What Calvin Heard
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by

Members of the Connecticut Writing Project
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Edited by the CWP Staff

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The Connecticut Writing Project offers opportunities for growth and professional development to teachers of writing in all disciplines who recognize the worth of using writing as a means of learning any subject matter. A program of the University of Connecticut Department of English, the Connecticut Writing Project is affiliated with the widely-acclaimed National Writing Project, which now has 168 sites in this country and abroad.

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The Garden

Sarah McDermott

After Aunt Missy's accident Edna continued to live in that big house for a time. She had been with the family for over thirty years. It wasn't until I was fifteen that I found out that Edna wasn't one of my relatives, but was "the help." My grandmother said my cousin Karen was a "conniving bitch," which is very strong language for my grandmother. Said Karen thought she'd be able to retire off what she'd get from selling the Scheidell house. After thirty-three years of service, no provisions were made for Edna. Sent her off to a rest home in Scranton. That tall, strong woman became sick and frail not long after arriving at that rest home. Funny how rest homes seem to make people so tired.

The house is a bed and breakfast now. People come up to get away and to soak up the atmosphere of simple country life. All sorts of people have been there. The French Ambassador's wife came up for a weekend with her watercolors and her easel and sat out by the birdbath, where feebleminded Cousin Fritz used to sit in the afternoon. Oliver Sacks has come and gone and come again. He writes and walks. Most of the time, however, the house is filled with the Yuppies trying to escape pace of the city.

They come for the weekend and putter around in the yard at the bed and breakfast. Some drive over to Roscoe to go antiquing or do some trout fishing on the Beaverkill or the Willomec. My paternal grandfather had a small place on the Beaverkill. Sometimes he'd come up from the water and say, "Awful night on the river. I was down stream from a pair of Abercrombie and fishies. All decked out in flashy gear. Could have won a fashion contest, but they made so much noise I think they sent the fish on vacation." Most people from the bed and breakfast wander into downtown Jeffersonville at some point during the weekend. They almost always end up in the new gift shop that sells over priced soaps wrapped in pleated paper and knickknacks that city people associate with country living. They don't seem to notice that almost no one who actually lives here buys anything in there or that most things sold there aren't made in this country, let alone in Jeffersonville.

That spring after my maternal grandfather died was a very difficult one for all of us—especially my grandmother. She had cleared the overgrowth by the old fence. My grandfather always wanted to plant there, but it wasn't until after Aunt Missy's accident, when Cousin Karen put the property up for sale, that my grandmother found out that piece of land had been theirs all along. Poppie offered to buy it when everyone thought it belonged to Aunt Kate, Aunt Yettie, and Aunt Missy, but Aunt Kate wouldn't budge and left it overgrown with weeds, as if to spite my grandfather.

Grandma was sweaty and dirty from her work in the garden. She wouldn't let anyone out there as she worked. I stood on the porch and saw a couple from the bed and breakfast stroll into our yard. In their defense, I will say that the yards flowed together making it difficult to tell where one ended and the other began, although Aunt Kate wouldn't have let you forget. The woman from the bed and breakfast was a case study in studied casual. She may have left her Gucci bag and Louis Vitan luggage in her room, but if she thought she looked like one of the natives in her Ralph Lauren jeans, her Joan and
David paddock boots, and her mustard colored barn jacket that was featured on page 13 of the spring J. Crew catalog, she was sorely mistaken. She watched my grandmother for a minute, and as she reached for the hand of her companion she said, “Oh this must be the life. Can you imagine finding time to garden?”

What did that woman see when she watched my grandmother in the garden? Could she know about the shocking poverty my grandmother knew as a child? Did she see my grandmother graduate from college in 1932? Was she aware that my grandmother was profoundly deaf by then but had managed to keep it a secret from her professors? How about the speakeasy Grandma worked in so she could send money home and pay her tuition? Did she see my grandmother for the rock that she had been for all of us? Could the woman understand the sacrifice my grandmother made when at 78 she decided to care for my mother so that I would not have to leave college? Did she understand our loss?

Maybe the woman’s Oakley sunglasses shielded her from more than ultraviolet rays. I saw the strongest woman I have ever known groveling in the dirt, trying to come to terms with the inconsolable grief. What did she see? A well kept yard and a lovely garden, with a dottering old woman tending to her prize roses.

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Tu Yong Fa

~Deborah Goodwin

Her eyes, Tu Yong Fa would never forget her eyes. She had round, wide waiguoren eyes. But then again, she was a waiguoren, a foreigner. Tu Yong Fa didn’t know from where. She didn’t even speak Chinese, but then again, maybe she didn’t need to. Her eyes spoke for her.

She got into his boat. She sat huddled on the seat like she was trying to make herself small and invisible. Tu Yong Fa stood at the stem of his boat, tall and proud. The five waiguoren were riding up the river on his boat. It would be talked about you a long time to come. He would be known as the honored boatman. He was pleased.

Tu Yong Fa took hold of the boat and called out to the two pull men at the prow. He began to call out the familiar cadence that ruled every day on the river. The men pulled hard on their cotton harnesses as Tu Yong Fa pressed his whole strength into the smooth wet side of the boat. And they began the long pushing and pulling contest against the river that would bring the boat and its honored cargo far upstream.

Tu Yong Fa watched the waiguoren woman closely as he worked. His body required its whole strength for this job, but his mind was free to wander. She had a camera in her lap like all the tourists who came here. But she wasn’t snapping pictures of the trees and the river. She wasn’t chatting airily with the others with her. She seemed intent on something. Tu Yong Fa realized with a start that it was him. The waiguoren woman was watching him as closely as he was watching her.

He tore his eyes away from her to call out direction to the two tow men. They pulled hard against the current as Tu Yong Fa pushed and guided the boat with his pole. Then the water deepened and his men scrambled aboard, grabbing their poles to propel the old boat through the deep icy water.

When the shallows returned and his men slipped back into the water, straining at their harnesses, Tu Yong Fa’s gaze returned to the waiguoren. Her eyes had not left him as he worked. He smiled to her, acknowledging her stare. To his amazement she returned his smile and motioned, asking permission to take his picture.

His mind reeled. Why would she be interested in him? How could she be interested in him? He was not a flower or some beautiful scenery to be photographed. He was not an important person whose image should be preserved. He was only a boatman on the Lao Wei River.

His eyes met hers again and for an instant he saw himself in those round, wide, waiguoren eyes. He was a boatman on the Lao Wei River and he leaned hard into the pole and nodded, giving permission.

She took his picture, a picture of Tu Yong Fa, a proud man pushing his boat up the long, raging river.
Amongst Women

-Cheryl Lyon

The door is big and so is Nunaun's bed. I push on the brass knob, springing into the room almost ahead of it. Nunaun lies in the white cotton sheets, smelling of Chantilly and propped up on pillows. She has long gray hair, coarse and straightened by its own weight. It hangs loosely on her shoulders, or maybe Aunt Jennie has pulled it into a bun, making a halo of unruly fringe around her face. Her fingers are smooth and bony. There are rosary beads on her lap.

She holds out these hands to me, smiling. For hours, she speaks in Italian, her only language, and I answer in English, mine, but we know exactly what the other is saying. I show her something I've colored, I tell her about school. (She must be saying it's beautiful, I'm beautiful.) Somewhere in there she brushes the dark curls from my cheeks, pausing at the urge to pinch them.

Behind her, the ceramic Madonna watches from her place on the dresser, her left hand broken from a top-heavy fall and the blue of her veil faded by the sun. The light is filtered through sheer curtains in the two corner windows, streaming through dust and landing on the bureau and the mirrored vanity plate with the comb and brush no one ever filters through. Gram brings a pillow and Aunt Jennie, in flowered cotton, hunches in a tweed chair in the corner, her back so bent she faces her knees, her charcoal hair resisting Aunt Martha's efforts to press it down. The stories are on as loud as they will go, and as I turn down the TV I think of Uncle Middy and how before he died Aunt Jennie thought he was her father-in-law. She lifts her eyes and squints at my face, empty. Gram asks if she remembers me and she nods, says my name, sure. Then, like nothing, she points next to her to the doll in the pink crocheted dress and says she's named Mary and she's been crying all day. Gram nods, too, picks up the doll — of course, Jennie, Mary is crying because she's hungry. Or maybe it's time for her nap.

In the windows the breeze moves the tired dime curtains as it lunges by. Gram brings a pillow and Aunt Jennie nods again, closes her eyes and sags her head further, brushing a wiry fringe of hair back up, pulling the chain for the lightbulb and climbing the rest of the damp stairs in darkness, but Aunt Jennie's knee-highed legs are in front of me this time, and I feel safe. It is summer, but on New Year's Eve I'll be back here again—Aunt Jennie and I watching Guy Lombardo until the New Year comes. (This is my only chance to stay up late—did you know she keeps her teeth in a cup at night?) This time, I get to sleep in her bed, with the big dolls in pink and white crocheted dresses. (Where does Uncle Middy sleep?) She wakes me at four to grind the noodles through the machine. I turn the handle and she spreads them carefully on the wax paper. By six I am tired and sleep on the carpet with the cartoons on low.

Twenty-four years and summer again. Nunaun is gone, has been for twenty, and so is Aunt Jennie, really. I walk up the stairs, this time behind Gram, still pausing at the landing, knocking and then turning the scratched brass knob. Aunt Jennie, in flowered cotton, hunches in a tweed chair in the corner, her back so bent she faces her knees, her charcoal hair resisting Aunt Martha's efforts to press it down. The stories are on as loud as they will go, and as I turn down the TV I think of Uncle Middy and how before he died Aunt Jennie thought he was her father-in-law. She lifts her eyes and squints at my face, empty. Gram asks if she remembers me and she nods, says my name, sure. Then, like nothing, she points next to her to the doll in the pink crocheted dress and says she's named Mary and she's been crying all day. Gram nods, too, picks up the doll — of course, Jennie, Mary is crying because she's hungry. Or maybe it's time for her nap.

In the windows the breeze moves the tired dime curtains as it lunges by. Gram brings a pillow and Aunt Jennie nods again, closes her eyes and sags her head further, brushing a wiry fringe of hair across the flowered housecoat. Behind her, the afternoon light lands gently on the curve of her back and the oak paneled dresser where the Madonna still stands, hands clasped in the anxious repose of prayer, her dreams for the world emanating from her fingers like a fairy princess' wand.
I Can't Wait...

-Kathryn James-Ste66ins

Pushing the lawn mower out of the garage and across the driveway, I could feel the resentment. "Another three hours..." I figured. "I'd rather shovel snow than do this." Of course I wanted to be done with the lawn, and with almost automatic reflex, I heard my voice add, "I can't wait to get this finished."

And I hear these words all the time...I can't wait till Friday...I can't wait till vacation...I can't wait till this is over...I can't wait till tomorrow...What is it about us? What's the matter with right now? Why do we so desperately want to get to a place other than where we are?

It's the anticipation and excitement of the secretly expected, we hear, or for some high-stakes risk-takers, the unexpected. But mostly our "I can't waits" come from the more immediate - we look forward to the hint of what we think will be pleasurable, or at worst, what we think will give us some relief from the stress of the routine. And yet, as soon as we find ourselves in the "I can't wait" place, we lament that it will come to an end or we even miss that place where we're not. Maybe these ambiguities are too much to figure out, but I decided to give it a try. "A good time to think," I thought as I yanked the starter and pushed my mower along the periphery of the yard, beginning a long-overdue job that I still couldn't wait to finish.

"So," I thought, "I'll be present to the moment." Even the simplest of tasks, I had read, can capture our attention, and as I made the first turn, my concentration was on the mowing. I suppose, but I was visualizing some possible geometric cuts, a kind of lawn topiary possible only because the grass was higher than usual. Maybe this wasn't going to be so bad after all. Usually, I tried to be most efficient, mowing part of the back yard along with the front yard, so that when I actually started on the back lawn, I would be surprised, deceptively tricking myself that I would finish sooner than I thought. The sun was hot, I was getting thirsty, mind games or not, I wanted to be done.

"My god," I thought, "At least I'm alive, and the recent flashback of Tim absorbed my thoughts. A sudden and untimely death that had shocked all of us...The aneurysm, undetectable and silent, taking away, leaving us with the person who had been such a life-force of our school community. And I thought back to my conversation with friends on that Sunday afternoon as we tried to make sense of the senseless, trying to bring something positive out of loss, agreeing again, as we all had so many times before. "It puts life in perspective...It helps us to know what is important," we agreed. For a little while maybe, or maybe a long time for some. Our words compassionately spoken, but soon, as inaudible as the gentle stirrings of butterfly wings when we would return, well intentioned, to our busy lives.

And what kinds of lives? Are they just ying-yangs of endurance and anticipation, and while we're in one, we're thinking about the other? And don't get me wrong! I'm a part of this mild schizophrenia myself. But where does it start, and how does it gain such a grip?
"This is where the rubber meets the road," Arnie told me before I started working there. I didn't know what he meant, until my first day on the job, when the supervisor told me that the van was here, and to go stand there and follow them in.

It inches and crawls along, like a slow, foul-smelling, disgusting, Spanish-speaking insect. If it goes through a public area, heads turn. Like a traffic accident, it is difficult not to look at. Once I saw it, I knew I'd never forget it.

It is the sight of prisoners being transported from jail to court, which I've now witnessed dozens of times. Still, its impact is still strong. How can it not be? There are about ten prisoners who are marched in together, some from Windham County police stations, having been arrested within the last twenty-four hours, awaiting arraignment. The others, garishly conspicuous in their orange jump suits, are inmates from Corrigan Correctional Facility in Montville.

When they come out of the "ice cream truck," a white, box-shaped van, they have the ever-present Smith and Wesson handcuffs, double-locked with keyhole facing away. These they'll wear all day, until they return to Corrigan or are released on a PTA (Promise To Appear). They are also bound to a huge gang chain, with massive iron links to which all their cuffs have been secured. Add to that leg irons, 12-inch ankle cuffs that prevent anything other than a slow, stiff-legged shuffle. When they pile out of the van and trudge toward the lock-up area, a large cell in the belly of the courthouse, they move as one, but awkwardly, with a cadre of sheriffs watching their every move.

Upstairs is a whole different world. And they talk about it that way, too. "What's goin' on up there?" they say, and, "When are we goin' up?" Most of them have been "up there" many times. There are no innocents who travel those stairs. Up to the courtroom, where their friends and family have gathered and been waiting for hours, some ashamed and crying, some angered and swearing. Up to the world of paperwork, of clerks and bailiffs, writs, habiases, and other strange words most can't understand. Up to the "suits," the public defenders, and the prosecutors. Most know them by first name, having gone against them before. "Is that scumbag Davis on today?" they'll ask from the communal cell. You'd think they'd be more intimidated, but they're not, most of them, especially the veterans. In front of all the others, they spit, scratch, swear, and urinate. I guess if you've been through the system for years, not much phases you. Except.

Up there; the god of that universe "up there" is the Judge. He has to answer to nobody. "Matt told me he'll put me away for another 2 years, so I'll shut my mouth," remark some about one of the nicer ones; "He's a mean mother-f---er!" about a jurist with a nastier reputation. And this, from a man who killed his wife, or shot up a housing project, or, or... No, they clearly understand the power of the judge, if not the actual words he uses.
The Classics from One of the "bungled and botched"

~Edward Duclos Jr.

She stood in front of the class and continued to lecture: "They were star-crossed lovers. They had no control over their destinies. They married, they parted, and they died."

"What! Hold it just a second. What do you mean, 'They married, they parted, and they died.' What about the night they spent together?"

"Edward, what do you mean?"

Her clipped, abrupt tone told him that he was in trouble, but he continued, "Well, they slept together...I...I...mean they consummated their marriage," he added quickly as he noticed the violent red hue to her face.

"Well, young man you come right up here and show me where you see that," she snapped.

He walked to the front of the class with his Romeo and Juliet text opened to the third act. "Right here." He motioned to the empty space at the end of Scene 3.

"That's wrong!" she snapped.

"Oh, really? When's the last time you had a talk with Will?"

"I have had quite enough of your insubordination, young man," she hissed between clenched teeth.

"Well, young man you come right up here and show me where you see that," she snapped derisively.

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"Oh, really? When's the last time you had a talk with Will?"

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"Well, young man you come right up here and show me where you see that," she snapped derisively.

As I sat in the chair outside the principal's office, some 25 years ago, I don't believe I pondered the larger questions of pedagogy at hand, and I probably wasn't all that concerned with whether I was "right" or not. I most likely said what I said in class just to get a laugh, or a blush, from the girl next to me.

But now looking back, I wonder, What was wrong with my interpretation? Zeferelli obviously agreed with it. Was the problem here that I was speaking to a teacher who considered sex to be a four letter word? Or was it something more? Wasn't my thinking a valid interpretation of the "gap" left by William Shakespeare? Or wasn't it my place to interpret the words of the "classic" playwright of Western Civilization?

I guess the aspect that bothers me most now as a teacher--ironically of the very same play--is: Why is Will considered a "classic" playwright? Why is Romeo and Juliet a "classic" play? Who determines what is "great" literature and what is "trash"?

Through my experience it has always been implied that in order for something to be "classic," it needs to be explained to you. The masses are not part of the cultural elite, the intelligentsia, the gods of our society. I learned this during my entire high school career. I would sit in class bored out of my skull as the teacher explained what one great writer after another was saying. At first I contested their words. After a while, I became silent.

I began to simply regurgitate their words on the "test" at the end of the book or unit. By doing so, I became a "good" student, at least in the eyes of the system, and now, that's what bothers me most.

I came to know that great writers are the types of people who sit up in their lofts and think their thoughts, the ones that are beyond the scope of the masses--people like me.

"Normal" people are not the ones who read and write the great literature of our society. The people that do this are the ones in the lofts who are touched by greatness, the ones who have been visited by the Muses. The rest of us are not destined for greatness. We are what Nietzsche described as "the bungled and the botched." So for us, the masses, we need those great literary critics, the ones surrounded by ivy walls, to determine what is great and what is not and then to tell us that. Generally, the definition they use is something like this: "If the masses cannot understand it, then it must be great; it must be classic." Maybe that's why there's a marketplace for Cliff Notes.

I am angered and I am concerned. One of my primary concerns--safety. Aren't these great men and women, the literary minds, aren't they up in the towers of academia, those ivory towers? And aren't these the very same towers that lunatics with semi-automatic rifles in hand race to? Is there some correlation here?

Am I mocking the classics? No, but my aim as a teacher of teenagers is to find literature that will touch, intrigue, anger, move, and challenge them; therefore, I do try to find new "good" literature every chance I get. However, when Ann Petry's The Street is substituted for Edith Wharton's Ethan Frome, or Fences by August Wilson is taught instead of a play by Shakespeare, movies, and oh my God, television are actively taught and discussed in classrooms, the halls of academia begin to scream that teachers are "dumbing down" America.

But they're missing the point. I don't want simplistic, non-challenging text for my students, but on the other hand, we need not necessarily subscribe to the timeless wisdom of the Great Books. What I want in my classroom is debate, intense debate, spurred on by the literature; yet, I also want texts which promote self-reflection.

Throw out the classics! Of course not, but neither should we have a rigid adherence to this canon.

O.K. maybe, after all is said and done, I am a bit cynical; actually, I probably just hate being "told" what is good literature and what is not.

In my classroom I have a bulletin board with a heading "Classical Literature." On the board are a number of my favorite comic strips of all time. "Classic" Literature? They are to me.
The Final Chapter  
~Alberta A. Landino~

When I read a novel, I'm disappointed to finally reach the end of a great story. It's somewhat of a let down as I feel like the characters have become so much a part of me. The problems they face and the good times they have are mine, also. Then that day comes when I finally get to the last chapter and I know I'll never meet those characters again. This is when I find myself hoping for a sequel so that I may again share in the rich experiences of the people I once met who became my friends.

Walking with no particular speed to the door that day in early July, I knew looking into her eyes would be difficult. Well, like in all good books, the final chapter had arrived. While her otherwise radiant face smiled outwardly, I could see past her "everything is fine" appearance. I just knew seeing her for the first time since Dad's death a little over one month ago would open that raw wound for both of us which, come to think of it, probably will never heal anyway. I'm glad Dad had the courage to continue living after Mom died. Some would call it luck; some would call it fate. In any case, he had a special relationship with someone who changed his life forever. If he wasn't so brave to begin again, who would have been there to make him laugh? Who would have been there with him to share in life's little things? Who would have been there when he struggled with those final last breaths of a life taken from him too soon?

As we carried in the ordinary cardboard box, I was uncertain about my feelings regarding its contents. All that was left of seventy years of life could be found in that simple, nondescript box. As I thought about the possibilities awaiting me, I began imagining what treasures from his entire life lay ahead. As I rummaged through the outdated slide rulers, drafting triangles, and old family photos, a stack of letters caught my attention. This neatly arranged collection was bound together by a piece of discolored twine which was meticulously knotted. It is not surprising that he would have stored such a priceless collection of family history in such a way. Dad often wore his personality so outwardly.

As I picked up the tattered bundle, I gently received a musty whiff of many years of careful preservation. I felt as if I had an ever so small piece of the puzzle in the palm of my hand. I surprised recognized the handwriting as that of my mother's and immediately knew that what I was about to unearth was chapter one of a book that would possibly say even more than I wanted to know. The top letter was addressed to my father, Albert A. Landino, at a California address. Glancing in the upper right hand corner, I noticed several words inscribed just below the canceled three cent stamp. It read, "Give to the American Cancer Society." I wonder if those words had any meaning to anyone in 1951? Probably not. Like all good novels, foreshadowing can be such a key element.

Undoing the tightly knotted twine, I was free to begin a journey into the lives of two very young people who became my parents. I guess in some ways my story will be the sequel.

Mother, with Love  
~Joanne Woodward~

Holding my hand,  
you taught me to walk  
one step at a time.

Now I hold yours,  
and we walk, slowly,  
taking one step at a time.

I learned to talk,  
and you talked with me,  
supplying the words I could not form.

Now, as we talk together,  
I anticipate your needs,  
giving you the words you cannot find.

I was wet or soiled,  
and you changed me.

Now, I clean you when you do not remember.

Someone once said that love is proved  
in the letting go.

I will let you go...  
I will keep the memories.
Big Mama's Front Porch

-Patricia Proctor

What is it about porches and Southerners? I never pondered over the idea of just sitting out on the porch. It was just something my family and friends have done since before my time. Is this sitting in the porch swing or on the big wood and twine rocking chairs a Southern thing? Maybe. You Yankees don't sit on porches fixing to do something because you are in such an all fired hurry to get someplace.

All Big Mama and Granddaddy's houses had big front porches. The one on Adamson Avenue in Carrollton, Georgia is the one I remember. This is where they lived when I was born. The Hanson family moved to Adamson Avenue from Senoia, near Newnan, after Mama and Uncle Shirley graduated from high school.

There where four Hansons in the graduating class of 1940. Arnold, Stanley, Shirley, and Mary, my Mama. Stanley and Mama were both seventeen, the right age to graduate back then. Arnold and Shirley were two years older, but their schooling had to be put on hold a month or so each year when they were needed to work in Granddaddy's sawmill.

I guess the porch at the home place in Whitesburg was Big Mama's porch too. Granddaddy owned the house and lots of land down there. Susan Francis Alabama Hanson and Sarah Effie Elizabeth Hanson, better known to all as Aunt Ef and Aunt Bam, lived there 'til they died. They were Granddaddy's oldest sisters. They were both old maids 'til Aunt Ef married uncle Idus who had been a hired hand at the home place! Lord, everyone thought Brooks Hanson, my Granddaddy, was going to die! Idus was just common trash according to the rest of the family.

When Uncle Idus died they did bury him down at Antioch Primitive Baptist Church, but he's been dead over thirty years and the poor fellow still has no headstone! I know because I was down to Antioch Church last summer for the burying of Cousin Clara, Uncle John's middle girl. Aunt Ef and Aunt Bam were laid to rest along with five generations or more of good Hanson folk; all of whom have headstones of the finest marble or granite with the royal Hanson name enblazoned in large letters. Poor old Uncle Idus only has a pitiful little metal square with his name in stick-on letters. Us Hansons are a stubborn lot.

Did I happen to mention that Brooks Hanson was a foot-washing Baptist? How I would beg to get my feet washed on the front pew at that tiny church! "No, baby, you and Mary Nan sit right here and wait for Granddaddy, then I'll buy you something at the store."

My sister and I could always be charmed or bribed, so we would wait patiently on the pew, standing up on it so we could see Granddaddy get his feet washed. I now know that the foot-washing was reserved for the male members of the congregation.

The church had what my sister and I called fa so la so singing. All the fine old hymns like "Onward Christian Soldiers", "Beulah Land", or "Shall We Gather at the River" were sung by singing the notes instead of the words. I didn't really understand until I had music lessons at school. What I wouldn't give to have a tape of that singing now.

Mama says she thinks we always have sat out on our porches to cool off after cooking huge meals in sweltering kitchens. Georgia has always been hot and humid in summer! Mama hasn't cooked a huge meal in over four years and she keeps her air conditioning set on 65 degrees, but we still gather there on her front porch to rock and chat while numerous grandchildren indulge in that great summer pastime of catching lighting bugs.
How it Ends

~Andrew S. Page~

When I still could,
I was a medic in an old war hospital,
My room was bunks and blankets and wounded soldiers.
I tended each moan, cleaning and bandaging, calling for nurses, helping doctors.
Until nap time was over.

Saturday mornings,
We were heroes of the yard.
I was Batman or Green Lantern, with a cape.
We rescued the woods from evil monsters and tough badguys,
Until we had to go.

Or we were the villains,
Pistols holstered to our sides,
Then fired, each its own special sound.
We terrorized the woods from our shed-hideout.
Until our moms called us in.

In school,
A boy forms a gun.
With folded hands, fingers aim.
He fires, with his own special sound,

Until I stop him.

~A Teacher~

Smile

~Lisa McLaughlin~

The photographer snaps
the shot.
Kamikazes and Shirley Temples
expertly mixed
on the table in front
She smiles
I think.
It is hard to know
for sure.
Is it a smile of
Tolerance?
Joy?
Accomplishment?
Freedom?

I cannot know.

Late at night
we sit
together.
The smile and
the words
"If I die, you know,
get hit by a car
or something,
I don't want
you to come to the
funeral."
Disbelief
The response
"Don't joke mom.
The smile...Is it
humor?
happy thoughts?
sad thoughts?
I cannot know.

Later
The smile
once more
You lie in bed
flowers all around.
It is the same
smile

Determination?
A mask to hide?
fear?

I cannot know.

I know
the smile,
the mystery,
the sorrow,
the pain.

I know
my mother,
29,
unselphish,
courageous.

Taken before her time.

A Recipe for Success: Lizzie's Curbside Cuisine

~Donna Ozga~

When Irish eyes are smiling, you can usually find them at "Lizzie's Curbside Cuisine" outside Arjona Hall on the University of Connecticut campus at Storrs. Lizanne Monahan Searling, aka "Lizzie," the euponymous owner, sets up her twelve year old Custom 650 for your dining pleasure - a late breakfast bagel or a tasty lunchtime special - Monday through Thursday from 8:00 A.M. until 2:30 P.M. or (more likely) until her daily specials are gone.

I interviewed Lizzie during a rare lunchtime lull.

DO: Tell us something about your background. How does Lizzie happen to be on the UCONN campus?

Lizzie: Well, I come from Miami, Florida, but had a college friend from Connecticut. I found that I was spending lots of money on airline tickets to come to Connecticut so I moved here. I've been here eleven years.

DO: And when you came to Connecticut?

Lizzie: I've got a background in hotel work and took a job in a new gourmet shop. From that I moved to salad prep in the kitchen with a chef. Then I got into a position with a restaurant catering business and became an assistant in the kitchen. I was there until the place burnt down - funky lighting, I think.

DO: Then what?

Lizzie: From there I went to a restaurant that did catering and then to this ("Lizzie's").

DO: You serve some interesting items on your menu. Where do your ideas come from?

Lizzie: When I was a little girl, my parents traveled a lot so I had a Peruvian nanny. I watched her cook meals. And, I like to scan cookbooks the way some people flip through "Cosmo" so I pick up ideas that way. I have a good ability to put tastes together, too. That helps.

DO: I'd say that's right. You offer a selection of regular foods like your "Awesome Egg Salad" and "Tarragon Tuna," but your condiments like "Pesto Mayo," "Dill Scallion Mayo," and "Hellish Relish" (hot) are intriguing. What is your bestseller?

~18~

~19~
Lizzie: Whenever I offer it, the chicken gyro sells.

DO: And what is your favorite to prepare?

Lizzie: Um, SOUPS! I like to fix those; they sell in the winter.

DO: How about the oddest or strangest thing that's happened to you in the five years you've been at this location?

Lizzie: Let's see.

DO: Anything you can remember.

Lizzie: When I first started, I didn't have the Custom 650. I had a regular hot dog cart. It got cold...

DO: Were you still here year round?

Lizzie: Oh yeah. I had a plexiglass shelter built - just two pieces with a door so I could stand inside from the weather. It didn't have a lot of room, so I almost always sold out.

DO: Tell us about the Custom 650.

Lizzie: I've had this two years, but it's twelve years old. I found it in New Jersey and it was a mess. My husband spent a lot of time fixing it up. It's powered by propane and has a steam table, urn, charbroiler and griddle.

DO: You feed the late breakfast and lunch crowd. What's your lunch?

Lizzie: I don't usually have time for lunch, but I might have a bagel if I can fit it in. Or a green salad.

DO: You're familiar with the back page of "Bon Appetit" magazine. Personalities are asked questions about their favorite this or that...

Lizzie: Ah, I thought this sounded familiar.

DO: So, if you could invite three people to dinner, who would they be and why?

Lizzie: Three people. My father, because I love and respect him and he's brilliant and interesting. Julia Child, because she's queen of the culinary world and also very interesting. And Tom Cruise, because he's the HOTTEST...okay, and his wife, because she's attractive and Irish.

DO: We've got to know. What's in your refrigerator at home?
The Power of Words
~Sharon Rabideau

Rejection...how could one word be empowered with enough emotion to cause the blood to run cold? How could 21 years of a life together be swallowed up in such a simple phrase, "there's someone else." And yet, you are told that life must go on despite the fact that none are aware of the internal numbness lodged in the deepest recesses of your soul. You fear that trust will forever be transformed into mistrust- - fidelity changed to all that is fleeting and uncertain. Only one thing is permanent, your own inner conviction of who and what you are. From deep within, you are aware that it's not the crisis that can shatter you. Rather, the power lies in what you let it do to you. And so, you pick yourself up knowing that you have endured the ultimate and everything after this will pale in comparison. You see to it that a wall of steel encases you so that the dreaded word will never penetrate your fortress again. Time tempers your wall making it even stronger.

And then that other word creeps up without warning. It starts with a warm look of acceptance, a hand held out in friendship. It begins to unfold slowly and without your even knowing it, your Jericho wall begins to crumble. There is great risk involved but ever so gently he allows you to see him as the light at the end of the tunnel. His word contains a total commitment to all that you are and all that you will ever be. There is no fanfare, no pretense, just the simple reality that he wants to walk with you through life's endless paths. Can you accept his word? Is it powerful enough to cast out the demons of fear and suspicion? But then, you cannot deny that his word is that which makes life worth living - - life worth sharing - - his word... LOVE.

GSOL: Greek Speakers of Other Languages
~Elizabeth Reilly

After reading Maria De La Luz Reyes' article, Challenging Venerable Assumptions: Literacy Instruction for Linguistically Different Students, I was suddenly struck by a horrid nightmare from the first days of my honeymoon.

I had gotten married on a Saturday and we spent our first night together in the hotel where our reception was. The next morning I realized the butterflies I felt in my stomach the day before were not from nerves. The bagel I tried to get down while waiting for the limousine to take us to Kennedy airport had already come up and out. This should be interesting!

The limousine arrived and we went downstairs to get on our way. Tom had to carry everything to the car because I was too dizzy from the vertigo that was now setting in. In we got and off we went. I don't remember much of the ride because I mostly watched the inside of my eyelids.

Arriving at the airport presented an even larger problem. Kennedy was a huge place, we had lots of luggage, and I was feeling worse. I hoped Tom's biceps would hold up.

Finally, after waiting in several lines we were able to board the plane. While I made frequent visits to the ladies' room, Tom stood in line to find our seats. What was to come next was the most humiliating experience I can recall. The first four of the ten hours on the plane weren't that bad; I slept the entire time while Tom watched movies. He was catching great conversation with a guy he called Sam. This man's name wasn't really Sam but Tom couldn't pronounce his real name because it was Egyptian. He was flying to Athens to catch a connecting flight to Egypt.

After those four wonderful hours of sleep, I awoke, thinking I felt better. No such luck. No sooner did I have some Coke when the wave of nausea began to hit. The remaining hours of the flight were a blur of aisles, people's laps, and that stale airplane lavatory. Towards the end, my stomach muscles were so tight, I could no longer stand upright. The pain from the contractions was so unbearable I couldn't control the low moan escaping from my far too parched lips.

The plane landed and all I recall is being laid out flat on a group of four flight chairs, faces studying me in my decrepit condition. In between periods of blackout I felt tidal waves of panic after hearing the pilots saying, "Either she's pregnant or she has a real bad case of food poisoning."

Next, I was wheeled off the plane through a back exit and taken by ambulance to the airport clinic. It was here that I began to know a desperation I had never known. I was put in a bed in a room alone. The door was shut and before I knew it Tom was gone.

Doctors who spoke no English came in to examine me. They poked hard at my already pained belly and began saying the word, "Appendix," over and over. Panic struck me and I pulled myself into a ball like one of those little bugs you find under a boulder on
a rainy day. How horrible! They were going to operate and my husband was nowhere to be found.

All at once, the doctors left and I dozed off once again. I don’t know how long I had been sleeping but when I woke up and still didn’t see Tom I really got worried. I pulled my dead weight off the bed and opened the door. Amazingly, there were two nurses and some other people just sitting around laughing uncaringly at some joke they must have been discussing. I asked if anyone knew where Tom was and no one could understand me. Everyone spoke nothing but Greek, which I suppose is normal for Athens.

I remember feeling frightened that I was going to get left in this horrible place because no one could understand me. All I wanted to know was where Tom had gone. Now I began to cry and the nurses could only look at me as if I wasn’t even there.

Then I got angry. Wrong move. They thought I was demanding to be taken to the hospital so one particularly rough nurse forced me into a wheelchair and started wheeling me into another ambulance. When I started throwing a tantrum because I didn’t want to leave, she started yelling, “You go in, go out! What you want? You want hospital? NO? I have boy with abdomen! You go or he goes!”

I attempted a yell in response but it was too difficult. I just pointed at the building and she grudgingly returned me. Inside, I was relieved to see Tom waiting for me. He was in a panic too, however, because he went to get the luggage while I was sleeping and lost his temper when no one would tell him where the luggage could be found.

“I couldn’t get over it,” he barked, “no one would even acknowledge my presence.”

“How did you find it. Did someone offer to help or did you have to throw a few punches?” I asked weakly.

“Funny thing is,” he said, “was that just as I was about to punch an attendant out, a guard with a semi-automatic Ouzi came up and started forcing me away from the counter.”

I couldn’t believe that decent Americans like us could be giving such a bad impression.

“Finally, George here, comes to my rescue. He asked if I was Tom Reilly. He also said he was our tour guide and was so sorry for being late.”

We were saved. I didn’t even know this man, yet I wanted to give him my life. I don’t think I ever felt more grateful for hearing someone speak the language I knew so well than at this very moment.

After we all calmed down, George and Tom got in the ambulance with me to Athens Hospital. After some more nightmares in a socialized medicine environment, I got treated and went to our luxurious hotel room where I fell off to sleep after feeling like I’d been awake for centuries. I truly felt as old as the Parthenon.

It turned out that after two more days of illness, what I had was not appendicitis but an inner ear virus which caused all the terrible symptoms I was having. I was amazed Tom never caught it. I also never imagined we’d be “in sickness and in health,” so soon in our relationship.

Knowing the fear, anger, panic, and frustration I felt not being able to communicate in a time of need and being far away from home, as well, suddenly made me feel great sadness for all the children who come into our schools everyday with these same feelings. I dealt with it for a few hours. They bear the same burden of language differences continually.

Unfortunately, many teachers are like the nurses were, with me, preoccupied with things of greater importance, resentful they had to put up with me and that I couldn’t speak their language, and indifferent because I was insignificant.

I get a terrible feeling in my heart when I think others have to feel what I felt in my situation and I can’t bear the thought that I may be guilty of the same injustices. I will not let this happen in my classroom. I can’t!