

REAL WORDS



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*Connecticut Writing Project
Summer Fellows
1997*

Real Words / Real Worlds

by

Members of the
Connecticut Writing Project
1997 Summer Institute

Edited by the CWP Staff

Connecticut Writing Project
Storrs, CT

1997

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The Connecticut Writing Project offers opportunities for growth and professional development to teachers of writing in all disciplines who recognize the worth of using writing as a means of learning any subject matter. A program of the University of Connecticut Department of English, the Connecticut Writing Project is affiliated with the widely-acclaimed National Writing Project, which now has 166 sites in this country and abroad.

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Over the River

~ William Elrick ~

"What's on the agenda for this morning, Will?" Grandma asked as she began to clear away the breakfast dishes.

I looked down at the remnants of my soft-boiled egg on toast, the runny yolk turning the toast all soft and gooey, the salt that Grandma allowed me to shake all over it, something I was never allowed to do at home. It was my favorite breakfast in the whole world. I noticed a piece of eggshell, an island of brown in a sea of yellow. There was usually a piece of shell, since Grandma was always thinking about a million other things when she was cooking, but it was a small price to pay for my favorite meal.

"How about a game of Sorry?" I queried. Grandma and I played lots of different board games every visit but I liked Sorry the best. Whenever I would knock Grandma off the board, I would yell SOOORRRYY as loud as I could!! Grandma would get that hurt look in her eyes like I had called her a fresh name...and then start laughing, the hurt look turning into a twinkle.

"No games this morning," she said, as I knew she would. At Grandma and Grandpa's house mornings were for work and projects, afternoons and evenings for fun, although if truth be told, even work seemed like fun at the big white house on Ridge Road. "I think this morning feels like a garden morning."

"Flower or vegetable?"

"Flower. There's lots of weeds and Grandpa said he could hardly see the bachelor's buttons this morning."

Every morning, during the warm weather months, Grandpa would pick a bachelor's button to put in his lapel, the varied blue colors of the flower set off by the red that was in every tie he owned.

Grandma and I cleared and rinsed the dishes. "Don't bother with washing, Grandma said with a laugh. "The dishes won't rust and the air's too fresh."

Actually Grandma's kitchen was pretty much a mess most of the time. It wasn't neat or tidy or really all that clean but some of the best meals in history came out of that room.

We went out to the "back bed" as grandma called it. When I was real little I asked her one day, "Grandma, how come you call that a bed? People sleep in a bed."

"Will," she giggled, "Don't you think those plants get tired just like we do? They need a place to sleep too."

Ever since that day she said that, I couldn't walk by her flowers without picturing them lying flat against the ground, row after row of multi-hued babies sound asleep.

I raced down the back steps to get the hoe and rake from the shed. It wasn't a job I liked to do. The shed was dark and spooky even in the daytime. There were always spider webs on the back of the door and the handles of the tools. They would cling to your hair and stick to your hands until you felt like one of the bugs the spiders were hunting. The summer before, there had been a hornets' nest in the back corner of the shed. You couldn't really see it but you could hear the ominous buzz when the door opened. I never got stung, but a hornet did fly out one day just as I was opening the door and hit me in the cheek. I shuddered when I thought about it and ever since then I opened the door very slowly, hiding behind it like it was a shield, until I was sure the coast was clear.

I had to run and get tools because it took Grandma so long to get out to the garden. She went down the back steps sideways, like a crab sidling along the beach. Each step was an effort and she would start whistling to hide the fact that her breathing was so labored. By the time she reached the garden, I had been out to the shed and back with the tools.

I looked down at the garden, a jumble of vines and plants and flowers. There was no pattern to the plantings that I could discern, just a tossed salad of flowers; some marigolds in front, a few begonias on either side, bachelor's buttons everywhere. There were rose bushes planted in no particular order, lilies of the valley mixed in with everything and back by the fence a patch of sweet willum. I didn't know if that was the actual name of the flower, I still don't, but every time Grandma worked on them she would say, "Sweet willums but not as sweet as this Willum."

I looked at the old split rail fence that marked the back boundary of the bed. You could barely see it for the rose bushes and nameless vines that had twined through it. One rail was missing and several others were broken. Two posts right in the middle were tipped forward at such an angle they looked like they were fighting a stiff wind. I remembered back to the days when I would sit on that fence with Grandpa pretending we were cowboys at the rodeo. Other times I would ride the fence like a horse and usually get a sliver or two in my leg for my troubles. Grandma would have to dig them out with a pin heated over a match and then dab them with iodine. After a particularly tough ride I would end up looking like I had a case of the measles. If I tried to climb on that fence now it would probably collapse under my weight. At the very least I would have a major league case of the iodine measles.

We worked on the flowers for about an hour, although I was having so much fun, I really didn't notice the time passing. Grandma couldn't kneel down. She would lean on her cane or one of the garden tools and bend at the waist. With her head down near the ground and her butt sticking up in the air, she looked like one of those acute angles we learned about in arithmetic. I don't know how she stayed in that position for so long. Of course at 4 feet 11 inches tall, she didn't have to bend very far to get near the ground.

"Why don't we pick a bouquet of lillies of the valley for the dinner table?" Grandma suggested just as we were ready to go in. I stepped carefully into the bed and picked a good sized bunch of the tiny white flowers with their large flat leaves. As I handed them to her, tears came to her eyes and she enveloped me in a hug. This was very unusual behavior. Grandma never cried. "Your grief is your burden," she would say, "everybody has their own. You don't need to give them yours." As she held me to her she said, "Uncle Dick just loved picking bunches of lilies for the table. He would have loved you so much!"

"And I know I would have loved him too." I answered, a little confused, knowing only that Uncle Dick had been lost in "the war" and I would never have a chance to love him.

As soon as she let go of me, her eyes were dry and she had a smile in her voice as she said, "let's get inside and put these in water before they wilt."

The first stop was the cabinet to get a jelly jar to hold the flowers. Then to the sink to wash our faces and hands. The kitchen may have been a mess but the people in it had better be clean. A good scrubbing with the ever-present bar of Ivory Soap and we were ready for the rest of the morning.

I thought I would try again, "Sorry now grandma?" I questioned.

"Nope." That requires too much thinking after all that outside work my get up and go, has got up and went! Besides I need to finish sewing some more squares to the quilt I'm making and I can do that, all sitting and no thinking."

Grandma was always working on one or more knitted quilts. She would knit patches about four inches square and then stitch them together to make the quilt. Each small patch had a pattern of vibrant primary colors in the center and a border of navy blue. When stitched together the quilt made its own geometric design. Grandma never followed a guide or a set of directions. Each pattern just flowed from head through fingers to yarn and each one came out perfectly formed.

I really didn't like helping with the quilting or crocheting or tatting or embroidery. They were all girl things. I did however, enjoy watching Grandma do them. We went out on the sun porch where she always did her sewing because the light was better. I sat in Grandpa's rocking chair inhaling the faint aroma of cigar smoke that clung to the upholstery. Every weekday at noon, grandpa would come home for lunch. After his meal, he would sit in his rocker for fifteen minutes, watch *Search for Tomorrow*, and smoke a cigar. When I was real little he would give me the cigar band to wear as a ring. The cigar bands were no longer of interest but the chair and the aroma of the smoke still made me feel somehow protected and secure.

"Who is this quilt for?" I asked. Grandma was always giving things away as presents. She had probably made more than a dozen of the knitted quilts and they had all gone to friends and family. She used to have hundreds of old Indian Head Pennies but she would give a few to every child who came to her house for a visit until she only had a few left. At every family birthday party, she would give a small gift to every guest, just so they would have a package to open too.

"This one's not for anybody," she said, "it's for me. Everybody else stays toasty warm on cold days. I figure I should too."

Sitting in the rocking chair, holding the finished squares of the quilt, I handed them to Grandma one at a time so she could attach them. I watched her, thimble on one hand, needle and thread in the other. With the pull of each stitch her hand would move through the air like a conductor at a concert. She never looked up except to ask me for the next patch, her hands and a slight bob of her head the only movements in the room. With each breath she gave a barely audible whistle from between her lips. At one point she sneezed. "God bless me cause no one else will," she said as always.

The warmth of the sun through the window, the soft velvety feel of the chair fabric, the subtle smoky aroma, Grandma's low rhythmic whistle, I felt my eyes getting heavy. Just a short rest before lunch.

I awoke with a start as my head snapped forward. Looking at my watch, I realized that my nap had been longer than anticipated. "Boy, I've got less than an hour till my tee time," I thought, "but that's still enough time to stop and say hello to Grandma before heading to the course."

I pulled into her driveway and noticed the dead birch tree that I had been promising to cut down for months. "Next week." I mutter to myself. "Plenty of time, after all it's not going anywhere."

I let myself in and called out my usual greeting. "Hi!! It's only me."

I saw Mrs. Anderson, the housekeeper we had to hire when Grandma stopped being able to go up and down the stairs. "How did you get here so fast?" She exclaimed with a startled tone.

"What are you talking about?"

"I just called your father's house and 911 two minutes ago. I didn't think anyone would get here this fast!"

I walked onto the sun porch. She was on the sofa with the quilt half over her legs. She might have been stitching pieces onto it, except I didn't hear any whistling.

"I'm real sorry mister," Mrs. Anderson said, "but there wasn't nothing I could do. I just now found her like that."

Fighting back my tears, this was my burden, not Mrs. Anderson's, I replied, "It's okay, God blessed her."

Untitled (inspired by Blood on the Fields)

~Medria Blue~

I am the one stained in the voice
of *Blood on the Fields*
waiting for yr touch
I am the cropped head
soft souled chile
trying to be whole for memories
that ripple upon the shore
whispering for their birthed
he told me he wanted a yellow girl
told him he was less of a man--dangerous
forgot about you
creaming milking cramming jamming
into MTV BET VH1 ABC
always desiring a finer strand
I am not her
black as coal in my soul
want to spin myself into your depth
make you shuffle along
along past the driver
along past the big house
along past the shackles on yr brain
my maroon
my god seeing Toussaint
my Marcus Garvey
my Maasi-warrior-interior-blessed man
is gone from the rock
cannot remember the smell of salt
choking the midnight air
cold sea air drying the water from his eyes
crusting the corners of his mouth
want a Maybelline Queen
don't like my nappy defiance
I am dreaming nappy thought
I am not conforming
I am not letting go
I taste the cold cutting my raw sores
drying my oozing blood
I remember the smell of urine and vomit
and shit and rape and of death, haunting death
I am dreaming nappy thought
of revolting with Nat Turner
killing men and women and babies
I am dreaming nappy thought

of flying to Ibo land
 on the back of a mighty Sankofa bird
 I am dreaming nappy thought
 of traveling with Harriet packing a gun in my skirt
 I am dreaming of shooting a Confederate in the front line
 before the stinging bullets
 scatter my flesh into the still wind
 I am dreaming nappy thought
 of derailing Jim Crow cars in Dixie
 and of chain ganging the government
 that used my blood to build its cities
 I am dreaming nappy thought
 of marching with king and malcom and the million
 I am dreaming nappy thought
 of becoming the keeper the guru the shaman
 the one to cast ghosts in the air
 to keep alive the pain
 that moves you

moves you

moves you

further from

the touch of
yrsel

The Raft

~Brenda G. Kaulback~

Valerie set goals for herself and then determinedly carried each one out. Dog paddle from here to the orange buoy. Side stroke from the orange buoy till she was even with the big rock. Back stroke from there to the orange buoy again.

The sun beat down on her face and the water poured onto her cheeks over the horrid bright pink flowering bathing cap her mother made her wear so that she could be spotted easily among the bobbing heads of all the other young swimmers. The mixture of the heat and the cold confused her senses, but she liked it.

She reached the buoy and dog paddled in until she could feel the soft sand touching her outstretched toes when she dropped them down to test the depth of the water. She looked toward the beach, checked that her mother was still sitting there on the brightly striped blanket they carried daily to the cove. Her sister Barbie, jumping up and down, partly blocked Valerie's view of her mother. Sugar was sitting beside them, tail wagging, studying the swimmers.

Valerie turned to swim. As she did, she caught sight of Chrissy McGinnis, her last summer's swimming teacher, making a perfect dive off the raft at the entrance to the cove. The small wooden platform swung from side to side as kids jumped and dove off its canvassed top and climbed back up on the metal stairs. Their slicked down hair and brightly colored bathing caps made it impossible to recognize them. From here they looked like representations rather than real teenagers, standing, kneeling, sitting on the raft, with bright, bobbing balls of heads surrounding them in the water. Their occasional yells reverberating off the hills. One brave figure was doing back flips.

Nick Thibodeau, Valerie's teacher this year, had taken their intermediate class out to the raft in a row boat and had them jump off and swim back to shore. Valerie had done fine. By the time the class had reconvened in waist deep water, she had been a little breathless but pleased with herself.

She did a few breast strokes in the direction of the raft. Two ponytailed girls in animated conversation sat on the side of the platform facing the beach, tanned legs reaching over the side, feet dangling above the water. Three boys who looked younger than she was jumped in one after the other, crash, crash, crash, arms wrapped around knees held tight to their chests, bottoms reaching the water first. Shrieks and then mock groans followed the sheets of water that exploded over the side of the raft when they hit.

She could do it, she thought, it wasn't unimaginable. It wasn't any farther out to the raft then it was from one side of the cove to the other.

She thought about how pleased she'd be with herself. She imagined telling her father that evening. She'd wait until he was swimming with her in front of their camp. They swam together every evening, at the time when only ripples disturbed the lake's surface. He swam by her side, out past their raft, out far enough so that they could see around the point of land that separated their inlet from Murray's Cove, out far enough so that they could see the raft. By that time of evening, though, the raft was quieter, with just a handful of swimmers, probably those who waited to swim after work, like her father. Sometimes, in the calm, a man's voice, deep and resonating, carried across the water so clearly, that she thought it was her father, treading water beside her, speaking.

Swimming out to the raft from where she stood wasn't much farther than the distance she swam with her father each night. Probably shorter.

A young girl with dark bangs plastered to her forehead came up to Val. "You're going to get burned if you just stand still in the water."

That really annoyed Valerie. She hated people who stuck their noses into other people's business. Especially when they acted so know-it-all. And Valerie wanted to tell her that the theory was wrong anyhow, she wasn't going to get any more burned standing still than she was if she swam. But the girl was long gone and Valerie realized she had been just standing there, looking at the raft.

She pushed off the bottom with her toes and practiced her crawl. She couldn't sustain the crawl very long, but to her it was the most grown up of the strokes. She swam until she was even with the orange buoys on each side of the cove, treaded water for a moment, then passed between them, as if between Scylla and Charybdis, which they'd read about in *The Odyssey* just before the end of the school year.

Switching to her side stroke, she noticed that from out here, she could see the boat tied up to her uncle's dock and a figure that looked like her Aunt Gretchen standing in front of the camp. She didn't bother to wave; her aunt was too far away to see her. How far away were they, she wondered. Distances seemed so different on the water. When they took their motor boat down to Caliendo's General Store, her Dad would often turn the boat around another inlet after she thought they were already at the end of the lake.

The water seemed colder out here. Only swimmers who were venturing out to the raft swam out this far. A muscular swimmer propelled past her, each arm pounding the surface loudly. He swam as if he were fighting with the water, angry at the lake.

It must be getting close to lunch time. When she got back from the raft she'd tease her mother to let them have a hot dog from Murray's Ice Cream Stand for lunch. Sometimes her mother let them stay into the afternoon. She could read her Nancy Drew book, *The Whispering Statue*, which she'd brought in the terry cloth beach bag her mother had helped her make out of pink and white striped towels.

The raft still seemed far away. She couldn't see the beach when she was headed in this direction. She turned her body just a little, angling toward the shore so she could see the place where their blanket was. She could see the blanket, but not her family. Blankets and beach chairs had filled in most of the sand. She knew they wouldn't leave without her, but where were they? The beach always got more crowded in the afternoon. Maybe they were in line at the candy store, but the clump of customers made it impossible to distinguish them. She straightened out her stroke and resumed her voyage toward her destination.

She altered between the side stroke and the back stroke, gaining distance with the former and resting with the latter. On her back, she studied the sky, blue and distant above her. A few clouds drifted very high up, and she tried to make them disappear by concentrating on them. Her friend Linda told her that people could do that. The main problem with the back stroke was she couldn't always keep a straight course.

She flipped over and couldn't tell where she was. She struggled to recognize something, finally spotted her uncle's camp and veered to the right until the rocking raft came into view. Phew, it was farther than she had imagined. She was getting tired. She did her best to move in easy flowing strokes and to breathe with each stroke the way Nick had taught her.

Once she was visiting her cousin Cathy in Virginia, they had gone to a beach where there was a lifeguard on duty. No one could swim if the lifeguard wasn't there. The swimming teachers probably all swam as well as the lifeguard. They had to have their Red Cross Life Saver's badge in order to teach. The only difference between the swimming teachers and the life guards was that the life guards got to sit in a high chair and watch over things. The swimming teachers were usually busy keeping track of their charges in the water. It must be almost time for the afternoon classes to begin.

She flipped over onto her back once more. Her arms and legs were getting heavy. She tried just treading water. She was a pretty good treader. She and her Dad sometimes went out into the lake and just tread water side by side for long periods of time. Her Dad could make her laugh by treading water with just his head and his big toes above the surface. Once she had copied him and they hadn't heard a canoe that came upon them. It was someone her Dad knew and after the canoe had passed she had laughed at how funny they must look with two heads and four big toes sticking out of the water. She thought maybe if she tried that now it would distract her from how weary and out of breath she was, but she couldn't keep her toes up for any length of time. She reverted to the side stroke.

She heard the vibration of an engine and looked to her left. A big turquoise motor boat with an inboard engine headed into the cove. It slowed down as it came close to the raft but the wake was still pretty strong when it came parallel to her. When the first wave arrived, she was still worrying that the driver might not see her and somehow her mouth was open and she accidentally swallowed some of the lake water. It surprised her and she stopped swimming and started coughing, then realized where she was and tried to cough and swim at the same time. It wasn't easy.

She should have asked her Dad to bring her over and try this with her the first time. She should have at least told her mother what she was doing, but she hadn't really planned to come, it had just kind of *happened*. She wondered if her mother was looking for her.

The beach looked so far away when she glanced back. She couldn't be sure that she was looking at the right blanket now, but, if she was, it still didn't look as if anyone was on it. Maybe she had been foolish to do this.

The people on the raft actually were distinguishable right now. She couldn't see Chrissy's black and white suit anywhere, but she was close enough to recognize a girl who had been sitting near them on the sand before lessons had started. The boy gently pushed the girl into the water. Her legs flew straight up in the air as she sank backwards over the side of the raft. The three cannon ballers were still repeating their routine, into the water, crash, crash, crash, and back out again. Into the water - crash, crash, crash - and back out again.

It was noisier out here than she had imagined. From the shore she could see the motions of the diving and pushing and talking, but, except for occasional loud shrieks, the sounds were so far away they had been subdued. As she got closer, she could hear the teasing and the giggling and the bickering.

"Agh, you're getting me all wet. PUSH OVER!"

"If you didn't want to get wet..."

"I'll race you!"

"Splash!"

"I'm gonna tell Mommy!"

Splash. Splash.

She was nearing the activity now and she began looking for a safe landing place. The three jumpers were jumping from the other side, but the raft was moving on its anchor, partly because of the remaining wake from the boat and partly from the movement they created by jumping. The two ponytailed girls had become four and they were taking up a second side. The third and fourth sides were out of her view, but she knew that the ladder was over there somewhere and she was tempted to swim the extra few feet around the side of the raft just for the sake of the ladder. Frankly, the raft was pretty high in the water, resting on eight big barrels, and she wasn't sure if she could boost herself up without the ladder to hold onto.

There was a metal pipe-like thing that went around the barrels, but she thought she'd look pretty silly hanging onto it under the girls' overhanging feet. She could picture them looking down their long slender legs into the water and laughing at her pink bathing cap drifting below them.

She dog paddled around the edge until she was on the side of the raft facing out into the lake. No one on shore could see her now, not even in her bathing cap. Once she rounded the corner, she could see the two older boys, one in front, one off to the side, bodies dragging in the water, arms stretched above their heads, embracing the ladder. She was stymied for a moment, but she was also tired, and she knew she couldn't swim back without resting.

She swam close to the gray painted barrels and found a rim wide enough for her to get her fingers on. She rested by the ends of her fingers for a few moments and then realized that if she used that small protrusion as a foothold, she could boost herself up onto the edge of the raft. She found a space between the four girls and the boys hanging on the ladder. She got herself hoisted half way up, torso resting on the raft, legs dangling over the side, feet touching the water.

Ordinarily, if she hadn't just swum farther than she had ever swum without resting, she probably could have pulled herself the rest of the way up. As it was, she put her head down onto the canvas covering, praying that the army of bare feet that surrounded her head wouldn't step on her, tried to look as though this was as far as she intended to climb, and closed her eyes. Eventually she stopped worrying about whether or not she was about to have a heart attack and opened her eyes. She couldn't really change positions because of her precarious balance, but toes still dragging in the waves, she rose on her elbows and studied the raft. One tow-headed boy caught her eye and she smiled nonchalantly and examined her fingernail.

No one else seemed to be paying much attention. Periodically she kicked her feet in the water to make her circumstances look more calculated, as though her feet were too hot to be out of the water and she really wanted to get a tan on her back. She thought up lots of reasons why a person might deliberately be resting in this awkward position and then relaxed enough to begin studying the lake. From here she could see where she and Dad swam at night, and even the very corner of their camp with the green chaise lounge on the porch and the American flag flying from the flagpole where she had faithfully raised it each morning. Her uncle's camp was visible at a very different angle than from the beach. She could no longer see her aunt, although now she saw a whole line of sheets and towels flapping between their camp and their garage.

If she lifted her head way up, which she could do by resting her head on her chin, she could see the shoreline. She studied carefully where their blanket should be and saw something she thought was it, but there was still no one on it. She spotted several dogs running behind the little store, but none of them looked like Sugar. Her eyes scanned the crowds. The raft drifted to the right as the three boys followed each other into the water again, yelping like kicked dogs, crash, crash, crash.

She took one last look up the lake, let go of her tenuous hold and dropped back into the water. The trip back didn't seem quite as long. She dog paddled most of the way in. She could see the shoreline getting larger and the people becoming more distinguishable, but she still couldn't locate her Mom or Barbie. When she rested on her back, she saw that the clouds had vanished from the sky and she wondered whether her efforts had played any part in their disappearance.

Once only did her heart leap into her throat on the return trip. She had passed the orange buoy markers and thankfully let her feet drop to the bottom, but she had misjudged once again and the water was still well over her head. Her head went under and when her feet finally did touch bottom, she gave a gigantic push and came up sputtering. She paddled a few more feet and tried again, this time successfully. She had done it! She wanted to turn cartwheels and shout, but she was in the water and too tired.

She swam until she could actually sit on the bottom, and sat with only her head above the water until her breathing evened out. It was more crowded than when she had begun her journey. The younger kids were beginning to assemble for the afternoon classes. She saw Chrissy with her clipboard and her whistle around her neck talking to two really little girls. It all looked so familiar and welcome it made her heart sing.

Then she spotted Sugar, lapping up water at the lake's edge. Her mother was nearby, walking towards Val. She had that line between her eyebrows that signified worry.

"Valerie Jordan, you know you aren't supposed to go out past the buoys. I was so worried about you." Her mother's sunglasses fell out of her hand and landed in the sand.

"But Mom," Valerie countered, "Did you see I swam out to the raft?"

Her mother leaned over and picked up the glasses.

"Of course I saw you. I watched every stroke you took."

"You didn't get up on the raft." Barbie scoffed. "Your feet were in the water the whole time. You looked funny."

Sugar came running up to her as Val dragged herself to her feet. Sugar's tail wagged emphatically from side to side, moving the whole back part of her body. Sugar barked and tried to jump onto Valerie's legs.

"You're here," Val thought she was saying. "I missed you!"

"New England Sisyphus"

~Nancy Otter~

It's patient work, this wall building.
You may come upon a stone as you walk in a morning-damp field
and in your hand
the weight and the welt of it
mimic a shape of space in need of substance.
Or stones may heave themselves at you,
vomited out of the earth,
unasked, untamed, dangerous.

Take each one.
Find the space that calls the shape
as the tense, irregular moments of a life
form into a geometry marked by sediment and crystal.

The wall is not mortared.
You conspire with the rocks to sustain
an angle, a boundary, a quiet seat.

This is not a hasty architecture.
This artifact of necessity is
the work of hands hard with repetition,
eyes packed with memory,
bones moving bones,
the ancient child amending the eternal mother.

The Lift

~Gregory Esposito~

Joey stood there shivering at the base of Killington Mountain. It was cold, windy and snowy. He knew, though, that it wasn't the weather alone that was making him shiver. He was only a little cold. He was a lot scared.

It looked big: much bigger than it had looked from the parking lot behind the base lodge. It looked meaner, too. He hadn't noticed all the rocks and tree stumps before. From the lot, it looked all white and fluffy. He was scared.

When his ski instructor had finished giving Joey and the ten members of his ski class a few directions, most of which Joey really couldn't hear, he led them all over to the lift. Joey imagined (he had a very active imagination) that they must have looked like a brood of ducklings following their mother as they plodded along awkwardly on their artificially extended feet. He almost wanted to quack. Almost. But he was too scared.

As they bungled into the lift line, the instructor asked those students who had never ridden a chair lift before to raise their hands so he could pair them with an experienced lift rider. Joey raised his hand. The instructor didn't see it. Maybe it was the wind-driven snow that obscured Joey's panicked hand-waving from the instructor's view, though it might have been Joey's size. Although he wasn't the only seven year old in the class he was by far the smallest. Being at the end of the line didn't help either.

As the class moved through the railed fence that delineated the lift line, Joey's already whirling mind went into overdrive. The configuration of the railings reminded him of a stockyard. He couldn't lose the image of cattle going through a chute to their slaughter. What was he going to do? Not only didn't he have an experienced rider beside him, *he didn't have any partner at all*. He had an impulse to cry out, but he didn't. He didn't want to draw attention to himself, especially the kind of attention that would make his fear apparent to the others. The others were talking, laughing and jostling each other. They didn't seem the least bit scared. Joey didn't want to be. But most of all he didn't want the others to know that he was. He remained silent.

His skis felt like lead; his legs felt like mush. The combination made his progress as he edged forward in line appear as ponderous as it felt. Through his watery eyes -- teary from the cold wind he told himself -- he began to observe what each pair of skiers did as they prepared to board the lift. As he did, and as he moved toward the boarding point, he became aware of noises emanating from the wheels, cables, chairs, and other parts of the lift apparatus he was coming alongside of. He watched as the light blue chairs, covered with a dusting of snow from their trip down the mountain, swung and sometimes clanged against the metal of the machinery as they whipped around a big overhead wheel and began heading toward the waiting riders. The diesel engine that powered the lift was very noisy, but not so noisy that Joey couldn't hear the screeching of the gears and wheels and the squealing of the hinges that attached each chair to a cable that Joey thought looked very, very thin.

The clamor became so loud as Joey inched forward that it extinguished all hope. He knew now that even if he cried out, the instructor wouldn't hear him. He looked away from the beast that powered the lift in time to see the back of his instructor's hat being made gradually invisible by the distance and the snow as it rose toward the mountain top on the chair lift. Ahead of his ascending instructor, the mountain too disappeared in the swirling snow. Not being able to see the top made it appear even bigger to Joey.

Resigned to his fate, Joey began to observe the loading procedure even more closely as he moved shakily and shiveringly toward the point at the opening in the railings. He noticed that each pair of riders waited there for the lift attendant to call them forward. As the attendant barked out, "Next," the pair used the side of the railing to push off and quickly worked their way over to a flat spot adjacent to the attendant. Once there, they turned around as the next chair careened around the corner of the wheeled contraption and began to come forward. When it reached them, they sat down and the attendant yelled, "Okay," while he grabbed on to the side of their chair to lessen the jolt. That was it. It looked easy. Joey could picture himself doing it and almost relaxed. Almost.

Alone, Joey moved forward. It was time.

"Next!" Was he sliding forward toward the attendant? Yes he was. Did he stop in the right place? Yes he did. Was he going to live? He didn't know.

He turned around. "Okay!" Whack. Was he sitting down? Yes he was. Was he moving higher? Yes he was. Was he going to live? He didn't know.

As he began to collect himself, Joey realized that he had gotten into the chair almost effortlessly, though not painlessly. The chair had slammed into the back of his calves, lifting his legs off the ground and depositing him into the chair before he had realized what had happened. He became conscious of the pain in his legs, just below his erratically shaking knees. He also became aware of the cramp in his right hand, caused by his vice-like gripping of the chair's side rail. He scooted farther back in the chair and looked around. Then he looked down. Big mistake. The stumps and rocks he had seen from the lift line were sharper and more vivid from this vantage point, and their appearance became even more menacing as the height of the chair increased. He looked away.

That's when he saw the sign: the one that said, LOWER SAFETY BAR. The panic which had alternately rose and subsided during the last thirty seconds now spiked to a new height. "What is a safety bar?" his mind screamed. "Where could it be?" He looked around his chair as much as he could with a minimum of movement, fearful of falling out. Nothing. He looked at the chair ahead of him to see if he could discover a clue to the bar's whereabouts. Nothing. He forced himself to ever so gingerly spin around to look at the chair behind him. Nothing.

Fertilized by panic, his imaginings grew in scope until there was only one thing he could be sure of: he would die. The chair would start rocking or moving faster, and he would surely become part of the lifeless jumble of rocks, stumps and lost mittens that made up the hellish looking haphazardness of the landscape below him. The wind at the top would be so strong that it would lift him from the chair, and he wouldn't come down until he spattered onto the pavement in the parking lot near the base lodge. He wondered if his parents would ever know what happened to him.

A few minutes passed. The cable kept squeaking. The chair rocked a little; and whenever it rode over the guidewheels on the towers that supported the cables, it bumped up and down and then did a little sudden dip. He continued to worry about the safety bar, but nothing happened. He didn't die.

He found himself looking around, watching skiers glide down trails that were adjacent to the lift. He was beginning to relax a little. In fact, he really started to feel more calm when the lift came out of the wooded ravine it had been traveling through and began to pass over a slope. He thought if worse came to worse he could jump and get away with only a few broken bones. As his chair continued moving over the slope, the distance between his chair and the ground looked to be growing smaller. Maybe he wouldn't break anything.

His momentary relief came to an abrupt end, however, his panic being reignited by the chair entering another wooded ravine as he was simultaneously struck by a terrifying realization: he didn't know how he was supposed to get down from this thing. Maybe he *would* have to jump.

He peered ahead through the snow, trying to see if he could make out the top of the lift. The snow seemed to be slowing a bit and he could see the four chairs ahead of him with their seemingly relaxed riders. But they all had partners. Although, Joey thought, even if I had a partner, I still wouldn't be relaxed if I knew I was going to die.

The chair once again came out of the woods and began passing over a smooth, gentle looking slope, though it seemed to be very far below him. Again, Joey thought about the safety bar. He forced himself not to look down. He thought he could make out some kind of structure ahead, a little building that was alongside the lift at what appeared to be the top of the slope. Peering through the snow, struggling to make out the details, he discovered that his worst fears were about to be realized. He could clearly make out that as the chairs rose up the height of the shack, the riders dropped off, the empty chairs continuing onwards for a little bit before whirling around a big wheel to begin their trip back down the mountain. As he was contemplating the size of the drop and his apparent imminent death, he caught a glimpse of the sign on the support tower he was nearing: RAISE SAFETY BAR. That did it! Whatever doubts he had vanished in an instant. He just knew that that bar must have something to do with getting off safely. Why else would they call it a "safety" bar? He knew now, for sure, he would die.

Joey had no time to ponder further. The pair on the chair immediately in front of him came alongside the shack and (and this was what Joey couldn't believe) appeared to WILLINGLY push themselves out of the chair.

He waited for the screams.

Silence.

And then, as he himself came alongside the shack, he realized why he hadn't heard any. There was a ramp. It had been hidden from his view by the mound of snow piled up on the downhill side of the structure which supported it. He forced his nearly paralyzed hands to let go of the side of the chair, pushed himself out, and managed to glide down the ramp on skis that felt like they were floating above the snow beneath him.

His instructor motioned him over to where the class was gathering. Joey saw that the instructor was saying something to him, but Joey couldn't hear him. The thumping of his pulse echoing through his head was too loud. The only other sound he could hear was the panting of breath coming from deep within him. But these sounds were enough. They told Joey all he wanted to know. He would live. HE WOULD LIVE!

The River

~Helene Hebert~

As she approached the river, her knees began to tremble with each deliberate step forward. The river was loud and the water was clearly higher than it had been before. But there was something about the river that was unusual for such high waters; it was clear and the volume of the river did not seem to make it appear any slower. In fact, it looked oddly fast and each movement over a rock seemed engulfing, purposeful and quick.

The current brushed the vegetation which held tightly to the earth, gripping the ground below it as its branches stretched dangerously over the violent rush of the river. Rocks below the water were moving along with the current. They were not settled into comfortable and fixed positions. This speed the water carried was new to the rocks. The current measured the weight of each stone precisely, carrying lighter rocks like willing children far distances with ease. The heavier, reluctant rocks were nudged slowly onward, unconvinced. Even the bank of the river gave in to the demanding waters, breaking away from the roots which it supported. And the hungry river took it greedily, every brush it could get, every rock it could turn, continuing along its path, pulling what was once here over there.

The river flowed madly, loudly, and so fast that to focus on the traveled earth below was nearly impossible for her. Each wave, each white curl in the water provided her eyes with a source of visual distraction, and as she leaned over, toes dangerously touching the edge of the river bed, water gently sprayed on her face seductively. The spray's fine mist collected on her face into larger droplets and fell from her nose, chin, and ran down her body stopping where her confining bra held her tightly together. Her eyes caught sight of the object below her and her trembling hand hovered over the top of the rushing water, waiting for the exact moment when her mind would allow it to jump to command, pierce through the water and snatch the object just below. She was crouched, legs pressed against her sweaty body. Her focus was clear, fearful but still undisturbed. She didn't even take the time to wipe her brow dry but only waited for the right moment. Suddenly, almost surprising herself, fingertips were in the water with one quick movement the object was in her hand and she stood up immediately. Facing the current she caught her breath. It all seemed to have happened in one quick movement. Abruptly, her eyes, which had closed slightly during the capture, regained focus on the water. She began to walk away, continuing to face the river, as if retreating from a predator. Trying not to disturb anyone or anything with any sudden movements, she kept her eyes fixed, focused, fearing any sudden event or action from the hungry water.

She had moved far enough away from the river that her eyes were no longer fixed in its trance but she was still facing its raging waters. She could smell it though, each cold inhale carrying a scent which was neither pleasant nor unpleasant, but unnatural in some way. Although the sun was heavy and the humidity sweltering, the water did not invite salvation; it made her mouth dry. She leaned her tired body against a rock and allowed her head to bend down away from the river. She felt her tense neck strain with the movement of her chin falling to her chest. The pain moved down her spine slowly. With a sweep of her hand, she pulled her head back up with a deep breath, and brushed her forehead and hair. Her hand remained clamped on the back of her neck, made

moist from the river. She curved her back in the opposite direction, pushing her breasts forward to release more of the anxiety which had taken over each muscle in her. As the discomfort faded, she became aware of a sharp pain. Clamped tightly around the object, her hand had been pierced by the sharp edges. She could feel the moistness of her palm and the blood lubricating the object so she didn't release her grip but actually held it tighter and closer to her body.

Despite this grip, she had started to relax; her feat accomplished. She closed her eyes and began to imagine how her life would change so dramatically as a result of this simple act. She knew better than to laugh out loud, but she thought how foolish she had been to believe in all of those stories and curses. She had been an archaeologist for 12 years, surely the notions of Indiana Jones and voodoo should have been long in her past now. She had been so rational even as a graduate student when confronted with the stories of archaeologists who had perished in the pyramids by some strange disease or freak accident, and nothing she had seen in the last dozen years made her doubt her objectivity.

A cool breeze came by, and her toes were cooled by water trickling past her feet. It was not long after she had enjoyed the cooling massaging feeling that she awoke from her pleasure, and almost as if being strangled, she gasped for air, eyes open wide in fear. The river had crept up to where she leaned against the rock. How could it be, moments ago the water was safely 20 feet away? She crawled on her hands, one clenched, the other flat and pulled herself up onto the rock. She stood and turned to jump onto the hill for an escape but realized that the river was now on the other side and rising quickly.

The water rose and eventually swept her off of the rock, she was in the water and still tried to rationalize the events. Perhaps a dam had burst and allowed the raging waters to pass its confinement. If so she would surely be able to grab a branch and swim to safety. She lifted her hand to swim toward the shore but what came out of the water was not her hand but a branch attached to her shoulder. Her dense body was losing weight and her feet rose to the surface, and she cried out when she saw twigs emerging from the water. Her face was no more, where eyes had been there were knots in wood. The lumber floated toward the shore and pushed by the current's hand lead the way. As the shore came closer the hand plunged deep into the ground and rooted itself there. The small tree was anchored to the ground by her flesh. The object returned from the earth and its shine and luster sparkled in the water as it returned safely to the bottom of the river close enough to the edge to lure another victim.

The Tie That Further Binds

~Georganna Trosky~

What was that, she thought, as she came out of her deep sleep. It was probably just the baby moving around. It couldn't be the start of labor. She was too tired. It had been a busy day - her husband's company picnic - the heat; the raw egg she wore from the egg throwing contest. She was in no mood to have a baby now. This definitely couldn't be labor.

Drifting back to sleep, she felt another twinge. Okay, so this might be labor. She might have to deal with actually having this baby soon. Going to sleep was no longer an option. She better get up and time the pains; no need to wake up the expectant father. If this was really happening, he would need his rest. His "coaching" was getting a little out of hand since the LaMaze classes. He continually made her practice her breathing and check supplies for the hospital; and all that blowing in her face. She could wait for his help.

All of a sudden, the fatigue of the day vanished and she had a burst of energy. Didn't all the books say this meant something? She cleaned the whole apartment, stopped each time the pains began and diligently timed and recorded the intensity of the labor on the coach's neatly prepared check-lists. The stop watch was attached to a long string on his clipboard. She laughed to herself as she penciled in the numbers and wondered if he had his "whistle" handy. She could picture him as the pain began, blowing his whistle to get her attention. This could be a real trip! Finally, with her house in order, she showered and shaved her legs. Personal hygiene was important at a time like this, wasn't it?

The pains were coming steadily every fifteen minutes. She decided it was time to sit down and reflect upon what was happening. What exactly did all of this feel like? She felt compelled to get it all down. This was, in fact, a momentous occasion - having a child. Besides, this would help her best friend, Karin. She would be having her baby in a little over a month. Karin would feel better if she knew what to expect! Okay, so she was naive but the journal writing kept her calm. She actually believed she was enjoying the whole experience. She thought forward to the lives that would now be even more connected. From the time they were young, Karin and Sharon carefully calculated their lives. This was all planned and now it was actually coming to pass. She hoped that the babies would be the same sex, but quickly fast forwarded to the unborn children's wedding if they weren't. Was she getting ahead of herself, she questioned, as another pain brought her back to reality. These pains are definitely getting stronger and closer, she thought.

Little did this friend, with all her good intentions, know what was going on in the opposite end of the state.

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"Greg, wake up. Something terrible is happening," Karin shook her husband urgently. "I think my water just broke. I have five weeks to go. I can't have this baby now."

Quickly, Greg sat up, and stared at the soaked sheets as he tried to stay calm. Wasn't he the man of the house? Didn't he have to remain calm for his wife, the mother of his child? He swallowed all his oh my God, this can't be happening thoughts and calmly stated, "Honey, it will be okay. Let me call the

doctor. Just relax." The doctor's tone conveyed the real message. "Get to the hospital and get there as quickly as you can." Grow up, he thought. You can do this.

"Let's get in the car and go to the hospital!" He guided her to the car quickly and confidently although his knees knocked together uncontrollably beneath his pants.

They barely made it to the hospital before little Gregory Thomas was born. Labor and delivery were the easy part of this whole nightmare. The question of Gregory's survival was the haunting question that stared him in the face.

"He's so incredibly tiny," Greg thought as he fixed his gaze on his newborn son in the preemie-intensive care unit. He had to live. He was their son. As he watched his son fight for each breath, he wrestled with Karin's reaction. But then he realized, this was his wife. He witnessed the stamina and strength Karen had shown in the past. She would end up taking care of him through the whole ordeal if he let her. It was his responsibility to do the worrying. He was a daddy now; the man of the family.

"Greg, take me down to the nursery, please. I need to see how Gregory is doing. I never even got to make sure all his parts were examined and counted."

"I think you should just take it easy for a while. You just had a baby, Karin," Greg repeated gently.

"If you don't take me down to that nursery, I'll get there myself. I need to see if Gregory is okay? I need to hold him. Remember what the books say about the first few hours of life and the bonding that takes place.

"Remember the books also say to trust the doctors if anything goes wrong. The hospital staff needs to make sure our baby gets what he needs right now. We'll have plenty of time for bonding." Greg was surprised that he spoke with such confidence.

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Meanwhile, down in Central Jersey, Sharon's pains were much stronger, longer, and only eight minutes apart. Sharon, calmly dialed the doctor's service. She hated to wake him in the middle of the night. What if this was a false alarm?

"Hello, this is Dr. Johnston."

"I think it's time doctor. My pains are eight minutes apart and I've been having them for the last four hours," she said meekly. The reality of the situation suddenly hit her. It was just like when she got married. She wanted to be a bride - the first six months of being a wife were not at all like she thought. Did she really have to go through with this?

"When is your due date?", the doctor droned as if this happened every day.

"Today, May twenty-third," she replied.

"Mm, only ten percent of all women actually deliver on their due dates."

"So, does that mean I'm one of the ten percent or one of the ninety percent? Maybe I can forget this whole thing," she queried aloud.

The doctor finally woke up. "I think you should come to the hospital and let the nurses make that decision."

"Okay. We're on our way."

"Joe, wake up. We have to go to the hospital."

"What? For what? It's only 4:00 o'clock in the morning."

"I've been in labor for the last four hours. The doctor said we should go right away. He gave me a hard time for not calling when the pains were ten minutes apart."

"You didn't wake me?" he asked incredulously. "How could you do this without me?"

"I didn't do anything without you except clean, shower and write to Karin about what was going on! Sorry, I didn't realize you would have wanted to be a part of the preparation ritual."

"It's not funny. I'm supposed to be the coach, you know," he pouted.

How could she forget, she thought, but gently took his arm and picked up the suitcase as she guided him out the door.

Arriving at the hospital, she was whisked away by three nurses. They were excited to finally have some action. It had been a slow night.

"You may wait out here, dad," the short, pudgy, nurse said soothingly. "We'll call you when we're through with the checking and the prepping."

"I can't wait out here. Doesn't anybody understand? I'm the coach."

"Don't worry. You'll have plenty of time for coaching; relax while you can."

Settled in the labor room, things were progressing nicely - or so everyone said. The nurses confided in the coach that there would be a baby born by ten a.m. Finally, the coach enacted his game-plan. Actually, he was all ready to execute the final minutes of the game. He was relaxed with the labor. Everything was just as he had planned it. He could hardly wait to see a real live birth - the final moments of the game - the touchdown.

As the person who actually had to execute the delivery, Sharon wasn't so sure she liked what was happening. Natural childbirth was something she had hoped she would not have to deal with. Being pregnant was one thing. Having this baby get out was a whole different matter. She should have realized after the bride and wife thing.

Meanwhile, Karin's Aunt Rose was trying to call Sharon and tell her the news. When she didn't get an answer, she called Sharon's parents and had everyone praying for tiny little Gregory T. Sharon had decided that she would not let anyone know she went to the hospital. She didn't want the world there and knew that if she made one phone call, they would be lining up for this baby's arrival. Everyone would get the news of the baby being born after the fact. Little did she know that her plans were nixed by her best friend. Her mother sent her father over to her apartment to check out what was happening. The suitcase was missing! They must be at the hospital.

Meanwhile, at the hospital - Sharon's labor had suddenly stopped. She was eight centimeters dilated. Pitocin was ordered and injected intravenously.

Yuck, Sharon thought as the pains came fast and furious. She decided this was not really something she wanted to finish. "Forget it. The game is canceled. Take me home," she demanded.

The coach, sympathetic guy that he was, slapped the wet washcloth over her mouth and commanded her to "bite on this. You're not going anywhere."

"Get the doctor!"

"He's busy with another baby."

"I was here first. Go and get the doctor."

"Boy, they say this whole thing really changes a person. I guess they are right."

"Would you stop the psychoanalysis and just get the damn doctor."

"How are you doing?" the doctor asked as he rushed in the room, chuckling at this familiar scene.

"Not good. Let's get this show on the road."

"Let's see...Mm, the baby doesn't seem to want to drop. Let's see if I can help?" he murmured, as he reached up inside her to try and pull the baby down.

"That's it. Take me home. I want to go home."

"Would you like something to take the edge off?"

"Give me something or I'm leaving."

"Okay, now just calm down. I'll try and pull the baby into the birth canal again. When I give the signal, push."

Sharon pushed and pushed as the coach urged her to push more. He even made the welcomed remark, "Hey, doc, would you look at that. The blood vessels by her eyes are rupturing as she pushes."

Before Sharon had the chance to take the coach out of the game with an upper cut to the chin, the baby's heartbeat dropped.

"We need to prepare for an emergency c-section", the doctor announced as everyone ran frantically to prepare.

For some reason, though, this didn't upset Sharon. Thank God, she thought. I won't have to deal with this natural baloney. "Put me out and put me out now."

"I'm just scrubbing up. We'll be with you in a few minutes."

"But the baby," she screamed. "Now, where was the coach?"

"He can't be in here now. You'll see him soon and by then you'll have your new baby."



For the next four hours, the coach sat patiently by Sharon's side and answered her questions of "What was it? Is he okay?" with "We have a son, honey, and yes, he's perfect. You did a good job."

Although he was really getting tired of the same question, he had time to let the reality sink in. They were parents? He had hoped he would be a good coach to his newborn baby. He also had time to think about how he would tell Sharon about Karin. He knew she would not take this news well and he really didn't want to upset her. She had a rough time of it after all. Didn't he have to protect her?

At last she was coherent enough to understand what he was about to say but still groggy enough not to get too uptight.

"I have an amazing story to tell you," Joe began.

"Oh, how sweet. My father used to always tell me stories," she thought to herself. She hoped that Joe would be as good of a dad to the little Joseph George as her dad had been to her. "What kind of story?", she asked.

"This is a story about two best friends. These two women have been friends for nineteen years. They met in Kindergarten and went to school together for the next six and a half years. One of the girl's family started moving all over the country in the seventh grade but their friendship always remained strong. It must have been fate or the fact that each thought the friendship was so important that they wouldn't let it die. After they were married they both ended up living in New Jersey again. Anyway..."

"What are you talking about? Why are you pretending you are telling me a story about Karin and me? Did something happen to her?"

"Let me finish my story. They dreamt of their futures. They would do everything together, they decided. However, when one became pregnant with her first child - the doctors couldn't confirm that she was pregnant. They thought she had some kind of virus and her buddy commented on how she

wished she had "caught" that virus. Sure enough five weeks later, both young women were pregnant. The dreams continued through the pregnancy - ad nauseam - I might add - at least from the husbands' perspectives. These two friends were so weird that one kept everything that they ever did together in a scrapbook and the other one remembered what they wore on each of these cherished occasions. Naturally, every time the couples got together, they inevitably lugged out the books and retold all the stories noting the precise apparel of the day."

"What happened to Karin?" she pleaded, but Joe took his time and told the story he had planned so carefully in his head.

"Just last night, the friend who had a while to go yet before delivery called the other friend to see if "she had gone yet." The husband of the friend who was actually due that day, quipped "Didn't SHE go yet?" in the background as they talked. A few hours later, Karin's water broke and within a couple of hours, she delivered a tiny little boy, Gregory Thomas."

"What? Karin couldn't have had her baby. We had our baby."

"Now, his lungs have not fully developed but everyone knows he will be okay." After all, Sharon's little boy is a bruiser at eight and a half pounds and they did everything together. The doctor even commented to the new father as they paid their first visit to the newborn, "Look at the size of that head. She would never have been able to pass that on her own."

As tears streamed down Sharon's face, little Joseph George was placed in her arms. As she looked at the miracle of her son who she decided looked like a cross between Yul Brenner and Genghis Khan, she said a little prayer for her best friend and her little boy. She knew that everybody would be fine. They had to be. After all, it was the future they had imagined for themselves when they were little girls.

Identities

~Heather Doreen Merkle~

It was torn and tattered when you gave it to me. I was surprised, honored to hold it in my hand. After all the oil soaked preparations it's worn, its leather smell is barely distinguishable. Yet, it remains intact. Why? Was its use limited? I think about you and your life in your concrete jungle. Somehow, I never imagined that you came from the city and, even now, when I say it, it seems unnatural. You're too soft for the city. As soft as this glove-- worn too, perhaps. Is that why you gave it to me?

I hesitated that day when your son glanced over his shoulder. Shouldn't this be his to keep, treasure? Even though its use would be negligible for his play, I had to think twice. Should I even use it? It must hold so many tales - conceivably of *your* father. Was he around to play ball with you before the day, the one to which no one can refer - the day voices halted conversing and hid behind their shroud of silence. Maybe it doesn't hold memories of him at all. But it's worn, so you must have used it. With whom?

I can hold it closely and feel its life, secretly wishing that the leather ties would talk and spew the answers to all the questions I'd never dare to ask. But, your son - I think - needs to know for no other reason than just knowing. His anger toward Nana on that cold fall day in November that she joined Grandpa showed his need to know, his need to understand why his grandfather ran into the darkness before he was ever born.

I don't think his anger rests on the fact that he never met this man as much as it does on his need to know *you*. Doesn't it go to reason that all *you* are came from *your* father? After all, when he looks in your eyes, he sees himself. He sees our Matthew bubble with pride when someone says, "You're just like your dad," and he laughs with veneration when Brandyn tromps through the house in Daddy's size eleven shoes. He just wants to understand the man behind your quiet steel-blue eyes.

I squeeze more tightly, and I realize it's been trained to give. Funny, your son has been trying to train Matt's. I guess it takes some time.

When I place it upon my hand, it almost fits as though it is welcoming me home to a place I've never been in a time I'll never know. Maybe one day I'll ask you if this worn leather glove holds better memories of the steel-blue eyed man you found lifeless on that unspoken day, or maybe I'll just pretend it does.

Behind Your Eyes

~Robert Slajda~

In this one, you are coming down the aisle through customs at J.F.K.. Your brother took all the pictures that day and you'll see in them the brilliant colors that eight year olds love. You can barely see your sweaty head emerging from the blanket. The New York social worker didn't know that you were in three layers of quilted cotton, and she swaddled you up on that minus twenty day. Good thing we didn't put you in that snowsuit they told us to bring. We didn't know what to expect.

You must have been so hot that you kicked off one of your sneakers somewhere in the bonded custom area. That's why with your baby things we've still got your red suit, your bottle, your pacifier, but only jade green slip on sneaker. That's all you came with. We brought a doll with us, and "aigi". One of the few Korean words we could pronounce correctly or that you'd react to.

This was the first time we saw you outside of photographs, when our social worker pointed to you. We were in the glassed in runway above customs, and we had waited impatiently as they took you off the plane last. It had been such a long wait since we started the adoption paperwork two years before. We were told suddenly on Christmas Eve that you were coming and here it was only the day before New Year's Eve.

We would have had you leave first in our anticipation. We wished we could have thanked the female staff sergeant that rode you on her lap and walked the aisles with you through that twenty-four hour flight.

Your eyes were wide with an all encompassing stare for two days. You didn't cry until your brother or I tried to pick you up. I had shaved my beard because it was explained that Korean men are clean shaven. Someone could have saved me the razor burn if they mentioned Korean men never pick up babies or toddlers. You stared at everything and only smiled for your mother until the party a day later. There you smiled at your grandparents' white heads and instant absolute devotion. There you grabbed the shrimp tray and lapped up the horseradish sauce as the only thing that looked and smelled like real food to you.

I wished you could have spoken more then and that we knew what was behind those wide eyes, but we did all right. Even six months later, we didn't really understand how much you thought about everthing and how strange it all was to you.

We had gone to the cottage with incredible baggage that's necessary with young children. Packing and unpacking and used up so much of our attention. You loved it there between the people and the sea. We never thought to try and explain it somehow. When we got home you raced up the stairs and kissed the refrigerator. You thought it was yet another move. What must you have thought that day at J.F.K.?

The Swing

~Kerry Jones~

Pump, sing-song

Pump, sing-song

"I can go higher!"

"I can jump farther!"

Pump, sing-song

Pump, sing-song

We're free!

To be an octopus with arms and legs dangling.
You pump, I pump.
We face each other, giggles dancing in our eyes
until they erupt like ocean spray

Hours upon hours
the pendulum of our childhood swings in balance.

We're free!

To swing with abandon until dusk
when we pull off our gray sweaty socks
to reveal rings of reddish sand
orbiting our ankles.
A moon of black eclipses the space about our heels.

Hours upon hours
the pendulum of our childhood swings in balance.

To reach the horizontal axis, the ultimate goal
and
the ultimate risk.

The candy cane legs lose their footing
and emerge from the soil

Reminding us to stay in orbit in *this* world.

~Erin K. Beaulieu~

As I feel the loose stones in the pin, I think of the story that this brooch must have to tell. It was worn by my aunt for many winters and it had been many places. I wondered how she had acquired this large piece of costume jewelry and as I wondered, I could almost hear the jewels telling their own story.



He took the pin from the box and pinned it on her black jacket. They embraced for a moment and then walked out to their car with love in their eyes. They loved each other more than anything. They made it to dinner that night and it was so romantic. They ate wonderful meals at Chez Jose, the most acclaimed restaurant in Banford. They ate filet mignon and lobster and gazed into each other's eyes over the candlelight in the dimly lit room. Neither of them wanted the night to end.

It is 1997 and she has left me her greatest possession. I would never forget her. I now knew why she wore this ruby pin for so many years and I knew what and whom it represented for her. As I look at the pin in my hands I can almost see Aunt Mae's smiling face at my front door. She was always bearing gifts and wearing her ruby pin. I was told, "She wanted you to have this." Then, I had held the piece in my hand and wondered why. Now I know.

The Trunk

~Maryellen Noonan~

I first came upon the trunk down in the cellar under the table where my mother kept her laundry detergent. Opening it one afternoon, I discovered the marvelous romantic treasures hidden inside. Old photographs, letters bound with string, medals and the insignia cut from an army uniform, captured my young imagination.

I cleaned and varnished the trunk to preserve it, and took it with me when I got married. It became a precious chest filled with images of memories. They aren't all mine, but I have inherited the responsibility to keep them. Old photos in sepia tones, imperfected color snapshots, and the Polaroid's of impatient photographers chronicle more than a generation of our family's "Kodak moments".

My dearest Aunt Con, you are with me when I open that trunk, as you are with me when I rummage through my jewelry box, dust the antique canister set on the kitchen hutch, sew soccer patches on Danny's team jacket, and delight in the music Thomas plays on the piano.

The trunk is sitting in my room now. It remains a connection to our family's past. In the late 1920's when my father immigrated to the U. S. he lived in a boarding house. He traded his suitcase with another resident for the trunk. She had used it to transport her possessions to this country as she traveled across the ocean. Hartford, Connecticut, Nord Amerika is neatly painted in white script on the front. The trunk has a history.

This spring with a strong, clear sense of purpose I eagerly began searching through our family artifacts looking for the beginnings of the Noonan Family's journey to America. It was my personal quest to learn about my ethnic background and then to share it with my children, completing the knowledge of who we are and where we came from.

I opened the trunk and you were with me. In your wedding pictures I studied the beautiful young bride, with a years ago face, from a time before I really knew you. The photos of your trip to Belgium to visit me with mom, and Aunt Rene and Uncle Rob comforted me from the inside out warm and soothing like a cup of tea on a bone chilling afternoon. Tucked safely and securely in there too, is the journal of that trip. I touch the script from your hand and smile over taking turns writing about our adventures each night sipping New Beaujolais in the living room of that cozy Belgian bungalow. There are pictures of you at my wedding. My favorites are not in the album made by the professional photographer, but in the one someone else put together. In true candid photos by an amateur, you look so stylish and so proud.

A photo of you and Patrick and me slips from an envelope. This must have been mom's, or was it yours? In this one you are sitting beside me on the concrete bench by the beach. The tide is out and Patrick scampers about barefooted, overalls rolled up, arms outstretched at his sides like an airplane's wings. The fluffy white clouds above us seem to drift into formations of turreted castles. Our conversation is carefree. It is a good time. I was as innocent as that three year old who thrilled at the seaside unaware of all the painful things I would be called to do because I am no longer a child but an adult.

I remember all the extravagant gifts you gave me. The sewing machine on my sixteenth birthday because I learned to sew and wanted to make my own

clothes, the piano in my early twenties because since childhood I wanted to learn to play, the down payment for a house when I started my family. You wanted to make my dreams come true. What did I ever give back to you for the love that you gave beyond all the things?

Abruptly life turned on us, a fierce bitter storm, ruthless and cruel. You were living with mom and the cancer came back. I couldn't bear it. Where was I standing, frozen in time, the photo to my ear, hearing the account of that afternoon's nightmare through my mom's breathless quiet tears? The simple question "Mary will you look at this? Is it a lump?"

We all fell so quickly into the spiral that pulled us down, farther and farther. It seemed that there was no bottom. Everyday life filled with the scattered debris of treatments, procedures, and lost hope. In the eye of the storm time stood still, yet moved so quickly because there wasn't enough left.

When you called from the convalescent home asking, "Can I please come home?" I wasn't allowed to have that decision be mine. My mom and aunts, your sisters, made it all so complicated, desperately loving each other while creating an adult version of their childhood tug of war.

Father came to bless you when I asked him. We stood around the bed completing an illuminated triangle of three in the fading light. I held the oil for him. There was a small candle. Who held its light? His eyes mirrored my sadness. After all the years, we walked out together in silence.

The final phone call came when I was at school. Someone said that I had to come right away. I left my lunch, I don't know where, as I walked blindly into the sunlight.

The House

~Mary Louise Rogers~

She had always loved the house. Ever since she was a little girl and she had passed the house every Sunday on her way to Aunt Helen's, she had wanted to live there.

The house was a large white Greek Revival that sat at the top of a hill in the middle of 23 acres, most of which were open fields. A 300-ft. driveway led up to a yard full of flowers and tall sugar maples. The flowers started blooming in the early spring and continued until the first hard frost. In the fall the yard and surrounding woods were a blaze of warm, bright colors.

The house was attached to the barn by a two car garage. This was a common type of construction in New England. Years ago farmers connected out buildings to their houses so they wouldn't need to go outside in severe winter storms. She couldn't remember who'd told her that. Maybe she'd read it in a Yankee magazine.

It was the kind of house where the all-American family should live. The house held the promise of the perfect life, with the perfect husband and two perfect kids. She had the husband. Oh, he wasn't perfect, but he was hers and she loved him. She had 1.7 kids. Zack was 2 now and another baby would be born in two months.

And the house was for sale. The sign had gone up 2 days ago. It was the same Realtor that had sold them their present house; the house with only two bedrooms and no backyard. It was time to move to something bigger.

They would have to act quickly if they wanted that house. She was sure there would be many interested buyers. Boyd shared her interest in the house. They had talked about how much they loved it every time they passed it.

Should she call the Realtor or would Boyd do it from work? They really hadn't decided who would make the call. If they waited another day would it be too late? Would someone else already have made an offer?

It didn't matter that she had never seen the inside of the house. She was sure it was the house for them.

Maybe she should call Boyd at work and find out who was supposed to call. But she didn't want to interrupt his important meeting on the Florin account. After all it was landing that account that had gotten him his big pay raise. It was because of that raise that they could afford to buy such a big house right now.

She would call the Realtor herself. If Boyd had called she'd just say she wasn't sure he'd have time to call from the office. After all it really was "their house". So she'd better move now or it would be sold.

She called the Realtor. His secretary said he was out showing a house but she'd have him call her as soon as he returned. What if it were "their house"? What if someone else were looking at it? All she could do was wait. And wait she did.

Zack would wake up from his nap soon and she would have to take him to the park. They went every afternoon so he could play on the slide and the swings. If she didn't take him he would cry and fuss.

The phone rang. She ran from the bedroom to answer it. It was Mike, the Realtor.

"Mrs. Johnson, I understand you're interested in one of our houses."

"Yes, the old white Greek revival house on the Boston Post Road across from the Congregational Church."

"That's very odd Mrs. Johnson. You're the second person to ask me about that house today. It was the old Peterson farm. But, it burned down three years ago. The maple trees are all that's left."