

LEAS LIT

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LEAS LIT STAFF

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* Medford Leas Staff

LAGRECCA

To my recollection LaGrecca never used a first name. Nor was he ever addressed as “Mister” by my father, whose toleration of LaGrecca was founded in respectful disdain after he failed with the plunger and LaGrecca would have to be summoned to crawl under our kitchen to clean out what my father called the “Grecca Trap.”

Likewise, LaGrecca did not seem to have too much respect for my father. As I remember, he never called my father anything, and would address him only to say, “You owe me \$25.”

But with my mother there seemed to be some civility. LaGrecca often called her “Lady,” like the time my younger brother said “bye-bye” to the toothbrushes and pulled the chain. Water was all over the bathroom floor when LaGrecca arrived, and my mother was frantic. But LaGrecca took charge and never said a word until he was leaving, at which point he walked across the living room carpet in his wet galoshes and handed the toothbrushes to mother and said, “Lady, you shouldn’t put these in your john.”

Mother later told my father that LaGrecca was “uncouth” and “dirty.” My father then called Frenchy, another local plumber. But Frenchy didn’t seem to understand toilets the way LaGrecca did and my father said he charged too much. So when my brother said “bye-bye” to Teddy and pulled the chain, LaGrecca was brought back for the operation.

I remember when LaGrecca arrived that day he allowed me to carry his tools because he said I was big

enough and had more brains than my brother. That was the start of a kinship and my ambition, at the age of five, to become a plumber.

LaGrecca, I guess, had trouble saying “toilet” and would often call our toilet “Baby.” I remember that when we got to the bathroom on the day that Teddy went down, he turned to my mother and said, “Lady, this Baby is really clogged.”

It took LaGrecca and me a long time to extricate Teddy from the drain, and when we finally did I remember that LaGrecca seemed mad when he handed Teddy to Mother and said, “Lady, don’t let this happen again!”



My father arrived home from the office as LaGrecca was leaving and LaGrecca said, “You owe me \$25.”

My brother got the barber strap and Teddy got washed with brown soap and was hung out on the clothesline by his ears.

LaGrecca was squat in stature with a distended stomach that was never quite covered by his T-shirt. My older sister said he looked like a toilet. But I disagreed because unlike our toilet he had a hairy black wart on his belly and his hands were dirty to the extent that no amount of Ajax would ever make them clean. He once told me that the only good Americans were those who got their hands dirty.

LaGrecca lived in the poorer section of East Falls. He said that he was proud to live there because his neighbors worked six days a week and got their hands dirty.

One day we heard that LaGrecca had died suddenly of a heart attack while fixing a drain on Hortter Street. I was sad because once when we were working together he told me that he had six kids.

After LaGrecca died Frenchy came to fix our toilet. But things were never the same and I soon lost interest in becoming a plumber and decided that I would go to college and be a lawyer.

Peter A. McCord

THE BOY WHO GRADUATED

After years of traveling from place to place with my engineer husband, retirement to Fredericksburg, Virginia, provided a less adventurous life. A former high school teacher, I decided to tutor students free of charge. I found the work very satisfying. Most children responded and were happy as their schoolwork improved. After each session, I praised them and handed out chocolate chip cookies.

John was a whole new challenge. An affable boy who was a high school senior, he detested his English class. The first session was a disaster!

“I hate English,” he grumbled, discomfited. “What do I need it for?”

“For starters,” I replied, “you must pass this English course in order to graduate from high school.”

He slumped in his chair, barely attentive, defeated. After testing him on his school assignments, it became apparent that when the work appeared too difficult, he simply gave up.

I called his mother and made a proposal. I suggested she send five dollars each week. John would be rewarded if he performed well in school and did his homework. She agreed.

The next week, I laid the five-dollar bill on the table and told him to think of the lesson as earning a living. If a person worked, he would get paid.

The homework and hour of tutoring were lackluster. When the hour ended, he reached for the five dollars. “No John,” I said.

“But I need that to go to the movies!”

“Put some thought and effort into your homework next week,” I said. “Come prepared to participate and I feel certain you can earn that five dollars.”

Remarkably, the following weeks showed slow but steady improvement. John even seemed to enjoy learning how to write an essay. To teach this, I chose a topic from class. I wrote the first sentence, he the next, and so on until the essay was completed.

“Hey,” he grinned, “I can do this,” and he did. He laughed and pocketed the money,

As the semester neared completion, his English grades were greatly improved.

One day he bounced in, a grin covering his face. “Hey, Mrs. Stewart, I got a B in English. I graduated!”

I smiled and asked, “How do you feel about English now?” He laughed, “It’s not so bad!”

Grace Spicer Stewart

I'M TOO BUSY

I remember a little girl four years old who begged me to take her to a movie about a little girl just her age. I could not do it. I had a big house to clean and straighten. She just didn't understand that was more important than the movie.

I also recall a little boy, just six years old, who begged me to take him to the playground, but I didn't have the time. I had three big meals to make and clean up afterwards. He didn't understand why that took so much of my time.

Yesterday, my mother called and begged me to visit her more often. She missed me. She understood that I was very busy because I was on so many committees, but couldn't I spare her a little of my time? I told her she really has to try harder to make new friends. She won't be so lonely.

My husband is often away on a business trip and calls me every night to tell me about some of the problems he has encountered. That takes a lot of my time, just to listen, when I am so busy with other things. Why can't he handle those problems himself?

30 YEARS LATER

My mother has passed away. I am now divorced and I rarely hear from the children. I guess they are all just too busy. I wonder why?

Laura Farr

MEN AT THE DOORSTEP

That doorstep was smack in the middle of the Mission District, a mile or so away from the old Franciscan-founded Mission Dolores, near a large park where I used to play. We were on 21st street, which in a few blocks would begin a steep climb up in the general direction of Twin Peaks. It was not a prosperous part of town.

I was six years old, it was 1939, and we had just moved into what my mother called “Hotel House” – a very large Victorian on level ground that served as the parsonage for my father’s church. He was the pastor of “Grace United Church of the Mission” (Methodist and Congregational). San Francisco was in what turned out to be the tail end of the Great Depression, until the worst Stimulus Package in the world was dropped on December 7, 1941.

The parsonage, like most Victorians in the city, had its main floor one flight above the street, our basement being at street level. For seven years my father, who had had polio as a boy and wore a legbrace and used a cane for the rest of his life, toiled up the 15 steps of that flight every day without complaint. And so did a steady stream of suppliants – sad and needful men (mostly) who were coming from all over to seek a bit of help from a church whose huge wooden Gothic building with its lofty spire helped make it a target for those truly and not-so-truly needy. We were about three miles from the waterfront, the Embarcadero with its famous “White Angel” bread-line, but the population of the poor and homeless came calling from all over the city wherever a handout might be discovered.

They stood on our doorstep, hat usually in hand. Most of them knew how church charity worked when they came to the doorstep – it would not be hard to find a meal and/or find some clothing and blankets. But these men were desperate enough to try for something beyond all that. They needed money, and almost every church had learned not to proffer cash, at least for a doorstep call. But the men tried. Please, they needed car-fare to get home (the streetcars ground their way, clanging and moaning, half a block away on Mission Street), and they were stone-broke.



“White Angel Breadline” – Dorothea Lange, 1933

I thought at first it would be fun to answer the doorbell, and pull open one of the double-doors at the doorstep. But these bums frightened me. They tended to mutter and slur their requests, their eyes cast down. And as I learned to understand, these bums, these raggedy, dirty, smelly men, smelled of poverty as they smelled of strong drink. “Carfare” was their need; enough carfare would get them a beer, or some wino wine, or a bottle of rot-gut. It was not my job to turn them down; I got Mother.

Brother, can you spare a dime?

In later years, the first time I saw the quiet, grim, ravaged face of the man with the cup in Lange’s powerful photograph, my heart stood still. Here was the essence of the men at the doorstep.

The lesson was of alcohol, especially alcohol and the underclasses. I had no idea, really. Neither my mother nor my father had ever touched a drop, and there was no alcoholic drink in the house, ever. I had never tasted an alcoholic drink.

I was surrounded by the culture of strong drink and drunkenness, glancing off it or passing through it fairly heedlessly. When I played cowboys or cops and robbers in a vacant lot up 21st Street, I took for granted that one always had to look out for broken glass – broken glass and weeds, the Mission District’s natural landscaping. I didn’t brood on this evidence of throwaway littering by drinkers. Indeed, one summer while on vacation on the Russian River, I discovered that I could earn enough loose change to keep myself in ice cream by gathering bottles to turn in for deposit. And soda pop

bottles were all over the river area, but, oh boy, beer bottles were the best! My mother did not forbid me this gathering. It showed enterprise and cleaned up the mess. One day she sat on the shingled beach of Guerneville Park and laughed helplessly as I surrounded her with rings of empty beer bottles: a good haul that was!

But normally I had no desire to explore a San Francisco bar. I did not see the fun of it, or find any attraction, though obviously my view was slanted. My father spent a good deal of his pastoral counseling dealing with drunken fathers and drunken mothers. My mother had to go more than once to wheedle some family's mother out of a bar. A lesson of alcohol even more immediate than these encounters of my parents involved simply my walking any direction on Mission Street – on the way to school, or to shop, or to see a movie, where about every fifth storefront was a bar, and as I walked past I was never assaulted by a drunken lout, but by a SMELL billowing out...I can smell it now, as I write.

I didn't know enough to tell what made up that smell – mostly beer, I suppose – since the patrons rarely had enough cash to belly up for a strong gin or whiskey. But the legacy from boomtown gold rush days got the barrel rolled out; the infamous Barbary Coast had been romanticized in memory, especially in movies.

* * * * *

A little farther on in the education was the issue of drinking and becoming *happy*.

*Forget your troubles c'mon get happy,
you better chase all your cares away.
Shout hallelujah c'mon get happy,
get ready for the Judgment Day!*

Here things got ever so much more complicated. I had much more experience with happy drunks than with Happy Hours. I had seen how nervous the happy drunks made Mother when they sidled up to us, say, at the Civic Center as we were feeding the pigeons, and began to chat us up. Mother was more nervous than she was frightened, anxious for her two young sons. She learned how to respond with a brush-off without getting into an argument. Happy drunks could turn into mean drunks in an eyeblink. But the culture cried with its many mouths, get *happy!* The radio broadcasts, as I listened to the Seals baseball games, were crammed with beer commercials, and of course liquor flowed copiously in Seals Stadium. (A convocation of Happy Drunks.) “Happy Days Are Here Again” was written in 1929 by Yager and Ellen, and became the campaign song for FDR’s 1932 presidential campaign. It immediately became what has been called “a true saloon standard.”

But there was another universal alcohol-related smell: that of urine. For example, in the little stairwell at the bottom of a few steps from the street to our basement door at the side of the house, there was always some variation of the same scene: a pile of crumpled newspapers, empty bottles, and the acrid reek of urine. And these hobo nests were scattered all over the Mission

District and the rest of the city. One expected to clean them out from time to time, and also expected they would almost immediately be filled again.

But that was only one side of the coin. For the popular culture had its insidious ways of educating us all to understand that the rise of maturity was crowned with pleasure in the rituals of drinking (and, of course, of smoking). Beer was the champagne of hearty, sports-loving men and women, whiskey was the nectar of the well-to-do, and a martini was the ambrosia of the gods! The movies showed us it was so.

There were drunks in movies, mostly for comic purposes. The classic example (1916) would be a short by Charlie Chaplin, "One AM" – in which he comes home to his house in his tuxedo and dapper tie, blind drunk, but very happy with himself. But he can't find his key, and the rest of the movie deals with how he gets inside and then is utterly flummoxed by every appliance and piece of furniture in the house. I laughed so hard my sides hurt. It never occurred to anyone (including Charlie) that the moral was that drinking could be bad for you.

I suppose the comic drunk was just another version of the happy drunk. Of the many characters Red Skelton portrayed, one of his earliest (1941) was a silly and harmless drunk called Willie Lump-Lump. Quite often a movie star would get drunk in a movie and behave in a lovably silly way. I recall Katharine Hepburn getting drunk in "The Philadelphia Story," on her way to becoming a sweeter and less spoiled-brat person. And so on. But the sophisticated drunk was almost at a high-

er state of enlightenment. The Zen of gin? Consider the series of films in the Forties, “The Thin Man”:

The main characters are a former **private detective**, Nick Charles, and his clever young wife, Nora. Nick, son of a Greek immigrant, has given up his career since marrying Nora, a wealthy socialite, and he now spends most of his time cheerfully getting drunk in hotel rooms and speakeasies: William Powell and Myrna Loy, “Shadow of the Thin Man,” 1941, a little before Pearl Harbor. Powell was suave and witty, and Loy was lithe and wry and adorable. A sample:

Nora: How many drinks have you had?

Nick: This will make six martinis.

Nora: [*to the waiter*] All right. Will you bring me five more martinis, Leo? Line them right up here.

With all that gin in them, they went right ahead and solved the mystery and caught the culprits!

*You go to my head,
And you linger like a haunting refrain
And I find you spinning round in my brain
Like the bubbles in a glass of champagne.
You go to my head
Like a sip of sparkling burgundy brew
And I find the very mention of you
Like the kicker in a julep or two.*
(Coots and Gillespie, 1938)

It’s a wonderful song, even with a few howlers (burgundy *brew*? and what’s the ‘kicker’ in the julep?), and a perfect example of the implied sophistication of drinking. But these celluloid images were never something I felt I

had to refute or defy. No, I think my sorrow and revulsion and pity rose most unforgettably as I saw about me in the very real world *the misery inflicted on young children* by alcoholic excess.

Nothing funny about it. Our church had a “daily vacation Bible school” every summer, open to all in the surrounding neighborhoods. We had a number of kids from what might be called the Irish Ghetto, out the other direction on 21st Street toward Harrison: firetrap tenements, “ancient,” weather-beaten, yet no older than the earthquake of 1906. I remember a frisky little girl who told us how at night when Daddy came home drunk (here she giggled), he would chase them around the house with his belt or his shaving strop (and here she began to cry) and even if he caught them and they begged and said they were sorry he would beat them. And he would sometimes beat up their mother, “and Mommy would cry, and we would all cry, and so would Daddy.” There was so little that could be done, and that made it worse for my parents, along with the recognition that these scenes were occurring in so many other houses every day, every night, over and over and over.

*You'll have to excuse me, I'm not at my best
I've been gone for a week,
I've been drunk since I left
These so-called vacations will soon be my death
I'm so sick from the drink, I need home for a rest.*

* * * * *



Alfred Eisenstaedt, August 15, 1945, Cover of *LIFE* Magazine

“The smack that was heard ’round the world!”

When I first saw it, I thought this Times Square picture had been taken on Market Street, San Francisco. Certainly our beautiful city had been awash with sailors, and it seemed everyone turned out to celebrate the end

of the War. V-J Day was a kind of mob scene the city knew well, and my parents knew to keep me away from. It was assumed, correctly, that most of those rejoicing would have been drunk. They were right about the crowd, even though we had no Eisenstaedt with his Leica and his street smarts to take a picture.

* * * * *

San Francisco Chronicle, August 15, 2005

“The dark side of V-J Day. The story of V-J Day. A Victory Riot that left 11 dead, accounts of gang-rape and the city’s reputation besmirched.

“The V-J day riot was the deadliest in the city’s history. Mostly confined to downtown San Francisco, it involved thousands of drunken soldiers and sailors, most of them teenagers, who smashed store windows, attacked women, halted all traffic, wrecked Muni streetcars – and one Muni worker was killed.

“Said Deputy Chief of Police Kevin Mullen, ‘If you pull all restraints off and add liquor, that’s what happens. Everyone went nuts.’ ‘They were all drunk,’ wrote *Chronicle* reporter Delaplane; ‘one in four was falling down drunk.’ ‘You put young girls with them and add liquor, and that’s what happens’ said Chief Mullen. Some of the women were not so willing; several rapes were seen by eyewitnesses, but none was ever officially reported. In the postwar euphoria, the whole matter was quickly forgotten,’ wrote Mullen.”

I had never heard of this downtown riot until I stumbled over its account in a recent collection on the Internet of end-of-war photographs and information. But the account mustered up for me the boozy faces, the blurred grins, the unsteady walks, the smells and sounds of a population driven by drink, that are part of my memories of a great but wounded city.

*Show me the way to go home
I'm tired and I want to go to bed
I had a little drink about an hour ago
And it went right to my head...*

Alan Gaylord

IMPROVING THINGS

“**B**een doing this long?” I asked the thirty-something African-American driver of the Rapid Rover shuttle that was speeding me to the Philadelphia airport.

It was Saturday morning and I was the only passenger. I sat up front so I could pass the time in conversation.

“About eight months,” he replied.

“Do you like it?” I queried.

“I used to be a long-distance trucker,” he offered. “But I didn’t like being away from my wife and kids, so I quit. What I really want to do is be a police officer in a high school. I’m doing this to earn money for the police Academy.”

“That’s pretty challenging,” I commented, admiration in my voice.

“It’s not that bad,” he answered. “Actually, the number of troublemakers is small. And they almost always come from single-parent families. They’re usually the oldest, and they have had to take care of their younger brothers and sisters. By the time they get to high school, they know how the world works. They don’t want to be told what to do and when to do it. So, they rebel. I understand that. I feel I can help them.”

“How did you grow up?” I ventured, wondering if I might be probing too far.

“I grew up in Camden,” my driver answered easily. “My mother was a single parent, and I have two older

brothers. They got into drugs and gangs, but they always told me not to follow in their footsteps. Now they're in prison. When I was ten, I swore I would never hang out on the streets."

"How'd you avoid that?" I asked, looking in his direction.

"Roller skating," he said.

"Roller skating!" I exclaimed. "How'd that keep you off the streets?"

"My friends and I went to a rink and skated after school. We had teams and competitions and trophies just like sport teams at school. We skated hard and had a lot of fun. It saved us from getting into trouble."

He paused, then continued, "My mother always told me I could be whatever I wanted if I worked hard enough, and she would support me. I finished high school and married my girlfriend. We have four kids. My daughter is the oldest. She's studying to be a pharmacist. My eldest son is in college, too. He doesn't know yet what he wants to do. I tell him he can be whatever he wants, and I'll support him. My next son is in high school, and the youngest is in middle school"

"What a record!" I said admiringly. "You must be very proud."

"I am," he replied. "Sometimes, because there are so few fathers around, at my son's high school they ask me to act as a father temporarily to a kid who needs one. I try to be a role model and show what a father is really like."

The shuttle was nearing the airport. I was silent, steeped in wonder and elation at such a triumph over the brutality of life in Camden.

Then, wrapping up his just completed self-revelation in his personal philosophy, he added, “You see, when I go into a situation, I try to leave it better than I found it. I always try to improve things.”

Kay Cooley

ALEENE

My first memory of any outside help in cooking, cleaning, and looking after three girl-children (I being the youngest) was when we moved from the second floor of the Victorian house on Rankin Street (a dead end) in Natchez, Mississippi, to the cottage two doors down on the bayou (bi-yo). It was summer 1938, and I was five

Enter Aleene – willowy, handsome, tall, quiet, immaculate, strong, mysterious; striking copper braids encircled her head. She lived in an alley two and a half blocks away; I had never been there.

Aleene was hired to help us move and to cook and to clean. She was to keep an eye on the children and neighborhood friends who often played in our yard; we were to stay within calling distance. Some days Mother worked right along beside Aleene. Curtains and rugs were changed two times a year – once as winter approached, and again in spring. Clothes washed and stored “according to season.” The house began to run on an unmistakable schedule, everything in place – “anyone” might come in “at any time.” It would be all over town if Mother did not have a tidy house – actually more of an embarrassment for Aleene.

In summers, a myriad of cousins from both sides of our close-knit family frequently visited from out of town. (I never realized the extra work for Mother and Aleene.) My sisters and I, in turn, visited them and had glorious times.

Aleene was experienced but had not served in a mansion, nor was our life-style mansionly. She did not serve at table nor own a uniform. I am ashamed I never knew her last name.

Mother and Aleene fed three men: Great-Uncle Walter, an engineer; my father, a valued employee of the city Water Works and eventually superintendent; Uncle Sam, injured in World War I, limped slightly and worked for Sears Roebuck. He moved into a bedroom (with a fireplace) which had a private entrance. Aleene changed his sheets and cleaned his room. We lost a playroom for our dolls and treasures.

She organized the house, the siblings, the kitchen, the cleaning, the cooking for three men, three children, and one mother, and took home dinner for herself and her husband, all with nary a complaint. She never had a discussion with or made a suggestion to my father. I am sorry she and I were not close, but that was not to be. (What were her deepest feelings about the life to which she was born? Did she love us? How did she manage, knowing that there was no hope for changing her station in life? She borrowed books and magazines, one at a time, from my parents. I scarcely took notice.)

Aleene came in the morning to eat her breakfast and have her coffee, wash the dishes, and help Mother select vegetables from the horse-drawn wagon which came three mornings a week to our house. Summer dinners were around noon and Daddy came home for the main meal of the day. Aleene was free to go home when all was tidy in the kitchen. She poured any leftover fat into a can, packed up most of the remaining food,

and put ice in a jar for the tea. She had been hired “with totin’ privileges.” My Mother knew the routine – there was always more than enough for Aleene.

She did the dishes and took the dirty clothes down steep steps to the yard. Here the wringer washing machine was located on an old brick floor in a makeshift room under our enclosed back porch. Added to the above was the ironing. Men’s shirts went to the laundry – also, the sheets.

Aleene ruled the roost almost immediately. In the years that followed, I wished we could have talked more – but that was not to be – it was another time, another place. I was too young to know that hard-to-spell word, the one whose meaning was too complex for me to understand – “prejudis.” Why did some people live in alleys in shacks, did not vote, went to a different school and church than we did?

Daddy was special; everyone trusted him. He and I were friends. Any time of day or night he could be called out to the Water Works and its problems. By his actions and manner he taught me kindness and respect for all people. His best friend was Jim – they rode together in Daddy’s Water Works truck for years until Daddy retired. Jim often came to visit. They respected each other. If I have one legacy, it is the one given me by my father’s kindness and caring for others. (I wonder if he even saw color!) I remember my mother’s parenting with fondness. It was unthinkable to talk back to our elders. I did the unthinkable one time.

When I was older and had worked for days on a jigsaw puzzle on top of my dresser, Aleene, far behind in her chores, with one fell swoop, swiped the entire thing into the top drawer, literally destroying my hours of work. I was heartbroken and screamed, “You are fired!”

Impudence, thy name is ignorance.

Aleene turned and walked out of the room, out of the house; no word was spoken. For the first time in my life, I wondered what real punishment would be like. One sister and a cousin agreed to come with me to Aleene’s house. Crying, we knocked at the door – with a cold stare, she opened it – I begged her to come back – I said I was sorry over and over – she replied with an icy voice, “I will think about it . . .”

The three of us went back to Rankin Street and made ourselves scarce, imagining all sorts of punishment that might be meted out to me, as well as them, for we had left without telling a soul. That was unacceptable.

Before supper, Aleene returned, even though most of her chores were finished for the day. She slowly came up the back steps and went to her kitchen. My supporters disappeared. I tried to be brave. Alone, I went to the kitchen. “I am truly sorry, Aleene, please forgive me.” She replied softly and movingly, “I know, that’s why I came back.”

I left to cry some more, to a private place on the bayou. I could not bring myself to try that puzzle again,

nor did I ever, knowingly, repeat such a thoughtless act.
I grew some that day.

 Aleene worked for us until I went away to college.
The sisters married. The parents retired. My career began.
My grief has endured.

 Aleene, Aleene, I never told you I loved you.

Dunbar Denham

FINAL VICTORY

Short fated months before his death,
Alexander (great Aristotle's pupil)
Led his vast army west through the
Mountains and plains of Baluchistan.
His intemperance was alive with volatile energy;
He was personally expanded in his youthful glory.
His deeds of conquest,
And the founding of cities in his name,
Were soon to make him a god.
His ever-active mind blasted stones,
He would conquer the whole world,
Planning East and West as one.
His simple soldiers of Macedon,
Long sufferers of frenzied and wounded years,
Yearned for the softness of wives and children.
Along the way, through Baluchistan –
Appeasing the gods of relentless war –
The gum of the giant myrrh
Was collected by Phoenician merchants,
Those among the followers of Alexander's army.
Aristobulus records that the same land, mostly desert,
Also yielded ginger grass in great abundance.
When trodden underfoot by the exhausted soldiers,
It released a delightful seductive fragrance.
The wafted, abundant pungency,
As if of a final ethereal godlike mantle,
Prepared by his loyal and trusted men,
Accompanied and sustained
Alexander's uncorrupted, golden entombment –
One of the cherished mysteries of the ancient world.

Chris Darlington

A CARDINAL'S DEATH

When last we parted you sang for me
From high up in the beechwood tree,
But now your voice no more will sing
In coldest winter or dampest spring.
No more the red on virgin snow,
Your crimson fire no more will glow.
No more the crest with pride held high
No more the flash through azured sky.

For whom the beauty, for whom the song?
For whom the joy through winter long?
Perhaps the child who threw the stone,
Perhaps for me now so alone.

Evil lives and goodness died,
Heaven's order again defied.

Two crossed feathers were all I found,
And a drop of red upon the ground.

Peter A. McCord



STILLBORN

He lies lifeless in his mother's lap.
A few hours are all she's allowed of what should have
 been a lifetime,
A few hours not even of life.
Then he will be taken from her unwilling arms
 – arms that remain outstretched after him,
And pass through the door of no return.

The fruit of hope and promise,
Nurtured in love and safety from cell to infinite com-
 plexity,
He was ready to grasp the world
And achieve his destiny.

But his future was denied.
Neither the breath that would signal his communion
 with those who waited in welcome,
Nor the flung-wide embrace that would announce with
 joy,
“I am yours and you are mine!”
Nor the cry and reach to her who bore him,
– No. Fate, perverse fate, allowed none of those.
His life ended at the very moment it should have begun.

His mother and father float between shock
 and understanding,
Between bewilderment and realization that their life
 must go on.
“What was he like?” they wonder.
An ephemeral being that passed into memory
Leaving only the anticipation of his totality to remember.
A shadow without substance.

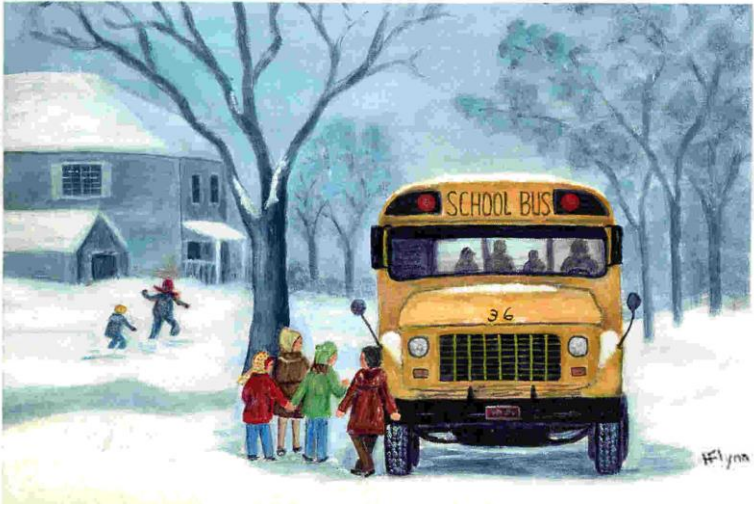
A nursery, a crib, and a dozen other objects,
Gathered over months for a common task,
Now find themselves without purpose.
In their mute, inanimate way
They, too, mourn the loss of their charge.

And the bereaved parents, looking upon them,
Touching them ever so gently,
Grieve all over again.

But grief cannot sustain its cruel, crushing grip forever.
What will endure is the joy this child's fleeting visit
Brought to those who love him.

Herb Heineman





KINDRED SPIRITS

Mich and Stevie met on the first day of kindergarten. Hanging onto the lifeline of their mothers' arms, they waited apprehensively for the big yellow school bus. It came charging down the street and stopped in front of them with a squeal of brakes. The door opened and the friendly, smiling face of Mrs. Kirkpatrick, the driver, greeted them. "Top of the morning to you children! Now hop on board. This is the first day of the rest of your lives and we don't want to waste a moment of it." Taking courage from each other, they climbed on board and sat together, sharing a hard leather seat.

"Want to sit next to the window so you can wave to your mom?" Mich inquired.

Brushing a tear away Stevie replied, "Nah, this is O.K. Want a Milk-Dud?" and he produced a box of the chewy candies from his pocket.

"Sure, thanks." The two sat in companionable silence thinking about the day ahead.

This was the beginning. Discovering they lived not far from each other, the early morning ritual became a reassuring and comfortable pattern. They now called the bus the "Cheese Box" as it meandered about the neighborhood picking up children of all ages and sizes. The older more worldly youngsters sat in the back of the bus, teasing and jostling each other, occasionally provoking a fight. The younger children buried their noses in their books, minded their own business and sat toward the front of the bus. Mrs. Kirkpatrick's calm, cheerful,

no-nonsense presence maintained order and Mich and Stevie took comfort in choosing the seat directly behind her. They began to save seats for the afternoon ride home.

“I hate that Jack Scully,” Stevie confided. “He’s such a jerk. He always pushes in front of me when we line up for lunch, and on the playground he hogs the jungle gym and says he’s King of the Mountain!”

“Don’t pay any attention to that big bully. Here, have some M & Ms,” and Mich poured some of the crunchy chocolates into Stevie’s hand.

One afternoon, Mich was late and almost missed the bus. Stevie scooted over on the seat making room. “Where did you get that black eye?” he exclaimed.

Sheepishly, Mich grinned. “I just happened to run into Jack Scully’s fist after I declared that I was King of the Mountain. Guess it made him mad,” and Mich shrugged nonchalantly.

Eyes popping, Stevie offered Mich his box of Good & Plenties. They munched contentedly, dribbles of licorice staining the corners of their mouths.

The summer they were eight years old swimming lessons were offered in the neighborhood pool through the park system. Mich and Stevie were enrolled. Stevie was a natural and had no fear of the water whatever. Mich hated all thoughts of submerging one’s face in the cool, chlorinated water, blowing bubbles and then, horror of horrors, opening ones eyes.

“Come on Mich, give it a try,” Stevie encouraged as he stood on his head, happily splashing and cavorting

about. Backing away from the minor tidal wave Stevie was creating, Mich was suddenly in deeper water struggling to touch bottom. Stevie came to the rescue, of course, which resulted in the two of them entwined in each other's arms bobbing up and down trying to stay afloat. As they bobbed, Mich alternately grabbed a bite of air, and released it under water, just as taught by their water safety instructor. It really worked!

“Can’t you guys stay out of trouble,” the exasperated instructor exclaimed as he hauled them out of the water. Deposited on the deck of the pool, Stevie and Mich grinned sheepishly at each other, rather enjoying the stir they had created. By the end of the two-week session, they had both passed their beginners test, were jumping into deep water, treading water and floating on their backs.

The years slipped by. One rain-drenched day in October, Mich appeared glum and unusually quiet. Golden maple leaves were plastered to the street, forming a collage of colorful fragments.

“What’s up?” inquired Stevie.

Mich faced the window and wouldn’t talk.

“Aw, come on. You can tell me,” Stevie urged.

Fighting back tears, Mich turned and replied, “I’ve got to wear these dumb braces. Now everyone will call me Metal Mouth, or worse yet, Train Tracks.” The tears flowed.

Sure enough, metal and wires filled Mich’s mouth.

“Tough break,” Stevie responded sympathetically. Then he added, “I just found out I’m farsighted. When I start wearing reading glasses, guess I’ll be known as Four Eyes.” They looked at each other with compassion. “Here,” Stevie offered, “have a sour ball. It won’t get stuck in your braces.”

In Junior High, the work got harder. Stevie excelled in math and science, while Mich shone in literature and creative writing. Mich went so far as to complete an assignment for Stevie, writing an original poem, which Stevie submitted under his name. The poem got an A. Mich’s poem received a B! Their duplicity was discovered during a Science test, when Stevie was caught giving Mich the equation for photosynthesis, that complex chemical process in which carbon dioxide and water, in the presence of sunlight and chlorophyll, form carbohydrates. Stevie had tried to explain it, but Mich just didn’t get it! Sent to the principal’s office, they were reprimanded. Engulfed in shame, they waited for their parents to come pick them up.

“I’ve got some fruit-flavored Lifesavers. Want one?” Stevie asked with an air of bravado.

“Sure, why not,” Mich answered, matching his air of defiance, then dithered between lime and strawberry.

By unspoken agreement, they cleaned up their act and never resorted to such nefarious activity again.

Through grade school and junior high, through measles and chickenpox, through thick and thin, their friendship continued. They were indeed kindred spirits.

Then it all changed. Mich's father was transferred to the West Coast and given a position of great importance. The family sold their home and moved to San Jose, California. As the moving van rolled down the street, followed by the family car, Mich peered out the back window and waved a sad good-bye to Stevie.

The high-school years passed and then college. Letter and e-mails were exchanged at first, then dwindled to birthday and Christmas cards. Life was busy; both of them caught up with their private dreams of changing the world and making a difference. Stevie was now studying to be a doctor at the University of Iowa. Mich was studying law at Stanford. Separated by miles and culture, plus grinding studies, who had time to write a letter or browse the Internet?

One day in June, after a particularly grueling night of emergency room duty, Stevie checked his e-mail and was surprised to read, "Coming east for my cousin's wedding. Can you meet my 12:00 noon bus in Iowa City on the 25th? See yah!" It was signed Mich.

Glancing at his calendar watch, Stevie realized that the 25th was the day after tomorrow. Ten years had elapsed and now Mich was coming here!

Stevie arrived at the bus station early. Pausing at the vending machine, he popped out a box of Milk Duds. He waited impatiently, running his fingers through his close-cropped hair. Fatigue gave testimony to another late night in ER.

With a screech of brakes and a rush of exhaust, the Greyhound Bus lumbered in at 12:05. Passengers poured

forth, weary from the long cross-country ride. Swinging off the bus was Mich, a backpack slung across a shoulder. Dressed in slim designer jeans and a short denim jacket, she moved easily through the rush of people. Silver and turquoise earrings glittered in her ears reflecting the blue of her eyes. She appeared anxious and hesitated as she brushed the curly fringe of dark hair away from her eyes. Scanning the crowd for a familiar face, she finally made eye contact with Stevie. A dazzling smile transformed her from pretty to beautiful. "Stevie!" she yelled.

"Michelle," and in three strides he was at her side, swooping her up in a bear hug. They stared, gobbling each other up with their eyes, then burst out laughing. Picking up her backpack Stevie said, "Come on, we have to catch the campus bus back to the residence hall. It's here now, so let's go."

They climbed aboard and settled on the hard leather seat. "Want to sit next to the window?" Michelle inquired.

Rubbing a fist across his eyes, Stevie replied, "Naw, this is O.K. Want a Milk Dud?" he asked.

"Sure, thanks," and the two kindred spirits, separated over the years by circumstance and distance, grinned at each other.

Edith R. Pray

NO NEWS IN THE NEWSROOM

While in college, I substituted for vacationing reporters on the beloved but now long-gone *Wilmington Morning News*.

Early on, I was standing at the city editor's desk to get my assignments when the city editor looked over his glasses as I looked down at the document on his desk. This was an eight-column mini blank front page, marked with where the next day's stories would appear, with reporters' names sketched in. There was a very large space for Klaver on the front page. Uh-oh.

Looking over his glasses, the city editor explained: "Today is Wednesday, Klaver, and we have a big newspaper with lots of advertising. And lots of news space." He paused.

"Klaver, we don't have much news today – and that's where you come in."

I already had the reputation of creatively expanding on news and writing feature stories that had nothing to do with the news but filled space. That got me very quickly accepted by the old reporters, who hated that kind of work and loved only the news. They gave me a lot of help and encouragement. You would sit and write and smoke. Although there were ashtrays, you soon learned to put the cigarette conveniently on the edge of the desk while typing – all the desks had burn marks all around the edges. One writer threw matches over his shoulder into the wastebasket behind. After a few wastebasket fires, they went to asbestos waste-baskets.

“Klaver, I need a column on the weather.”

Although the weather was perfectly normal that day, there would be a column on the weather right on the front page. I loved that kind of story.

“You might even get a byline.”

I knew I was being bribed. But no matter, I beelined to the morgue. The morgue is the newspaper files, in which I could find the weather of the past. There were thoroughly enjoyable people there who helped me dig out old yellowing moldy files.

In the morgue I found the weather a year ago, the weather 50 years ago, the worst weather on that particular day, the best weather. The worst summer, the best summer, the long-range forecasts, weather disasters. This went on and on. I was never a touch typist, but I could go very fast, and the “desk” would fix my mistakes. I could fill space, to the city editor’s delight, on Wednesdays.

Another reporter had originally been assigned weather, complained, and was greatly relieved at my assignment. It was a hot day and the air-conditioned bar was just next door. The city editor was also relieved.

All of us reporters came in at 3:00 and got our assignments. Then we went out on rounds, such as the courts, and also to our informants. Some people are always willing to talk – often about others they don’t have an “affinity” for. If there was some kind of a dispute going on, we sought out our sources. The person in the wrong had nothing to say. The person in the right was

always willing to talk, so we always contacted both sides to find out who was right in a dispute.

In the courts there was a law clerk we knew all about legal news and explained filed lawsuits very carefully to me whenever I went there. He was not a lawyer, but lawyers came to him for advice. Later he was appointed a federal judge. He never got a law degree; he did not need it.

One day I came in with a BIG story. I went up to the city editor's desk and said, "I have a BIG one. A prominent person has died and given all his money to his secretary instead of his wife."

"Who is this prominent person?" the city editor asked, looking worried, and now looking up over his glasses." Upon my naming the prominent person, the city editor turned pale, sweating, and said "You want to get all of us fired?" Apparently the prominent person had something to do with the newspaper ownership.

Despite an exasperated look, he explained patiently to this young reporter that "You never heard this. It is gone from your mind. And this is Wednesday, and we have a very large paper and very little news. But we do have the weather." That was my punishment, so I went back to the weather story. No punishment for me, though.

Another day I had a murder. "I have a murder today." The city editor did not even look up from his papers. He had been busy brushing smoke into a photo of a burning building taken by our photographer, Lemon. Matter-of-factly he asked, "Where was this murder?" I

identified the part of town. Again, without looking up, the city editor, now looking exasperated, spoke patiently, “Martin, they have murders down there every day. Forget it. It’s not news when it happens all the time. News is something NEW.” I went back to my desk and thought about that. I am still thinking about that.

Another day the city editor, looking as if he suddenly had a bright idea, said “I have a murder for YOU, Klaver.” That was very exciting. I was being given a major story. We had three reporters on vacation. We had absolutely nothing on it.

A woman was killed in a lonely park when no one else was in the park. The police did not have anything, even a “person of interest” as they say nowadays when referring to the killer. In those days they did not have persons of interest, anyway, or even under suspicion. They did not have a clue. So, where was the story?

Using my creative talents I painted a word picture of the lonely park, its beauty, its history, the sudden shot, the silence, the quietness before and after. The murder has never been solved, but the city editor was delighted. He needed to fill space, and the police had nothing whatsoever, not to this day. I got photos of the park by our photographer, Harry Lemon. The newspapers even recall the murder today when news runs out or they have a big paper.

One day we had a little mistake that was caught just in time but delighted all the reporters except the city editor. The social page extended over to the agricultural news. There were photos of an engaged socialite and a prize pig. The captions got reversed. Under the

socialite's picture was the caption: "Prize Pig" and under the pig picture was the name of the socialite.

Once we got wind of a story, we could not save it for another day. It had to go that day. Otherwise the competing paper might scoop us. The competing paper was not a fun paper, but a nasty boring paper run by paid hacks. We hated it.

"Klaver, what's this story about the marine biology lab?" I had written a piece on the fish industry and mentioned the lab. "There is NO LAB. Now, I think you have a scoop. I am reserving front-page space. Go get it Klaver!!!!" Whee! I called the university and they would say nothing. I called the Marine people and they were silent. Uh-oh. Then I called the home of the Marine Department head, and the wife answered. I felt a glimmer of hope. "He is away, but maybe I can help"

Wow!! "I have a few facts on the lab but need to corroborate them." Bingo!! I even got the location and then Lemon got pictures.

I got a byline, too. A few days later the head of the lab called. "I don't know where you got all those facts. I wish you had waited, but it was a great story." She called me a bit later and said. "If my husband ever finds out, there will be hell to pay." Not to worry. She would be protected as my future informant.

Another day the city editor looked up over his glasses and said "Klaver, this is Wednesday again..." "I know", I said "A big paper and no news" I saw three front columns marked "Klaver" on his eight-column front-page makeup sheet.

The city editor paused and then turned to business. “Oak trees are dying around us. There is an unidentified oak disease called ‘oak dieback’ and it is killing trees. I have sent Lemon for a picture. Top center three columns, front page, byline.”

Oh boy. I got the full story from the university and wrote more than a column about oaks dying back. I went out to dinner from 5:00 to 7:00 as we all did, and came back at 7:00 to see Lemon’s picture. Oh my!! It was an oak tree, but it did not have oak dieback disease. It was just an old oak, dying. What could I do?

I rushed over to the city editor and explained my dilemma.

“Klaver, that picture is a genuine Lemon, and we are going to use it right on the front page, dieback or not. Now go back and write the caption for it.”

I sat and thought. Thinking was really unusual. We mostly just wrote, as fast as we could. We did not sit and think; we could be caught thinking. Finally, I wrote something like this: “Although the tree above does not have dieback disease, it is symbolic of the many oak trees which are dying in the area.”

I got the byline and many calls of praise of my story. No one seemed concerned that the picture had absolutely nothing to do with the story. They were just tree lovers. The story continued on Wednesdays.

Another time we had a fire in the evening and we all assembled as the city editor told each of us what to cover. We ran out of the office. Of course, I was assigned what we called “color.” I went down to the fire

and found an old woman with a handcart with all her belongings – her home was burned out. She told me all about her life. Lemon took a picture and I wrote the story of her life. It beat out the rest of the story by landing prominently on the front page. This was NEWS.

I am a jazz fan. One day the city editor said, “There is a concert out at the Drama League, some guy named Armstrong. Think you ought to go. I could not conceal my excitement. I went out and interviewed Louis. I was often sent out to cover the theater and concerts and public events, usually with a free dinner, especially after a busy Wednesday. This was my reward for filling space when needed. “Klaver, I want names and interviews, as many as humanly possible, and get them right.” I was the book reviewer, and books flowed in every week, many perfectly awful books, but also some very good ones. I read and reviewed them all, and the reviews were printed on Wednesday.

When news started ebbing in early summer the city editor would call me over: “We haven’t had any flying saucers since last summer, Klaver. Somebody just called in about one – make it good, we have all summer to go. The flying saucer stories, once seeded, grew quickly, and sometimes were bigger than the weather on Wednesday.

In those days, life was simpler. On Friday night, we ALL went down to the bar next door. We laughed about the week’s stories. Joining us were people who loved the newspaper, and many prominent people, including politicians. And here we learned of possible future stories, especially from politicians, who were eager to tell stories

on their opponents. It was a motley group, and there was a lot of laughing. The owner locked up at 4:00 a.m.

I hated to go home.

Martin Klaver

* * * * *

STORM A'COMING

When the wind blows the leaves
till they're all upside down,
And the cows all get nervous and lie on the ground,
Storm a'coming.
When black clouds consume the last rays of sun,
It's mid-day, but dark!
The storm has begun.
When billowy rain clouds start clashing together,
Best head for the house,
Here comes stormy weather.

Jane Walker

NO OTHER YEAR THE SAME

“Do you have to sing that stupid song again,” my sister grumbled.

Stubbornly, a little louder this time, I began.

*One nine three seven at Marion's Camp,
No other year the same . . .*

Little did I realize how prophetic these words were. I was about to find out that even when it seems like every year at camp is just the same, it's not at all. Well, certainly not at Camp Marion in 1937.

“Oh, thank goodness,” my brother rejoiced, “Here's the Camp Marion road at last.”

Our Chevy was just one in a long line of cars following the narrow dirt road that led us to Camp Marion. The stone walls on either side of the road served as silent witnesses for what was once farmland. We passed the fields and here the trees grew thick and dense.

The darkness of the evergreen forest engulfed us. My father, as he did every year when we reached this particular point on the Camp Marion road, would begin to intone from Longfellow's *Evangeline*.

*This is the forest primeval,
The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,
Bearded in moss, and in garments green . . .*

As the road opened up to us again and the light streamed back into the car, the blue sky was above us and the shimmering beauty of Lake Singletary lay below, sparkling and inviting, but off limits until 4:00! My eyes

took in the familiar buildings: The Lodge, the Craft Center, cabins half-hidden on the edge of the woods. One of those cabins would become my home for two weeks. Which one, I wondered.

All the cars began nosing into the parking lot and car doors flew wide open. Out of each car came the families – mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. At least one person who clambered out of each car was a Camp Fire Girl. You knew immediately which one was the Camp Fire Girl. She was the one looking a little anxious. Like all the other adolescent girls, she was dressed in black bloomers, a white shirt with a big sailor’s collar, and a silky red tie that hung slightly askew in the vicinity of her neck. And, yes, I was one of those bloomed Camp Fire Girls.

“Wohelo!” I called to friends I hadn’t seen since last summer. “Wohelo” was Camp Fire Girls talk. It meant **w**ork, **h**ealth and **l**ove. “Wohelo, Sarah!” they called back to me. With a few other choice words we established our positions as seasoned campers. We knew what a Mess Hall was. It was the place you chowed down. We knew what KP duty meant and how it often led to skinning the spuds.

We knew the drill all right. First we got our cabin and bunk assignments. I think I always had a little prayer ready like: *Dear God, please let me have an upper bunk, and please, please, please, don't let Alice Rolo be in the same cabin with me.* I’m sure I must have said something like that, but I rather suspect that Alice Rolo was praying her own prayer of selective discrimination. Before the two weeks were over, we would become good friends, and I would

thank God for letting me have a lower bunk right next to Alice Rolo. It's kind of the way things worked out when you were 11 years old.

What luck! Our cabin was Awkumonin. That's Indian-speak for "Aw, come on in." Our families joined us in the inspection of Awkumonin. They got to meet our Counselor, Miss Irena, who would be our surrogate mother for the next two weeks. It was actually a short inspection. The families began slowly edging toward the parking lot. Once, as a new camper, I had stood and sobbed hysterically as our car pulled out of the parking lot and headed back out the lane without me. Now I said my goodbyes like a fearless veteran with hasty hugs and kisses knowing that, sigh, we could at last strip off our baggy bloomers and get into our swimsuits. Lake Singletary: Here we come!

The waterfront at Camp Marion is indelibly imprinted on my mind. The shoreline of Lake Singletary stood out, always crystal clear, always inviting. Birch trees fringed the sandy beach. They stood like sentinels between the camp's grounds and the waterfront. A long wooden wharf went out for 25 feet or more, moored to the bottom of the lake by posts of lodgepole pines. On one side of the wharf the canoes were tied up, and on the other side were the ropes and markers that set the limits for the tadpole swimmers, also known as the non-swimmers. Another area marked the intermediate swimmers' boundaries, and a third one marked the depth to which the good swimmers were allowed to go.

On the first day of camp it was always expected that the swim would be freestyle without instruction.

The “buddy system” would be in place the next day when the lifeguard had established who were the tadpoles, the intermediates or the swimmers. Thus the waterfront was filled with flailing arms and legs, splashes and squeals, non-stop action, perpetual motion. The lifeguard sat on her high stool and blew her whistle whenever she needed to sort out the commotion. And then there was the final whistle that brought us all out of the water scurrying up to our cabins to get ready for supper.

By the time we had eaten our fill, the light in the sky had dwindled down to nothing. We Awkumonin girls were soon in our cabin listening to Miss Irena read us a story. There would be no ghost stories for us tonight. Maybe they would come later in the week when we were more acclimated and when we had bonded. Something soothing was called for, something calming, something like Winnie the Pooh! A good choice! The night air was cool and we pulled our blankets up and cuddled beneath them. Tigger was already into mischief. Heavy eyes took over and we were soon sound asleep.

Breaking into this quiet summer camp scene, shattering the silence, came a blood-curdling scream that seemed to have no end. It was as though there were echoes repeating and repeating that terrible desperate sound. We all sat up in our beds, wide-eyed, bewildered, and scared, too startled to make a sound. Miss Irena admonished us to stay in the cabin as she went out to join the other counselors and whatever staff was around. Eventually she came back to report that there had been an accident on the lake, but she didn’t know any more than that.

Imaginations ran rampant, and then the state troopers arrived. I know they were state troopers only because I was told that that's who they were. We trembled as they came to our cabin and asked if any of us had seen anything. They scrutinized our faces as one of the troopers barked: "Were any of you down at the waterfront after dark?" Satisfied that we were all telling the truth, they moved on quizzing the girls in each of the cabins. They proceeded then to question the staff before leaving the camp without any prisoners, witnesses, or whatever it was they were looking for. There were no explanations. We were left to ponder what it was all about. Certainly, this was not the usual drill at Camp Marion. Did we ever go back to sleep? If we did, it was a fitful night, the scream never quite leaving us.

The next morning the bugle sounded Reveille. We stumbled out of our cabins, sleepy-eyed and confused, to raise the Stars and Stripes. At breakfast the director announced that there had been an accident just outside our roped-off waterfront. A woman drowned. "If any of you saw anything, please come to me immediately," she said. That was the official announcement.

Little did we know that it was the biggest story in the newspapers and on the radio since the Lindbergh kidnapping and trial. Except for one brief encounter with a blood-curdling scream and an interrogation from state police, Camp Marion continued with its usual program. Lanyards were woven, beaded bracelets were carefully handcrafted, spatter-painted leaves were attempted as were book covers fashioned from birch bark, and none of us was the wiser. Indian lore was learned, hikes were taken, our swimming improved, and every

known camp song ever heard around a campfire was heartily sung replete with hand motions. Innocents that we were, we sang with gusto:

*One nine three seven at Marion's Camp,
No other year the same . . .*

* * * * *

Theodore Dreiser's story *An American Tragedy*, written in 1925, was the story of a young man named Clyde Griffith. Brought up in a religious home, he was accused of murdering his girlfriend by taking her out for a boat ride with evil intent. When he got to a remote portion of the lake, the girl stood up. Clyde swung his camera at her, stunning her and capsizing the boat. Clyde swam to shore, but the girl was unable to swim and she drowned. Following a sensational trial, built on circumstantial evidence, Clyde was found guilty and electrocuted.

The Singletary Lake drowning was often referred to as "An American Tragedy." For example, the newspapers liked to play up the young man's religious upbringing and often referred to him as "the choir boy." The boat capsized, she couldn't swim. He swam to shore. In this case, however, the woman who drowned was the young man's wife and there were children at home. But again the case was built on circumstantial evidence, and the young man was found guilty and electrocuted. Many years later I learned to know the town and the family that still grieves over the loss of that young mother and father. If I were to write a story about the

Singletary Lake drowning, I would call it “An American Tragedy Meets the Camp Fire Girls.” It really is all I know for a fact. There is some kind of mad authenticity in the title, about as much authenticity as circumstantial evidence ever offers to a jury. They know so very little about what really happened, yet it is enough for them to determine who shall live and who shall die.

Sarah Klos

TAPAS

Rumors were flying around Medford Leas of a “top-less party.” Was conservative Medford Leas losing its moral compass? Read on, people. The explanation is much less scandalous than it might seem at first blush.

The traditional pattern of a meal in 21st century America is soup and/or salad, entrée and dessert. It is the way meals are served in Medford Leas dining rooms and most restaurants where the entrée, the protein component in most cases, is the centerpiece, flanked by sides of starches and vegetables, and served with breads as a complement. In much of the world meat is likely to be a side dish, if it even appears, or is included as a flavoring ingredient.

According to a *New York Times* article by Kim Severson, December 5, 2007, sophisticated diners in New York, San Francisco and Chicago are veering away from the three-course dinner. At newer restaurants the entrée is being replaced by a series of small snack-sized dishes with innovative and ethnically mixed dishes and ingredients offering an adventure in dining.

One style of dining is called “Tapas” (pronounced “top us”). Tapas is a Spanish word meaning bar food. It comes from the practice of going from bar to bar, or sidewalk café, having a drink and nibbling on small snacks at each stop. A version in 1920s Florida was described by the author’s father, when a glass of beer cost five cents, and sandwiches piled high on a platter were offered free of charge.

The Chinese, of course, started it all. Dim sum is sometimes described as a tea lunch. One book recommends skipping breakfast. Small portions of many different dishes are wheeled about on carts among diners. Most are baked, steamed or fried dumplings with varied mixtures enclosed. The customer selects as many as desired and is charged accordingly. Two restaurants in Philadelphia's Chinatown offer dim sum: Joy Tsin Lau and Dim Sum Garden. In Philadelphia dim sum is not limited to the lunch hour.

Tapas is a way of dining where, like dim sum, the diner makes selections from many offerings of small bite-size foods. Mary Ann Black, acknowledged by her friends as an adventurous cook, chair of the Medford Leas Food Committee, has brought tapas to this community. After living at Medford Leas for about a year, she decided to entertain a few people with a food party. In July a meal of many small items seemed more appealing than a formal sit-down dinner. She sent out invitations to 10-12 people she thought would appreciate the concept, and planned the menu. The invitation stated that "tapas – significant snacks" would be served. Most of the invitees asked, "What is tapas?" Answer: varied small servings of food as in Spain. The menu, developed with some Trader Joe's items, became a Spanish idea with an Asian twist.

Mary Ann described the innovative meal: "For the first course I served chilled tomato-ginger soup to be drunk from parfait glasses. Bruschetta, olives and salty nuts provided a nice contrast to the smooth texture of the soup. From a buffet table guests then helped themselves to cream cheese cubes marinated in soy sauce with

sesame seeds, pecan stuffed dates wrapped in bacon, mini quiches, fresh asparagus with wasabi dip, and a fresh spinach-strawberry salad, served with poppy and celery seed dressing. Bulgar wheat tabbouleh, bite-sized poached chicken breasts, and salmon cut into one-inch squares were available with a hoisin-garlic-chili sauce or a spicy peanut sauce. My guests enjoyed tasting and testing the variety of flavors and textures. A large pitcher of iced tea and a similar one of red Sangria (a wine-based punch) provided liquid refreshment. Since I don't do desserts, a guest contributed a light and frothy lemon pudding delight!"

The next few days rumor traveled around Medford Leas about the incredible party that was held in one of the courts, a party unique and original, a "topless" party.

Someone's hearing aid must have been malfunctioning or turned off.

Sumiko Kobayashi

THE GIFT

I met my artist friend one morning on the street where we lived.

“Would you allow me to paint your portrait?” she asked. “I’d like you to sit for me.”

We decided on the next Sunday afternoon, say one o’clock? I had no inkling this was coming. Because I held her artistic ability by and large in high esteem, her request came as a great honor to me. How does one “sit” for a portrait?

“Wear your black hat and suspenders,” she said, “I’ll be ready.”

We had been friends for many years. It was always a joy to be invited into the large entrance hall of the house she shared with her mother and father. The entrance hall’s six-foot wide-open staircase, leading to the floor above, filled me with awe and admiration. Everything was grand about the house, even the large canvases from this prolific artist that hung in nearly every room.

I chose a comfortable ladder-back chair. We placed it on the wide back sun porch facing south where there was an abundance of light. If “sitting” became a bit boring, I mused, I had a magnificent view. Because of the drop of the land – our street had been laid out along a natural ridge, making the porch a story above ground level – the porch overlooked the expansive landscape of lawn and gardens below.

We didn’t say much as she worked. I thought of the portraits of her brother hanging in the back sitting

room, majestic even in his youth, and of her Ganny (the name the family gave her maternal grandmother) in the dining room, gentle and loving. Later, thinking of her portraiture work, I realized the longer she knew her subject the better she captured them on canvas.

“I don’t have black on my palette,” she announced. I sat with my black hat and suspenders, pondering. She was not at all perturbed.

Many times I had been invited to sit on that porch, sipping tall glasses of iced tea. Such graciousness! Her mother had grown up in the South. Her accent, the family’s leisurely style of living and her inherited graciousness confirmed this. It seemed that this trait emanated from the very woodwork of the grand old house.

We often talked of books and heroes. My artist friend seemed to need heroes. We enjoyed many good times together: concerts, drives in the country and especially our trips to Longwood Gardens. It was the order and peace of the Gardens that we both loved.

“Would you like a break?” she asked. I had been “sitting” for about an hour. “Would you like to have something to drink? Let’s sit in the kitchen.” Then she added, “I don’t allow people to see my work until it’s finished. Please don’t look.” Me? I had no intention of looking until invited.

That first break came after an hour. Until then I hadn’t given thought about how long this “sitting” would last. Three hours? Several days? Maybe more? I hadn’t asked.

Settling once again on the porch, she continued working behind the canvas. Once in a while she'd glance in my direction, keeping her work on course.

"I'm having trouble with the background," she said.

I, not being an artist, have always looked for the simple path: "How about a background of old wallpaper?" I suggested off the top of my head, having no idea what the painting looked like.

"Perfect," she agreed. "I have painted out the ladder-back chair, it just didn't work."

Sometime during the second hour her mother came to inspect the artist's progress. "How wonderful," she pronounced, in her soft sweet voice, "the best you've done." It was a joyous, Southern lady's exclamation. Possibly another day of sitting, I thought.

I returned to my appreciation of the outdoor scenery and yes, all the artist's focused attention. All that was soon brought to an abrupt halt when she simply said, "It's done."

I was amazed at the speed of her work and surprised that it had come to an end so soon, forgetting all my fretting about "sitting." She turned the easel so I could see the final product. "If you like it, and not everyone likes my work, I want to give it to you as a gift. But before I give it to you, I'll keep it for a few days until the paint dries."

It had not occurred to me to ask where the portrait would eventually reside. I was doubly amazed, overwhelmed and delighted with the gift of her work. I stud-

ied the image. The canvas, more than a yard high and a yard wide, was filled with color, grace and strength. It was neither a caricature nor a cartoon; it was, to me, a character study in oil.

The “absent” black from her palette was the blackest I had seen. She explained that she had used many colors to create the black, some artist’s alchemy, no doubt. My suggested “wallpaper” background consisted of little squiggles of browns, blues, creams and reds, in no particular pattern, but effective nonetheless.

After my artist friend determined the painting was sufficiently dry and ready to move, we arranged, much to our delight and her benefit, to have the portrait hung for a month in the prominent “Artists Corner” in our local library.

One aspect of the human experience, I have observed, is that with some friendships – even those that exhibit an initial robustness – are going to end without apparent reason. Even with this awareness, it was not without sadness our friendship of many years began to cool soon after my sitting, and it eventually ended. Our friendship is now long past. However, the portrait – the work of a dedicated artist – remains a token of what it once was. I am grateful for the generous gift of the artist’s work and the past friendship it represents.

Chris Darlington

PHOTOS

Nothing, nothing, nothing is left
Just a few sprinkles of ash under a tree
Way up north
In the beautiful mountains

Yes, there are plenty of pictures
 Black and White
Newer, later, brightly colored
Slips of paper that have no life
But bring to life what is in our hearts
The little dark-haired one is with us still
As always, in her own way



Margery Rubin

EULOGY

She who walked with me
Has gone away
I tell her stories
Most everyday
Lest when we meet
On that golden strand
We will have forgotten
How to play

Howard W. McKinney