VISIONS
AND
REVISIONS

Connecticut Writing Project
Summer Institute
1983
The Connecticut Writing Project

The Connecticut Writing Project is one of 116 regional affiliates of the National Writing Project and its parent, the University of California Bay Area Writing Project. According to Michael Scriven, evaluator for the Carnegie Corporation, the National Writing Project seems to be "the best large-scale effort to improve composition now in operation in the country."

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Under the continuing sponsorship of the Department of English and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences of the University of Connecticut, the Connecticut Writing Project offers staff development programs in writing and writing instruction for teachers in all fields. For further information about Inservice Workshops and about future Summer Institutes, contact the project office in the Department of English (U-25), University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT 06268. Phones: 486-2328, 486-3179.
Introduction

From July 5 through July 29, 1983, sixteen teachers participated in the second Connecticut Writing Project Summer Institute at the University of Connecticut. The participants -- elementary, secondary, college, English, reading, science and physical education teachers -- were a select, wonderfully diverse and enthusiastic group who shared the common bonds of love of writing, the desire to become better writers, and the willingness to try anything that would make them better teachers of writing.

Most of the morning sessions during the Institute were spent on seminars discussing recent research on writing, arguing writing issues, presenting workshops on aspects of the writing process and on effective techniques for teaching writing, and listening to lectures about writing. During the afternoon session writing groups met. In groups of four the Summer Fellows criticized, revised, and edited compositions in each of four modes of discourse -- personal, objective, analytical and persuasive -- and through this process improved their understanding of the writing process.

The writing collected in this booklet generally represents the effort of one of the four weeks and was chosen by the author with the advice of the other members of his group. These papers are organized according to those groups rather than subject or genre.

By variety, imaginative process, and richness of the writing, a reader may begin to appreciate the enthusiasm and dedication to teaching and writing that each participant brought to the Summer Institute. They are a most admirable and inspiring group, and we are grateful for the opportunity to have worked with them.

Ann Policelli and Ralph Wadsworth, Coordinators of the Summer Institute
William E. Sheidley, Director of the Connecticut Writing Project

Faculty Meeting Minutes

Constance Aloise

The final faculty meeting was scheduled to begin "promptly at 9:00 a.m." All teachers were in attendance. This uncommon occurrence resulted because there were no in-service, in-house, inter-school, inter-departmental, or inter-disciplinary meetings; no parent-teacher conferences; no C.E.M., C.S.T., F.P.T., P.A.C., P.A.C., or NASCAR meetings; no intramural or interscholastic varsity, junior varsity, or freshman girls, boys, or coed volleyball, football, basketball, baseball, softball, soccer, hockey, golf, wrestling, tennis, or track practice.

Mr. Evers, the principal, energetically swung in at 9:35, delayed by a lost divot on the sixteenth fairway. I remember radiating with pride at my first faculty meeting when Ev assured, "I stand behind my teachers. You are professionals, and I trust your judgement. I only ask one thing: Try not to hit a kid -- I will support you if you do -- but try not to. And oh . . . try not to call these clowns names." I then sensed Ev's unwavering fidelity and unparalleled dedication to only the highest of educational goals when he stated, "We will have a faculty meeting the first Tuesday of every month, irregardless of whether I have anything to say or not." Nine years later and nine over par, Ev remains as supportive, as loyal, as eloquent, a promontory of administrative acumen and a sea of obtuseness, despite the increase in "passing time" from three to four minutes which subsequently increased his work day by thirty percent from twenty-four to thirty-two minutes and despite the additional and challenging responsibility of keeping the soda machine stocked.

Ev called the meeting to order and asked Mr. Jedgar, the administrative assistant/disciplinarian, if he had any opening remarks. Jedgar replied, "No."

Jedgar's brevity is but a small part of his wit and a good indication of his deliberate, fair, and fast meting out of justice. Just last month, Jed suspended a girl for two weeks for igniting a toilet seat in the lavatory. The very next day, Jed suspended a boy for two days for igniting a peer in the hallway. "Toilet seats cost money, and that Afro needed trimming," reasoned Jedgar. Ev further hypothesized that Jed's expeditious decisions would garner him recognition from renowned neutron bomb enthusiasts and other eminent politicians. A former science teacher, Ev was delighted with the possibility.
When the applause ended -- teachers have a proclivity for cheering brevity -- Ev turned the meeting over to Ms. Kintay, the newest guidance counselor with a triple major in Indulgent Child Advocacy, Parent Appeasement, and Advanced Jargon, who undoubtedly had the most experience facing people who are not apt to be listening. Ms. Kintay began: "The ad hoc committee for devising a new system to evaluate student conduct would like some input from the faculty so that we can all know where we are coming from and where our respective heads are so that we can touch base and reach consensus on a new system. The committee recommends a change from the present system which is as follows:

1. good
2. satisfactory
3. poor

to the following system:

1. excellent classroom behavior
2. appropriate classroom behavior
3. usually inappropriate classroom behavior
4. unacceptable classroom behavior

The committee felt it necessary to establish the category of 'excellent classroom behavior' to reward those rare qualified students and to acknowledge catatonics and similar types who are now mainstreamed under the new federal legislation and who would otherwise do poorly academically," explained Ms. Kintay.

The ensuing input was slow in putting out since most of the male faculty members were baffled and disoriented, never having attended a faculty meeting due to coaching responsibilities. Nonetheless, the conservatives rallied in support of the new system, urging "specifics to insure consistency"; the liberals opted for "professional judgement" -- inconsistency; the music teachers requested that "all students with two or more "1's" or two or more "4's" be placed under a doctor's care or placed in jail, respectively"; the English teachers recommended that "Usually be stricken from the text because it is verbose and ambiguous"; the science chairperson asked to be dismissed because she had to put a roast in the oven -- her in-laws were coming to dinner; the history teachers, unable to differentiate between "inappropriate" and "unacceptable," requested an "in-service workshop, a summer curriculum workshop, and/or Title VII funds."

With the home economics teachers awaiting recognition, Ms. Kintay asked for consensus. A vote was taken and surprisingly, only one confused learning disabled teacher voted "No." Ms. Kintay voted "Yes," and the remainder abstained.

"Fifty-six out of fifty-eight is not consensus, but it will do," cried Ev.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:17 p.m., thus ending another school year.
"Isn't there a right and a wrong way
To put toilet paper on the roll?" Marlene interrogated
As I innocently came through the kitchen door.
She was expeditiously clearing the dinner dishes
With Carmen's inept and unappreciated aid.

"I don't know.
Let me think ...
I know when I was married
I knew the answer ...
But I don't remember now ...
I do know that I used to know which way was right,
And not only that --
I knew that it should be replaced
Immediately after the final sheet was consumed
By whomever consumed it,
And furthermore,
I knew the wrapper should be placed in the wastebasket,
That all scraps should be removed from the floor,
And the vanity door should be closed.
Tight.
I suspected, in fact, accused Matt of going out of his way,
To another floor,
In a moment of urgency,
To use the bathroom
Rather than change the roll.
'You use most of it anyway,' he retorted.
'And besides, you don't know how to open milk cartons.
The carton in the refrigerator spills all over the counter
Because you destroyed the spout.'
I retaliated with my best weapon: guilt!
'I made one mistake.'
'You did it on another occasion,' said ol' Matt
In his inimitable flat style.
But wait ... I am digressing.
Let me get back to your question ...
No, I really don't remember which way is right ...
If the sheets fall in front of the roll,
And the roll is to the right,
Will that give better leverage to the lefty?
And vice-versa?
If the sheets fall behind,
Is it neater?
I don't know ... ummm ...

"Actually," contemplated Carmen, a systems analyst by occupation,
"The margin of error
With regards to the overhang
Can be greatly reduced
If the paper hangs on the outside
With the perforated edges visible."

"Your argument is not all inclusive, my dear,"
Objected Marlene.
'Take the case of Aunt Theresa
Whose cultural beliefs do not allow
Discussion of the bathroom
Or articulation of the word
'Toilet'
So much so
That the paper in her bathrooms
Is enclosed behind flush, chrome, revolving doors
On which the toilet paper is held vertically.
Since the paper collapses to the bottom,
I fail to see the significance of your
'Margin of error' theory."

"Wait, Marlene,
When I think about it now,
As sole maintainer of my sole bathroom,
I fail to see the necessity of replacing the roll immediately --
Leaving it on the vanity is okay --
Scraps of paper have never shown on the floor --
At least I don't recall seeing any --
And besides, I clean it up anyway.
But let me think ... ...
Which is the right way?

"Nope,
I just can't remember.
But I will tell you both this:
If I ever get married again
You can bet your bottom dollar I will know
Because in my heart and mind
I sense
Intrinsic within the answer
The panorama of marital roles and responsibilities
Emerges ...
Gee ... I better practice opening milk cartons ...
Wait ... I think the answer is coming ...
Yes, the definitive answer is surfacing;
Marlene,
The right way to put the toilet paper on the roll is
The right way --
Which, of course, is partially dependent upon your cultural upbringing
And ultimately dependent upon
Your marital status!

A voice from the past is nothing unusual...

Lynn was married, had a career, and lived comfortably
in a rural community. People were envious of her life style;
some were actually jealous. This financial and emotional
security was shattered the day her husband announced he was
leaving.

A period of confusion, depression, hostility, and
questioning followed. After Lynn had carefully examined
the entire situation, she sadly but bitterly admitted that
her marriage couldn't be saved, and she initiated divorce
proceedings.

There were many anxious and restless moments prior to
the final decree. Then in a sterile courtroom amid indif-
f erent people milling around in the background, the judge
granted her the divorce -- irreconcilable differences.

The single bar scene was not her style. In fact, she
steered away from any social contact -- male or female. To
assure herself of privacy, she applied for an unregistered
phone number. Her life revolved around the safety and
security of her parents, her job, and her home.

When the phone rang, Lynn usually knew who was calling,
but this was not the case this day; the female voice was
foreign to her ear. She was concerned how this individual
had procured her number. After formal introductions were
made, she breathed a sigh of relief. It was Jen, an old
friend and tennis partner. Since the number was not listed
in the phone book, and the operator said it was unregistered,
she had called Lynn's folks.

At first the conversation was somewhat stilted and awk-
ward. Gingerly they touched upon a few personal items --
both were divorced -- Jen was remarried. When the topic
focused on earlier tennis experiences, the tone of the con-
versation changed. Hearty laughter followed the "Do you
remember when...?" Lynn soon realized how much she had
missed Jen, and they made plans to get together.

The first encounter was indeed revealing. A metamorphosis
had taken place. Jen was now a tall, slender, striking blonde. Although her physical appearance had changed, she still possessed the same sincerity that had attracted Lynn to her as an adolescent. When Jen finally suggested they try their skills on the tennis court again -- neither had played seriously in nearly a decade -- Lynn was apprehensive but agreeable. The purchase of new racquets and a private tennis lesson were the priorities set for the following week.

Both women felt exhilarated after the lesson. Individually they contacted former tennis enthusiasts and friends and arranged to play doubles at an indoor club. Lynn hadn't had this much fun in ages.

The decision to play tennis every Tuesday evening was unanimous. Members of the foursome enjoyed their newly established camaraderie. Discussions after the games were therapeutic, and Lynn could feel her burden, her inner turmoil, lightening. In turn she was regaining self-confidence; no longer did she shy away from social gatherings with friends, and Jen was largely responsible for this transformation.

Summer vacation was fast approaching. Lynn, Jen, and her close friend, Candy, discussed the possibility of spending a few days in Maine. The fact that Lynn would even consider this was monumental, another first in her single life. She was excited.

Plans were finalized, bags were packed, and the adventurous trio traveled northward. Accommodations at an ocean-view inn were perfect, and the first day was spent riding the thunderous waves, walking along the beach, and soaking in the sun. Jen and Candy felt the freedom that apparently surfaces when husbands are left at home.

On the second day Jen had a stomach disorder. Candy insisted nothing was wrong with her; she just happened to be a hypochondriac. Lynn wasn't convinced that this diagnosis was correct, but she didn't question it openly. When Jen's condition improved in a couple days, everyone forgot the minor setback.

Returning to an empty house after the vacation was devastating for Lynn. She missed the morning jok.es, the afternoon chats, and the midnight snacks; she missed being with people. Those weekly treks to the tennis club and occasional visits with friends were now essential for well-being.

One crisp October day, Jen phoned Lynn. She was experiencing excruciating shoulder and back pains and couldn't possibly play tennis that evening. In fact she was having difficulty raising her arms. For a successful business woman -- owner, manager, and operator of an established beauty salon -- this was indeed a problem. When Lynn suggested she relax, take a few days off, she laughed. There was no space available in her appointment book for relaxation or vacation.

Although the substitute for Jen was a mutual acquaintance, it just wasn't the same. Lynn's mind was not on tennis, and she played the worst game of her life. She was anxious to address her troubled thoughts -- to leave the club -- to visit Jen. Her concerns were substantiated when she arrived at Jen's home and found her lying on the couch -- her face registered pain. Lynn insisted she call her doctor immediately. That had already been done.

After a routine examination in his office, the physician said he wanted additional testing done. Jen made plans to have another beautician cover for her while she was in the hospital.

Lynn visited her friend regularly. Jen was listless, weak, and emotionally drained; Lynn understood this to be the result of the demanding medical tests.

Awaiting the results was an agonizing ordeal.

Meanwhile Jen remembered that Lynn had planned to spend the weekend in Maine with friends, and she urged her to keep the engagement. Although Lynn would have preferred to remain home, she finally decided a change of scenery might have a tranquilizing effect on her. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Her anxieties increased. She couldn't sleep; she couldn't relax. The unknown kept gnawing at her.

When she returned on Sunday, Lynn phoned Jen at her home. There was no answer. She knew something was wrong. With some trepidation she automatically dialed her number at the hospital. The voice at the other end was recognizable but nearly inaudible. Lynn was not prepared for that nor for what was to follow. The testing was completed and the diagnosis was made -- LUNG CANCER.

Lynn could hear those words echoing in her ears. She felt the singeing surge of tears rolling down her cheeks -- her lips were trembling; she was confused and frightened. As Jen spoke calmly about the prescribed radiation treatments, Lynn desperately attempted to gain control of her emotions. When Jen said she was tired and would call her
tomorrow Lynn was relieved. This would give her time to think.

As Lynn attempted to clear her confused mind, she questioned the validity of all medical statistics, especially the high mortality rate of lung cancer patients. Each case was different, and there were exceptions. Jen would surely be just that -- an exception. Since Lynn was basically an optimist, she accepted her conclusion without question. Now she could face Jen.

Jen appreciated Lynn's visits; she welcomed a smiling face -- a supportive figure. Her father had died of cancer, and she sensed her mother's fears. Her husband couldn't handle the situation. Instead of being her backbone, he chose an escape route -- the companionship of another woman.

In December Lynn took Jen for her last radiation treatment. She was convinced that it had done the job -- shrunk the malignant tumor. Now it was time to prepare for Christmas. This was Jen's favorite holiday, and she wanted it to be festive. Lynn helped her shop for presents, decorate the tree, and wrap each precious gift. Although Jen was weak, she partied and spread her own Yuletide cheer.

A crucial period followed. Everyone was awaiting the results of her recent X-rays. The family was informed that the tumor was growing rapidly, and the only alternative was chemotherapy.

When Jen received this news, she cried; she feared the loss of hair and the physical discomforts that accompanied each treatment. Nonetheless she had no choice, and was scheduled for her first appointment. In addition to the expected results, Jen was now having difficulty breathing because the tumor was blocking her air passage. There were times when she felt she was suffocating, and she became hysterical. If Lynn was there, she could relax her.

Things weren't improving, and Jen asked to be hospitalized. She wanted the security of qualified personnel twenty-four hours a day. To avoid the stares of curious onlookers, she insisted that a "NO VISITORS" sign be placed on her door.

When breathing became even more difficult, Jen was placed in the intensive care unit. She couldn't handle this turn of events very well. Morphine had already been prescribed and now the dosage was increased.

Lynn would visit with her at night because she especially feared the darkness. They relived adolescent experiences, discussed the issue of cheating husbands, and talked about death, admitting that death was more frightening to her when she thought of being alone.

To ease the tension and lessen her aggravations, the doctor agreed to move her from the intensive care unit. Her spirits were lifted. Now Lynn chose to visit her in the morning as well. If she was a minute late, Jen would be looking for her. One morning she asked if Lynn would consider taking some "sick" time to spend a couple of days with her. This was certainly a possibility.

That same day Lynn was paged by the school secretary; she had a phone call. Running down the corridor, she could feel her heart pounding unnaturally. When she reached the office and grasped the receiver, she was trembling. Candy informed her that Jen was dying; she wanted to see Lynn.

When she arrived at her bedside, Jen was already incoherent. Nurses were attending to her needs, attempting to make her as comfortable as possible. Amidst this confusion, someone handed Lynn a note written in labored script -- a thank-you that would be cherished forever.

As Lynn left the hospital that evening somewhat dazed, she did remember Jen's last request. "Take a couple sick days and spend the time with me." That's exactly what she would do.
WHAT SHALL WE DO TODAY?

Joan Hopper

Clear, hot summer afternoons are the best times for little girls to test anything to its ultimate.

Janet and Eleanor were sisters and the best friends of Judy, my sister, and me. We were still young -- young enough not to realize that "best" friends were those you talk on the telephone to and share secrets about boys with. They lived up the street from us, far enough away that their father blew a police whistle three times to summon them home for dinner but close enough that nobody worried if we tired of one yard and moved to the other for there were no streets we had to cross.

Summer had drifted through June and half of July, through dress up on the front porch, tents in the back yard, and showers under the lawn sprinkler. Today we needed something new to do -- something different -- to break the monotony of doing anything we pleased.

Nothing at our house offered any promise. Maybe Janet or Eleanor would have an idea. Tucked under their bunk beds were boxes of games usually investigated only on rainy days. But, a few days ago an older cousin had sent some things she had outgrown. She was 12.

There it was! A Ouija board! Taking it to the front porch, we began to test its powers.

"How many people in our families?"

"What was my father's middle name?"

"What color was Eleanor's hair?"

"When was Judy's birthday?"

The pointer never hesitated as it flew from one letter to another. After the standard questions that tested its truthfulness, we moved to the mysterious ones.

"Who would be Eleanor's teacher next year?"

"Would I marry Chucky Mac Laine?"

"How many children would Janet have?"

"What would Judy be when she grew up?"

Again the integrity of the board did not disappoint us.

Soon, however, we began to run out of things we wanted to know. After all, how many questions can little girls think of and for how long?

The afternoon was hot and the sky was a deep blue generously sprinkled with billowing clouds moving at a lazy pace.

Could the Ouija board "make" things happen? We asked.

"Yes," it said.

What would we ask? Something easy -- something we could see right away.

Could it change clouds into animals?

Yes, it could.

We wanted a camel.

Positioning ourselves in the shade of the side yard, the four of us stretched out on the cool grass to watch. Here the view was uninterrupted by the bridal wreath that framed the front porch or by the maple trees that lined the street.

In a few minutes, off to the left over the Davies' house, we watched it take shape. Two humps, the unmistakable head, the skinny legs.

We'd like a bear next. But this time it was to come over the cemetery across the highway that we were never allowed to cross. We moved to the back yard to get a better view. It took a few minutes, but there it was!

The afternoon passed quickly and the Ouija board passed every test we presented.

How could it do all these things?

We had to believe!

Supper time approached and we had to abandon the board. Things were going so well, however, we would continue later, after the dishes were done.

By the time we settled in the back yard again, it was dusk. The sun was down by "our" house and it was cool.

"What should we ask it now?"
"Was there a spirit in the board?"
"Did it ever come out?"
Nothing happened.
"Did - it - ever - come - out?"
"Y.....E.....S....."

As I stepped to the bedroom door, I looked in cautiously, startled by its emptiness. All of the furniture and the usual effects were there but missing were those bits of human expression that make a room belong to someone.

The bookcase under the window was bare except for the lamp with its faded burlap shade and the only evidence that something had been on the shelves below was the dust, neatly outlining squares, circles, and the remnants of questionable shapes. The dresser matched except for a tattered photograph stuck in the mirror.

Almost frantically I began to check the drawers and the closet for a bit of hidden testimony to reassure me that I had misinterpreted what I saw. But nothing... nothing of any importance -- only a tarnished buckle, an empty wallet, a discarded sock.

Last night we had said goodbye. It wasn't the first time but this time was different. When the house quieted down, I called him into the kitchen, away from the others who were still up, for a private moment. This would be the last chance.

I knew I would cry and so did he for I always do at important moments -- and unimportant ones, too.

Standing on tiptoes, I slipped my arms around him kissing him gently as I ran my hand across his forehead to smooth his hair. His arms circled my waist with a quick squeeze.

The tears came as scheduled and in the blur I was again holding the little boy who clung to me, his arms squeezing my neck while his legs locked securely around my waist, and I was listening to him whisper, "I love you, Mommy!"

We parted and he flashed an understanding smile. "I'm almost ready," he said. "I've packed all the big things and I can finish with my clothes in the morning. Call you and Dad on the weekend. O.K.? Should be all moved in by then."

Nodding and trying to smile, I turned to leave. "Love ya, Mom," he said as I reached the door.
Quickly turning to look at him again, I answered softly, "Me, too, Hon," and added with a wink, "Cook now and then, O.K.? You can't live on pizza and beer alone, you know."

Why I became a Teacher of English

E. Charles Vousden

"If you could see into the future, as I can, you would see everything that was going to happen to that creature; for nothing can change the order of its life after the first event has determined it. That is, nothing will change it, because each act begets another, and so on to the end, and the seer can look forward down the line and see just when each act is to have birth, from cradle to grave."

-Salman Rushdie

The Mysteries, The Stranger.

Once upon a time, three old conjurers huddled about their cauldron brewing up a life. They were doing consignment work for the Lord who was finding himself harder and harder pressed to look after the universe all by himself. But with the tremendous increase in urgent prayers from constituents suffering from natural disaster, nuclear holocaust, civil unrest, psychic upheaval and all the other benefits of productivity and population growth, minor concerns like bulletins to God and predestining lives had to be delegated with more and more frequency. Anyone at all with a talent for the miraculous was pressed into service.

These three ladies went busily about their work, albeit without much concern for the result—they functioned in the spiritual world as VA workers do in the auto industry. They three of them mixed together a dash of intellectual curiosity, a large measure of pigheadedness, an equally overabundant dose of concern-for-detail, much too little ability-to-see-the-whole-picture, and a standard chunk of other assorted ingredients like sadism, arrogance, and eloquence. After stirring, boiling, simmering, and cooling the composition, they upended their cauldron and poured out one E. Charles which they promptly served to the world on a paper plate.

The rest, according to Twain, was inevitable.

My mother was a teacher, and as much as I hate it, hers has been the most telling influence on my life. (She told me what to do and I did it.) If I caught the disease of teaching.
regardless of what other stories you might hear, it's because she gave it to me. Blame her, I do.

Of course, there were other, more subtle (but not hard to be more subtle than none) events that led me to consider teaching. I've always been lazy, for instance, and the idea of summer vacations and short work days is like an aphrodisiac to me.

I like to read. That's another handicap I was never able to overcome. As a kid, I couldn't do math, so I read while everyone else added. And if you can't add up large sums they figure they don't have to pay you very much. I looked over the list of low-paying jobs in the guidance counselor's office one day and only found one that seemed worthwhile trying to get into—teaching.

With an eleventh grade education, I was overqualified for all the rest.

My first brush with teaching came one day—one fateful, tragic day—when my father came to me and said, "Son, or E. Charles, or whatever you call yourself, you got two choices—move out or get a job." (I got my compassionate and charming nature from my dad.) So I picked up the local newspaper and perused the want ads where I found a job that appealed to all my passions: It was out in the sun; it promised lots of contact with gorgeous, fun-loving women; and it left my nights free for partying. Immediately I went down and applied to be a life guard/summer instructor.

Because I was obviously a man with the required physique and skills, I got the job. It was NOT because my dad was the recreation director's golfing buddy—however says that, they're lying!

All good things must come to an end, and alas, so did my childhood. One day my folks told me to pack my stuff. We were going to take a trip. After several hours we came to what appeared to be a bombed out city full of refugees. The inhabitants, with their glazed eyes, scraggly hair, and tattered clothing were barely recognizable as human beings. At last my father stopped the car.

"Jim, Son, or E. Charles, or whatever you call yourself,"—(You can see why I was so much closer to my mother)—"there we are at the University of Florida. It was good enough for me and, by God, I know you're gonna do me proud. You get out there and become a man!"

Those first weeks at UF were a time of some very strenuous soul-searching for me. I thought long and hard about my major. I considered my talents and my goals. I asked around to compare my thoughts with my peers—very gorgeous one I could talk to. I realized that there would only be one job I could ever be happy doing, only one field which could promise me the lovely co-workers I craved—elementary education.

It was the perfect choice, except for one thing. I couldn't stand the lack of reading. I was dying to read something fresher and more vital than "See Spot run. Run, Spot, run." I decided to change my major.

Changing majors turned out not to be such a bad thing. By this time I had met my own true love, and she was very encouraging about the change. In fact, she suggested English. High school teaching carried more prestige than elementary teaching, she claimed, and she wanted to "look up to her man."

I found I really enjoyed studying English. At last I found a comfortable niche. Things, however, were not completely settled I soon discovered. My beloved was growing dissatisfied. Our marriage plans were proceeding along nicely, we had both graduated and were getting interviews for jobs; but still I was not content.

"Lover, or E. Charles, or whatever you call yourself," she said to me one day, "I now know what has been bothering me. You will never make enough money."

"But I can't make lots of money. I don't have any math skills. What would I do with it all?"

"You don't have to worry about those things any more, Dear," she replied. "Math is one of my favorite subjects. I'll know what to do with the money. You just make it."

Her logic was impressive.

Once again I was on the lookout for a new career. I had several friends with degrees in English. What were they doing? I wondered. Over the next few days I looked them up. They were all very successful and making lots of money—insurance and advertising, except for one who was in law school and hadn't gone into his father's firm yet. To a person, they were all thrilled with their careers and very eager to help me get started.

With that kind of pressure from my sweetheart, and the eager helpfulness of my friends, I really had no choice. There was only one thing I could do and I did it. I canceled the wedding and took a job teaching English in another state.
As a short order cook and bartender at the marina restaurant, he does not get off from work until after two o'clock in the morning. Then he finishes for the night, he locks up and begins his routine four-mile walk home along the island shore.

From the marina to the town is a two mile journey along a stone sea wall. He tries to judge his movement so that he will not be splashed by onrushing waves beating against the wall, but inevitably he is caught by one of the frequent swift and fuming breakers. His legs and shorts are soaked, but that is a small penalty for the pleasure of the clear night air and comfortable island breeze. This night is not the brightest he has known, but the moonlight is sufficient and he is sure of his footing as he strides along.

At the end of the sea wall on the outskirts of the village is a bench. In the daytime, people sit here to wait for the bus as it makes its way around the island each hour. Now, however, it is the halfway point and resting place on his journey home. Each night he stops here to gaze out over the bay and look back at the sleeping village. Perhaps one night he will be enlightened upon this bench as Buddha was under his tree.

Tonight he contemplates the waves rippling in the moonlight. Though he has dived under such waves countless times, he wonders what lurks beneath them now. A cruising thing slips invisibly through the bay tonight and will be gone in the morning without trace except possibly for a chewed fish head floating near the wall.

He runs his hand along his shins, scraping off some of the seawater. Then he passes his hand through his hair, pushing it away from his face. Everything feels sticky in the salty air by the bay, but he is used to the constant stickiness. It is a much cleaner feeling than the stickiness that coated him when he walked around the big city on the mainland from which he came.

He stands and straightens, ready to begin the final portion of his walk. From here to home is a two mile passage along a sandy beach.

Something slams into his shoulder from behind, then bounces back noisily onto the bench. Instantly he spins around. In the dim light, he sees the moving silhouettes of several teenage boys. He is surprised by their presence for he had not heard them. They are perhaps thirty or forty feet away.

Another object flies past him, a bottle. The boys are shouting at him. They use racial epithets, and he notices that their speech is a little slurred. He sees one of them raise his arm and throw a bottle with amazing accuracy right at him. He tries to catch it, but can only knock it away.

The boys advance slowly. He sees their mouths moving, snarling, as they approach, but is too frightened to understand their words. They move closer.

Something near him reflects a beam of moonlight. It is a bottle. He picks it up and smashes its butt end on the bench. Holding the jagged broken neck in his hand, he faces the boys and shouts, "Come on, bastards. I'll kill one of you!"

The figures stop. One of them throws a bottle which misses widely. They stop calling out profanity and are silent. Slowly they turn and move away.

For several minutes he does not move, but remains poised with the broken glass in his hand staring at the retreating shapes as they move toward the village by the bay.

After they have completely vanished, he breathes deeply and notices a sharp pain in his shoulder. He walks around the bench, looking once more to be certain he is alone. Then he begins walking along the shore toward home. He does not drop the broken bottle.
On July 14, 1983, my son Chris was involved in a near fatal car accident. As I sat beside his bed those last ten days many thoughts kept surfacing. His accident is something my subconscious had dreaded for seventeen years -- that piercing wail of the phone in the stillness of the night when the world should have been at rest. The questions are mine to order and sort. Nothing is answerable -- yet I must try to place the puzzle together. Did I fall to let Chris' judgment develop by not letting him experience the consequences of his actions long ago? Did Chris grow up with such confidence that he felt nothing could ever harm him? Did I start to let down on my questioning just when he needed to be reminded most? A certain bond develops at birth between mother and child. Whether this bond is strengthened by the child's similarities or differences to the parent, I'm not sure. The whole process is very individual and personal and I have the need to stand back and reflect.

My pregnancy with Chris helped me during a very difficult tragedy in my life. My brother Dick had been snatched from life in his seventeenth year as the result of an accident. Although my brother was entering his senior year in high school, he did not have a driver's license. My parents, who were very strict, felt they could eliminate the danger of cars by not allowing him to drive. On that night, he had gotten into a car with seven other fellows for a ride around town. Dick and one other youth lost their lives that fateful night.

My pregnancy seemed like the only reason for my family to pull together and go on. We had to prepare for a new life. The emotional ties that I felt at the time of his birth gripped tighter as the years unfolded toward his adolescence.

Even though Chris had a sister and brother added to his life in the next ten years, our relationship remained special. When Chris was ill, I became physically sick. This didn't happen with my other children. The emotional ties that I felt at the time of his birth gripped tighter as the years unfolded toward his adolescence.

Chris understood this bond as he approached the teen years. He was never a talkative child, and I persisted in wanting to know his every thought, especially as he got older. I knew he used my weakness like a baby kangaroo seeking refuge in his mother's pouch. At other times he would laugh about my twenty question quiz about where he'd been during a two hour absence. He would comment, "Aren't you ever going to let me grow up?"

Chris showed leadership ability at an early age, but sometimes he used it to his own advantage. When he was young, we raised a beef cow. The feeding and watering were his responsibility. It was not unusual for me to look out and see Chris' friends trudging across the lawn with buckets of water for "Mr. Steak". Chris would be lounging against the fence post telling them how lucky they were that he was letting them carry water. As Chris grew older and was given more demanding jobs, he began to believe that he worked harder than anyone else in the family. His attitude made me uneasy because it was so egocentric.

Between 10th and 11th grade Chris changed overnight into a handsome young adult. Talk of getting his driver's license took over his every waking moment. This was the time I had psychologically been dreading from the first moment I knew I had a son of my own.

Up until this point in his life everything had been pre-planned. We knew all his friends and their parents, as people in a small town do. Some friendships we encouraged and others we discouraged. We never discussed things like this with Chris. We just arranged things to happen as we thought best. Looking back, we really shielded Chris from these worldly decisions. We assumed that he would somehow absorb our values and take them to be his own.

Chris attends a regional high school so we were suddenly faced with not knowing his new friends or their families. We held off letting Chris get his driver's license but now a new problem loomed. "Friends" we didn't know began to drive him home from places. How could we let him ride with people we didn't even know? We decided that the time had come to face my fear by teaching him to be a careful driver and then somehow try to live through these adolescent years.
Six months after his birthday, during Christmas vacation, Chris' dream came true and he could drive officially. He promptly began to consider one of our business vehicles, a canary yellow VW pick-up, his truck. He washed that truck every winter thaw. He wasn't allowed to drive often -- mostly short day trips. Since his girlfriend lived thirty minutes away and daytime dates were not exactly what Chris had in mind, we endured many heated discussions. We held firm even though my husband believed that winter conditions probably make driving slower and safer. He used to say it was those carefree summer nights that caused people to leave caution to the wind.

As spring turned into summer, we began to relax with Chris. He was working in his father's business and proving to be both hardworking and responsible. Now instead of once a week, we began to let him go out almost as often as he asked. I kept telling myself that I had to let go -- I had to let him become a normal teenager so eager to experience life. Many nights I would awaken ten minutes before he was due home and wait in silent terror until I heard the wheels turn into the drive and saw the beam of the headlights. My husband would try to comfort me, but we decided that it was not something I could erase -- the fear I felt for this son's safety.

History came close to repeating itself in my family last Thursday. For some reason my son and I are getting a second chance. We are a typically comfortable family whose children have never had to face illness or job loss or divorce or any worldly discomfort. Did these comfortable conditions help Chris develop a false sense of confidence in life itself? Can a mother be too protective? I wish there were a magic answer. Perhaps that is the mystery of life itself.

THE REQUEST

Jim Johnston

When a patient is about to die in a hospital a Code Blue is called by the nurse who first notices that serious complications have developed. The code is a message for the entire medical staff, alerting various emergency teams that a patient is in serious trouble and needs immediate attention. When the code is called, the normally peaceful ward instantly turns into pandemonium as doctors, nurses, and technicians race to save the patient's life.

Kate had witnessed her first Code Blue as a student nurse and had participated in no less than a dozen such codes during her two years of nursing at Mercy Hospital. Kate herself had only called one Code Blue when the patient she was administering medication to suddenly went into cardiac arrest. Even though she only worked on the man for about 30 seconds before the team arrived, she felt exhausted and was greatly relieved when the doctor took over. Kate always felt physically and emotionally drained after any code, whether or not the patient survived.

Vincent Bonti was an elderly gentlemen who had gone into kidney failure while he was being dialyzed on Kate's floor. He had lived fifty years in this country, but still spoke with a thick Italian accent which Kate had difficulty understanding at times. At eighty-six, Vincent felt he didn't have long to live and often prayed that he might be able to join his wife who had passed away five years earlier.

Kate felt a special affection for the old man who never failed to ask about her "boy-frenz" or tell Kate about his grandson Freddy, who lived in Cincinnati and taught school. Sometimes, if the floor wasn't too busy, Kate would stop and visit for awhile with Vincent and tell him about anything that she thought a lonely old man might find interesting. Vincent didn't have many visitors; actually he had only one that Kate knew of, and she felt sorry watching the old man spend all day by himself in the hospital as other patients received a steady stream of company.

The only visitor that Kate did notice was a middle-aged woman who spent exactly one half hour with Vincent on Wednesday afternoon's between 4 and 4:30 P.M. Kate had gathered the woman was his niece because she called him Uncle Vinnie.
She would usually sit by his bed for the first fifteen minutes and speak to him in Italian. He would make a comment here and there, but really did more listening than talking. After she finished, she would get a drink of water, straighten the articles on his bedside table, and then sit down again and stare out the window while she chewed on a fingernail. At the stroke of 4:30 she would abruptly get up, smooth out her skirt, and then lean over and plant a quick kiss on her uncle’s forehead. He would smile at her and feebly raise his hand to wave as she walked out of the room and through the ward. The clicking of her spiked heels which had grown louder and louder a half hour earlier announcing her arrival reversed their message and slowly faded as she neared the exit.

One quiet afternoon Kate had time to visit with Vincent and told him about the wonderful Italian Restaurant where she and her boyfriend had eaten dinner the previous evening. She described the delicious antipasto and Fettucini-Alfredo with gusto and was delighted to see the old man smile and nod his head as she recounted the delicious meal. Two weeks later when Vincent’s niece came to visit she brought a paper plate filled with home-made Italian cookies. She handed them to Kate and said,

“My Uncle Vincent wanted you to have these. I made them myself. I want you to know my husband and I appreciate the extra care you give Vincenzo. He’s so lonely, but I just can’t see him that much—kids—you know how it is! And I got a part time job. Sometimes I feel kinda guilty—especially with Aunt Loretta—that’s his wife—gone and all. Oh well, what can you do?”

With that she smiled, turned, and left before Kate could even say thank you.

Kate took the cookies into the nurse’s station and put them on the table. She removed the cellophane and reached for one, but stopped before she actually picked one up. She then took out a piece of paper from her pocketbook, scribbled “Help yourself!” on it, and placed it under the plate.

Later that evening as Kate passed Vincent’s bed she noticed that he looked paler than usual and his breathing had become irregular. She quickly took his pulse and blood pressure, adjusted his I.V., and propped his pillow up so that he was in a more of a sitting position. He smiled at her and asked if she had eaten any good Italian food lately.

“Why, as a matter of fact I just did,” Kate said. “Today your niece brought in some of the most delicious cookies I’ve ever eaten!”

“You like?” Vincent both exclaimed and asked at the same time. “That’s-a good! Maybe next time you like some-a nice-a ravioli. Put-a some meat on those skinny bones.” His eyes twinkled when he mentioned skinny bones and Kate laughed when he patted her thin white arm as she reached over his bed to turn out the light.

Later that evening in the quiet ward, Kate went to check on Vincent again. The only sounds were the swishing of crisply starched uniforms and squeaking rubber soles on the shiny tile floor as nurses went about their duties. Kate was alarmed to discover that Vincent’s breathing was irregular again, and he appeared to be moaning in pain. Quickly she injected him with 50 mg of Demorol and readjusted his I.V. As she looked down at him she was surprised to see that Vincent was awake. His grayish pallor disturbed her and she was even more distressed to see a large tear slowly rolling down his withered cheek. She also noticed that one gnarled hand clutched a well worn rosary which draped over the side of the bed. Carefully she picked up the dangling beads so that they didn’t become entangled with the various tubes and cords and laid it on the bed next to Vincent.


Even though Kate had only been a nurse for two years she was quite familiar with a patient’s request to die. At first she had been shocked, then saddened, and finally angered. What right had they to compromise not only her professional standards, but her ethical ones as well by requesting such a thing! Most of them didn’t realize what they were saying anyway, and those who had, certainly didn’t really want to die afterwards. A cast of characters flooded Kate’s mind as she looked at the old man: a young divorcee who had tried to commit suicide; a 40 year old salesman who had lost his eyesight in an accident; and a grandmother who had gone into kidney failure, been dialyzed for five years and rejected her first transplant. All of them had wanted to die in a moment of overwhelming depression—but what would they say now if reminded of their past request? The happily remarried divorcee had recently delivered a beautiful baby girl at Mercy Hospital; the salesman had regained sight in one eye and now owned a thriving auto parts business with his brother, the grandmother’s second transplant had taken and now she served as a literacy volunteer in the city public schools—What would they say now?
As Kate propped Vincent up and gave him a sip of water she looked at him and said, "Don't be silly, Mr. Bonti. How can you ask such a thing! What's the matter with you? Besides, if I ever break up with my boyfriend I'm going to need you to take me out on week-ends to nice Italian restaurants." Vincent blinked and a small smile creased his lips. Kate's stab at humor to bring him out of his depression seemed to work, but as she left to continue on her rounds she found it impossible to shake the deep melancholy which had settled in.

Kate felt better the next afternoon when she went on duty and had nearly forgotten about Vincent Bonti's request the night before. She and her best friend Vivian were planning to go to the Cape the following week-end with Vivian's sister from Texas who would be visiting for a week. It was fun planning an itinerary and by the end of the afternoon both nurses had worked out a fun, but hectic schedule for the three of them. They planned to spend Friday night in Hyannis, Saturday afternoon at Turo Beach, Saturday night in Provincetown, and on the way home stop in Dennisport to see an old friend both Kate and Vivian had gone to nursing school with.

Kate was concentrating on which bathing suit to bring when she passed Vincent's bed. His slow intermittent breathing followed by short rapid breaths was typical of one experiencing Cheyne-Stokes Respiration. This was usually a signal that the patient was about to expire. As she neared the bed Kate realized that she must do something immediately. A Code Blue, which she could start, would be necessary in order for Vincent to be resuscitated. As she turned and headed for the emergency phone where the operator would broadcast the Code, Vincent's tired face and weakened voice flashed through her mind. His request was more vivid now than ever before, more poignant than any of the other requests she had heard in the past. In her mind she saw him lying alone day after day watching the nurses, smiling at his niece, joking with Kate. She saw his eyes and tears, his rosary and a paper plate of Italian cookies.

Kate was jolted out of her thoughts by the crisp sounding voice coming from the loudspeaker.

"Attention-attention- Rush Doctor Pace- Code Blue now in progress in the ER- repeat- Rush Doctor Pace- Code Blue in the ER."

Immediately Kate's throat tightened and she started towards the Emergency Room at the other end of the hall. As she put down her stethoscope and began to leave, she glanced over at Vincent's bed. Quickly she drew the curtain around his bed and then raced down the hall. She knew that by the time she returned to Vincent Bonti's bedside his request would have been granted.
THE CALL

Arleeta O. Karwoski

Dan Rather was just signing off when Barb heard the telephone ring. The shrill sound shattered the hypnotic trance which enveloped her mind.

"I'll get it," she said, as she wearily pushed herself up from the chair. Dan didn't answer. His eyes were still fixed on the screen. A commercial began and the volume suddenly increased as Barb left the room.

"Hello," she said as she cradled the receiver between her head and shoulder.

"Mom,..." The voice on the other end of the line sounded tentative, unsure. It was Lisa. Barb breathed a little easier, although she wondered at the sound of Lisa's voice.

"Lisa! Hi honey. What's wrong? You sound kinda funny."

"I'm all right Mom. I just had to talk to you. Is Dad there?"

"Sure. Why?"

"Oh nothing. I just wondered. Mom...."

"Lisa. What is it?" Barb's voice became a little sharper. She was getting impatient with this conversation. The phone pressed into her ear; as she switched it to the other side Lisa's words startled her.

"I'm getting married Saturday."

Barb's heart leaped in her chest. Her throat constricted and her mouth felt too dry to answer. She grabbed at the phone to keep it from falling.

"Married! My God Lisa. You just left!" Barb's voice sounded as if someone far away was talking and the words were coming out of her mouth. "What's going on?"

Lisa's words tumbled out in an avalanche...something about Dennis, and Chicago, and planes. Barb's mind struggled to make sense of the words, while she sank onto the desk to keep from falling. Her knees suddenly felt weak.

"Mom!" Lisa was calling her. "Mom, there's one more thing."

Barb listened as Lisa's words came through the receiver, but she wasn't prepared for the shock that hit her. She felt the whispered words, "Oh my God," hot against her hand, and then nothing, just a dull numbness.

"Mom, say something."

Lisa's voice sounded so scared. She suddenly seemed like a little girl again.

"It's O.K. honey. Yes, I'll tell Dad. No, I'll call you when I know what we're doing." Barb was surprised at how in control she was. "Lisa...I love you."

"I love you too, Mom. Tell Dad I love him."

Barb placed the receiver back on the wall, her hand resting there.

"Who was that?" asked Dan, coming into the kitchen. He looked so tired and trusting. What was she going to say to him?

"It was Lisa," she managed to blurt out before the tears started. Great sobs wracked her body as Dan grabbed her.

"What's wrong?" His face was puzzled and angry at the same time. Barb couldn't answer. "Answer me," he said roughly, "What is it?"

"Lisa," she managed to get out. "She's getting married."

Barb knew this would be the hard part -- what she had dreaded the most. Lisa was the oldest. Dan never said she was his favorite, but there was something about the way he talked about her that made Barb know she was -- and why not? Lisa had always made them feel proud -- good marks, nice friends, ambition, and drive. They both trusted her judgment. After all, she always thought everything through.

When she first came home and talked about joining the Peace Corps it came as a shock, but after hearing Lisa talk about why she wanted to do this they both calmed down. "Listen," she had told them. "I can get a lot of experience using my Spanish, and then when I come back I can do what I
want to do. It will be great on my resume. You know this insurance job isn't what I want. I just took it so I could get out on my own. If I do this for two years I'll be able to get a job as an interpreter. Where else could I get a chance like this? They couldn't argue with her.

Barb had tried to picture herself wanting to do something like this at Lisa's age. It seemed inconceivable. What she wouldn't have given for a new car, and an apartment of her own when she was twenty one. God, kids were different today.

She and Dan had been caught up in Lisa's excitement as she prepared to leave for the six week training session in Washington, D.C. It had made them feel like celebrities, telling their friends about Lisa and her new venture. Barb could tell a lot of them were glad it was her daughter and not theirs. People like that kind of story. It makes them feel a little better about their own kids.

When Lisa found out she was going to Belize City, they both looked at each other in puzzlement. "Belize City! Where in God's name is that!"

"Really Mom," Lisa had explained patiently, "it's a very small, very peaceful city in British Honduras." She had emphasized the word peaceful. Barb supposed that was to make them feel better.

Lisa had mentioned Dennis in several letters -- just that she had met someone from Chicago who liked doing the same kinds of things she did. Once, when they called, she said she had to hang up because Dennis was waiting. They were going for a ride. Barb tried to put it all together. Had she forgotten anything? "God, there must have been something I missed."

She felt deceived in some way. Not that she and Lisa had had a chummy mother-daughter relationship -- that wasn't their style -- but on the big decisions, Lisa had always talked things over with her. She liked Lisa's independence, yet it was good to know that Lisa respected her thoughts and feelings. Now this....

"Barb, what are you talking about? What do you mean married," shouted Dan, throwing her away from him. His eyes demanded an explanation.

How could she tell him his oldest daughter, his favorite, was marrying a stranger from Chicago -- someone she had only known for ten weeks -- getting married in a God forsaken country in Central America. Could he accept Lisa marrying a black man? Could she?

Have you ever pictured yourself paddling a canoe in the Canadian wilderness, gliding effortlessly through the mist, emerging into a sparkling clearing with water rhythmically lapping the rocky banks and elusive wildlife heedless of your presence? Or sleeping under a moonlight bath, soothed by the haunting call of the loon and the natural smells of pine and smoldering campfire? You and your partner, together with nature. If this idyllic image appeals to your romantic inclination, you are also likely to be tempted by the charm and challenge of restoring an ancient house. Consider carefully before you embark on a purchase which may alter the course of your life.

As you begin your journey, you'll be traveling against the current. The majority of your friends will be buying custom-built homes, their choices dependent upon the size of the Super-Spa bathroom, replete with exercise equipment and entertainment center; you will be lucky if your old home has a working bathroom. Your friends will be opting for a tennis court or a pool; you'll be hoping for storm windows. Thus, as you choose to paddle against the current, you are choosing a direction for your social life as well. You may gather a few friends for a roofing party once, but when you announce plans for a sheet-rocking gala, you'll find that they have already arranged to attend a jacuzzi party that day.

You begin any trip with a destination in mind. You picture the headlines in the Sunday Homes Section: "1700's SALTBOX RESTORED WITH MORE THAN ORIGINAL CHARM." The images in your mind exude character, warmth, and history: luxuriant plants and hand-polished antiques accent the glowing wood paneling; the cheerful hearth emits the aroma of spicy soup and fresh bread; the lovingly hand-made calico curtains with matching pillows and the earthen crocks filled with baby's breath reflect casual elegance; the cat curled up in the rocker beside a colorful basket of knitting completes this picture of tranquility.

Reality attacks with the first rainy day. Your first inkling that this trip is a mistake comes as you discover that the roof leaks, as does the cellar. Indeed, the whole picture looks rather dismal on a rainy day. For the first time you admit to the over-all dinginess of your surroundings and vaguely

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Defying this adage, you feverishly begin to clean. You spend the next several hours erasing remnants of resident rodents of years past and present. Then you decide to organize the closets, only to realize that there are none to organize. When you carry boxes up those charmingly crooked stairs, you constantly lose your balance and crack your head on the low doorways. In desperation for success, you decide to tackle just one corner and set up your knickknack shelf, hoping to make just one spot look like home. Alas, the small items slide off the smooth slanted surface, and you spend the rest of the day designing shims to level the furniture. Hardly a productive day, you say? Get used to it...

As the moisture from outside penetrates the house, you become increasingly aware of the natural smells of this paradise. Centuries of accumulated smells do not resemble the lemon wax and home baked bread you had imagined. Instead, you are forced to admit that something stinks. Is it a dead animal under those wide, golden floor boards? Is it rotten wood from a leaky drain? Or is it just plain musty, damp dirt? The answer is probably "Yes." You have no choice but to learn to live with the natural smells of an old house.

Occasionally you'll drift into a calm eddy, and your dream will surface once more. You'll finish work on one room and recline, nostalgically absorbing the success of your labor. You'll reflect upon tidbits of ancient lore you've unearthed and speculate on the tales of pirates and soldiers who once occupied these rooms. Your spirits will be bolstered by your ability to portage around the hurdles. But soon you'll realize that this is not the end of your trial. In truth, you still have far to go. You must prepare for the whitewater of winter.

Winter. Now you find how little "not much" insulation is. The dog's dish freezes to the kitchen floor. Since pipes freeze daily, your hairdryer becomes an indispensable thawing tool. The insatiable fuel tank moans for refills bi-weekly, and you are advised to replace the antiquated furnace. After only a few days without heat, the new system will be operational. In the meantime, you huddle around that cheerful hearth, kept aflame with charge slips from Grossman's protesting that winter is no time to run aground.

As if on cue, your old acquaintances speed by in their power boat, suggesting a cruise to the Bahamas. You wave them on and gaze longingly in their wake. You cannot join them, for you must not leave your pipes to freeze and burst, and besides, your resources are depleted. Their appearance has rocked your boat, however, and you know full well that you have chosen the wrong craft.
Catherine N. DeNunzio

Before they dive like kamikazes,
The terns,
Spotting some crab or fish below,
Dance above

Suspended
As they beat their wings,
They defy one pull
While another
Seduces the waves to come in
To the shore.

Yesterday
Six swallows on a goalpost sat
As I ran laps.

Four of them, young, unsteady,
Like empty seats on a slowing ferris wheel,
But they with only their small feet
And neophyte feathers
To save them from
Toppling
Over
Heads first.

I ran another lap.

I rounded the bend.

This time, only
The two
Were on the goalpost,
Supervising, while
One of the four
Wondered over the grass below his feet.

I rounded the second curve.

Cautiously low to the ground, they flew
Towards their sibling and parents,
Hollering as they went.

I rounded the bend once more.

A young swallow flew
Directly at me.
But he did not mean to.
He's like I was on my first
Both-feet-off-the-ground
Bike ride

At the last --
As I considered ducking --
He swerved
Hollering as he did.
I remember
At the last,
Funding --
Somehow --
The way to turn
Before the tree
And squealing as I did.

A day came when I finally
Hovered
On my own, on my bike
Until I could not help but give in to the pull
To one side
Or the other.

The terns tuck
Eager for their targets below.

The water becomes a mine
As the terns,
Swift, streamlined,
Barrage the surface below.

They recover,
Success in their beaks,
And launch another hunt.

As a ten-year-old I didn't know too much, but I knew my parents were always right. That is not to say they did not make mistakes, but, in my mind, there was no question about the correctness of their errors.

Mom, Dad, and I had just spent a week away from our Brooklyn apartment. It was the family's yearly retreat to a country bungalow complete with pot-bellied stove and paperbacks. Mom always seemed to get halfway through the same book.

For me there was fun in those purple Catskill hills. I tubed down a river that actually popped with fish, swam in a crystal lake, and bicycled on a gravel hill so steep I had to steer in wide S's to get to the top. Wurtsboro was just about as far from Brooklyn as the sun is from the moon.

During our stay, Mom and Dad smiled a lot and turned browner than at any other time of the year. Once, on the screened porch, I heard Mom whisper, "Wouldn't it be nice?" They were different here. Dad spent the whole day in baggy pants and a white T-shirt. He fished for catfish and Mom cleaned and fried the catch for dinner.

Long ago we had gone fishing off the ferry pier in Brooklyn. There were people on every pile. Someone got his fishhook stuck in Dad's arm. It bled so much I was afraid he was going to die. I cried, but he just clipped off one end of that hook and slid it like an unthreaded needle stitched through his skin.

We left Wurtsboro on a Saturday afternoon after Mom finished cleaning the kitchen floor. Most of our Brooklyn neighbors sat on the steamy stoops of their apartment houses. Noisy players socked punchballs on the sidewalk. Squatting between parked cars, two boys got ready to scream, "Car, car, C-A-R, stick your head in T-A-R," to drivers passing by. Their chant stopped at "stick" when they recognized our car.

Monday morning, Dad returned to work in a suit and tie. On his walk to the BMT, he was greeted by a pigeon and a wet splat on the side of his head. Back home, he ran into the bathroom with Mom and quickly came out with a slick head of water-smacked hair. "Good luck!" was his abrupt mutter as
he shut the front door. It almost sounded like a question.

At six o’clock, the el rumbled in and out of the New Utrecht Avenue Station. The neighborhood, as usual, trembled. By 6:10 Dad walked in, his expression much too severe to still be fixed on a dirty bird. His tie turned crooked under his collar. The shirt puffed sloppily above his belt. If I didn’t know better I’d have guessed that sticks filled his pant legs and lead, his shoes.

He looked more himself by dinner, but his news was as unexpected as his earlier appearance. “The company’s moving to Connecticut,” was all I heard. Mom, turning white, listened to the details. I cried angry tears and inwardly shouted my own questions. “Where was this place anyway? Who lived there? Did its beaches have parachute rides?”

The next day, the goodbyes over, Mom bent gently to me to say, “You’re quiet today.” For a moment in the rush she touched my shoulder.

My turtle dish shared the back seat of the 1955 Plymouth with me. I braced the bowl against my knees to keep from shaking my hard-shelled pets. Silent and dry-eyed, I sat through the three hour ride to Connecticut steadying my turtles all the way.

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We took three trips to this northern state. Between pouts, I kept busy with the usual spotting of out-of-state license plates and counting of telephone poles. Along with these, I played even more serious games in my head. “What if I lived here? Who goes to this school anyway?” Even though Connecticut looked so different -- tobacco farms, single family homes, no sidewalks or stoops -- it had a Carvels, just like Brooklyn.

Dad and Mom bought a home, picked out a lot, and asked for two extra outlets on the breezeway. My usual move in a game I couldn’t win was to quit. I couldn’t exactly quit my family. It was easier to cry.

The eve of the move remains a blur of aunts, uncles, cousins, and neighbors hugging, kissing, and patting me. I felt like an abused puppy. When everyone finally left, the three of us paced through the warehouse of boxes that used to be our home. Mom’s face was worn when she said, “Best get to bed. Tomorrow’s a big day.”

Lying wide awake, I focused on each corner of the room. The walls were as bare as the ceilings. I thought I could weep myself to a soft sleep that would dream away tomorrow’s move. The tears came, but not the peace.

I slipped out of bed toward Mom’s and Dad’s room. The bedroom light assured me they were still awake as it lit a safe path through the cluttered hallway.

Something made me stop at their door. Dad’s back was turned to me and Mom grasped his shoulder . . . no . . . those were her arms wrapped around him. His head resting on her shoulder, he shook. And he sobbed, “I don’t know Dee, I just don’t know.”

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Kim Jackson

Laura looked up at me in amazement. "I didn't realize how much thinking writing involves and how much writing can help you think."

She left my office and I got that special feeling I always get when a student discovers something through a writing assignment, especially that writing is an integral part of the learning process. One student making the discovery was worth the frustration of battling with twenty students cloaked in the armour of "I hate to write" and "I can't write," or the toughest of all to penetrate, "Why should I write?"

Now, as I listen to the debates about the fate of American education and the reasons why Johnny can't write, I contemplate answering part XI of the application for the teacher certification program: an "expression of your personal convictions regarding your potential as a professional" or more succinctly, "Why do you want to be a teacher?" For the first time, but probably not the last, as I am assured by veteran teachers, I must question my motivation for wanting to save poor Johnny.

I began teaching for the money. This may sound ironic since everyone knows and complains that teachers aren't paid in proportion to their responsibilities of cultivating the minds of future generations. But I needed something to pay for my last semester of graduate school, and teaching freshman composition was more attractive than working as a waitress at the college hangout. Also, the fringe benefits, tuition waiver, and health insurance convinced me that the job was worth the undertaking. Unfortunately, no one warned me that I could become committed to the endeavor.

I was amazed at the attitudes toward writing I encountered in my first year of teaching. To these relatively bright young people, writing papers was merely a requirement of the course and nothing more. They realized they would be asked to do any such tasks in the "real world." Many of these students viewed paper assignments as another excuse to pull an all-nighter rather than as an exercise of the mind. Grading papers and teaching grammar I had expected,
Janie gloried in the power of her mandibles. This strength, this leverage that enabled her to lift and carry food almost as big as herself, was what she had been born for. The food was enormous. It would feed many of her sisters. It also kept her from seeing exactly where she was going, so that she occasionally bumped into something and had to back up and try again. That didn’t matter, though, because her sisters ahead of her and behind her, going back and forth, had left a clear path for her to follow by smell. The path was the path to home. It smelled like home. Janie felt the deep, enormous joy of doing supremely well what she had been born to do, of knowing exactly what to do and how to do it. She had been born knowing, not like some unfortunate creatures, who had to find out, and keep making mistakes.

"Janie! Where are you, sweetie? I need the garbage pail back again! --Oh, there you are. What are you looking at? Did you rinse the pail, honey? Well, rinse it now, angel baby, and come on in. It’s almost time for lunch, and Daddy needs to get back to work."

Janie picked up the pail and carried it slowly toward the outside faucet beside the back steps, stopping every few feet to decide which of her mother’s irises she liked best. She disapproved firmly of the muddy-colored ones, but the pale blue ones were nice, and so were the deep reddish ones. She decided that her favorite was the pink. She leaned close and touched a yellow beard with her finger tip, inhaling the faint fragrance that breathed up from the flower’s throat.

Janie’s upper petals arched proudly upward, with just the right degree of curve so that the three met with the smallest overlap of their gently ruffled edges and created a space of pearl-pink light in the bright sunshine. Her lower petals curved out, down, and out again, not drooping, but held just so, rigid along the central vein and delicate from there to the flaring edges. Janie knew just how to hold her petals, and knew that she had only two days before she would begin to fold them inward into a neatly rolled little package. She breathed her faint, fresh scent up into the arch of pink light, creating, she suddenly realized, a place for the Most Special Strangeness. She had never found it in so small a place before. Usually it was in places she could walk in to, although stopping at the edge was one of the ways she knew the Most Special Strangeness was there. But if she stopped and paid attention for a moment, she could always walk in to the space slowly and sit down in the middle carefully, and enjoy the Most Special Strangeness for a while. In fact, she had the feeling that the Strangeness liked her to do that.

"Janie!"

"I’m coming!" She carried the pail quickly to the outside faucet and turned on the water full force, enjoying the way it made bubbles down the side of the pail and went round and round at the bottom. She wondered if the water would go round the other way if she held the pail just right, but she never found out, because the pail was filling up with water, and her mother was waiting for her. Hastily she turned off the faucet and emptied the pail over the flagstones laid down for that purpose.

She glanced at her hands and decided they were clean enough. Catching her mother’s eye as she sat down at the kitchen table, Janie realized that she had seen her looking at her hands instead of washing them, but Mom just grinned instead of sending her to the sink. The sandwich was her favorite kind, cream cheese and jelly, and Mom had cut it the way Janie liked best, in eight pieces. Janie hated getting jelly on her cheeks the way she always did when the sandwich was cut in just two pieces.

Mom was saying, “So he says the only thing to be concerned about is if there’s any real withdrawal.” Janie listened anxiously for a moment. Sometimes when her parents talked about withdrawals and deposits they got a little tense with each other.

This didn’t seem to be one of those times, though. Her father said, “There’s certainly no intellectual deficit.”

"Lord, no. That PBS special about ants the other night went down as slick as a whistle, including the technicalities."

"So what it comes down to is that Richard thinks we don’t have anything to worry about."

"Right," said Mom.

Richard was their next door neighbor. He was also a shrink, Janie knew, because she had heard her father call him that one day. Ever since then, Janie had been watching
him with great interest, but he never seemed to get any smaller. Maybe he was careful never to wash in very hot water. Janie was glad she wasn't a shrink. No matter how hot her bath water was, she just kept growing.

Janie looked up to see her father smiling affectionately at her. "Good old Janie-bumps," he said. "Always mooing around."

From her deep blue, starry sky, Janie shone down benignly on the entire world, turning the sidewalks blue and covering the smallest animals in shadows of inky blackness. All the well-fed ants were asleep in their nest. The irises were all lighter and darker shades of the same color, her color, the color of cool, gentle light spreading over the toy-sized streets and houses.

Joseph was blowing out of town in the predictable whirlwind of frantic panic. It had been ten months of stability and luxury nestled peacefully in the Carmel Valley. Now he was off again and wondering why.

Here he was, leaving what was possibly one of the most scenic spots on earth. About ninety miles south of San Francisco, it had miles of rocky coastline along which he jogged daily on paths winding through fields of wildflowers. Every run provided a new adventure. One day monarchs were so abundant they had to be brushed out of the way. Another time, a pod of water-spouting whales provided the show. Once the fearless grace of a doe only ten feet away made him pause. And, just beyond the surf, he could often spot sea otters dining on abalone while seagulls and cormorants soared overhead. It was a Sierra Club paradise. Fog billowed off the breakers and drifted through cypress and pines, dissipating as it crossed the peninsula until the sun finally burst through at the valley mouth. Here, on a quiet hillside, he had found a magnificent house for rent.

It had seemed ideal, but the rent had been well out of range of his meager teacher's salary. However, some timely creative thinking and inspired negotiating allowed him to move in, in exchange for a few major improvements and some minor repairs. To the casual observer there was nothing that the place could possibly need. But he had worked out a list of jobs with his landlady which included enclosing the carport, oiling the cedar shakes which covered the roof and sides, painting the trim, fixing the gutters, repairing the gates and a few other odds and ends. Nothing impossible but, as usual, put off until the last minute -- literally. Now she was due back any day, and he had just found the original list with a couple of things on it that he had completely forgotten about.

"You always let things go until the last minute," his mother had scolded him when he was a boy. Now, at forty-four, he could still hear the lecture, "And then you get all tied up in knots trying to get everything done." It was a good thing she couldn't witness this performance. At first light, he exploded from his bed and climbed up to the roof to wash the skylights. And now, there he was, half an hour
before departure, still clad only in his undershorts, varnishing the back door -- the last of the minor repairs.

"It doesn't have to be perfect, you know. There'll always be something more to do." Now he felt his stomach churn as her voice carried all the way from the shower in the back bedroom; "Did you call and change the cab? We'll never make it at ten fifteen."

Just then the phone rang, and he lunged for it. "You have a job for next year," the personnel secretary announced.

"That's great, Renee!" His hand holding the varnish brush shot up joyfully creating an archipelago of tiny satin gloss droplets on the kitchen floor in the process. Glancing over his shoulder, he caught a glimpse of his landlady's cat, Cindy, taking a tentative step into one of the mining dots.

Stretching the cord back to the door, he attacked the bottom panels while Renee explained more details about September. There wasn't time to consider the fact that he was now supposed to be a fifth grade teacher for the first time. He had to clean up fast.

Ten o'clock. That left fifteen minutes to pack and straighten up before the cab arrived. As he stepped outside to retrieve the bed sheets from the clothesline he had hastily constructed when the dryer quit, he saw a yellow car pulling into the driveway. "I'm a little early," the driver apologized.

"Would you like to come in and have some coffee?"

"No thanks. I'll just wait out in the cab."

Clad in two fresh sheets and still clutching the wet brush, Joseph watched the driver retreat in confusion. Certainly, he rationalized, any seasoned cabbie had seen worse over the years than a toga-clad house painter.

Right on schedule the trapezius muscle in Joseph's neck tightened as he threw some clothes into his diving bag. Minutes later, he stormed out the door in a flurry of luggage and doubts. Avoiding Jan's impatient stare from the cab, he paused for one last look. There, right in the middle of the skylight, an inconsiderate bird had proved her right. There was always something more to do.

It was pure Monterey at the Greyhound Station. This town on the bay accepted a strange balance of military types,
Now that the journey had actually begun, it seemed much easier than he thought it would be. The hand he was holding was far more important than a mere place could be. Maybe he was on the right track after all.

"Good riddance to the most despicable man that has ever passed for a husband and the most godawful marriage that has ever existed since the beginning of time," fumed Sheila as she aimed her speeding car down Route 91. Sheila and Peter were separated again. This time the parting of the way had been initiated by her and would be permanent she hoped. After all it had been a really crummy fourteen years, full of accusations, resentments, sniping and anything else Sheila and Peter could think of to hurt each other.

Sheila remembered their last estrangement; that one was Peter's idea, not hers. The kids and she had been at the hospital all afternoon visiting her very sick father. Peter, of course, elected not to join them as he did not want to waste his weekends doing depressing things. When they returned to the house, they discovered that Peter was long gone. So that his little family wouldn't wonder where he was, however, he left them a note on the kitchen table announcing that he had moved out of their home and into the house and arms of a loving "Miss Wonderful" who truly appreciated him. "Bastard, typical of him to leave notes behind like dirty fingerprints instead of facing me," Sheila silently raged. Jeannie, then a vulnerable and sensitive twelve-year-old, had been the one to find the note which was held firmly on the table with one of Peter's ever-full ashtrays. "He didn't even take time to empty his damn butts," Sheila thought seething. "Whatever he touches turns into garbage anyway."

Poor Jeannie, devastated, crushed, trembling -- "What will we do now, Mommy?"

And Karen, then nine, tougher than Jeannie or at least trying to be -- "Oh, who cares; he is always such a pain anyway. Maybe now I can get the mouse I wanted without him here to say 'no'."

And Sheila, wanting to be a comforting adult, mature, in charge, was anything else but. With her father in the hospital for so long and in such critical condition and with her weary mother completely drained from his extended illness, she could not look to her parents for support as she always had done before when being Peter's not so beloved wife had become an overwhelming burden for her. And so without her folks to fall...
back on, she really wasn't "Mommy" at all; instead, she
behaved like one of her frightened children. There they were,
three abandoned babes in a big house, except one of the kids
was thirty.

While Peter was off with his lady love being appreciated,
Sheila cried and blamed everyone but herself for Peter's
deserting them. "If only Peter was like my brother John,
responsible, caring. If only Daddy weren't sick, if only the
kids were better behaved, if, if, if . . . ." In between the
tears she asked herself how she could miss the bastard. Did
she really miss him or was she afraid to be on her own for the
first time in her life?

Sheila never got to answer her own questions, however,
because after about six weeks of living in the best of all
possible worlds with "Miss Wonderful" her estranged husband,
tearful and contrite, crawled back home. He was shrewd, of
course; he contacted the kids first to plead his cause lest he
should meet some resistance from Sheila, his suddenly beloved
and much missed spouse. He needn't have worried, though. She
was all too glad to have her provider back. The much relieved
Sheila hardly listened to Peter's lame explanation of how his
dream girl had turned into a smothering witch, nor did she
listen to the nagging voice inside her head which said, "Here
we go again, fool." Instead she convinced herself that this
time things were different. They had learned their lessons,
had grown up: surely they would now live happily ever after.

And so they played at their fairy tale, for awhile any-
way. Peter left her notes on the table once again, but this
time the message was considerably changed from the now almost
forgotten letter of farewell poor Jeannie had found weeks
before. "I am leaving you, bitch" became "just a note to say
I love you."

Sheila too danced to the romantic tune which now perme-
ated their home. She had read somewhere that the way to a
man's heart was through his stomach, so she became "superchef"
as she prepared roast pork, standing rib roast, Yorkshire
pudding and many other culinary delights.

She knew, of course, that stomach was only step one; bed
was really where it counted, for Peter anyway. She was deter-
mimed to become Peter's mistress once again as she had been so
many years ago before she had wakened into the real world of
balancing check books, dirty diapers, and bruised egos. Bed-
time found her with hair combed, fresh make-up applied, and
filmasy nightie instead of usual curlers, Clearasil, and mother
hubbard flannel sack.

For awhile at least, Sheila and Peter managed to convince
themselves that they had in fact conquered the demons of
matrimonial disharmony and were born again in the marriage
sense. The children, of course, were wiser than their not
too bright parents, and they nervously waited for the other
shoe to drop. One would ask, "Are you and Daddy still happy
together?"

The other would inquire, "Do you think Dad ever thinks
about that other lady?" Sheila handled this about as maturely
as she had the separation. Like a blind little girl playing
the confident wife and mother, she refused to look at the fact
that nothing had ever been resolved and so she assured them
and herself that all was wonderful.

Before too long, the other shoe did drop of course. The
sarcasm, insidiously, sneakily, began to edge it's way into the
conversation of the unsuspecting lovers. And so the play that
was their lives turned toward the tragic once again. Peter
would ask, "Did you speak to your mother today? After all
you two big doctors need to confer on your father's condition
every minute you know."

Sheila responded to his stinging remarks with nasty com-
mentary of her own. "Look, just because your family doesn't
care about each other doesn't mean that all families operate
that way. You should take a lesson from us and learn what
love is really about."

Within another few weeks, Peter began spending more and
more time away from home. He would often escape to the summer
place in Old Lyme and say to the kids, "Come on, let's go to
the cottage and let her stay home with her precious parents.
She always ruins everything with her damn long face anyway."

The girls were torn between wanting to join their friends
at the shore and sailing the Blue Jay their father had bought
them and leaving their mother at home alone. "Come on, Mommy,
they would plead, "you'll have a good time; you've got people
at the beach who like you as much as they like Daddy." But
no, Sheila chose to remain behind and dwell about her lonely
condition. And so they would depart and she would pace in the
empty rooms, unsuccessfully attempt to read, watch television,
or knit, and would finally drive to the summer place to join
Peter and the kids. She would make sure, however, everyone
knew what a favor she was doing Peter by gracing the cottage
with her presence. "Now that I'm here, what have you got
planned for us to do?" Sheila would querulously demand of
Peter. "It had better be something I like for a change."
As the summer progressed their relationship deteriorated even further. The critical point in the now very sick relationship came one hot evening when Peter had had one drink too many at the home of a friend where the "crew" had gathered for the evening. Sheila had become bored with the same people, the same old stories and what she referred to as "the same crap in general." She decided that she would leave the little gathering right then and there instead of subjecting herself any longer to another one of their host's never-ending tales about when all the guys were on the track team together. "I'm going, people." Sheila tried to cover her boredom with a light, friendly tone. "I think I need a little air. Peter, why don't you stay and visit for awhile. I can manage to walk myself home." Peter said that that would be fine and that he'd see her later. She felt relieved that he seemed content with her leaving early.

Her sense of relief was shattered however when Peter arrived home several hours and several gin and tonics later. He stormed about the room berating her about how she acted better than everyone else and how everyone thought she was a deadhead. As he railed, his fury, fueled by the liquor he'd consumed, was no longer containable and he drove his point home with a stinging smack across Sheila's face. Hurt shocked and angry, she packed kids and bags into her car and fled back to the city. The children, aware of their mother's agitated state, kept a very low profile as they pushed themselves into the cushions of the back seat of the flying car.

And so it was only her own voice that Sheila heard against the backdrop of the roaring engine -- "Peter and I are separated again. This time the parting of the way has been initiated by me and will be permanent I hope . . . ."

At the end of my music lesson, Miss Gordon smiled and said, "This piece will be perfect for the recital next week."

"What's a recital?"

"Oh, it's nothing to worry about. All of my students gather in the social hall of the Methodist Church and present a program for their friends and relatives. I'm sure you'll enjoy the experience."

I wasn't so sure, but when I discussed it with my mother she echoed Miss Gordon's confidence. "'The Elf and the Fairy' is such a pretty piece; everyone will love it."

"Suppose I make a mistake?"

"That won't make any difference. The room will be filled with mothers and fathers, and a lot of nice people, none of whom know anything about music."

Fears allayed, spirits high, I spent the first two days of recital week selecting those friends who were to attend, and became quite the celebrity, until I was confronted at the playground on Wednesday by Joanne.

Joanne also studied with Miss Gordon, but she was not a friend, because, well, she was not particularly friendly. She was a year older than I, and to me all fourth graders combined to form that classification known as They. Joanne with her freckles, scrawny frame, thin brown braids, gold-rimmed glasses, and mean disposition constituted a She, a force to be reckoned with.

Joanne and two of her henchmen blocked my path as I headed for the third grade line just forming by the school doors.

"You lie, Elaine!"

"Lie? What are you talking about?"

"You're not playing 'The Elf and the Fairy' for the recital, because you can only play that after two years."
"Well, maybe it's a different 'Elf and the . . . .'."

"Hah! There is no different 'Elf and the Fairy'."

Her henchmen nodded and also scoffed. Friends moved away, some quickly, some reluctantly, from trouble and perhaps even a fraud. My teacher, Miss Coleman called, "Girls, line up." Regimentation and multiplication absorbed me the rest of the morning, and by lunch time the incident was forgotten.

Unfortunately, Joanne and company were not afflicted by amnesia. As she and her friends hid in ambush by the Grange Hall, I leisurely walked home for lunch with friends, laughing and chatting. As a soft spring rain began to fall, we all reached for candy-caned umbrellas dangling from our wrists. At that moment Joanne leapt out at me screaming, "Liar, liar!" I froze, then flung up both arms, as I made ready to flee. But I froze again as I watched my umbrella swirl up from my wrist and flip Joanne's glasses from her nose to the ground.

Suddenly crowds of angry adults appeared, swarming around the smashed glasses, Joanne, and me. Some lady told me to go home immediately. Another lady embraced hysterical Joanne, who did not return to school that afternoon. Mother was buying me a dress for the recital, so I had lunch at my grandmother's. She was always so happy to see me, I could not tell her a thing.

By the time I reached home after school, Mother had heard from Joanne's mother. Evidently, Mrs. Bradley had heard about the incident, and she was more concerned about me than the pair of glasses. Mother was confused about what had happened, but she was sure Joanne and I should forget the argument and concentrate on our solos. Dad said that Joanne was playing a march by a very good composer. He never said anything bad about anyone.

Believing that all problems were resolved, I looked forward to Thursday, but Joanne had set another trap. This I discovered when I was summoned before the principal's fourth grade class. As I walked into the room, Joanne began a reprise of her performance by the Grange. She screamed hysterically about glasses and lies. I launched into an antiphon of wails about elves, fairies, umbrellas, glasses and nasty girls. Overwhelmed, Miss Lewis yelled, "Stop that, both of you! Go and fight no more!"

I was positive I did not want to play the piano ever again. Furthermore, recitals were definitely not enjoyable and schools were dumb places. But in his gentle way, Dad persuaded me to participate in the recital, since I had worked so hard on my solo.

Friday flew by. Mother was to take me to the hairdresser to get curls after school, and I could hardly wait to slip into my new blue taffeta dress. It had short puffy sleeves and a skirt that flared over a crinoline. I described it in detail to the hairdresser as she produced a halo of curls all over my head with a carefully wielded curling iron.

As mother and I rode the trolley home, people seated nearby smiled and asked all the questions people usually ask little girls. All of this positive attention soothed me, healed me, and removed thoughts of the horrible Joanne far from me. Then, a few blocks from home, conversation suddenly ceased. Passengers stared quizzically, then tore their eyes away. Mother turned to me gasping in alarm, "My God, there goes another one! Your hair is uncurling!" We rushed from the trolley to the homes of several neighbors in a frantic search for a curling iron. It was found; my hair was recurler, and I reluctantly bathed and dressed. Few, if any, words were spoken at dinner. Recital preparations had exhausted us all.

Mother and Dad rallied as we drove to the church. As I was deposited with the rest of the students in the back of the hall, Mother said, "Just remember to smile, and don't worry about mistakes. No one here knows anything about music. They're just nice people."

Miss Gordon came over to proffer encouragement and last minute advice to each of us. "Now Elaine, you must adjust the piano stool before you begin to play. Just take your time. If it isn't right the first time, wind it a little lower, and smile. This is supposed to be fun."

And it was. My friends and I had fun counting the length of the applause for each participant. After a piece was played, each student bowed, walked from the platform, down the center of the social hall to the row of seats along the back. Usually, the applause stopped after they had passed ten rows or twelve rows. If the applause stopped after three or four rows, we felt badly for those students, and whispered, "You were good," because they really were; they just forgot to smile. Joanne's braids were unbound, and her hair fell in tight little rivulets down the back of her yellow dress. She nodded her head with each beat of her march, played with expression, and didn't make one mistake. I listened very carefully. But I guess parents don't like marches. She got eight rows.
The first-year students were placed in the middle of the recital. Miss Gordon nodded at me when it was my turn. The first thing I did when I reached the platform was turn to everyone and smile. Mother was right. They all smiled back. I climbed on the stool, but it was much too high. Slipping off, I wound it down, tried it, slipped off, then wound it down one more time. This time it was fine, and everyone was still smiling.

"The Elf and the Fairy" was a wonderful piece to play. It began below middle C, with a series of four "do-mi-sols" up the keyboard. It was fun to lift the left hand over the right hand, then crash into a sforzando, and end with short, crisp staccatos. My piece was over much too soon, but everyone seemed to like it. After my bow, people smiled as I walked back to my seat, and the applause lasted for eighteen of the twenty rows!

Barbara Webber, a high school student, ended the program with a very difficult piece that was so fast you could tell it was a scherzo without looking at the program. Maybe no one had told the audience about scherzos though; Barbara only got fifteen rows.

After the recital was over, I bounded to Miss Gordon with my friends to whisper: "I won! I won!" She looked very surprised, smiled, cleared her throat, then said, "Could you drop by my house after school on Monday?"

"Sure," was my reply as I dashed to the circle of friends and relatives who were getting ready to pile into cars and go to Vail's for ice cream. Most of that weekend I slept.

Monday, after school, I walked to Miss Gordon's. Her street was by the water tower behind the school. When I arrived, she invited me into the kitchen and gave me a glass of milk and a saucer of warm Toll House cookies. We talked about the recital for a while until she paused to look at me, not in an angry manner, but with a frown upon her face. "Elaine, about the applause. You do realize that there were students who played pieces which were more complex than yours was; in fact, there were students who played... well..., better than you did."

"Of course!" I replied giggling. "Wasn't it funny. The audience was very nice, but they certainly didn't know anything about music."

For some reason, she didn't laugh right away. But once the laughter came it lasted a long time. She rose from the table and wrapped me up almost a dozen cookies in a sheet of wax paper. As we walked to the door, she picked up two old copies of Etude Magazine and tucked them under my arm. "There are some pieces that you'll enjoy playing in both issues. Just return them in September."

I thanked her. We exchanged goodbyes, and that was the end of my first year of piano lessons.
REMEMBER, I'M SEVEN NOW

Renee Schatteman

Tessie Johnson whined to her mother who stood bathing Mattie, Tessie's infant brother, in the kitchen sink.

"Why can't I sleep over at Josephine's? I'm already seven, and you let Cindy sleep over at her friends' when she was only six and a half." Mrs. Johnson pondered as she splashed water over the baby's short, pudgy chest.

"Tarn these kids," she thought, "why do they always remember these things so well? I guess it's only fair to let Tessie go, but I hate to send her to the Hallidays' house." She had been concerned about Tessie's friendship with Josephine ever since the Hallidays moved into the neighborhood last month. She knew little about the parents, only that they loved to socialize. She had heard that they went out many evenings of the week and often came home late and tipsy. But what worried Mrs. Johnson even more was that Josephine was a spoiled child, and she dreaded the thought that Tessie might start imitating her friend's grandiose ideas and expectations.

But Mrs. Johnson also did not want to govern her child's friendships. (Her extensive training as a mother had taught her that children select certain friends because they need them for some reason at that particular time in their lives.) Because she was experiencing these conflicting feelings, she hesitated to respond to Tessie's appeal. Instead, she pulled Mattie out of the cool water, wrapped him in a thick towel and kissed his wet cheek. She brought the baby over and placed him in her daughter's thin, frail arms so that she could go drain the sink. But Tessie wouldn't let her mother go so easily.

"Now, can I?"
"Shhh! Not so loud .... Kiss your baby brother, Tessie. Isn't he a precious gem?" Because Tessie sensed that her mother was stalling, she gave Mattie only a quick peck, but she had to stop and laugh when he reached up in response and pulled on her nose.

"Okay, Tessie," Mrs. Johnson finally answered, "you can go -- but only on one condition. If anything goes wrong at the Hallidays', you've got to promise that you'll never ask to sleep over again."

"All right," Tessie responded gleefully, "but I'll be fine; remember, I'm seven now." Before Mrs. Johnson could add any further admonitions, Tessie had pushed the baby back in her arms, scampered thought the dining room, and leaped up the stairs two at a time to pack her bag.

When Tessie reached the upstairs hall, she passed Peter and Edmund, two other younger brothers, who appeared to be practicing their headstands against the walls. Actually, they were competing to see which one could stay upside down the longest. Tessie got down on her knees and put her head on the floor so that she could tease them properly.

"Guess what, you guys? I'm sleeping over at Josephine's tonight, and you can't sleep over anywhere for two more years." Peter found it difficult to respond from this position — he had been upside down for seven minutes already —, so he brought his legs down and shouted at her defensively.

"So what? Tonight's Friday, so it's 'change-beds-night' anyways." That was a habit the Johnson children had been practicing for a number of years. They each started off their adventurous week-ends by sleeping in someone else's bed.

"That's not the same thing," Tessie cried stubbornly, "and besides, Josephine has a TV in her room." The boys could not match this boast — the only TV the family owned was in the recreation room, and it had been on the blitz for two months.

Tessie left her now glum and jealous brother and confidently marched into her room to gather everything she'd need. She pulled the pillow out from under the spread and shoved her pajama down to the bottom of the pillow case. To this she added her toothbrush, her copy of Stuart Little, a deck of cards, two Barbie dolls dressed in evening gowns, and a shabby, old radio that she and her sister, Cindy, listened to under the covers at night. She then ran up to the attic, where her three older brothers slept, to find a sleeping bag in the cedar closer. Meanwhile, Mrs. Johnson beckoned to the kids to come for dinner.

Tessie found it hard to eat because she was so excited but forced herself to finish everything to please her mother. Her brothers were not nearly so concerned with their plates. Tessie observed them as they slyly attempted to get rid of their vegetables without actually consuming them. Peter clicked his peas one at a time so that they dropped behind the radiator at the end of the table, while Edmund chopped on his asparagus once or twice before spitting it out in the napkin he courteously brought to his face. Tessie was quite familiar with these tactics herself, but tonight she was irritated by them.

"You guys are such babies," she kissed when her parents left the room. She then stuck the last bit of asparagus from her plate into her mouth, chewed it without allowing her tongue to touch it, and doused it down with an enormous gulp of milk. After clearing her spotless plate from the table, she grabbed her bag, kissed her parents good-bye, and promised to be home early the next morning. In her great excitement, she transgressed normal procedure and used the front door instead of the back. She jumped the imaginary hop-scotch board that ran down the front walk and skipped all the way to Josephine's house.

Josephine was at the door when Tessie arrived, and they both released high-pitched squeals of delight as they ran toward each other. After obediently greeting Mr. and Mrs. Halliday, the girls rushed up to Josephine's room to unload Tessie's belongings before plopping themselves in front of the television to watch "Here Comes the Bride" and "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea" with a package of Pop-Tarts from the kitchen. Tessie glanced around during the shows and wished she too could have a room
like this. Josephine had her own bed, and, better yet, it was a canopy bed with ruffled lace that draped down from the edges of the overhanging frame. Her dresser was enormous, and on top she had neatly arranged her knickknacks and her brush and mirror set. (Tessie's dresser had been moved into the hall when her parents put up a crib for Mattie in the room she already shared with Cindy.) Best of all, Josephine had her own TV and stereo. Seeing all these luxuries, Tessie decided and, to her friend the items she had lugged over in her pillow case — somehow, they didn't belong in this wonderful world that Tessie knew could never be hers.

When the second show ended at eleven o'clock (an hour Tessie rarely saw at home), Josephine pointed out the bathroom that was attached to her room, and Tessie entered, armed with toothbrush and pajamas, and elated over the privacy contained there. She tried to picture what must have occurred at her own house just a few hours before. She could see Dad lining the kids up in the tub, cleaning first their fronts and then the command "Turn Around" so he could scrub their back sides also. Then she imagined each of the boys scampering out of the bathroom after having been towed down, only to be retrieved again when Dad shouted "Brush-Teeth-Time!" But in Josephine's bathroom, there were no shouts, no lines, and no fights over the toothpaste; instead, Josephine was lucky enough to have her own personal towels, a bottle of bubblebath, and a "Micky Mouse" electric toothbrush.

When she finished getting ready for bed, Tessie began to unroll her sleeping bag on the floor as Josephine was washing up. Her energy had hardly been exhausted by the evening's activities. As she waited for her friend, Tessie began to devise games they could play in the dark. Cindy and Josephine had developed numerous nighttime activities to be played in their big double bed after the lights were shut off. Sometimes they would arm wrestle or foot wrestle; sometimes, when they were in a combative mood, they would draw an imaginary border down the middle of the bed and challenge one another to cross the line; but most frequently, they played "house." Cindy's pillow, at the head of the bed, would be transformed into a kitchen unit — sink, stove, and oven all included. Tessie's pillow, or rather the grand piano, would be pushed down to the lower end. In this contained, little world, they had everything they needed. They could cook, eat, sleep, and sing. Tessie was about to suggest this same game to her friend when she came back in the room, but Josephine cut her short.

"Tessie, what are you doing? You can't sleep here. I can't fall asleep if there's anyone else in my room. You have to go in the guest room." Tessie was shocked but too embarrassed to protest. She collected her things, moved over to the next room, and crawled between the covers of the pull-out couch that seemed ridiculously large for her small figure.

As Tessie lay alone in the darkness, she began to conjure up old fears she had at night in her own bed. First, she remembered how she felt whenever Cindy fell asleep before she did. She always feared that her own sister would transmute into a monstrous beast in her sleep. Well, at least she wouldn't have to worry about that here — but what about the alligators? At home, the sisters knew that these night creatures which slithered along the rug could never climb up onto their bed, but this couch was so close to the floor! The way she reckoned these old fears, the worse she felt. She considered slipping outside and running home, but her mother's threat came back to her. Unwilling to relinquish her newly acquired privilege to sleep over, she was determined to last the night.

Tessie remained in that paralyzed state of fear for two hours until finally dropping into a fitful sleep. It was short-lived slumber, however, because she awoke suddenly when she heard a loud, mysterious sound that seemed to be originating in the room somewhere. She imagined that the sound was being emitted from some horrible source but then breathed a sigh of relief when she realized it was nothing more than the buzz of a mosquito. She hid under the covers to escape the noise and the sting, but the air was stuffy, and she soon had to surface. The buzzing started immediately again. Every time she went under the covers, the noise would stop, but the mosquito was there each time she reemerged. This was no ordinary mosquito — she imagined it to be the size of a bumblebee, and she knew it was ravenously hungry for her blood. If Cindy was beside her, Tessie's imagination wouldn't have gone to these extremes, but Tessie was all alone through this trial. Her little chest was bursting with frustration and fear, and she finally had to release her despair through tears. She cried quick, hard sobs into the pillow, trying to muffle the sound. After she finished crying, she decided she wanted to go home and never sleep over again. She felt somewhat embarrassed and childish as she got up and crept into Josephine's sacred room, but her desire to be with her family drove her on.

Mr. Halliday seemed displeased when he finally entered the room after Josephine had roused him. He tried to appease the girl, telling her that he'd go kill the bug. But Tessie didn't care about the mosquito anymore; even if she saw it smashed against the wall, she knew she'd never be comfortable without the sounds of Cindy's snores and Mattie's thumb-sucking around her. Seeing the girl's stubborness, Mr. Halliday finally consented to walk her home, but Tessie could feel that he was angry as he stomped down the block with her in the darkness.

When Mrs. Johnson heard the knocker downstairs, her gogginess cleared quickly and she thought immediately of Tessie.

"Oh God, what's happened?" she thought. She scrambled for her robe and darted downstairs, stubbing her toe on the dresser in the hall on the way. She opened the front door, and relaxed her tense body, seeing that her swollen-eyed daughter was still in one piece. Mr. Halliday gruffly explained, "I guess Tessie just isn't ready to be out visiting like this." After thanking Mr. Halliday for his kindness and concern, Mrs. Johnson closed the door and noticed that Tessie didn't look ashamed about having failed this supposed step towards maturity; she just appeared to be secure, relieved, and happy to be home.

"That's my big girl," Mrs. Johnson said as she hugged her little one. "Now, why don't you go get some sleep."
She pulled her weary legs up the stairs and slipped quietly past the crib toward her bed. Forgetting about the alligators on the floor, Tessie took off her shoes and socks slowly. As she crawled into bed, she pushed Cindy off of her half of the mattress and was about to peer over her sister's shoulder to make sure Cindy wasn't a beast, but decided she was too tired to bother. With that, she snuggled up and fell fast asleep.
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