a-Whirl

by April Salzano

"Bye, Mom!" Nate called from the front door as my sister-in-law, Kathleen, beeped her horn in the driveway. She had come to take him to the school, where he and her daughter needed to be by 7:30 a.m. in order to catch the bus to Grove City College for the "academic games" tournament hosted by the gifted program. Getting him to school during the time that he, my other son, Thomas and I would normally be getting ready for school is exactly the kind of thing that stresses me out, so I was exceptionally grateful for the ride. My sister-in-law had also arranged for a ride after school at 4:00 to my mother-in-law's house because immediately after school, I needed to get Thomas to occupational therapy, something he has done since he was two and diagnosed with autism. Saying that since that day, our lives have

seemed to revolve around Thomas's schedule would be a gross understatement.

"Bye, Nate! I love you! Good luck!" I called back, instantly feeling guilty for not waving at the front door both in greeting to Kathleen and in farewell to Nate, but I was sitting on Thomas on the bathroom floor. His arms were tucked under my quads, his head dangerously close to the wooden baseboard. This is how I have to brush his teeth lately, and how I give him his morning medications almost all the time, which include a liquid iron supplement and Prevacid for acid reflux, both due to a severely limited diet that results from food aversions. He could probably easily throw me off, but for the time being, it works. This is all part of our morning routine—a list of things Thomas knows he has to do in order to get 10 minutes of YouTube time. He only gets three chances per day, so I take full advantage and get all I can out of him—spelling words, math homework, even nail clipping.

Mornings are the hardest because the list is the longest, so I remind him of our routine along the way to keep him motivated: "What do we have to do? Get up, pee, eat breakfast, brush teeth, get dressed, write spelling words," I usually chime in as positive a voice as I can muster at 7:00 a.m. Then I add the phrase he is waiting to hear, "Then Bad Hat Harry, 2006," which is currently his favorite television production company logo, a two second clip that features two cartoon guys and a shark in the background. I am never unaware of how strange we would look and sound to an outsider.

I heard the door close and attempted to talk myself out of the guilt by using logic. I tried to ignore the thought that I am sure every parent considers during situations like this: *What if today, the only day I didn't get a chance to say goodbye...*

For the first few years after Thomas was diagnosed, I held on to the hope that I would be able to look back on all of this and say, "It has gotten easier."

It hasn't.

Even now, there are times I feel like I am getting parenting an autistic child right, but parenting a normal child completely wrong.

These are the times that autism will not relinquish control over what should be a normal event, that it colors everything with a specific shade of stress

and chaos. Looking back to what happened the day of the third grade Thanksgiving feast, I see that it was nothing unique to being the mother of a child with a sibling who has autism, though it certainly did add that certain extra layer to my sadness and a justification to my tears of frustration. I had spent an entire day stressing over finding time to make my designated dessert before deciding that in order to make it all work logistically, I needed to make it the day before the party.

My carefully-orchestrated plan to get Thomas to and from preschool and to my sister's, Ronnie's, house to babysit the day of the party had gone completely awry when after volunteering to make a jello salad for me, my mother, who was accompanying me to the party, bailed out because she didn't have any whipped topping. I called Ronnie, and the tears didn't stop for the duration of our phone conversation and at least thirty minutes beyond. As usual, she was my source of calm rationale.

I felt like a quivering bowl of jello by the time I squealed into the parking lot the next day carrying the cranberry salad that Ronnie ended up making for me after talking me down from hysteria. Bouncing between Thomas's preschool, occupational therapy appointment, behavioral therapy appointment, and my plan to get started grading the papers my students had handed in the day before left me no time to get to the store to buy something for Nate's party.

I tried to put my thoughts of Thomas aside for those couple of hours and focus on Nate, but the taste of autism was lurking in the stuffing. The woman I happened to sit next to introduced herself and said that I looked familiar. "Do you get your services through VPS?" she asked, referring to the provider for Thomas's behavioral therapy.

"Yes, for my other son, Thomas," I answered. I could almost feel Nate thinking, *there she goes*.

"You talked to that lady the whole time, Mommy," Nate said after the party. My mom shot me a knowing look. *Maybe that's why I had invited her, to supplement me*, I thought. More tears.

The same thing seemed to happen everywhere we went. During one of the few soccer practices I got the chance to see that season without chasing Thomas around the park, I found a woman who used to be an autism support worker, and we spent the whole scrimmage talking about how hard

it is to find someone you trust with your child and how hard the job itself is. We spent most of the few practices I was present for on the same topic, though the majority of that season I was at home in the bathroom coaxing Thomas to poop, cleaning up after him when he did, or treating the severe diaper rash that resulted from his attempts to withhold stool. The one game I did get to attend whirled by while I talked to another woman about internal yeast-infections and gluten-free diets for autism. “You missed my goal,” Nate said sadly. Shortly after, my husband, Eric morphed magically into a soccer dad for Nate.

Nate is a good brother. I couldn’t have asked for a better advocate and helper for Thomas. In part, this is something I instilled—something that has come with its own amount of struggle, now that I think back. I can vividly picture a poster board hanging on my dining room wall from when Nate was only six, two years younger than Thomas is now. The chart was proudly titled “Things I Can Do All By Myself”, complete with hand-drawn rows and columns, splattered with shiny stars in various colors. “Brush my teeth, Take a shower, Do Not Ask When Therapy Will Be Over...”

At that time, Thomas had just begun services. The boys’ father, my husband of twelve years, had just moved out. Nate was a wreck. I had him in outpatient counseling and the therapist had applauded my chart when I described it. Nate was going through a sort of regression, no doubt because he needed attention due to the loss of his father’s presence, even if that was only the loss of a sleeping lump on our couch. Nate had begun to exhibit new fears—going upstairs alone, into the bathroom, or being left for even a minute if I slipped out back for a cigarette while he was watching cartoons.

At times, the glowing ember at the end of my Marlboro seemed the only light in my life. Nate would rush to the storm door as soon as he knew he was alone and throw himself against it. If I didn’t turn around immediately from where I sat at the top of the deck steps, he would begin banging on the door. When I finally turned to look at him, he would shoot me an accusatory stare. He knew he wasn’t allowed to come outside unless someone was bleeding, but he was determined that if he had to stay in, he would make my few moments alone miserable. It worked. I would snuff out my cigarette and go back in the house. I felt like a prisoner to my children. What I needed was time to think, and time was a precious commodity back then, even more than it is now. The behavior chart was my attempt to gain back some control during a time when everything felt so completely out of control.

When I look back on these days, I have a vision of me and my two boys and everything we own on a high-speed, spinning amusement park ride in the middle of a blaringly-sunny afternoon. Rather than darkness, I see everything from that time period as bright and shiny, a sensory assault. There is too much of everything I do not want, and not enough of anything I need. The boys and I are held to the walls of a ride only by centrifugal force. But the ride suddenly begins to slow. We slide down the sides, then fall down, our belongings scattering everywhere. I climb out, gather everything back up, and spin us manually by running alongside the ride, anything to keep everything where it should be, my children stuck in place where I can see them, my life hovering at the fragile center. As long as I keep running, as long as I do not lose any momentum, everything stays put.

There are still days, five years and a lot of behavioral therapy later, when I feel like I am on that ride, days when our momentum is disrupted, when my run slows to a jog because I have tripped over some unexpected obstacle. This happens no matter how hard I may have tried to avoid that very occurrence.

For the past two years, mine and Thomas's preferred Saturday morning involves a 10:30 a.m. (sharp) departure. We drive to the nearest Starbucks, an admittedly long distance for a cup of coffee, and while we are in that town, we hit Thomas's choice of drive-thru's for French fries. Lately, it has been Long John Silvers. I discovered he will eat the batter crumbs and a few nibbles of a chicken plank. After we both have our treats in hand, we drive to visit Thomas's favorite place, Aunt Ronnie's house. On opposing Saturdays we go to meet my ex, but only under the condition that we "see Ronnie Sunday."

There is also another part to the routine: Nate's attempts to get out of going. "Mom, can I just stay home?" Nate asks, or, "Do I have to go?"

"Yes," I usually say. I wait for the eye roll and the pre-teen huff before I add, "What else are you going to do? Stay in your room and play video games?"

"Then can you drop me off at Ronnie's *before* you go to Starbucks?" Nate will whine as we leave the house. Ronnie's house is conveniently located almost exactly in between our house and Starbucks.

"No, Nate because if I drop you off there, Thomas will want to be dropped off also and then he won't have lunch," I had responded that particular

Saturday, thinking through the logistics in a split second, almost considering letting Nate have his way just to avoid prolonging the exchange.

“So?” Nate surmised. Then he decided on “just make him go with you anyway,” as a response.

“He won’t understand that we are coming right back and he will be all upset. Just come with us,” I answered. “It’ll be fun,” I added, knowing nothing about traveling in the car for 45 minutes without music is fun to Nathan, a fact he takes every opportunity to point out.

“Thomas, want to hear some music?” he always asks.

“Nope!” Thomas answers, instantly nervous.

“Nate, stop it,” comes my response from the front seat. We’ve had this conversation a thousand times if we’ve had it once. “Thomas waits for this all week. Don’t ruin it for him,” I say, referring to the fact that Thomas has been petrified of music in the car for well over six months now. It has to do with his fear of unpredictability, especially related to anything auditory. It has become normal to me. I actually enjoy the silence at times, but generally, there is no silence when Nate is in the car. I rarely see him now that he has hit his pre-teen phase of hiding out in his room and playing Xbox Live with his friends from school. When I do see him, at dinner, or when he has me trapped in a closed vehicle, he crams in as much as he can. I understand about half of it, and only after I replay his words in my head slowly.

“I’m bored,” is usually Nate’s next phrase, followed by my annoyance that I can’t have a peaceful treat just once a week. I admit it, I feel entitled to as much. Once I get frustrated, which is part of the plan, Nate says, “You should have just let me stay home.” It doesn’t matter how many times I tell him that he cannot manipulate me in order to get his way, he keeps trying. It’s working. There are days I do not want to listen to it and I leave him home with Eric, but this past Saturday, I must have been feeling especially resolute because I forced him to go.

“We won’t be there long. You need to be home to get ready for soccer by 2:00 anyway,” I say sitting up higher in my seat to look in the rearview mirror.

“Whatever,” he says with the tone I have come to loathe almost as much as his new bouts of budding rage and lack of personal hygiene. A few minutes later, though, he is back to himself and telling me stories about school with rapid speech and animation, peppered with as many swear words as he thinks he can get away with.

When we arrive at Ronnie’s that particular Saturday, over an hour later, Thomas is happy as can be. He runs ahead of me into the house. By the time I enter, seconds later, toting his backpack full of snack containers and various other necessities like his voice-changing microphone, perfect for auditory stimming, his shoes and coat are splayed on the middle of Ronnie’s kitchen floor, and he is already lying on the couch holding someone’s iPad.

“Well hi, stranger,” my mom chimes out. I set the strawberry frappe she asked for in front of her and one of the two bear claws I got from the bakery a few miles from Starbucks. I set the other in front of my 90-year-old Nana and throw the remnants of Thomas’s Long John Silvers in the trash.

“Hi, guys!” I chime to the posse gathered around the kitchen table. Nate has disappeared upstairs to find Dale. Lizzy and my mom are using a hot glue gun to attach what looks like braided rope to metal hair barrettes, which they tell me are to sell at the church craft show. The mood here is always relaxed and happy. Time seems completely irrelevant. No one is ever in a hurry, and despite minor bickering that only adds a level of realism to the scene, they are a happy family. Maybe this is what Thomas likes here. It surely can’t be the portable DVD player, the computer, or the dry erase board. These are all things he has at home. But this weekly visit is something he looks forward to so much that his helper at school had to develop her own picture schedule so that she could show him if he was going to his Dad’s or Ronnie’s that particular Saturday. It was the only thing that calmed his incessant asking in school, “Go see Ronnie, Saturday? You want Ronnie’s house?”

“You want *Powerpuff Girls*?” I hear Thomas ask from the living room. At eight, he still phrases questions backwards, saying the line that he wants me to say to him.

Ronnie’s husband, Junior, who is the only one in the living room, has a hard time hearing as it is, and most of Thomas’s requests are difficult to make out, especially if you do not know his ever-changing obsessions by



name. "He's asking for *Powerpuff Girls*," I translate, "because you put it on for him last Saturday. Thomas, say 'I want *Powerpuff Girls*,'" I coach.

"Oh, okay, Buddy, hang on a minute," Junior says. He starts to fidget with the remote, pulls up the On-Demand menu and begins to scroll.

"Dat one, *Powerpuff Girls*!" Thomas says. His voice has taken on the whining, frantic tone that signals he is already getting irritated. A few years ago, our then-BSC had suggested a "wait program" to teach him to delay gratification. I had thought she was insane. I remember saying, "Okay, so we have spent three years teaching him that language has a function, and now we are going to teach him the reverse?" I get it now. It was a good idea. I have since noted it as one of my mistakes. The all-too-frequent thought runs through my head, *if only I could go back and do it all over*.

*The Powerpuff Girls* does not show up on any of the several lists Junior pulls up. Thomas's scripting increases in volume and becomes more rapid. "You want *Powerpuff Girrrrrllsssss*!"

"Okay, we are trying," I say, feeling my blood pressure start to rise. I really want to go sit in the kitchen and visit with my mom and sister, and drink my six-dollar latte, but it doesn't seem like that is going to happen.

"We are trying, we are trying, we are trying," Thomas mimics.

Junior checks another channel. No luck. "How about *Spongebob*?" he offers.

"*Powerpuff Girls*!" Thomas screams.

"Thomas, it's not on today," I say, trying to stay calm.

"It's not on today!" he yells and then lunges at me from the couch. He shoves me up against the wall and pushes his weight against me. He's not hitting, just shoving himself into me. At 86 pounds to my 110, it's not a comfortable feeling. When I consider that I might go through the wall, I pick him up and forcefully put him on the couch. "Time out!" he screams.

"Yes, time out," I say, trying to catch my breath. He doesn't stay in his time out, but jumps back up and starts the wall-pushing again. He is growling and visibly full of adrenaline. His face is flushed. He clenches his teeth and before I can block it, slams an open palm under my chin. My head hits the

wall, and my own adrenaline spikes. I feel the old familiar anger and humiliation rise into my throat as my eyes start to burn with tears. “Jesus!” escapes my mouth as my automatic reaction.

I can see the kitchen table from where I am standing, still against the wall. My sister is staring at us, as if she can’t look away, despite the fact that she has seen this show a hundred times before. “I love when he imitates everything she says,” she chimes, like this is commentary about a sitcom. She takes a drink of her coffee.

My mom and niece keep working on their barrettes. My nana ducks her head as we teeter into the kitchen before I wrangle Thomas back to the living room. “Sit on the couch,” I demand, “and calm down.” He does neither. “Do you want to go home?” I ask. I intend this as a threat, thinking he will calm down.

“Yes!” he answers.

“Nate!” I call up the stairs. “We’re leaving.”

“What?” Nate asks. “But we’ve only been here for five minutes!”

“I know. I’m sorry,” I say. But I am not sorry. I admit it. I am pissed off. At the moment, I feel like the one cheated out of my Saturday. It is only later, when the adrenaline dissipates, that I feel sorry for Thomas who had waited all week to go to Aunt Ronnie’s. Though he cannot say so, I know he feels sad and ashamed, that he has already begun waiting through the next week of picture schedules and promises that he can come back.

“What happened?” Nate asks.

“*The Powerpuff Girls* weren’t on,” I answer. I do not need to say any more. Nate gets it.

Outside, I struggle to get Thomas into the car. He kicks and fights and then begins scripting. “All done, Ronnie’s house. All done. All done McDonalds and Long John Silvers. ‘Nother day.”

I repeat the phrases back like a robot, which is what he needs in order to de-escalate. At the stop sign, he starts to kick my seat and then unhooks his seatbelt to attack me with a fresh wave of anger. I get out of the car, open his door, and start trying the seemingly unending task of trying to calm him

down enough to drive home. We have driven through during this type of anger before and it is anything but safe. I have pulled over on highways and back roads alike to refasten this damned seatbelt and repeat the same phrases over and over, scared to resume driving. Worse, he has also taken me by surprise with a yank to the back of my hair and nearly killed us before I could pull over.

I try to hide my crying as we continue the journey, veering onto the on-ramp. I want to speed up to just get home where I know Eric will be a source of comfort. At the same time, I want to suspend the trip indefinitely so that I can avoid Thomas fully realizing he has ruined his own Saturday. I dread the sadness he is going to feel when we pull in the garage and he knows he is home for the rest of the day.

"I'm sorry, Mom," Nate says from the back seat. He is suddenly not a twelve-year-old child, but my partner in the mission of getting us home safely. He is my friend. He wants to listen to me rant if I need to. He wants to comfort me.

"It's not your fault. I am sorry we couldn't stay longer. No one except Uncle Junior even tried to help me!" I blurt out. As I say this I realize that I am again confiding in my adolescent son as if I am talking to another adult. "Things I Can Do All By Myself" pops back into my head and I add a mental star to the column that should have been there: "Provide emotional support for my mother well beyond what most people my age are capable of."

"I would have helped you. You should have called me," he says. I know that he means this. Though he can try my patience and frustrate me like no other, he can also make me feel better more quickly than almost anyone else. Maybe it is his sincerity, or my knowing that someone who can appear to be a real asshole at times, someone who is filled with pre-teen apathy and more sarcasm than I wish he had, is really more genuine and caring than most kids his age. Or most people for that matter. I know this is part of the constantly alternating emotions of parenting an adolescent.

"I know you would have. I shouldn't say anything, I guess I am just upset." Neither my mom nor my sister call later to check that we made it home safely. No text messages, no mention of the incident for over a week, and even then it will only be when I bring it up. My sister's voice echoes through my head: *I think it's so funny when he imitates her*, I hear her say. I try not to wonder what she could possibly be thinking in saying this out loud.

The next morning when I see the missed call from her number, I assume she has called to say she was sorry for her lack of sympathy, but the voicemail I listen to is from my nana. “Honey, I just wanted to tell you what a good mother I think you are. You have so much patience. God is going to help you,” she says. It was then that I realized my mom and my sister didn’t call because they knew I could handle it. They had seen the same scene a hundred times before. They have more faith in me than I have in myself, but I garner what strength I can from their belief that I am the best person for this job.

I have the same feeling, but it comes to me intermittently, in flashes of epiphany. Sometimes it takes a day like that Saturday, or the day of the third grade Thanksgiving feast for me to realize that with the help of the people who love me most, I can make it through even the worst days of parenting, whether that means my autistic or my non-autistic son. I will probably always have my moments of doubt, but what now exists as a constant is the knowledge that should the momentum of the Tilt-a-Whirl that is our life ever be thrown off, a sibling with wisdom and compassion well beyond his years will keep everything spinning and held in place for his brother. Nate is slowly evolving into the man who will become the best person for the job long after I have run myself to a permanent stop.

Bio- Recently nominated for two Pushcart prizes, April Salzano teaches college writing in Pennsylvania where she lives with her husband and two sons. She is currently working on a memoir on raising a child with autism from which this essay is taken and several collections of poetry. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Convergence*, *Ascent Aspirations*, *The Camel Saloon*, *Centrifugal Eye*, *Deadsnakes*, *Visceral Uterus*, *Salome*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Writing Tomorrow* and *Rattle*.

The author also serves as co-editor at Kind of a Hurricane Press ([www.kindofahurricaneprss.com](http://www.kindofahurricaneprss.com)).

#### Panel 24E

by Patrick Byrne

To many Americans, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, better known as "The Wall" in Washington, D.C., represents an endless litany of faceless names from a long past conflict. Indeed, over a generation has passed since its

completion in 1982. However, for me and many other Americans it is more than a cold granite wall with names.

For almost five decades I have tucked away a small cedar box containing mementos of a great friend and high school buddy. His loss at such a young age has lingered with me for all these years. Recently, upon re-discovering this box buried deep in a seldom opened credenza it prompted a flood of memories. As I slowly lifted the lid, there on top of yellowed newspaper clippings and old photographs was a pencil tracing on fine linen paper bearing his name in bold letters, followed by the symbol of a diamond, taken from the Wall years ago. Staring at his name and full of emotion I realized it was time to get reacquainted with an old friend.

The name and memory I have treasured for so long is on Panel 24E. It is etched on line 61 and the name ROBERT J. KLAGES, has a face that shines through the black-mirrored depths of the granite, each time I visit that sacred place. It is a face among thousands, all memorialized in a day-by-day diary of their deaths. ROBERT J. KLAGES, Bob, is nestled among his comrades who also fell on August 1, 1967. Sequencing the fallen by date was the genius of the Memorial's designer Maya Lin, a young Yale architectural student.

The Wall is actually two triangular walls of polished granite set side by side to create a V. At the apex Panel 1E (East) are the names of the first two casualties killed on July 8, 1959. Names inscribed thereafter descend the East Wall by date of death ending on May 28, 1968, then reconnecting at the end of the West Wall. From there, names ascend upward by date until the final eighteen to fall are inscribed on May 15, 1975, closing the sequence. The first and last joined together at the pinnacle.

Those killed in action (KIA's) are denoted with a diamond etched next to their name. Those missing in action (MIA's) are designated with a cross. As MIA's are identified, a diamond is superimposed around the cross. Approximately 500 are still listed as MIA's. As those families approach the names of their loved ones they must be filled with inconsolable sorrow. Never to know is a torment lasting a lifetime.

In writing this tribute to Bob, a First Lieutenant in the Marine Corps, I needed to reach back forty-seven years to that painful time in 1967. I was unsure of how to capture the mood and thoughts of a 23 year old not far removed from the campus of the University of Missouri [1] and thrown into

the hell of an ugly war. Fortunately, Bob's brother Ed, graciously shared with me letters Bob wrote to his mother and father, several from combat areas.

In one episode, Bob described how the order was given for the amphibious tractors he commanded to destroy a village infiltrated by enemy forces. These assignments were always difficult because while necessary to protect his men from hostile fire, the aftermath caused great hardship for innocent villagers, including women and children.

After carrying out the mission, Bob demanded the senior in command order the medics render aid to injured civilians. It is important to note that a junior officer confronting a superior risked compromising his career. At this point in the letter, Bob poignantly tells his mom and dad, "I've never done anything over here to make you ashamed of me."

I am sure a wave of love and pride swept over his parents when absorbing the impact of those words. To know you raised a son to act with decency and humanity in the midst of madness must have been overwhelming. It is not possible to measure the depth of grief and sense of loss his parents experienced each time they read this letter, as I know they must have many times.

All Bob's mail home reflected great love and respect for his mother and father. In another letter he apologized to his father for being late to wish him Happy Father's Day. It was especially moving coming just weeks before his death.

Further insight into Bob's character came from conversations with John Henry Adams, a seasoned combat veteran and two-time Purple Heart recipient who fought alongside Bob the day he fell. Listening to then Marine Corporal Adams recount events from nearly a half a century ago brought laughter and tears.

A story I particularly enjoyed was when Bob, after a number of grueling missions, told the Corporal to clean up and get into his best fatigues. He offered no explanation. Together they went to the motor pool where Bob requisitioned a Jeep and off they headed to a port on the South China Sea, where U.S. Navy ships were anchored. Before getting to the dock, Bob pulled over and produced his extra set of Lieutenant Bars and pinned them on the Corporal's collar. He then strapped an officer's 45-caliber pistol

around his waist and said “we are going aboard ship to the officer’s mess and finally get a decent meal together.” Cpl. Adams said being an “officer for a day” makes him laugh even now. He especially enjoyed returning salutes rather than giving them, as all enlisted personnel are required.

August 1, 1967, Operation Pike commenced. It was a battalion size search and destroy mission with 28 amphibious tractors loaded with Marine infantry troops, supplies and ammunition. Cpl. Adams recounted heading up river from base camp somewhere in Quang Nam province, in a platoon of three amtracs led by Lt. Klages.

After several hours the amtracs headed inland off the river and spent several hours in stifling heat punching through bamboo forests and thick vegetation before breaking into a clearing. Here the North Vietnamese, later estimated at division strength usually about 1,500 men, sprung a deadly ambush and Bob’s tractor platoon came under heavy automatic weapons fire, grenade and mortar attack. Lt. Klages immediately recognized the right flank of two infantry companies was exposed.

Bob once said in a letter to his father after a series of harrowing search and destroy missions, “I’ve never shown any sign of cowardice. I’m not saying I wasn’t scared but I know I didn’t show it.” Now on August 1, 1967 in the mayhem of combat, Bob was to have his courage tested for the final time. His decision was to make the ultimate sacrifice for his comrades. The following is a description of how he spent his last few moments on this earth.

The Silver Star Citation in part read “for conspicuous gallantry in the face of the enemy, Lt. Klages without hesitation used his tractors to cover the exposed flanks of two infantry companies under heavy fire during a sweep south of Da Nang.” The Citation, according to Navy Secretary Paul R. Ignatius, also stated “the Lieutenant, with complete disregard for his personal safety, remained exposed to direct his unit’s fire and gallantly led his platoon to within hand grenade range amid devastating fire. As enemy grenades continued to fall around his tractor, Lt. Klages, after being assured the gap was closed, finally sought cover but was mortally wounded attempting to reach a protective barrier.”

Perhaps Cpl. Adams, later Sgt. Adams, said it best when he told the family “the Lieutenant demanded the respect of his men and in turn he respected them. He asked nothing of us he wouldn’t do himself. The Lieutenant was

always out front with his men, never in the rear with the gear. It was an honor to have served under him and I felt privileged to call him my friend.”

Cpl. Jim Stace, a Purple Heart recipient, related “Lt. Klages led the platoon riding topside on my tractor the day of the ambush.” He would later provide some of the information that led to Bob’s Silver Star recommendation. Cpl. Stace said “Lt. Klages was a courageous leader in combat” but added he and Bob attended religious services together whenever possible.

In researching this story I was privileged to speak at length with three Marines who had extensive combat experience. Cpls. Adams and Stace shared Bob’s last day in Operation Pike, which raged for two more days. There were more casualties and two helicopters were shot down, including Bob’s evacuation chopper. The enemy retreated on the third day.

Marine officer, Dave Demmer, Bob’s cousin and a severely wounded Purple Heart recipient, visited with Bob on Okinawa before Bob’s deployment to Vietnam. He said they spoke of life after the war and shared hopes of attending law school together in Hawaii. Fortunately, Dave fulfilled his ambition and enjoyed a successful career as an attorney. I could tell by his voice on the phone it was difficult to recount the memories of a time when they were both so optimistic about the future.

The most striking comment from Dave was not his anxiety about facing combat again but “fear of losing his soul.” It was then I fully realized these were brave and honorable men, each in his own way struggling to keep a grip on their humanity. The mental strain of combat and the constant dilemma of deciding friend from foe took a heavy toll. For years they had tried to hide the scars of Vietnam. Now, I had asked them to reopen old wounds and relive memories they had tried to forget. I am extremely grateful for their patience and I feel privileged to have been taken into their confidence.

For me this story was a journey to find an old friend but that friend from carefree high school and college days of playing sports, dating and just the sheer joy of being young, I could not find. The Bob I found had become a brave, compassionate and unselfish man whose final act was giving his life so others might live. I now know him better than ever before.



Bob has been at peace for a long time. He did finally make it home with full military honors and is at rest with his mother and father in St. Louis, Mo. I had accepted his death years ago, but complete peace has been elusive. Through the men who knew him best during his final days and by words written in his own hand, I have finally found solace in his loss.

This Memorial Day 2014, fourteen more names will be added to the 52,286 currently inscribed on the Wall. Sadly, the tally of names continues to rise due to errors in earlier counts, and those who die from war zone-inflicted injuries years after separation from military service.

It is my hope that all the families and friends who approach The Wall seeking the names of their loved ones will also find peace. By remembering them they will always be with us.

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[1] In 2006 the Phi Kappa Theta fraternity at the University announced a scholarship and dedicated a plaque in tribute to their fallen brother 1st Lieutenant Robert J. Klages.

Bio- Patrick Byrne is a retired businessman (commercial real estate) currently residing in Tampa, FL. Three previous stories by Patrick centering on his time in the Navy in the early 1960s have previously appeared in *The Write Place At the Write Time*. In the past, his writing had been limited to business matters or items of special interest usually centering on historical events. More recently, personal narratives have been the subjects of his writing.

## Wind and Religion

by Ginger Peters

The wind holds gripping memories for me as a child, as a teenager, and as an adult. I still experience problems when the wind blows as it whistles through the cracks in the doors, bends tall trees down to the ground and rolls tumbleweeds across the road. Very little depresses me. I can manage a smile when I have a cold or the flu. I can manage a smile when I have computer problems or when the dogs track mud in on my floor. But when the wind blows hard, when I can hear it rip through the air like a rocket, I sometimes find it hard to smile.

As I travelled down the two-lane county road in my mind, I saw the trash on the sides of the road. Plastic sacks stuck to the barb wire fences, styrofoam coffee cups, pieces of plastic, and empty tobacco packages lined the bar ditches like crude decorations. Between the many residents who don't believe in tending to the environment and the strong winds, trash in the roadways was a common sight in my little part of the world.

I envisioned the breezes were up already. I could see dirt sweeping across the blacktop. I saw vehicles dodging tumbleweeds as they skirted across the road. I always thought of tumbleweeds as a type of alien. Prickly, ugly shaped weeds, some small, some very large rolling across the road with no arms or legs, no face, but a disturbing, a very disturbing shape. Sometimes I thought they might be trying to commit suicide under vehicles, because they were so despised and unwanted. It was springtime in Texas and I remembered a time so long ago when the wind was up and religion was at war with a teacher and a novel.

I grew up in a small rural community in west Texas. The landscape was draped with cotton farms, oil wells, dirt, churches and tumbleweeds. One could see far more church steeples than trees. No lakes, no rivers, no mountain ranges, just acres and acres of flat ground, colored with a reddish-brown dirt that happened to produce good cotton and huge amounts of oil from its belly below. The summertime could be sort of pretty when the weather cooperated and good cotton was grown. A person could look across the landscape and see acres of green cotton, about waist high. If the farmers were lucky and a few nice rains fell, the moisture, along with the abundant sunshine created blooms, which later turned into tons of fluffy, white cotton for the farmers to harvest in the fall. Oil wells pumped day and night, making an eerie sound of creaking metal, as they brought up the crude for our country's ravenous energy needs. Oil field equipment like drilling rigs, huge pipe yards, gas plants and roughneck crews were just a part of the landscape.

The wind blew immensely in this area. The worst time for windstorms were when the seasons changed, especially when winter attempted to turn into spring and spring tried to evolve into summer. The windstorms were strong and relentless, blowing across the plains before the new crops were planted. The wind converged with the reddish-brown dirt that lay loose on the ground from not much moisture, causing the sky to fill with darkness. I remember many times hardly being able to stand up and walk across the school or church yard to get to my next location. Girls would try to hold

their eyes and their skirts at the same time, while the harsh wind would sting their legs, piercing the skin like tiny stickers. At night, our clothing would smell like dust and the creases of our skin would be corroded with dirt. Washing our face with a light colored cloth soon turned it brown, and after brushing my hair I would have to rinse the brush with water to remove the gritty residue.

When I think of the wind, another phenomenon envelops my memories, religion. Religion grew as prevalent as the cotton, religion was as tangible as the oil pulled up from the ground, and religion was just as powerful as the wind. It created a force field of energy that surrounded everything from the school, to the crops, to the oilfields, to the businesses, to the people.

Several churches embodied the area. The power of these churches was great and the men that were members held all the highest positions in the community. The school board was made up entirely of men that belonged to them. The hospital board was the same. The mayor's office was the same. The city councilmen and county commissioners were all men that belonged to the most attended churches in town.

These churches were rigid in their beliefs and I was a part of that religious force. Growing up in an evangelical Christian church, I was taught hell, damnation and sin. I was taught the only way to a righteous life was one way, the church's way, which I believed was God's way. I walked the straight and narrow and I went to church every Sunday. Many times I remember coming home from church and being afraid of what I had heard from the pulpit. "And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:50) "...and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb." (Revelations: 14:10) This type of gritty, angry preaching terrified me for many years, so I grew up not saying curse words, not engaging in teenage sex, not drinking or doing drugs of any kind.

I was fortunate in some ways to have parents who believed I should be exposed to the realities of the world in small doses. The options they gave me, of course, were limited. But, one option I did have was books.

I learned early that books were a source of knowledge for me to learn the ways of the world, so to speak. I learned about courage, poverty, racism, greed, happiness, murder, horror, mysteries, discoveries, compassion, cruelty, and of course, I learned about God. The first book I remember

reading as a junior high student was the Bible. Most of the entire area's children were instructed to read the Bible by the time they started high school.

Naturally, I didn't understand the whole book, like if you pray hard enough, God would help you, yet I saw suffering around every corner. I never understood, if God loved mankind so much, how He could send anyone to hell. Many things frustrated me about religion, but I did what was expected of me and I truly loved and believed in Jesus. Occasionally I would ask my parents about certain sermons and Bible verses. They would just say anyone not believing in Jesus Christ would be sent to hell. Hell and God's wrath seemed to be the subject most preached about on Sunday. As I grew into an adult, I realized much of the Bible was about love, understanding, not judging others, and having great compassion for humanity. This was something not discussed often enough in our community.

The church leader's goals were basically to forge children and teens into a sinless life. No lying, cheating, stealing, drinking, or cursing. No dressing provocatively, no long hair, no tattoos, no disrespecting of adults, and the one thing above all they pounded into us, was no sexual sin. All of the above could lead to hell. When I was a freshman there was a senior girl who had it all: beauty, intelligence, athletic ability, a good family, and a nice disposition. But, she made a mistake. A big one! She became pregnant halfway through her final year. The school board stripped her of everything. She was not allowed to finish school with her classmates, she was taken off the volleyball team, she was taken off the National Honor Society, and only her picture appeared in the school year book, with her name and no mention of anything she had accomplished during the nearly four years of high school. Her punishment was harsh. So, I knew the school board meant business on moral issues. It wasn't just a scare tactic.

In the spring of 1976, the school board declared war. The results were tears, condemnation, ignorance, and one of the most poignant memories of my life. The cause, one great book, a school board full of powerful men, and a teacher that tried to enrich the lives of her students, but learned the hard way, that when wind and religion collide, winning was impossible.

I was a senior in high school in the spring of 1976. It was the bicentennial year, so flags waved everywhere. Gerald Ford was President of the United States, the Cold War was still going on, *Little House on the Prairie* and *Mash* were popular television programs. *The Choirboys* by Joseph

Wambaugh was a best-selling novel, *Rocky*, and *Carrie* were hit movies, and "Don't Go Breaking My Heart" by Elton John and Kiki Dee and "Afternoon Delight" by Starland Vocal Band were topping the charts in music. Jumpsuits and flared pants were in fashion for women and beards were in for men. What was in style across the country however, was not always the norm for this small rural community.

Some movies were frowned upon by the churches of the community. I didn't see many popular movies during my teen years, such as *Easy Rider* and *Taxi Driver*. I was convinced they were sinful. No X-rated movies were allowed in at all and no one under 17 years of age was allowed in if the movies were rated R. Of course, there were always a few kids who snuck in the drive-in by hiding in a trunk, but not those of us who were 'believers.'

The dress code at the school was rigid. No dresses more than 4 inches above the knee, no shirts or blouses that were low-cut or showed any amount of cleavage, and no see-through material. No one was allowed in school with a tattoo. Boys were not allowed to wear long hair. It had to be cut above the collar of their shirt, all shirts tucked in, always a belt, socks a must, and no side-burns longer than the middle of the earlobe.

A student could get sent home if the dress code was not adhered to or one might get expelled. A few people that moved into the area from different parts of the country tried to change the dress code, calling it unconstitutional. These people only wasted their time.

A new teacher moved to our school my senior year. Mrs. Moore was born and raised in the northeast. She had graduated from college and accepted the job as high school English teacher. Of course, the minute school started, there was talk. See, to a Texan, anyone that wasn't from a southern or western state was almost considered an illegal immigrant. I heard established teachers whispering in the halls about her, wondering what she was like. I heard students say their parents were surprised that the school hired such an 'outsider.' But, our school paid well, due to the oil companies established in our county. So, many young teachers fresh out of college applied with schools in the oil communities of the southwest, because their salaries were so much more substantial than other areas of the United States and Mrs. Moore had outstanding credentials.

I met Mrs. Moore, the first day of my senior year in English class. She dressed a bit different, definitely had a different accent, she did her own

hair, and she didn't wear much makeup. But, I liked her. She had freshness about her that I had never experienced. She loved literature and her passion for reading it and learning from it exuberated in the classroom. Her philosophy was to open our young minds about the world around us, as we were all about to become young adults. She believed reading benefited everyone. Mrs. Moore told us we could learn about life: past, present, and future. And, even with my staunch religious upbringing, I began to see a small bit of real life. Mrs. Moore helped our class see what the world was like outside of Texas, outside of our county, outside of our community, and outside of our religion.

I considered myself more fortunate than many of the other evangelical students. I grew up thirty miles from town on a cotton farm. We didn't have a phone and received only two channels on television. So, one of our big enjoyments was going to the library. My parents encouraged me to read. Most books I wanted to check out, they agreed heartily to. This played a huge part in giving me the sort of freedom in literature that some students didn't get.

But, this was ever so dangerous for Mrs. Moore. She didn't realize the winds were brewing in the west and the very tenacious bosses that hired her were watching and already preparing for battle. I didn't realize it either. Not until that week. The week in which the wind blew so hard that it ripped shingles off, tore siding off mobile homes, threw tree limbs from one end of town to the other, and left a dusty, cynical, sick taste in my mouth for the remainder of the school year. The 'Bible Belt' was about to blindside Mrs. Moore and it was all because of one novel.

Our English class had just been given a new assignment. We would be reading John Steinbeck's, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Mrs. Moore had introduced the book to us as a classic covering a period of time in America that was horrendous for most folks. The story takes place during the Dust Bowl, following a family driven off of their land, as they travel west to California to become migrant workers. This was the story of their hardships, their friendships, their burdens, their feelings, and the changes they were forced to endure.

The book sounded interesting to most of us. We took it home that night to read the first several chapters. I told my parents what I was reading. Both claimed to have read the book. I know now they had just seen the movie,

starring Henry Fonda. But, no matter, my parents thought it would be good for me to read and teach me about a time in America that was not so glorious. So, I started reading. "Houses were shut tight, and cloth wedged around doors and windows, but the dust came in so thinly that it could not be seen in the air, and it settled like pollen on the chairs and tables, on the dishes." This line captured my interest quickly.

I didn't live in the actual Dust Bowl, but I had lived seventeen years in mini dust bowls. I had watched my father plant precious cotton seed and I had watched the wind blow it away in an hour. I had watched wind so thick my mother would take a kitchen knife to rake the sand off the window sills before she could even use the vacuum. I had watched the wind force vehicles off the road and tear roofs off of barns. So, reading about a family that lived through wind and dirt a thousand times more than I had witnessed was fascinating and definitely something my heart related to.

The next morning my dad talked about a windstorm brewing. He became a weather expert during his life as a farmer, and he was worried. The weather reported a wind coming our way that might last 2-3 days.

I went to school somewhat worried about our farm. I felt sorry for my dad because I knew he worked so hard, so I prayed the wind and sand would not wipe my father's new crop away. I entered the school building and went to the area by the library where seniors congregated for a few minutes before the bell rang. I was there with some friends, when a couple of kids from my English class came over and asked to talk with me. They were kids from my church too.

Both looked serious and ask me if I did my reading assignment the night before. I said yes and one asked if I was in shock at the material. I was about to ask what they were talking about, when the first period bell rang and we all rushed to class. As I sat through chemistry, speech, and government, I found myself barely paying attention to anything that was going on. I kept thinking about what those friends were talking about. But, deep down I knew what they were talking about. It was the swear words, it was Jim Casey being an ex-preacher because he had sexual relations with some of the women in his congregation that he baptized. He had "fornicated." It was many parts of the book like Jim Casey saying, "Before I knowed it, I was sayin' out loud, 'The hell with it! There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do...'" There was language

like, “screwin girls” and there were parts where the Lord’s name was taken in vain.

I tried to shrug it off, but I couldn’t help but think something was about to happen. Maybe I was thinking about the windstorm, which was already causing the flags to wave fiercely outside the building. Maybe it was something like when the senior girl got pregnant three years before. Hopefully, it was nothing.

By the time lunch was over, the wind was merciless. I entered English class and could see leaves, paper lunch sacks, and dirt blowing against the windows of the classroom. I could also taste grit between my teeth, it was nasty outside. I just didn’t realize how nasty it was going to get inside too.

The minute all of us were seated, Mrs. Moore checked the roll and stood up in front of the class as always. She started to open her mouth, when one of the students, a smart and popular guy in school raised his hand. Mrs. Moore gave him permission to speak. He asked if we had to read *The Grapes of Wrath*. Mrs. Moore looked rather surprised and answered yes, it was the assignment. The boy raised his hand again, but this time didn’t wait for an official nod from the teacher to speak. He asked if there was another book the class could read. Mrs. Moore cocked her head a bit and smiled as if she wasn’t in on a joke of some kind. She said we were going to be reading several classics during the year, this was just one of them. But, for now the assignment was *The Grapes of Wrath*. The boy didn’t raise his hand again, but I wondered what was up. Something was in the air besides dirt. Mrs. Moore began discussing the book as we all sat back and listened.

At home that night I received a phone call from the same boy that had raised the questions in English class. The boy was very active in church and President of our student council. He was a good person, good student, and committed to his beliefs. He began telling me that many of the students in class, the parents of these students, and the school board were not at all happy with Mrs. Moore making us read this book. When I asked why, he stated he couldn’t believe I didn’t know why. I assured him I didn’t know what he was talking about. I had an ornery streak at times. I wanted to make him say it. He said there were many things, but the ‘vulgar language and ‘sexual references’ in the book were obscene. Christians should not be reading this material and the school board members were already regretting hiring Mrs. Moore. He threw in that most parents knew she



would be a mistake, because she wasn't from this part of the country and wasn't at all like us. I told him that I thought everyone was completely overreacting. I tried explaining to him that the author wrote it depicting a time very different than today. This was a time of bitter realities, poverty, and a family trying to adjust to a new life and world. He cut the conversation at this point and we hung up. I knew something big was going to occur. Much like the winds howling outside.

The next day at school was eerie. All the teachers were whispering to one another, students were gathered in small groups talking quietly, and the dirt storm roared outside. I didn't see Mrs. Moore until our English class began.

The sun's face was covered with a reddish-brown haze. Monster tumbleweeds were running across the streets and hiding in the outside corners of the school building like aliens. A post-apocalyptic scene emerged in my mind. But, it was springtime in the land of cotton, oil wells, and religion.

Mrs. Moore entered the room with tear-stained eyes. I hoped from the wind, but I knew it was from sin. Not hers, in my opinion, but the majority had ruled. I suddenly knew that the school board had won another moral victory.

Mrs. Moore stood in front of her students. She announced, sadly, that all students uncomfortable reading *The Grapes of Wrath*, may now read *Moby Dick*. Half of the students cheered and clapped. I heard one girl say with prayer-cupped hands, "God always prevails."

Class was dismissed. Mrs. Moore sat at her desk dumbfounded. She came to this school enthusiastically, to teach an open-minded agenda to a close-minded community.

Mrs. Moore did not come back to teach the next year.

I walked down the hall, smelling the dust in the air and hearing the strong voice of the school board. I felt peace reading *The Grapes of Wrath* and the experience changed me. I realized I could not stay inside a bubble of rules, religious or otherwise. I learned in order to encounter real life, the bubble had to burst every once in a while. Reading about the struggles of life in fiction or non-fiction, was one way to pierce that bubble. I will never forget

Mrs. Moore and I will never forget the plight of the Joad family. And when the wind blows ever so strong I sense something trying to force me back into a bubble, where the wind can't touch me. But, the wind has to touch me, sting me, and blow tumbleweeds across my path at times. For this is how I've learned and how I will continue to learn until I turn to dust and blow away.

Bio- Ginger Peters has been a professional freelance writer since the early 80's. She worked as a feature writer for local newspapers in Texas and New Mexico. She has sold inspirational articles, poems, and human interest pieces to various magazines. She's a mother of five total children and two grandchildren. She loves nature, hiking with her husband and their two dogs. She wants to inspire herself and others to be moved by compassion and nurturing of humanity and the earth in whatever form that works for them, whether it is writing, art, music, prayer, volunteering, or any other talent or hard work that provides good will to all.

### Survival Instincts

by Marilyn June Janson

"I'm a grown-up, Mom. I can take care of myself."

Sitting at the kitchen table in our Queens, New York, ranch house, I am eating my usual Saturday breakfast of cinnamon raisin bagel with pimento cream cheese.

It is 1971. At 16, going anywhere with my parents is so uncool. A shy and fearful teen, I was uncomfortable in crowds and social situations.

My mother sighs. Picking up a tote bag stuffed with a bathing suit, Dad's swimming trunks, suntan lotion, sunglasses, and flip flops, she says, "I'm not so sure. And this is the first time we're leaving you alone. Come with us to see Aunt Evelyn and Uncle Stanley. We'll have a wonderful time in their pool."

Dad shakes his head and goes into the garage.

"Hanging out in Brooklyn is not my idea of fun. Don't worry, I'll be okay."

I listen to the grumbling sound of the garage door. The 1970 Oldsmobile roars onto the driveway. *Yea! I can my blast my music and dance to the*

*Rolling Stones. I can watch whatever I want on T.V. Or write in my journal without Mom and Dad nagging me to clean up my room or put the dishes away.*

Mom closes the curtains above the sink.

“Do you really have to do that? It feels like a tomb in here.”

Whenever they go out, Mom always closes the curtains to prevent home invasions.

“Mom, keep the curtains open to give the house a ‘we’re at home’ look,” I told her.

Usually, she said ‘no’ to most of my suggestions. I am surprised they let me stay home today.

She plants a kiss on my forehead. “Don’t open the door to anyone, even if you know them. Keep the doors and windows locked and don’t go out. We’ll be home before dark. Love you. Be careful.”

“I know. You’ve told me like a gazillion times.”

She grabs her handbag and leaves the house through the side door in the kitchen.

I go into the living room and peek out from behind the full-length drapes.

Watching the car move down the tree lined street, I am relieved they are finally gone. Yet, I am sorry to see them go. My mouth feels dry and palms sweaty.

While the house makes creaking noises, I watch the 12-year old Gilbert twins play catch across the street.

I shudder when the air conditioner mounted in a window facing the alley sputters, causing a racket.

*What should I do first? I’ll celebrate my freedom with some Marshmallow Chocolate Chip ice cream and a huge glass of milk.*

Inside the kitchen I hear something that sounds like claws against wood.

With the curtains above the sink keeping out the light, I cannot see much.

A few years ago we had some mice. Dad set some traps and the tiny critters were caught. Gross!

I open a drawer, take out a flashlight, and turn it on.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

*Mice don't tap.*

My eyes dart toward the window above the sink.

The lock on the door clicks.

Dropping to the floor, I let go of the flashlight and roll up into a ball.

Thud.

*Did the intruder hear that? I'm going to die.*

*Damn!* I forgot to grab the phone from its base on the opposite wall.

*What to do. What to do. Think. Think.*

The airless dark kitchen becomes my casket. I cannot move or breathe.

Smash.

My head snaps up.

Through the curtains above the sink a huge arm emerges.

*Am I imaging this? This can't be happening. Don't say anything. If I do, the intruder will know I'm in here. Mom, help me. I should have gone with you.*

*If I'm going to do anything, it has to be now.*

"Stop! There's someone in here," I shout.

Shocked at the sound of my voice, I get up and run into my bedroom located next to the kitchen. I lock the door.

I call 911 and beg the operator not to leave me after giving her my name and address. She stayed on the line for what seems like forever until I hear police car sirens outside the window.

My memories about what happened after the cops came are somewhat muddled.

Except for the following details.

When faced with a dangerous situation I found the courage to speak up for myself.

As Dad drove up our street, the police cars parked in the driveway. Mom was shocked when they stopped in our driveway.

When Mom met me at the kitchen door, she hugged me so tight, my ribs hurt.

Then she shook my spindly body and screamed at me as if I lured the intruder into our home.

He was never found.

*Did I scare him away? Could I scare anyone away?*

After Mom's death in 1980, I had a mental breakdown. Housebound for five years, I was diagnosed with agoraphobia, panic, and Obsessive Compulsive Disorders.

During the fifth year of my self-imposed captivity, my husband went on a 16-day tour to Ireland and Wales. Without me.

I didn't cry, 'How can you leave me?!' He deserved a gold medal for bravery. Ed had to do everything for me.

That did it. Jealous of all the fun he was going to have, I had to get back out into the world.

Initially, I was frightened. *Should I get treatment in a mental health facility? What about the rest of my life?* Records of the hospitalization and

the stigma against these diagnoses could become a permanent part of my identity. I was determined to seek outpatient treatment.

Since childhood, I'd always thought of myself as weak and needing protection from people and life.

Not anymore. In therapy, I learned how my innate strength coupled with treatment, has helped to manage this disease.

After years of cognitive therapy, I am stable. Learning to recognize and change the negative thought processes that occur during panic attacks to positive ones, helps me to cope with my fear of dogs, new situations, and places. I pet therapy dogs, walk on the beach, travel, drive, and own a small business.

Everyday, OCD challenges my self-confidence and reality. Still, I compile exhausting lists, check and recheck the car and locks to the house.

I don't feel comfortable outdoors, visiting friend's homes, going to new places, and flying. Yet, I do them anyway, constantly working toward living a full and happy life.

*To learn more about OCD log onto the Obsessive Compulsive Foundation @ <http://www.ocfoundation.org> and the Anxiety and Depression Association of America @ <http://www.adaa.org>.*

Bio- Marilyn June Janson, M.S., Ed., is owner of a copywriting, manuscript analysis, and author marketing company. She is the author of Recipe For Rage, a suspense novel, and a children's chapter book.

Contact her at [www.janwrite.com](http://www.janwrite.com)

## The Visitor

by Robert Joe Stout

Although individual southeastern Wyoming farmers had milk cows and sold fresh milk to our neighbor Schafer's dairy, and others raised a few steers to butcher for beef, the area wasn't suited for cattle grazing. Some of

the dry land farmers kept horses to plow their plots and pull harrows; the farm kids would ride them, but except during the yearly fair and rodeo, one seldom saw riding horses, a luxury most farmers could ill afford—especially during the winters which often lasted from sometime in October until late April or early May.

Even before the winter winds began, one could feel their bite. The trees would tremble; dogs would bark. Then silence so tense one feared to speak, to move. It would begin to snow. Gently at first, a marvelous enchantment; everything sheathed an incredible white. Rooftops glistened. Fields became oceans of rippling clarity. I often sat for hours in the dormer window of my parents' upstairs bedroom gazing at cottonwood branches glazed with ice. The sky, pale blue as though awed by the changed landscape, seemed to pull away to give the spectacle beneath it more space. Now and then a lone crow would fly slowly past on its way to nowhere.

Then the wind would begin again, a low moaning as though something far across the prairie was in pain. Gradually other voices would answer—other voices also in pain. Imperceptibly, the voices would grow louder, closer, more intense. One could hear trees quivering, rattling. Fences, porches, roofs began to creak, shed doors to bang. The house began to shudder. One could hear things crashing, falling as though the house was being torn from its foundations and was riding the wind and would ride it and ride it until it landed somewhere far away.

These blizzards would last for days, at times seeming to abate then sweeping across the prairie with renewed force. So much were they a part of life on the Plains that by the time I was twelve or thirteen, the winters seemed to have condensed into a single long confinement. Only a few incidents stood out. One that lingered for years occurred before my brother was born, when my dad and mom and I lived in a little rented cottage on the outskirts of town. My mother and I were startled by a heavy thudding. She stopped what she was doing and stood frowning in the middle of the living room. The thudding sounded again. I distinctly remember her hesitating, her hand on the knob, her lips pursed amid intangible thoughts, then she opened the door wide enough to peer out.

"Oh!" she said as frigid air blasted her features. "Oh!"

An enormous dark form filled the doorway. Its face, covered with steam, bobbed up and down as its pained gargling continued. For a moment—a

moment that lasted as long as any that I can remember—I imagined that some hideous invader had descended from worlds beyond ours; then I realized that a horse was standing there facing us. Its huge red nostrils quivered as puffs of steam emerged; the hair around its eyes and ears was so crusted that it seemed barely able to see. Instinctively my mother opened the door wider, as though to invite it inside.

"Good heavens! You poor thing!" I heard her exclaim. She swung around and started to pick me up, then changed her mind. "Wait here. I have to get someone!"

She grabbed her coat and thrust it around her shoulders, patted me on the head and darted into the storm, leaving me staring up at the huge animal. It shivered violently and peered down at me. For a instant I saw my own quaking form reflected its eyes and I started to cry. Not out of fear but because I felt an emotion greater than I'd ever felt before.

"Good heavens! You poor thing!" I managed to whisper and the horse, the huge quivering freezing beast, placed its harsh, half-frozen, steaming face against mine.

We stayed that way, neither of us moving. It was as though time stopped and something important passed between us. As I heard my mother return—she'd only gone as far as our landlady's house—the horse shook its head and snorted. I reached towards it, to touch it again, but my mother shooed me back inside the house. A short time later some men came with blankets and took the horse away.

For years afterwards, when I recalled that stopping of time, I again felt that huge horse's presence; although I never was able to define what it was that passed between us, linking us not in fact but in memories that still send quivers through my hands and cheeks. I wanted to believe that the men who took it away warmed it and fed it and returned it to its owners. But having grown up in Wyoming I knew that the horse's owners probably beat it or worked it to death or sold it to a butcher to be carved up into food for soldiers or for WWII Prisoners of War or for dogs. Nevertheless, for many years I imagined that the horse remembered me and shared an emotion that I only can define as love.

Bio- Robert Joe Stout's articles, poetry and stories have appeared in many publications, including *The American Scholar*, *America*, *South Dakota Review*, *The Rambler* and *Notre*



*Dame Magazine*. He is the author of *The Blood of the Serpent: Mexican Lives and Why Immigrants Come to America*.

## Riding the Bus

by Nancy Morgan-Boucher

It was Carol's idea. Since moving to urban Springfield, MA, she had developed, by my small city standards, some pluck, even fearlessness. I loved it.

Every summer Carol would come back to spend school vacation with her vovô and vovó (grandfather and grandmother in Portuguese), while her mother stayed back in Springfield to work.

The first year Carol came back she was already wearing lipstick. I was awed. She showed me how to apply it. I was a changed eighth grader when I returned to school that September. The next summer vacation, her older brother Kenny learned how to drive. He drove us back all the way to the Springfield Fair. It was huge. To this day all I remember is it being dark and we were running around—did we sneak in? It was so exciting. I don't remember my mother letting me go. We went and came back to Taunton all in the same day.

What comes back to me the most is riding the bus. You know summer vacations; you always wind up with "nothing to do."

So Carol said, "Let's ride the bus."

"What for?" I asked her. "I don't know how to take the bus," as though it was space travel or something.

Really, compared to Carol, I led a very sheltered life. My mother would take the bus from Taunton Center to home, about one mile, but I never paid attention, except waiting in the bus station on wooden seats, staring straight ahead. Maybe we'd use the restrooms which were so-so. My mother tried to avoid them.

"Come on," egged on Carol. "It's nothing. It'll be fun."

So we walked to the city like I said, about one mile and Carol asked the bus driver waiting at the station, where he was going. In my mind I was scared we'd get lost and we would never find our way home.

"Going to the Norton line and back," the bus driver said, as he put the shift in gear.

"How much?" asked Carol.

"20 cents."

"Come on!" Carol pushed me. "We've got enough!"

It was now or never and Carol always knew what she was doing. So, on we climbed, dropped our two dimes each in the meter and the bus took off before we even sat down.

"Why are you going all the way down back? There's no one else on the bus. Why can't we sit right up front?" I asked her as the bus rolled and I clung to the backs of the seats.

"We're going to ride in the very rear of the bus in the middle of the seat. That's where it's fun-you feel all the bumps that the bus goes over and it tosses you around really hard so you have to hold on to the seat cushions for your life."

Well, yes it did, just as Carol described, and we never had so many giggle fits as we did that day getting bounced around really hard on that rear seat of the bus all the way to Norton and back. The bus driver never said a word. In hindsight, maybe he was wishing he was a kid again so that his bus would feel as much fun driving as we were having the most fun of our lives in the back of it. All for 20 cents one way and 20 cents back.

I'd give a whole lot more than that right now to have Carol back, and ride on that bus like we did. And laugh together like we did. And not grow up and have one of us die too soon, like Carol did.

Carol did grow up long enough to be married with two kids. In-between those years, we were in touch here and there. She went back to Springfield and continued to return every summer until sophomore year when Carol,

her brother Kenny, her mom and stepdad Larry came back to live in Taunton.

I wanted everything to be the same as when Carol and I were best friends in grammar school. But it wasn't.

We both attended Taunton High. I was going steady and Carol hang out with some faster "boy-crazy" girls. My boyfriend ditched me for the summer so sometimes I hung out with Carol on her vovô and vovó's front steps on Plain Street. I lived across the street on the third floor of a tenement house behind the Portuguese Market. Carol, the big city girl, was still way ahead of me in the "dolling up" department so I followed her lead by putting on lipstick and curling my eyelashes for the neighborhood boys walking down the street. The big deal was to find out who was going to the weekly outdoor band concert at Baylies's Park, where we didn't listen to the music, but meandered around the lawns looking for boys.

When we turned sixteen, Carol got a 1958 black Chevy Impala convertible for \$500.00 and we drove to "the Pink"-the Pink Elephant root beer stand in the next town over, being really cool flirting with the guys. One time Carol backed into a parking space and drove the back end of the car right over an embankment. Carol always made laughing easy with her playful half giggle. We laughed our heads off as the guys pushed the car up and out of the dip.

After high school graduation, I went back to my boyfriend. On Friday nights Carol went to Newport, RI with some other girlfriends. The Newport Naval base was there, and on Friday nights the local bars were the place to go for dancing when the sailors got off ship. That's how Carol met Gene, a sailor from California, got married, moved to his home state, and, had two kids. Gene turned out to be abusive. They got a divorce. She stayed on in Monterrey, California with her kids.

We were out of touch for ten more years when Carol's mother died, and Carol flew back to Taunton. After her mother's burial, Carol and I found time to go out to eat. She had a flight back to California in the morning. Carol told me she had had breast cancer and for eight years she had been clear of it.

We talked, though separated by the patchwork of years we had been apart and by who we were now sitting across from each other. Dreamlike were

our differing regrets she and I remembered. Laughingly, we agreed to forget the perceived wrongs we had done to each other. We exchanged phone numbers, addresses—those promises to keep in touch.

Years passed. Coming home from work one day, I retrieved a voicemail. “Bet you can’t guess who this is!” The voice lilted with an almost giggle that was unmistakably Carol’s. I dropped my coat on the floor, ran to the phone, and dialed her number. We talked and, of course, laughed for a long, long time. We exchanged e-mail addresses. Through the next few weeks, we reminisced via e-mail.

Less than a month later, I received an email from Carol. “Doctor found a spot on my lung. Not good. Can’t talk.” I drew in my breath and held it. ‘Surely not true,’ that first denial. I can’t really remember what I emailed back. There was no reply. I typed “I love you, Carol.” Her email address went silent. A month later, I read her obituary in the Taunton Daily Gazette.

There are certain memories at certain times that insist they are worth keeping. Maybe it’s the one that is the essence of a friend. Maybe it’s the best memory saving itself for last, like riding the bus.

Bio- Nancy Morgan-Boucher lives in Rehoboth, MA where she founded Poetry in the Village at the local library. Morgan-Boucher has been a featured poet at Main Street Café, Easton, MA, Coffee Milano, Middleboro, MA, Blue State Coffee, Providence, RI, Mike Amado Memorial Poetry Series, Plymouth, MA, Dream-Speak, Plymouth, MA and Stone Soup, Cambridge, MA. Her work also appears in *Finding Water: Poems and Stories by the Nomad Writers*, 2011. She has recently read poetry from her chapbook, *Climbing the Family Tree*, on the sidewalk of the venerable pub, The Drunken Poet, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. Morgan-Boucher's poems have appeared in *Siren: A Contemporary Literary Journal*, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, *The Unitarian Universalist Poets: A Contemporary American Survey*, Pudding House Publications, Jamestown, Ohio, and the *Wilderness House Literary Review*, an on-line literary magazine based in Littleton, MA.

Ms. Solick for President

by Anita Solick Oswald

It seems like hubris to me now, but I actually thought I could win the 8th grade class election because John F. Kennedy won the Presidency. I

volunteered for Kennedy's campaign in 7th grade, and he won. I'd elected a U.S. President.

So, the following year when the class election was announced, I figured this was my time. After all, I was an old hand at running a campaign. When we returned to school in September, my home room teacher, lanky, tomboy Sister Bernard, made the big announcement in class—nominations would be accepted in one week. The President and Vice President would lead all four classrooms and represent St. Mel-Holy Ghost School. At what, I wondered, but did not then ask.

I thought I was the obvious choice. I was certain I was qualified and had demonstrated leadership. I'd been top in my class for several years now and volunteered for many school activities. I was a star of the annual variety show. And, I had real campaign experience.

As we walked home from school, kicking the fall leaves, I polled my friends, Mary, Ray, Michael and Carole, about whether I would be a good president and whether one of them would nominate me. They all said yes and Mary said she would nominate me. Then, we wondered who else might decide to run.

Bounding two steps at a time, I ran up the stairs to our apartment to tell Mom about my plans. On hearing the news, she revved her engines. Mom's idea of a class election was something akin to a Mickey Rooney–Judy Garland movie. Mom also possessed a savant's ability to rhyme and write jingles and I immediately began inventing snappy slogans. She even had an idea for a poster.

"We'll go to Kroch's and Brentano's and get supplies—confetti and streamers."

Mom was always supportive of my school activities and had clever ideas. I loved her suggestion of confetti and streamers and imagined the stir it would make in the classroom. It would be a like a real convention. This could really amp up the enthusiasm for the election.

But I soon realized this was no Hollywood musical. While I plotted our strategy with my pals after school, I didn't anticipate what was ahead.

Finally, the day of the nominations arrived. As we planned, Mary rose when Sister Bernard asked for nominations.

“I nominate Anita Solick for class president.”

Now, our class was composed of 62 boys and three girls. The pubescent boys were like live wires and it took incredible energy to get their attention, much less educate them. Several of them had been held back, and some came from very disadvantaged families. Some did not speak English. Sister Bernard had her hands full.

Before Mary sat down, some boys hooted and yelled. Sister Bernard seemed to hesitate, but she regained her composure and asked for a second. Ray seconded the nomination. The class then voted on the nominees. When the votes were tallied, basketball captain Jim Miller and his popular and pretty girlfriend, Moe Sullivan, were on one ticket and Anita Solick and Daniel Ness were the other. I was ecstatic and ran home to tell Mom and the rest of the family...

But the next day when I returned to school, I got a rude awakening. This wasn't going to be so easy after all. Sister Bernard pulled me out of class and into the hall. She looked sheepish.

“Um, uh, I have some bad news.”

“I am going to have to ask you to step down and accept the vice presidential slot and let Daniel run as president.”

“What! Why?”

“Because, never in the history of St. Mel's has a girl ever run for class president.”

My face reddened. I clenched my fists to avoid biting my nails. My ears got hot. I was livid. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. *How unfair! Was she a woman or not? How could she ask me to do this? Maybe she liked being a second class citizen, but I was not one of them.*

I sputtered. “Well, it's time one did—I won't step down, Sister.”

Accustomed to compliant Catholic school girls, it took a minute for my surly response to register. She looked surprised and frowned. She repeated her request, but I stood firm.

“No, I won’t step down—I won the nomination.”

Sister was bewildered at my obstinacy, but she did not really know how stubborn I was. Speechless at my defiance, she motioned to me to return to class. I seethed through the catechism, science, and history lessons. When the bell rang, I stormed out.

My friends chased after me and surrounded me.

“Are you in trouble?”

“Probably. No—can you imagine the nerve? She wants me to step down because I am a girl.”

“What did you say to her?”

“NO, of course!”

“Oooh!”

My pals commiserated with me about how unfair it was and how I would be the best class president ever. I thought Sister B openly favored the boys; she was a boy in a nun’s habit. I knew she loved playing basketball with them every day, but I did not anticipate overt discrimination. I expected I’d have to run a great campaign against Jim and Moe. That did not deter me. I thought I had a good shot at it. Jim and Moe would run on their popularity. That would be hard to beat but I would take on the issues. I thought I could convince my classmates I was the best candidate and could beat them. I knew my running mate, Daniel, really wanted to run as president so I did not count on him for much help, but I thought he could pull in some of the boys’ votes. So it was up to me.

When I arrived home from school, I poured out my frustration about my conversation with Sister Bernard to my mother. Mom was always a sympathizer, especially when it came to a righteous cause. Although Mom was a devout Catholic, there was a rebel in her, and she often encouraged us to question authority.

“I hope you told her no.”

“I did—I think she was mad, but I stood up to her.”

“Good, that’s right; she can’t tell you you can’t run. You won that nomination fair and square.”

I thought the whole matter was closed, but when I got to school the next day, I was called to the principal’s office for a talk. Sister Veronica Ann did not crack a smile as I entered her office on the mezzanine between the first and second floors of the school. She showed the little boy clutching his absence excuse out of her office with a dismissive wave.

I was still deluded that the nuns might support my feminist cause, and come over to my side, but I was quickly cured of my naiveté.

“Now, what’s this business about you refusing to let Daniel run as president? That is not very charitable of you, Miss Solick, and pride is a sin. Do you think you are better than everyone else?”

I thought this was a particularly stupid question since obviously I did think I was better than everyone else or I wouldn’t be running for office, but I decided it was wise not to respond. She was not satisfied with my silence and repeated the question.

“Well, Sister, yes, I am better qualified to run a campaign and to lead the class as President. I volunteered for Kennedy, remember?”

I gave her the quick rundown of my qualifications: top in the class, variety show star, etc. and, of course, experienced campaign volunteer. She was nonplussed and her expression did not change at all.

“You forgot one thing. You should have more humility, young woman and support your classmate with your campaign experience.”

“Well, why should I...”

Sister cut me off.

“In the history of this school, there is no precedent for a girl running for class President of the 8th grade class. You must step down.”



I knew I had to take a stand, even if it meant I would be at odds with the entire school administration. There was a lot at stake for me. I might jeopardize my class standing, scholarships, awards, who knew what else. But I stood firm. Anticipating her objections, I held my trump card to the last.

"Sister, I can't step down. My mother won't let me and I cannot disobey my mother. I have to run as President."

Sister Veronica Ann knew I had her with this argument. She did not want to tangle with my mom—the nun was too busy running an inner city school. She would just tell our pastor, the Bishop, that Helen Solick's child wouldn't yield. She ordered me to return to my classroom.

I threw my hands in the air in a gesture of triumph when I walked into Room 21. The girls clapped and some of the boys razed me until Sister Bernard hushed them with the threat of demerits and a stay after school. Inside I was rejoicing. No one could tell me a girl wasn't good enough.

I ran home after school to tell Mom about my confrontation with Sister Veronica Ann. Shaking, I repeated my confrontation with the principal and my response. Mom grinned and approved.

"She has a lot of nerve. I'm glad you stood your ground. "

"But now you've got to get to work if you are going to win. Rome wasn't built in a day."

I wasn't planning on constructing a coliseum but I understood what she meant.

We got right to work on the campaign. Mom pulled out her rocket fuel—Cokes and bags of M&M's. She lit a cigarette and began free associations about election themes. I came up with "Solick for St. Mel's." Mom and I brainstormed our ideas for winning the Presidency for hours that evening at the big walnut dining room table. The posters, glitter, tempera paints, and markers purchased at Kroch's and Brentano's covered the whole surface. My sister, Barb, was recruited as my Creative Director and she set to work illustrating clever campaign posters. "Bright Ideas" was my campaign slogan. Barb worked up a big light bulb on the poster board, carefully hand lettering the main platform positions.

She even came up with one for my running mate, “Ness will clean up the mess” and created a poster with a spilled garbage can. I am not sure what the mess was, but Ness was going to take care of it. Barb came up with another poster with a child looking out from a tunnel to a bright sun and Mom devised a new slogan, “We’ll show you the light with Anita’s bright ideas. My campaign promises covered the poster—“Student Teachers”, “Regular Study Hall”, “More Field Trips”, “Community Service Days”, “High School/College Prep”, and “Career Counseling”.

I knew my ideas were advanced. I wanted to encourage activities that prepared us for high school and beyond. I thought it might be a tough sell to the teachers who were already overwhelmed with an average of 65 kids in each classroom, but I innocently thought my classmates would like these ideas.

Humming the tune to *Chattanooga Choo Choo*, Mom spontaneously began shouting out lines for a campaign song; her snapping fingers seemed to spur her on.

“Watch us soar ahead; our goals are high.”

“There’s no limit to our aims it’s do or die.”

“We’re the St. Mel Crusaders and we’ll get the job done.”

While Mom rhymed word after word I listened in awe and wondered why she did not write poetry. I wasn’t so sure I needed a song just yet, but she was on a roll and I knew better than to interrupt.

This was just the beginning. Mom, Barb and I would huddle around the dining room table every evening, plotting and tweaking our strategy. Sometimes Mary Lennon and other supporters would join us. We were determined to keep the pressure and awareness up. We designed a classroom activity for every day. We had a spontaneous rally in the classroom and threw confetti and streamers; sometimes I would just ask permission to address the class; another day we gathered a crowd with campaign cheers and songs. It was something new every day. Meanwhile, my opponents smiled and waited. It was looking like they wouldn’t mount any campaign at all. I worried when I saw they did not seem at all worried.

The day of the election I woke up so nervous and excited. I’d dreamed about

winning and giving an acceptance speech before the entire class. I hurried to dress and grabbed a bowl of Kellogg's Corn Flakes before grabbing Barb and heading to school. Along the way we saw a couple of the punkie boys from my class.

"Hey, Solick, our man, Jim, is going to beat you. It's in the bag."

"I doubt it."

Barb and I turned our noses up at them and continued west on Madison Street towards St. Mel's School. But I had a strange premonition—*how could they be so sure Jim would win? He hadn't done much to advance his candidacy. Did he know something I didn't know?* I tried to shake off my apprehension; I didn't want my sister to see I was worried. When we got to school, we hugged. She wished me luck. I flashed her a thumbs-up and told her if I won it was because of her, and if I didn't, it was because of me. Then we headed to our respective classrooms.

The election was proving too exciting for my adolescent male classmates, and Sister Bernard could barely keep order. Boys were hopping out of their seats like frogs, talking aloud in class, throwing notes to their buddies, and shooting spitballs. It was pandemonium. Sister gave each candidate the floor for a few minutes to make their final pitch before the voting began. I'd prepared a speech that succinctly covered my platform. My opponent stood briefly.

"Vote for me. I am the basketball captain."

He sat down. *That's it? That's all you got? Well, I am voting for me, and so should everyone else.*

Sister explained the voting procedures again. The four classes would be allowed to cast their votes for President and Vice President. The teachers for all grades could also cast their votes. Proctors were designated to collect the votes from the teachers and the other classrooms and bring them to Room 21. Sister would count all the ballots and after the voting was finished and the ballots counted, the winner would be announced.

The sickly sweet smelling mimeographed ballots had been distributed a few days before, so naturally some kids either forgot or lost them and needed replacement ballots. Students had to identify themselves if they'd lost their ballot and get a new one, along with a chiding from Sister Bernard. This

took a few minutes. Then Sister instructed the class to mark the ballot with their choice and when they were ready to bring it up to her desk. This went on for what seemed like a year to this impatient candidate. I couldn't believe some kids waited until today to make a decision. Sister Bernard wanted quiet and we were instructed to select a story from Lives of the Saints and read silently until everyone finished voting. Periodically, there would be a knock at the classroom door, and a child would appear with ballots from another classroom or another teacher.

Several hours passed and then Sister grew impatient and announced that the students had five more minutes to make a decision. But, I worried; did the other classrooms know she was closing the polls? She instructed the students to pass any remaining ballots forward. She counted the few remaining ballots and looked up. There was a knock on the door. Two children came in with ballots in hand, but Sister declared that the voting was closed and these ballots were disqualified. One girl interrupted Sister. I thought I saw a tear in her eye.

"But these kids were sick. Their moms brought the ballots to the principal's office and she told us to bring them up here when we were delivering messages to the classrooms."

The other girl told Sister that she'd picked up the ballots from teachers on her rounds delivering supplies and brought them up when she finished her rounds. She said she did not know that the voting would close or she would have brought them first thing. But Sister shook her head.

"I declared the voting closed. We have a winner."

I blurted out, "Sister, who are those votes for?"

She replied that she wouldn't tell us because they were disqualified and she'd declared the voting closed. I felt sure they were for me. Otherwise, why not tell?

My heart sank.

"The winners are Jim Miller and Maureen Sullivan."

I felt the election was rigged and I'd lost.

*Hypocrites!*

I was furious, not just for myself, but for Mom and Barb, and my friends who'd worked in earnest to get me elected.

Then I had a moment of realization—this was what I'd face for the rest of my life. I would have to fight against the status quo, and wouldn't always win. Sometimes the people I expected to be on my side wouldn't be. It was so unfair; I was disillusioned, and, in that moment, the authority figures at my school lost all credibility with me. I was finished—it was over. I would move on. I made a decision right then and vowed I would apply for high schools outside of my neighborhood. And I vowed to continue my fight against injustice.

Barb and I walked home a lot slower that day, dragging our saddle shoes, not wanting to tell Mom the results, not wanting to disappoint her. She'd put so much energy into this. I tried to think how I would break the news to her, but I didn't have to tell her. When she opened the front door and saw the sad look on my face she knew the results.

"They cheated me. Sister disqualified some of the votes and Jim Miller won."

I knew this wouldn't go down well with Mom; she was like a tigress when someone bothered her children. Mom flipped. Her face got redder and redder as she pressed me for the details. She lit and abandoned one cigarette after another.

"How dare they? After we donated to their damned building fund? I ought to cancel the pledge. We'll never use that hall anyway. And, then, the ultimate threat—"I'm going up there."

Almost true to her word, Mom called the school and made a stink, but the principal wouldn't allow her to challenge her authority in their school and wouldn't reverse the decision.

Always the pragmatist, Mom advised me to forget it.

"You're not getting a paycheck for being class president. Find something else to win. "

I knew she was right and decided to take her advice. I did not win that election but there were other personal triumphs. I won the class debates and the science fair. The recruiters from a new high school came to our

class and talked about how the new students would be in the first graduating class. I got the paperwork from the recruiter and filled out my application. I entered a Chicago-wide writing contest and won. I decided to embrace my role as a trailblazer.

Two years later, I was a high school girl in a rolled up uniform skirt who wore dark eye makeup and was crazy for the Beatles. I'd forgotten all about the election; it seemed like a million years ago. Then, inspired by my example, one of Barb's girlfriends ran for class president and won. Barb was her campaign manager and she incorporated the techniques we pioneered in my unsuccessful campaign to secure a win for her friend.

While working on an assignment for journalism class, Barb burst in and, flush with success, announced their victory.

"We did it. Ellen won!"

I felt like it was a triumph for me and for every girl. The male tradition was broken. Other girls would run for president and win. Other girls would break down barriers and win and win again.

Years later, when the former Sister Bernard and I became Facebook friends and exchanged emails, she expressed her regret that

I hadn't won that election. Comparing me to Hillary Clinton, she wrote, "And, I guess, the world still isn't ready for a woman president." I knew she was wrong.

Bio- Anita Solick Oswald is a Chicago native. She's written a collection of essays, *West Side Girl*, that are written from the point of view of her younger self and chronicle the colorful, diverse and oftentimes unpredictably eccentric characters and events that populated Chicago's West Side neighborhood during the 50s & 60s. Her writing has appeared in *The Write Place At the Write Time*, the *Faircloth Literary Review*, *The Fat City Review*, and *Avalon Literary Review*.

Anita grew up in the 3rd story apartment above her family's Bohemian restaurant on Madison Street, daughter of a fireman and a housewife/frustrated writer, and comrade of a ragtag brigade of migrant children who trooped into and found both themselves and the world-at-large on their neighborhood's streets. Her essays, set in Chicago, celebrate an era, a time of change, an urban childhood, ethnic neighborhoods, girls' empowerment, and the benefits of growing up in a culturally diverse community.

Anita studied journalism at Marquette University, earned her B.A. in Economics from the University of California at Los Angeles and her M.S. in Management and Organization from the University of Colorado. She is a founding member of Boulder Writing Studio.

Anita lives in Boulder, Colorado, with her husband, Ralph, and her cats, Figaro and Clio.

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