

LEAS LIT

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LEAS LIT STAFF

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THERE ONCE WAS A GAL FROM CAPE MAY

There once was a gal from Cape May.
She was no spring chicken, they say.
Her hubby had gone,
She lived all alone
So at Medford Leas she did stay.

Life was lonesome, it's true,
But what could she do?
There were men all around.
But none made her heart pound.

A man came one day,
He's no spring chicken, they say.
His fine wife was gone,
And he lived all alone,
So at Medford Leas he did stay.

Now life is just ducky,
They feel they're so lucky.
Their love is in bloom
And life's "over the moon!"

Pat Heller-Dow

WHAT TIME DOES

I can no longer raise my father's voice at will. In the first years after his death, I was able to comfort myself by replaying his last phone call in my ear, or mind, somewhere in my head I heard his strong, positive report of the good news from the doctor: his heart sounded better than it had for months, he was on the mend. I think he believed it. He was always able to summon optimism. To him, setbacks were transient, problems were passing, good times were coming.

But I had heard other voices, too; the doctors, backing my sister Betsy and me into an alcove outside the Coronary Intensive Care Unit, shifting their feet, listening anxiously for their beepers, hoping for an emergency to pull them away from our questions and our grief. "His heart's a wreck," they said. "It's totally inefficient. It has to work too hard and it's just too big."

We could have told them that. We grew up in the glow from that soft, enormous heart. When it was beamed toward us, things were warm and happy. There would be laughter by day and presents on our pillows at bedtime. But his heart had phases, like the moon, and there were cold times and dark silences. That was when we had hurt Daddy's feelings. His ego was as big and delicate as his heart. Mother controlled us with the threat of Daddy's disapproval or the promise of his love. It was her device, I think now, more than his moodiness, although that was real enough. She was the parent; he was the punishment, or the reward.

We were tremendously proud of him. He was taller than anyone else was then, six and a half feet, and he was handsome, such a twin of John Wayne that the actor heard of the resemblance and sent him a white, ten-gallon hat which he kept, unworn, on his closet shelf among the custom-made, monogrammed shirts.

He was a wonderful companion. Being with him involved more treats than day-to-day parenting routines. We almost never had a meal together, or a serious talk. But he got us out of school when the circus came and took us backstage to mingle with the clowns who were friends of his from his star-struck youth. Later, in our ringside seats under the big top, we cringed in mortification while the clowns knelt at our feet in mock declarations of love and our father beamed. We went on train excursions, and to Broadway shows, outings that bridged the gap between our actual childhoods and his recaptured dreams.

He wasn't complicated. The lonely little boy he'd been was always there, looking for affection and approval. He was easily offended, frequently maudlin, loving and loyal but slow to forgive, generous beyond belief. "Jim's so big-hearted," everyone said.

Something physical had happened to his heart when he was a boy. Oversized to start with, it was enlarged and weakened by disease. The doctors speculated on undiagnosed rheumatic fever. It must have happened in that tall, dark house where medical care was such a luxury that the patriarch, my great-grandfather, dressed in his hired man's clothes in an effort to get free surgery at Johns Hopkins, and where a childhood complaint would

have been dosed with beef tea and castor oil, if it was noted at all.

His damaged heart kept beating, driving him away from that Gothic atmosphere where his widowed mother raised him among her brothers, under the oversight of her dour, straitlaced parents. It drove him toward flashy times and glossy women, jazzy parties, bootleg whisky and city streets.

He dropped out of college during the Depression and went to work in his hometown hotel, making salads, busing tables, changing lightbulbs and sheets, and went on to manage an increasingly prestigious series of hotels. Throughout his career, he worked every weekend and holiday. He never got rich but it was the perfect job for him. "The great American public," he called his guests, cursing by his tone of voice at their caprices and demands, but it gave him pleasure to satisfy and entertain them.

He was returning from a speech-making trip to Mexico on behalf of the American hotel industry when he had his first known episode of heart failure. He was given oxygen, rushed to the hospital and drained of fluid to lessen the burden on his heart. That night was the first of the frightening times when our healthy hearts pounded in panic as we watched his heartbeats falter across a monitor's screen. I can't count the times we lived through that, but those emergencies came closer together and came near to wearing us down. They did wear him down, and out, so that the shots and the pacemaker and the shock paddles stopped working. And, finally, the

doctor told him that his heart sounded better and sent him home, full of hope, to die in his own bed.

We were alienated two times. He was heartsick, those were his words, when I left college to marry at nineteen. He could hardly endure the ceremonies of our engagement and wedding. He cried all day and drank too much at the reception and cried again.

Years later, we fell out over Richard Nixon. Throughout the summer of the Watergate hearings, I walked to a phone booth at the shore to call him long distance in an effort to make peace but he wouldn't speak to me. Squinting in the sun, dropping change in the sand, I pleaded with my mother to intercede. After supper, I went again, waiting in line at the edge of the miniature golf course where the bugs rose up under the lights and the air smelled of Coppertone. I couldn't stand his rejection, but I understood it. I was being punished for being in the right. After the president's resignation, we never discussed the issue again. He kept his autographed picture of Nixon hanging in his den as long as he lived. It's packed in a carton in my closet today. I won't hang it, as he'd want me to, but I can't throw it away.

The central fact of my father's life was his devotion to my mother. He loved his friends and his children but he would have sacrificed us without a backward glance, at her command. He sometimes denied her peace of mind with his high-living, hard-driving style in the early years of their marriage, but he never denied her anything else. He took care of her mother, and her siblings, with

uncomplaining financial and emotional support. If she admired anything, it was hers.

Once, at lunch in a cosmopolitan setting, he excused himself to ask a woman at a nearby table where she'd bought the shoes she was wearing. My mother had commented on them and, before the day was over, she had an identical pair. That was a typical outing with Daddy; amusement, attention, indulgence and surprise.

Immediately after his death, I shut out all the good time images. I could only deal with the ambulances, the fragile moments of fear and the tense drama of waiting. From one life and death incident, I carried home a generic tissue box that had been at his side in the emergency room. Unable to talk through the tubes, he'd written on it in his clear, elegant printing, "good E.R. team," and handed it to me. I could bear to remember that, the graceful spirit in the failing body, because I knew how ill, and how afraid, he was in those days and I wanted that desperate decline to stop. But I couldn't stand to think of the healthy man at the top of his self-made success, radiant with humor and confidence, full of life and of himself. The weakened, frightened man could die. The younger, stronger father who had furled over my life like a brilliant flag should have lived forever.

On my visits to him in the silver haze of Florida retirement, the ritual highlight of my last evening would be a slow walk to watch the sun set over the water. I remember him there with his neighbors, all of them old, lined up facing the Gulf as the sun disappeared and the sky flared into green and faded into violet. Walking back to the condo, between my mother and me, he'd pull

himself along holding our hands or lean his arms on our shoulders, bending us down.

Six months before he died, he gathered his strength and flew north for our daughter's wedding. I had to go into the plane to help him out and when I saw him there, so thin and dapper and gallant, I had to push my face hard into his lapel to staunch my tears in the camel's hair of the coat that hung, nearly empty, on the broad bones of his shoulders. It cost him an enormous effort to dress so well and to travel so far. He loved that wedding, walked down the aisle without his cane, sobbed through the vows and dominated the party afterwards. His heart was overflowing.

A year ago, at lunch with a family friend, I mentioned that he'd been dead almost nineteen years. We fell into reminiscing, telling tender stories that made me laugh. She's not given to thoughtful remarks that carry solemn undertones. At ninety-two, she copes by ignoring the realities of life. But, talking about my father, she turned her head and said, almost to herself, "It's good that time does what it does."

Time took away Daddy's dying voice in my ear but it gave me back the good memories. Now, after twenty years, I can think of him dressed for a party, excited, handsome, patting his pockets for keys, checking the points of his handkerchief and the knot of his tie. I can remember him in his heyday, getting ready for a football game tailgate, brewing potato soup on our kitchen stove where I was sterilizing baby bottles. In his fluster of anticipation, he mixed up the burners and scorched the soup. Ready, as always, to make the best of any problem,

he reached for a bottle of bourbon whisky and upended it into the soup kettle, thereby creating a legend. Jim's bourbon soup went to every cold weather game. Strangers came by with cups outstretched. "We've heard about your soup," they'd say. He filled their cups, shook their hands, found friends in common. We would drink with them again and again.

He died on a February evening. Bourbon soup would have been perfect for the lunch I served after the chill of the funeral but I couldn't deal with it then. It lay, like all the good time memories, throbbing at the back of my mind. Sometimes I serve it now on special occasions: Jim's bourbon soup. As I ladle it out, the whisky fumes up into my face. But, when that happens, the moisture in my eyes is steam, not tears. That's what time does.

Daddy's Bourbon Soup

Heat together until steaming but do not boil

5 cans commercial soup

3 cans regular milk

½ can Kentucky bourbon

Marcy Webster

AN UNSOLVED MYSTERY

It was one of those steamy, hot days near the end of July. Our parents tried to do as little as possible while we kids could not stand still. There was much, too much, to do before school began in September. To fill the summer days, exploration took over when games no longer satisfied. For ten-year-olds exploration is necessarily a local activity. Our explorations always began on the street where we lived.

Beyond the last house on our street, no more than three doors from our house, a farmer's lane led from the street, laid out between a cemetery's wall and his field of asparagus. Not far beyond the cemetery the lane divided.

On our first exploratory foray down the farmer's lane we took the right-hand lane at the fork. A few yards beyond the fork the lane changed from a white sandy bottom to a black loam fed by the leaves of a dense canopy of deciduous trees. We soon discovered we were walking into cool shade and a wild blackberry patch. There were bushes all around us. In our excitement we ate berries right off the bush. But our find called for further action. For one thing, vessels were needed for our harvest. We went home and made plans for the next day.

My mother was not impressed with our discovery. She was more concerned about my going near the creek – a word we were more apt to pronounce “crick” – because she was afraid of my falling into and drowning in the swift creek at high tide. Privately I shared her fear.

However, she relented with my promising I would not go near the creek and I had to give her the names of the kids involved. Provided with a saucepan, I met my playmates the next morning and we made our way to the patch of wild blackberries.

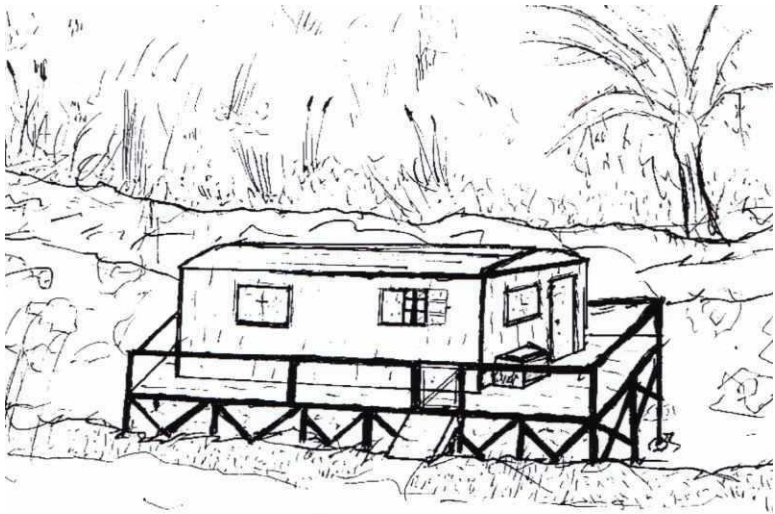
Picking went well in the right-hand lane. We then explored the left fork for more berries. There was a slight bend in the lane, taking us farther to the left. One could see that the lane was going to lead perilously close to the creek. Out from under the dark canopy of large willow trees a brilliant, sunlit view opened up. One could see a broad expanse of wetlands, for a mile or more, part of the northeast boundary of the township. Swamp grasses, high reeds, and cattails grew in large clumps as far as the eye could see. My mother needn't have worried about my drowning in a creek angrily roiling along at high tide. It was at low tide, exposing slimy black mud on the creek bottom. What really arrested our attention was a shack built over the creek bed.

The shack was somewhat larger than a low, flat-roofed, oblong tool shed, just tall enough for a man to stand in. It was covered with green asphalt roofing paper; it had small boarded-up windows and a low door at the near end. An old ice chest was next to the door. The shack occupied a large area of a deck.

The deck was built on a structure of heavily braced stilts or poles, placed into the creek bed. It was obviously a structure able to withstand the force of the tidal waters. Most of the deck was just wide enough for a walkway around the shack, but it extended out some six feet in front of the door. A stout railing guarded the perime-

ter and a gangplank connected the deck with the bank of the creek. A gate on the deck silently said, "Keep Off."

Long, slender branches of weeping willows, growing along the creek, drooped over part of the shack's deck, giving it an otherworldly aspect. We walked up to the gangplank but did not go farther.



"Fishing Shack"

Our loud, excited voices dropped to whispers as if we were approaching a sacred place. I had a weird feeling. Unsettled thoughts of ten-year-olds led to many questions and whispered discussion. What was the purpose of the shack and its framed structure? Why did someone go to all the trouble building it in the creek

bed? Was this something we would regret coming upon? Would we be allowed to go home? To see our parents again?

The rational finally replaced my excitement and fear. I had often seen men fishing from the bridges and causeways that were built over our two creeks and extensive wetlands. The structure may have been someone's fishing platform with a storage shack.

I don't recall that the shack was ever mentioned in passing or as a topic of conversation. After our discovery I never told my parents about it. That would have revealed the fact that I had disobeyed and gone near the creek. My silence also denied me a possible source of information about the "fishing shack."

And the wild blackberries? Did my mother ever suspect why so few berries caused so much excitement?

As a teenager I ventured down the farmer's lane a few more times, to stand and watch the creek and its flowing tide. I never saw anyone near the shack or on the deck. Nor did I learn who had built it. Nonetheless, someone must have enjoyed many leisure hours on the creek. I know I would have. The "fishing shack" is one of the mysteries of my childhood that was never resolved.

Chris Darlington

PAINTED SKY

The Lord must have been awfully busy today
 To paint so many clouds in the sky
As I look up in wonder at the colors he chose
 The sun puts a squint in my eye
With his canvas so vast and his brushes so blessed
 As I look up at night he shows me his best
The stars how they twinkle
 The moon what a shine
Lord painted them there for my own peace of mind
 Thank you Lord

Jane Walker

WE WERE CRUISING ALONG

I thought it strange that the boat was pulled into the slip prow first.

“The White Star usually docks back end first, doesn’t she?” I said to Chuck as we sat in the car looking over at the slip where the boat was tethered.

“I think so. And what’s all that activity on the pier?” There were several guys in black diving gear on the pier and some other worker-types on deck looking at something near the bow.

“Well, maybe we can see what’s going on later; let’s go over to the house.” We were anxious to get back to the beach house, where we had dropped off my cat Watson prior to the big “do” the day before. The previous day at 5 pm we had assembled at the dock to board the White Star IV, a comfortable 40-foot fishing boat. It was a very attractive vessel, with a cozy cabin and mahogany wood railings nicely highlighting the white of the hull. Festive decorations, which my sister and the rest of the “Baltimore crew” had put up that afternoon, blew gaily in the breeze. The participants were the wedding party and about 63 friends and relations who were willing to come all the way to the Jersey shore (no small thing for almost all of them) to witness our nuptials. Our invitation promised a celebratory dinner party on the mainland and a moonlight cruise on the Bay arriving back to the slip by around 9 pm.

It was a glorious October day and we were going to be on the water with a “fresh” breeze. It would be dark

before the boat was back at the dock when all was said and done. My father and Chuck's mother were among the several "elderly" attendees; I was a "natural born worrier," as Chuck was fond of reminding me. At any rate, at last all were aboard and accounted for. Some locals, who had ventured over to the dock to see what was going on, gaily waved goodbye as we pulled slowly out of the slip into the channel and headed toward the lighthouse. There were quite a few anglers on the rocks lining the shore and surrounding the Lighthouse, fishing for whatever they could get. We didn't notice anybody frantically grabbing for a net.

The Reverend Thumbheart had agreed to tie the knot. "I've married folks on the dunes, in the park, even in a bar once; the venue doesn't matter to me." We told him we wanted the ceremony to take place on a boat in front of the Barnegat Lighthouse.

As the Skipper slowed the boat in front of Old Barney, he skillfully maintained his position during the brief ceremony. The boat's rather raucous horn sounded proclaiming the formal procedure over, and it was done! The applause felt wonderful to my ears as we were presented to our guests anew. Champagne was uncorked and the atmosphere relaxed as our journey continued on to the mainland, about half-an-hour away. The voyage was pleasant and mercifully uneventful. Everyone enjoyed the natural scenery, while other boat traffic acknowledged our festive vessel with waves and toots.

Docking and disembarking at The Captain's Inn in Forked River was accomplished without incident and the open bar with a large variety of hors d'oeuvres was eve-

rything we had planned and hoped for, and a welcome sight. We had agonized over the dinner menu, but it seemed to be a big hit. Finally we cut the cake, which was crowned with a bride and groom standing atop a little red boat that seemed to be stuck in the icing. Relief flooded over me: Our event was an apparent success. The weather had held up, and the trip over had been smooth. We saw our guests safely back on the boat. “Aren’t you coming back with us?” one of them called as we stood on the dock and waved goodbye. “No way!” we yelled back and good-natured laughter and banter ensued as the trim White Star backed out of the slip for the return trip to Barnegat Light.

Heading off to our destination, Chuck and I rehashed the events of the evening. It had gone well, and except for Aunt Helen getting a little woozy from the sea sickness patch she wore to prevent her from getting woozy, everyone had weathered the journey. The rest of our evening lay before us and tomorrow we would return to our Barnegat Light home for a week of worry-free relaxation.

That all had happened yesterday. Now here we were back at the cottage with Watson, our venerable Manx cat, as happy to see us as we were to see her. On the table by the door, I could see several pieces of yellow paper with quite a bit of writing. Watty curled herself back and forth between my legs inviting the attention she had missed since we left her late yesterday afternoon. Chuck scanned the intriguing yellow paper.

“What’s that?” I asked, rubbing Wat on the tummy while she rolled over ecstatically on the rug by the wood

stove. Chuck seemed engrossed in the missive and I noticed his eyes growing wider as he read.

“It’s a note from Chris written around 4:30 am this morning,” he sputtered anxiously. Chris, his son, had been Best Man in the ceremony.

The events Chris described in his note, with some enhancements picked up later from guests who also lived the experience, were astonishing! It seems that the White Star was making good time across the Bay on its return trip. The tide was low and as she approached buoy 27A, where she was to bear to the left for the final approach to the Barnegat Lighthouse and boat slips further on, the boat came to a rather abrupt stop! The White Star IV had run aground! It was at this point in the return trip that things became interesting!

While descending into the bowels of the boat to check for structural damage, the Captain assured the passengers that there was “no need for worry,” but the boat seemed to be “stuck on a sand bar.” He added that the Coast Guard had been summoned. Luckily the Coast Guard station is located in Barnegat Light and in no time at all a speedy little red vessel bearing all the signs of John Wayne to the rescue was hovering around the White Star taking stock of the situation. The passengers on board White Star were mostly out on deck eager to see what magic was about to take place.

“Well, folks,” the Captain at last announced over the loudspeaker “the Coast Guard is going to back off a bit and come roaring by us at a fast clip on our port side, thereby creating a wave which will serve to rock us off the sandy bottom we are sitting on,” he said gravely.

“And you can help!” he continued confidently. “When the wave comes rolling towards us, it would be helpful if everyone would move from the right side of the boat to the left side of the boat as it (the wave) passes under and by us. Has everyone got that?” And he gestured with his arms to demonstrate the desired movement. There were some murmurings and comments, mostly in the affirmative, and everyone on deck established their spot from which to transfer to the other side theoretically creating this rocking motion which, together with the “wave” thrown by the Coast Guard, was going to set them free. No doubt some considered this event a nice little diversion to add to the whole adventure.

“Here she comes” and “Yea, Coast Guard” were heard as the little CG vessel, having backed quite a way off to create a run to pick up speed and manufacture this powerful wave, came hurtling out of the dark with spotlights glaring and engine screaming. It headed to the side of the stationary White Star. As if on cue, the crowd moved as one to the other side of the deck and held on in anticipation of the great wave.

“Well, that didn’t seem to work” and “We didn’t even move” were among the comments and laughter as the little red Coast Guard boat was disappearing in the distance (having sped by with reckless abandon, throwing her best wave).

Apparently undiscouraged, several more runs at the entrenched fishing boat were attempted with no positive results and the intrepid Coast Guard fell back to regroup. Meanwhile the passengers were tiring of their part and some had retired to the cabin, taking advantage

of the available seating space to stretch out and catch a few winks. In the end, it was decided that since change of tide was imminent, the best course of action would be to wait and let nature take its course. Those die-hards remaining on White Star's deck sadly watched the Coast Guard turn around and head back to the base with the message that they would be back in a "few hours" when the tide lift had done its job, and escort the White Star back to the dock.

In the meantime, one of the wedding guests rummaged around in the stowed boxes and located a fishing pole, which he rigged up, baiting with a half of a ham sandwich he found in the galley and philosophically started fishing from the bow. There was some talk of giving Chuck & Barb a call, but that didn't pan out. As it happened, among the guests were a graduate of the Naval Academy, two active Naval Reserve Captains, and an active Admiral in the reserves. Their advice was sought by those around them, but it was more tongue-in-cheek and to pass the time than anything else. Most everyone tried to create a space in which to cat nap, some borrowed cell phones to alert family members that they would be "quite late," and just about everyone finished off their piece of wedding cake and small miniature of Chambord liqueur which they had received as a favor at the reception dinner. The moonlight cruise was definitely losing some of its charm.

Comments about the other White Star line were of course inevitable, and one of the more enterprising guys, Woody, got up a lottery based on what time they would actually be rescued from the bottom. A dollar was collected from anyone interested in participating. Gary

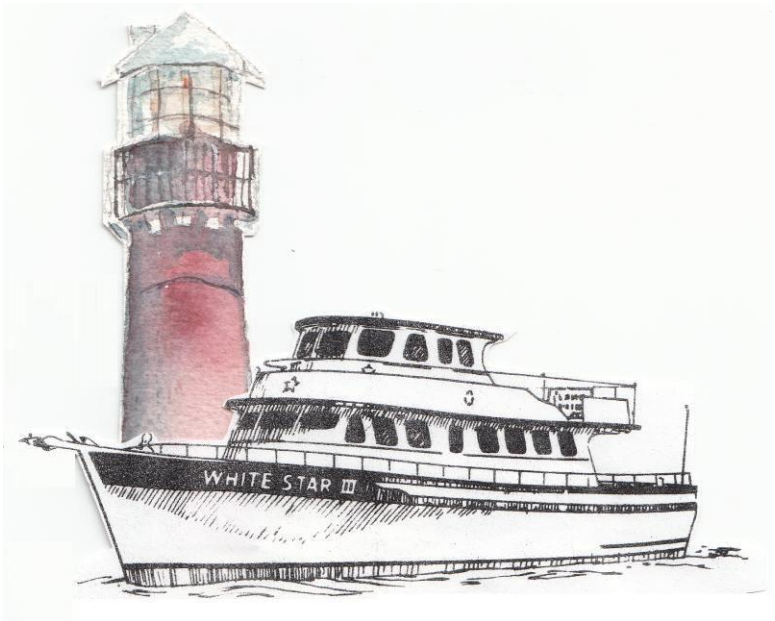
collected \$27 for guessing closest to the exact time, which turned out to be 2:40 am, when the White Star again became afloat. The tide had changed and with a much larger Coast Guard vessel now on the scene, a tow line was attached to the prow of the Star and at a slow but steady pace they headed back towards port. Actually the adventure was not over yet, because as they approached the Barnegat Lighthouse where the channel turns, the boat swung around the tow rope, became hooked on the bow sprit and tore it off with a frightening ripping roar. "This just gets curiouser and curiouser," one guest observed. The White Star did really limp into port, which all goes to explain why she was bow first and not stern first in the slip when we saw her a few hours later.

The aftermath tales began surfacing early the next week. There was Bill, whose wife didn't attend the wedding with him, because she was away on a much fanfares trip to Ireland. As he was walking up his walkway at 6 am returning from the ill-fated event, his neighbor was leaving for work as usual, and gave him a clearly interested "good morning Bill" greeting, with a bit of a twinkle in his eye.

Then there was the other Bill, heading down Long Beach Blvd about 4:30 am at a more than average speed, who was stopped by a policeman wanting to know what the rush was. "Well, Officer," Bill said as he reached in his pocket to retrieve the invitation promising an early evening after a soothing moonlight cruise, "here's what happened...." He didn't get a ticket.

And, finally, Janet headed home to Baltimore and went directly to the church where she was the organist for Sunday service. She miraculously was on time and managed the entire service with her usual aplomb except for the very end, when her clearly weary foot came to rest errantly on one of the foot pedals to send a magnificent chord echoing throughout the Church during the solemn benediction. She thinks it was a G Major.

Barbara Lassen



A MOTHER AND HER CHILDREN

January

She stands naked, indifferent to wind and ice and snow.

With equanimity born of years of survival, she bides her time,

*Knowing that the earth will inevitably carry her beyond
winter's grip.*

Only then will she unlock the secret

That illuminates her patience during those bitter months.

April

Days triumph over nights at last, and warming undoes freezing.

To the wakening world she shows the reward for her fortitude:

She delivers a hundred thousand children,

Which joyously clothe their mother in bright green garb.

*Nature, caught up in spring's fervor, bedecks her with flowers
of brilliant hues.*

July

*In the heat of summer she welcomes visitors to her shade and of-
fers them fruit for refreshment.*

*She reminds her children to replace their exhaled breath with fresh
air,*

And solicits the birds from their midst

To entertain her guests with song.

October

The sun recedes and the nights become chill.

She knows that the seasons are coming full circle.

*With serenity she girds herself for the coming ordeal and accepts
that she will outlive her beloved children.*

*She watches wistfully as they doff their greens and flaunt their
gaudy underwear in farewell celebration.*

*Then she loosens their bonds and consigns them to the resting
place of their forebears.*

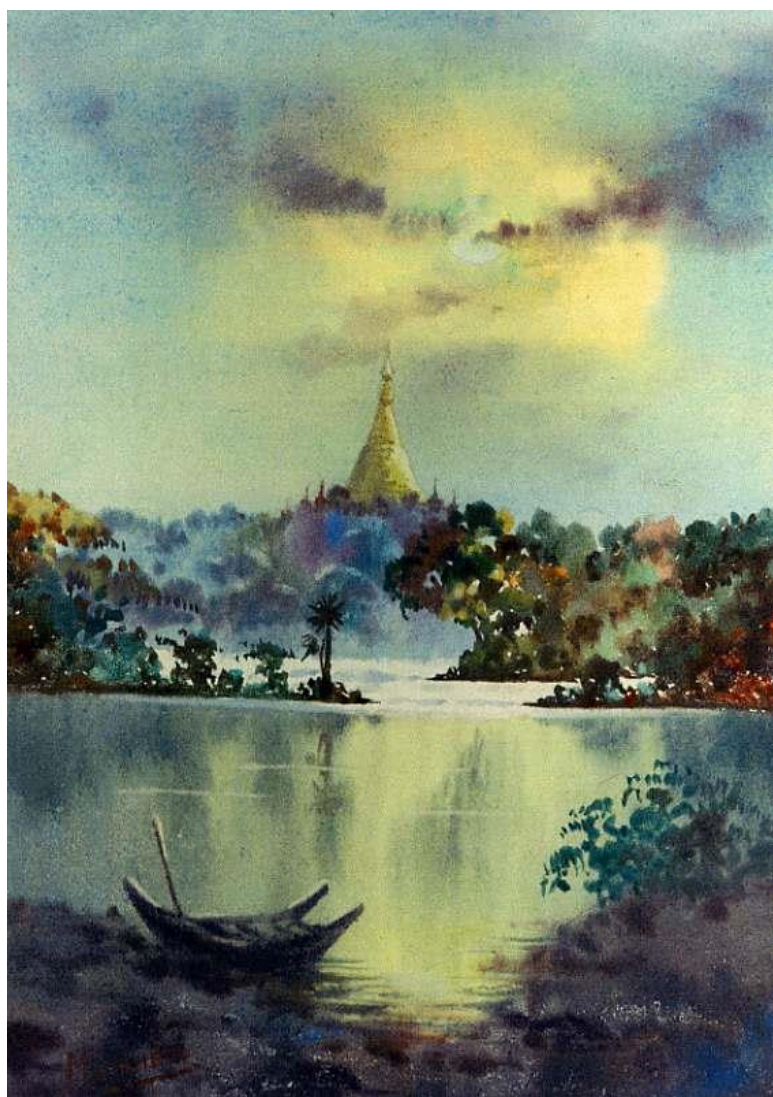
Coda

*She finds peace in her year's accomplishment, and marks her
calendar with another ring.*

*But her work is never done, only interrupted by winter's in-
clemency.*

*Even as cold closes in, next year's brood, in protected laten-
cy, awaits the signal for birth.*

Herb Heineman



Shwedagon Pagoda, Rangoon *Maung Shein, courtesy of Helen Vukasin*

IF ONLY TO BE FREE

As I watch daily the news reports of the revolutions sweeping the Middle East, I think of a much-overlooked dictatorship in Southeast Asia, (Myanmar*) Burma, where 55 million people live under the heel of repressive military rule. That's twice the population of Iraq. Young people in Tunisia turned out the country's dictator, Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali, of 23 years. In Egypt, Hosni Mubarak had been in power for 30 years, and in Libya, Muammar el-Qaddafi has ruled for 42 years. In Burma, the military strongmen have held the people in their grip for almost 50 years.

Why do I care about Burma? I care because I've been involved for twelve years, through a nonprofit, in finding educational opportunities for the young people of Burma outside their country. I have mentored students once they reached the United States, visited our graduate students in Thailand, and traveled to Burma three times. I ache for the people of Burma, whom I've come to know, in some cases, as if they were my fellow citizens. They are long-suffering, and yet always welcoming. They are a gentle, warm, hospitable, resilient people.

Where is Burma, people ask? Burma, about the size of France, is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia

*The democracy movement and many governments do not recognize the name "Myanmar," which has never been made official by a vote in Parliament or otherwise.

Asia. To the west are Bangladesh and India, to the north and northeast Tibet and China, and to the east Laos and Thailand. Its long Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) River flows from its source in China through the heartland to the country's southern delta, which reaches into the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea.

The central two-thirds of the country is populated by the Bamar ethnic group, or Burmans, who represent 68 percent of the population. Another 135 ethnic groups, speaking as many as 242 languages and dialects, inhabit the mountainous areas along the country's borders. Culturally, about 87 percent of the Burmese population practices Theravada Buddhism. The country was a British colony from 1885 to 1948, when Burma won its independence.

The freedom that came with that independence was short-lived, however. In 1962, Burma's General Ne Win took over a democratically elected government in a coup. He closed the borders, drove out all foreigners and foreign investment, and plunged the country into years of isolation. A foreigner for the first time could enter for one day in the 1970s, for one week in the 1980s and for two weeks in the early 1990s. No foreign journalists were allowed into the country until very recently, and now under watchful eyes. He led the economy on a path to economic ruin through a mixture of isolation, nationalism and superstition. Once the biggest exporter of rice in the world, for example, Burma became an importer of rice.

In 1988, the students of Burma, much like the young people in the Middle East, led a national uprising

against conditions under General Ne Win. In response to the uprising, Ne Win is said to have ordered the military “not to shoot in the air.” At least 3,000 students were killed, many more imprisoned and tortured, and still others fled into the jungle to the border with Thailand and refugee camps on the Thai side of the border.

The junta immediately closed down higher education for a period of years after that, and then opened a much weaker system of higher education, spread around the outskirts of Yangon (Rangoon), then the capital, designed to keep students from organizing.

Because of the uprising in 1988, General Ne Win was forced to retire, but an equally brutal military junta took over. The military has continued to put down any opposition, with attacks on villages of the independence-loving ethnic peoples. Within central Burma, there is constant surveillance of people and severe crackdowns on protest. Particularly notable was the horrific military response in 2007 to the “Saffron Revolution,” a peaceful demonstration led by Buddhist monks, many of whom were killed. But for the first time young people’s use of modern communications technologies allowed the world to witness the previously invisible longings and consequent repression of the Burmese people.

Burma is considered one of the 20 most impoverished countries in the world, with 2008 per capita income at \$578, according to United Nations figures. By 2003, on my third trip through Thailand to Burma, there were approximately 800,000 Burmese in Thai refugee camps, including children who had never seen their country, and 2,200,000 migrants.

In the year of the 1988 national uprising, something also important happened. The daughter of Aung San, leader of Burmese liberation from the British, fled from Oxford, England (she was married to an Oxford don) to Burma to care for her dying mother. Aung San Suu Kyi, as she is known, was asked to lead a democratic movement and she began to speak to growing crowds of people. Her party, the National League for Democracy, in 1990 elections staged by the military, won 80 percent of the seats in a new Parliament. The junta had already put Suu Kyi (pronounced Sue Chee) under house arrest in 1989. The junta annulled the results and imprisoned many of her elected followers. She was to remain under house arrest for 15 of the next 21 years. She received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her courageous stand. Her movements alone capture the attention of the world, a fact the junta does not like.

In November, 2010, the junta, led by Senior General Than Shwe, held sham elections, the first since 1990. A new Parliament opened in January for the first time since 1988. As expected, the new constitution and elections put the military firmly in control. Reported *The New York Times*, “A quarter of the seats [in Parliament] are reserved for the military, and a military-backed party controls more than 80 percent of the rest, allowing the generals to effectively retain their power....”

At the end of March, the new Parliament elected former Prime Minister Thein Sein, a Than Shwe loyalist, to be the new President, replacing the junta. A widely held view is that General Thein Sein is likely to be nothing more than a puppet of Than Shwe.

Only after the elections did the junta release Aung San Suu Kyi from her most recent seven years of house arrest. The generals, regarding her as a has-been, are allowing her to rebuild her party. While under house arrest, she refused to let her party, the NLD, participate in the fake elections. The junta, in response, abolished the NLD.

In awarding Aung San Suu Kyi the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, the Norwegian Nobel Committee said it wished *“to honour this woman for her unflinching efforts and to show its support for the many people throughout the world who are striving to attain democracy, human rights, and ethnic conciliation by peaceful means.”*

When I see the faces and determination of the non-violent demonstrators in the Middle East, who no longer could tolerate the conditions under which they lived, I see the consequences of years of submission to ruthless authority. The protesters are willing to risk everything to be free.

A young Burmese doctoral student in the U.S. recently emailed me, expressing admiration for the Egyptian revolution, and saying most poignantly, “I hope they will succeed in what we failed [in 1988].” I told him, “you didn’t fail. Your uprising was a beginning.” I wanted him to know that one day his country would be free.

Beth Bogie

PHOTOGRAPHS

alone
in cellar gloom
I search
and find the box

images
of she
no longer here
except in memory
fading
yet now revived

so fair a face
in sunlight's glow
alive
radiant
through tears I look
remembering

I gently
close the box
and climb the stairs
then pause
reflecting

if it
were found
in some year hence
might other eyes
peer inside
without remembering

perhaps to ask
should these be saved

Pete McCord

“HOLD STILL OR I’LL CUT YOUR EAR OFF!”

As an accommodation to my daughter, I recently took my five-year-old grandson to his barber shop. Fortunately I was told in advance that it didn’t have a barber pole outside and was called “Jack & Jill.” Otherwise I could have passed it by, mistaking it for an ice cream parlor or child’s playroom. Barber chairs didn’t exist. In their place were fire engines, school buses and airplanes. And the noise level was unlike the subdued rustling of magazines that I am accustomed to in the tonsorial parlors I frequent. Kids raucously engaged with Tommy Train playsets or scribbled with crayons at kid-sized tables. When his turn came, Sean chose a bright red airplane lettered “SKY KING.” As I helped him into the cockpit I was prompted to recite the radio sign-on of bygone days: “Out of the clear blue Western sky comes ...”

But I don’t think that Sean heard me since he was already quite engrossed with the Tommy Train video that played on a screen in front of him while Olga, the voluptuous blond Russian operator (they are not called “barbers”) commenced to gently cut his hair. To my shame, the thought occurred to me that if in nine or ten years Sean was still willing to sit in an airplane or school bus for his shearing he might find more than Tommy Train of interest.

And so with Sean in good (indeed quite gorgeous) hands, I settled back into a comfortable chair to reminisce about my own youthful barbershop experiences:

McFarland, the barber on Germantown Avenue in Philadelphia, clearly did not like kids. But his shop was

considered safer than Cosmo's, which didn't have a jar with the blue stuff in it that McFarland used to sterilize his combs. Joey Swartz made the mistake of going to Cosmo and got ringworm and had to have his head shaved to facilitate the application of the black goo that was the accepted remedy at that time. Swartz's slimy bald pate with its telltale red rings was then covered with a cut-off nylon stocking cap. During the three months that Swartz had to wear his stocking cap we all treated him like a leper since it was rumored that he was contagious and that if you touched him you could end up with your Mom's old nylons on top of your head.

McFarland, the kid-hater, under pressure from the fathers who were his regular clientele, reluctantly agreed to cut kids' hair on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons for 65 cents. But any deviation from this grudgingly granted accommodation would cost you the grownup price, which was \$1.25.

But a kid had to put up with a lot if he went to McFarland. Besides body odor and a stinky cigar that always dangled from his unshaven jaw, McFarland was sadistically brutal. Without any attempt to elicit peaceful compliance, he would forcibly shove your chin into your chest for application of the clippers – always with the admonition, “You better hold still, kid, or I'll cut your ear off!” And while I never knew of any kid being de-earred, many of the kids who went to McFarland ended up with horizontal lines on their napes as evidence of their failure to comply.

McFarland and I parted company when I was 11 or 12 and he noticed fuzz on my upper lip and declared that

I was no longer a kid and had to pay the full price. By that time I had a paper route and expenses for grooming were expected to come from my earnings. Girls and the social scene also cut into my weekly earnings and I decided that grooming with McFarland at adult prices was too profligate for life at the margin. Besides, some of the neighborhood kids had discovered Bill the Barber, who charged only 90 cents and had exciting “behind the counter” magazines that you could read while you waited.

Bill the Barber had a small one-man shop, which he maintained in the front of his home on Midvale Avenue. It was the end house of a long line of row houses in the East Falls section of the city and was marked by a small barber pole that hung from the solid brick wall bordering Midvale Avenue. Bill, who rarely spoke, was the master of the four-minute haircut. People of lower means sat on benches and folding chairs lining three sides of the room that, I suppose, had at one time been the parlor of the house. By unwritten rule, there was never any conversation among the dozen or so who waited, as everyone was too concerned about their turn and who was next, which required constant monitoring given the high volume of people seeking Bill’s 90 cent haircut. But at a rate of 15 haircuts per hour, your wait was never too long. And if you were next up, you were expected to stand behind the chair while the last customer dismounted. Bill would then rip the sheet from the coiffed customer, take his dollar, and slip a dime from the counter in change, while simultaneously wrapping the sheet around your neck. It did no good to offer suggestion on the nature of the service to be performed, since everyone

coming out of Bill's looked the same, regardless of their stated preference. However, what was really necessary was, at about the 3½ minute mark, to promptly reply to Bill's shouted query, "WET OR DRY?" Silence at that point was taken to mean "wet," at which point Bill would reach for a narrow-necked bottle and then slather your scalp with a sweet-smelling liquid that quickly hardened on your hair to football helmet consistency. I remember one time I hesitated and was given the treatment. It took a week of repeated washing to rid myself of it.

Another peculiarity was that after 9 or 10 cuttings, Bill would sweep the floor with a large broom and then lift a panel in the floor and push the mass of hair to an unknown destiny below – presumably his basement. I was often tempted to ask him where it all went and what he did with it, but never did since Bill, except for monosyllabic commands, never spoke. In fact, when 12 noon came, he would abruptly leave his shop without saying a word and disappear through a door to his living quarters, where his wife had soup and sandwich waiting. New-comers to the shop would always look puzzled by this move and had to be assured by the regulars that he would be back in precisely a half hour.

As I waited in Jack & Jill, I was roused from my venture down memory lane by Olga, who had completed grooming Sean and was lifting him out of the cockpit. "See, now he's handsome," she cooed.

Sean's Jack & Jill venture set me back \$20 (not counting the \$5 tip to Olga). By my reckoning that amounts to 2800% inflation over McFarland. Perhaps

I'm being unrealistic, but I think we should return to the days when a kid's ears were an element of barter when it comes to barbering.

But then again, in deference to my grandson's well-established preferences, Tommy Train didn't exist in those days, and Russian operatives were all Communists.

Pete McCord



EVIL MARIE

Mother was interviewing prospective candidates for a maid, a position left empty by the departure of pregnant Mary. This was a recurring incident in our family. As money was tight, Mother hired, at low pay, inexperienced, supposedly innocent girls from the surrounding countryside and trained them herself. After a while, they all became pregnant and left to get married. There was a saying in our town: “Don’t go into service with the Franks, you’ll become pregnant.”

Anyway, Mary, who had a slight figure, very curly blond hair and blue eyes, was leaving and Mother’s next choice was Marie, from an adjoining village. Marie looked very different, as she had an olive-complexioned oval face, straight black hair tied in the back with a ribbon, a full mouth and very dark flashing eyes. She was of medium height with a full figure. She was a good-looking young woman.

But, right from the start, we boys did not like her. I was seven years old and my brother was ten. She made it a point to berate us, yelling and constantly sneering at us. We called her “Evil Marie.” Mother did not know how badly she treated us. Marie took well to the training and tasks my Mother laid out for her. Not surprisingly, however, Marie became pregnant and gave notice. We boys never knew why the women left their jobs. A while after Marie’s leaving, Mother missed one of her best blouses, a dark yellow silk creation with black and red designs on it. Sometime later, a friend reported seeing Marie wearing it in town. It prompted Mother to remember that other

pieces of clothing had gone missing during Marie's service. She then concluded that the maid must have worn these items on her days off, probably hiding them under a coat or jacket as she left the house.

The story we heard later was that Marie went home to her parents' farm and had the baby. The baby's father was a young, local tailor who lived in the village. It was said that he did his sewing while sitting cross-legged on a tailor's table, stitching away. It seems that Marie wrapped the naked baby, her own child, in a blanket and proceeded to come into town. She entered the tailor's place of work and stopped in front of the tailor's table, at which sat the baby's father. Unwrapping the baby, she plunked it naked on the table in front of the tailor and said, "Here is your bastard, now you take care of it!" She turned around and left with the empty blanket in her hands. The tailor was flabbergasted, but found some clothes to cover the baby and then took it home to his mother, who tended the child until the tailor found a wife, a year later. Fortunately for all, she was a very forgiving and suitable woman who took excellent care of the child.

Just as the baby was lucky, Mother was lucky, too. Her next maid, Betty, a gentle, considerate, young woman from town, was the opposite of all our previous maids, especially Evil Marie. She had the good sense not to get pregnant while working for the Franks.

Stefan Frank

GOING WITH THE GRAIN

He worked with wood, sanding, polishing, restoring. “Always go with the grain of the wood,” my father instructed as his hands lovingly smoothed the walnut stretcher of a Queen Anne arm chair, dealt with the rough surface of a pine blanket chest, stripped paint from a dry sink.

My father was a tall man. He kept his white hair cut short. Blue eyes twinkled behind rimless glasses. Close shaven, the aroma of Bay Rum shaving lotion clung to his clothes. Working with sleeves rolled up, he bent over his workbench. His work-scarred hands often coached younger hands to rub and smooth a piece of wood, to pound a nail, straight and true, to patiently use a screwdriver. The resulting small boat made its way to the creek. The hammer that created it made its way to my son’s workbench many years later.

* * * * *

In the cool, cedar-tinted waters of the Rancocas Creek, my father taught me to swim. Hot summer nights, my sisters and I waited impatiently on the front porch for our father to come home. Once he appeared, we begged him to take us swimming. He usually did. After an early supper, we crowded into the car, dressed in our suits, clutching towels, and drove to Browns Mills. Here we cavorted, splashed and eventually learned to swim under the encouraging eye of our father. I’m not sure his tactics would pass the American Red Cross, but we held our breath as he held us by our bathing suit

straps and dunked us under the water. Mother, in her black wool skirted bathing suit, swam in a ladylike way with her head out of the water. Reluctant to leave the cool waters as dusk settled, we straggled out of the creek, dried off, and headed for the refreshment stand. Here we topped off a perfect evening with dripping ice cream cones. “See, I knew you could swim!” he said with a grin.

* * * * *

My father’s family owned and operated the Delaware River Sand Dredging Company. The business was located in Riverside, New Jersey. He and his brothers took over the dredging business when their father died and the Depression years that followed were difficult. Ingrained in us from birth, the Delaware River Sand Dredging Company was my father’s passion and my mother’s nemesis! I guess in today’s world, one would call my father the CEO of the company. He was in charge of making everything run smoothly. When a piece of machinery on the dredge broke, he scoured the junk yards around the state, and often far beyond, until he found what was needed. “Picking” junk yards literally kept the dredge afloat. He also balanced the books, adding up long columns of figures with the speed of light. There were no computers, iPads or Blackberries to help this CEO.

His relationships with people were honest and charitable. He was conservative by nature but creative and open to new ideas. Going with the grain, he easily conversed and did business with junk dealers, the blue-collar immigrants who worked on the dredge, and bank directors, from whom he borrowed money.

Occasionally, we were allowed to swim off the dredge. We changed our suits in one of the little cabins allotted to the “crew” and high-dived into the polluted waters of the Delaware River. Where was our mother to allow such a thing?

* * * * *

When my father retired from the sand and gravel business, his three daughters had married and were establishing their own homes and busy with their families. He and my mother reconnected, discovered new common interests and began to travel. His interest in antiques and fine furniture began when he married my mother and moved into the 1796 farmhouse that had been her home. The home was furnished with fine Early American furniture. His appreciation for the old pieces and the craftsmanship involved grew as he polished, repaired or restored them over the years. Most of these antiques were made by Philadelphia cabinetmakers in the 1700s and these pieces were rare and valuable. His attention was caught when a grandchild stood on the rungs of a walnut Queen Anne side chair and it snapped. Carefully repairing the chair, he sold the set of six side chairs at a very hefty price.

He began browsing antique shops and brought home unusual and derelict items. His “picking” instincts remained intact! Many happy hours were spent in his workshop repairing and restoring.

* * * * *

There was a tall pine tree in our sloping back yard. It rose high, reaching for the sky, its branches begging for a

swing. Accepting the challenge, my father contrived a sling and pulley arrangement. A small person was needed to fly to the uppermost branch and attach the ropes. I was that small person. “Of course you can do it!” he cried. I trusted him. If he thought I could do it, I was eager to try. I didn’t want to disappoint him. So up I went, tossed the rope over the branch and attached it to a pulley, and we had a swing which we enjoyed for years. I loved the feeling of living up to his expectations.

Yes, my father was a genuine person. There was nothing artificial about him. He knew how to relate to people. He was fair and honest. He knew how to smooth over a rough situation, just as he knew how to smooth a rough piece of wood, by going with the grain.

Edith R. Pray



REMEMBERING IMAM HUSAIN

We should learn, they say, the lessons of history. The problem is that history teaches different lessons. It all depends on whose history it is. With respect to the Battle of Karbala in Iraq on October 10, AD 680 (the 10th day of the month of Muharram of Year 61 of the Muslim calendar), Husain, the grandson of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, was killed. The significance of that death and the lessons it taught differ so radically that the event has been a cause of Sunni-Shia conflict ever since. Sunnis consider it an unfortunate death in battle of a rebel resisting the authority of the Umayyad Caliph based in Damascus who was the legitimate successor of the Holy Prophet as head of the new Islamic state. Shias view it as the heroic self-sacrificial death of the head of the Holy Prophet's family and, therefore, the true head of the Muslim community. His was a martyr's death and a monumental tragedy. The event is observed annually by Shias with ceremonies lasting over the first ten days of Muharram. They include public displays of mourning, street processions, lamentation and rituals of self-flagellation. In evening sessions the community gathers to hear the retelling of the tragic events. In Persia in the late nineteenth century a ten-day State-sponsored outdoor "Passion Play" called the Taziya recreated the Battle of Karbala in a theatrical way that allowed mourners to enter into the experience of blood-letting wounds that Husain and his family suffered. Reports say that prisoners captured and held by the Persian Shah in border wars with Czarist Russia were sometimes forced to play the role of the Umayyad Caliph's soldiers.

Tucked away on the shelves in the library of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago where I was doing course work in the early 1950s with Professors Nabia Abbott and Gustave von Grunebaum, I found a two-volume English translation of a late-nineteenth century Taziya that was brought out by Lewis Pelly, the British ambassador to the Persian Court. Pelly had arranged for auditors to personally record what the players were saying in performing roles for which, by tradition, there was no written text. Numerous references to the power of Husain's suffering to open the "Gates of Paradise" for sympathizing followers suggested to me Imam Husain's role as savior in Shia religious sentiment. This, then, became the subject matter of my master's thesis. "Husain, the Shiite Savior: An Analysis of the Muharram Commemoration." That was in June 1951.

The scene now shifts almost four years later, in April 1955, to Lahore, West Pakistan, to a gathering outside of the Old City wall. I am clearly an honored guest there. My hosts have sent a car to pick me up at Forman Christian College and bring me down to the Imam Husain Day *Jalsa* "Assembly" ground located in an open area outside the Mochi Gate. It's dark, but from what I can see, the meeting I have been invited to address is a large public gathering assembled under a vast canvas *shamiana* tent. Professor Zaidi said later it was a gathering of four to five thousand. They are seated on matting and cotton rug *durries*, creating a sea of faces that extends into the dim distance. Electric bulbs strung on lines provide illumination and loudspeakers arranged along the perimeter amplify what is being said at the speaker's podium.

I am escorted to the raised platform. It's covered

with carpets and furnished with overstuffed chairs and sofas. Seated comfortably in them are twenty-five other guests and speakers. Some are Shia clergy, with neatly trimmed beards and wearing dark robes and turbans. I am conspicuous in my tan summer weight Palm Beach suit, crew cut, clean shaven and wearing a clip-on bow tie.

Things go well. My address, “The Sacrifice of Imam Husain viewed from a Christian’s Perspective,” was an expression of my personal view that there is a link between Shias and Christians in their sentiments related to sacrificial death in the martyrdom of Husain at Karbala and crucifixion of Jesus at Golgotha. It is a matter of a shared emotion. The theology of these two deaths is another matter. In the light of the exclusionary theology of Christians and Shia Muslims there can never be any mutuality. I went on with earnest naiveté to express my regret that in this situation creed blocks natural inter-religious sympathy.

The response on the platform was approving. The sea of faces out there under the canvas ceiling was as hard for me to read as it was, I am sure, for the audience to understand what this young foreigner was trying to say. At the conclusion an editor asked for my script, explaining that he would have it translated into Urdu and published in his Shia paper. Then, after introductions on the dais and tea, and signing several autograph books, I was chauffeured back to the Forman campus.

I would never see the Urdu version or my script again. It got lost somehow in the busy day-to-day rounds of life on the campus. But the memory of this

unusual experience lingers. In addition to its having been the largest audience I ever faced, there is the remarkable fact of a master's thesis being revived and pressed into practical use so soon after its burial in the dissertation stacks of the Swift Hall Divinity School library at Chicago.

This background in Islamic history partially accounts for the almost instant rapport I experienced with my Forman history department colleague and host, Professor Z. H. Zaidi, who as soon as he learned of my work insisted that I address the upcoming Imam Husain Day Assembly. He said, "Stan, you must do it. I will arrange everything!" And that he did.

Zaidi was a Shia Muslim from India. As a student at Aligarh University he supported Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League's demand for the creation of Pakistan as a national homeland for Muslims in a partitioned independent Indian subcontinent. Jinnah's religious heritage was Bohra Ismaili, a branch of the Shia with social values similar to those of the Agha Khan. He was a modern political liberal and imagined that Pakistan would be a state in which religion would have no role in matters of government. Unfortunately in 1948 age and illness cut short his leadership as Head of State. The bifurcated Pakistan (eastern and western wings separated by the new India) was left to navigate its course as a multi-ethnic nation through the crosscurrents of anti-India phobias focused in Kashmir, the US-USSR Cold War in which West Pakistan was a frontline base for the US and the prideful Third World ideology of post-colonial Asian neutrals. That brought Pakistan to the point, after having lost its Eastern wing in the Bangla-

desh war of secession, of turning to orthodox Sunni religion as the true foundation of its national existence. As interpreted by the military dictator of the moment, it was a foundation that has little or no room for sectarian deviations, such as that of Pakistan's founder, or of the creative energy of citizens who stand outside of the orthodox norm or of non-Muslim minorities

There seem to be history lessons enough here for everyone.

Stanley Brush

(This is an edited excerpt from a forthcoming memoir of the Stanley and Beverly Brush family's missionary life in Pakistan from 1952 to 1963, *Footprints in the Dust*)