



Our Summer On the Porch

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Wednesday Morning Creation

Witnessing creation is a precious privilege. For several weeks now, I have been blessed with the chance to experience firsthand the sacred and healing dynamic that emerges when one is welcomed into the space where another person has opened their heart, their very center in the vulnerable hope of producing something new and meaningful. This is true where two are involved, but it bears out exponentially when a group is involved. The creation of which I speak has been unfolding in our church's Wednesday Morning Writing Group, and some of the new and meaningful fruits of their labors are included in the pages that follow.

In "Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art", Madeleine L'Engle writes about the setting I mention above, this vulnerable and timeless context. "The artist at work is in kairos", she says using the Greek word for the second meaning of time beyond chronos, which is the time of clocks and itineraries, deadlines and untimely death. "The child at play, totally thrown outside himself in the game, be it making a sandcastle or making a daisy chain, is in kairos. In kairos we become what we are called to be as human beings, co-creators with God, touching on the wonder of creation." The folks who have come to the Wednesday Morning Writing Group have encountered kairos, this lost-but-moreso found space and time of story sharing and nurturing. They have through their prayerful efforts and their willingness to both listen with care and be heard with grace, helped to make kairos.

This writing group started with a suggestion by Holly Tarrant to Eve Thew that perhaps some people might like to get together for the summer to write and read what had been written. They started on the Thew's sun porch in June with coffee and Chris Strattman's blueberry cake, and now have continued to gather in Battell Chapel. Not one of them would, I suspect, claim for themselves the title of co-creator, purveyor of kairos, spiritual tour guide. But each of them would be quick to assign these honors and more to the others who share stories of growth and loss, mercy and healing, awe and so much more. In this latter tendency they would, I say, all be right. I have been honored that they have allowed my chances to sit with them and hear what they have birthed; they've even humored my reading from journals at times. I am grateful they have taken the time to produce this small book of their writings. I think you will be too. Enjoy!

Pastor Erick Olsen

Our thanks also go to Bill Eckert who gave his time to help coordinate and produce this book.

The Summer Writers

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Our Summer on the Porch

July and August 2016

Here we are:

Peter Anstay- was unable to attend most gatherings, but when he did he gave us an insight into adventures most of us would never have.

Nancy Eckel- She too was not able to contribute weekly as she is writing a long novel. She read parts from it. Many weeks she was unable to attend so we took advantage of her artistic ability to help with the cover of this book.

Rae Foster- What a boon to us. An accomplished writer, she subtly taught much and demonstrated an uplifting attitude toward life.

Barbara Moeckel- A musician and teacher of music, she had never tried writing, as her sister is a poet. The same genes became obvious in her lively stories. She lives here in Norfolk and we are GLAD.

DeVere Oakes- Loves books. She worked at the Norfolk Library for years. She still is at the library much of her time and, as yet, has not tried writing as a hobby. We hope she soon will, for you speedily learn, upon meeting her, what a joy her words will be for readers.

Erick Olsen- Pastor of the Norfolk Congregational Church and a professional writer earlier in his young life is the father of three spectacular children and is married to a delightful teacher and is still is able to find time to join and enlighten us.

Pat Steele- a neighbor here on Ashpohtag Rd. hiked herself up here every Wednesday morning and brought with her some of her outstanding stories and poems we have in this book. Never would we have known she could write like this had we not had this fun group.

Eve Thew- Just plain enjoys writing. Loves putting thoughts and ideas on paper.

John Thew- a painter, sculptor and inventor. We discovered here he could be a writer if he could find the time.

Holly Tarrant- whose idea this writing group was, gave us her inspiration and was the reason for the success of this summer. She is a fifth grade teacher and I'm sure will be the "Teacher who inspired me throughout life" to her elementary school students. She too is an artist.

Peter Vosburgh- a former Norfolkian who is now living in Canaan and no longer able to drive, gave us a writing from his past with Pan Am. We all enjoy Peter and hope he will be able to continue coming.

Phyllis White lives in Norfolk and has written poems for The Chimes as requested and inspired our requesting that she be in our summer writing group. She wrote three this summer.

We will continue to meet 9-12 Wednesdays at Battell Chapel

Trees

Phyllis White

Standing silent, mute to the world,
they know but do not tell of what they've seen,
holding secrets for a lifetime.

Sentinels of wood do not speak of indignities endured,
Initials gouged by lovers, beauty marred 'til death.
The fires race, and trees, unable to flee,
stand like martyrs while being consumed.

Leaving

Phyllis White

The Seraphim's feathered wing raced to earth
And stroked the blue of my eye.
Will I board and enter the eternal?
The old woman sits nearby, needy but steadfast.
I am the only lover she has known.
Perhaps on the morrow, whilst she slumbers,
I will take my leave.

Time

Phyllis White

We were beautiful in our youth,
Dancing to the edge,
Reaching for the unknown,
Exhilarated by discovery.

Time creases the body,
Graying the glory.
Our beauty transformed,
We dance to the edge in wisdom.

To Bruce

Holly Torrant

When traveling back in thoughts, as far as I can remember
It's been you that has always been my pastor.

My religious upbringing was shaped by a few
Namely Sally with her music, Mr. Thew and you.

From Sunday School classes to Confirmation
I learned how important the church can be to a nation.

I never knew how learning the Lord's Prayer and Doxology
Could now bring such strength and meaning to me.

The retreats to Silver Lake were always fun,
The sharing the laughing, and the feeling of one.

Junior Choir years came and went under Sally's direction
Oh what we gained from her love, smiles and affection.

Then came the Junior and Youth Fellowship years
Many great memories built and shared with peers.

Remember the trip to Donaldson's cabin in November?
Then on to visit Martha Peck in northern New Hampshire.

With the help of your references done time and again
Potential employers could know me and where I had been.

We've had some chats over cookies and "Juice"
And certainly laughed haven't we Bruce?

I like to sit in church on a quiet Sunday when there are few
Or on Christmas Eve when it's hard to find an empty pew,

Both offer in their own special way
A time to reflect and be a living part of today.

The Church of Christ is a beautiful place
And with it I will always connect your face.

Your work has certainly had an effect on me.
Congratulations on twenty-five years of ministry!

Memory of Turkey

Pat Steele

Happy smiling faces, extending outstretched hands and warm greetings.

A vast silk road, winding toward the rising sun, stretching all the way to China.

A mighty blue dome and spires against a pink sky.

Shoes off as we enter the sacred space, silent and curious.

One foot in Europe and one in Asia, blending both worlds.

The people huddled beneath stone towers, fearing the noises outside.

The towers weep with tears of lost peace and beauty.

We cannot return!

SOUNDS FROM TWO LIVES

Pat Steele

COUNTRY

Morning breaks.
The silence melts.
Down the road a dog barks at a passing car.
Overhead the birds chatter to each other in the trees.
Leaves rustle in the wind.
Rain beats upon the roof.
And in the distance church bells sound with a faint ring.

CITY

Morning breaks.
A garbage truck sounds a metallic clang.
Voices rise from the street below.
Drums and music echo from a nearby park.
Overhead a helicopter roars and in the street a fire engine shrieks.
Rain beats upon the windows.
And in the distance the highway buzzes with a rhythmic hum.

I close my eyes and hear my two lives, echoing in my ears.

AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTEEN DAYS

Peter Vosburgh

No, you needn't join the cosmonauts to spend your two or three week vacation on a very enjoyable trip around the world. Nor need you skip several years' vacations to budget for such a trip. To encourage such travel the IATA airlines offer a surprisingly low round-the-world fare almost matching the cost of a trip half-way around the globe.

Such a trip of course must be carefully planned. (European cities are saved for other more local trips). More distant destinations must be selected to best satisfy her and his tastes as well as dreams. For the curious, adventure-seeking sightseer, up to seven or eight stops can be comfortably planned within three weeks. For the woman who knows what she wants, only three stops will suffice for an epic-making shopping tour: New York, Hong Kong and Bangkok. One stop - a fortnight in Tahiti - can provide the retreat from modern civilization that may be prescribed for MAN.

Previous experience taught us that November offers an ideal time of year for such a trip. By flying westbound the trip is easier as you're always gaining time to compensate for the day lost crossing the International Date Line. Leaving the office a few hours early for Sohiphohol we climbed aboard Pan American spacious jet Clipper and at 2.00 p.m. on Friday our vacation trip began New York. bound. Home for supper with the family in Connecticut that same evening and the following brilliant New England autumn day to alma mater's big game and Alumni homecoming. With the dazzling pre-Christmas window-dressing of Fifth Avenue and discount stores abrim, shopping started in earnest. On our way back to the airport two evenings later we passed the widely heralded exhibits of the New York World's Fair which could have been visited a month earlier. Save it for next year - hopefully a bu3iness trip.

Four and a half hours later in San Francisco for dinner to Nob Hill and the Top of the Mark for perspective, a panoramic view of this beautiful city. The next morning was mild enough for an open trolley ride to Chinatown and lunch at Fisherman's Wharf. A leisurely three-hour drive down to the Monterrey Peninsula, Carmel-by-the-Sea and the renowned Pebble Beach golf course.

After a day of relaxation along the shores of the Pacific we returned to our Pan Am jet and were off for four hours' anticipation of Honolulu. With the trade winds blowing in seeming cadence to the romantic background of Hawaiian guitars, we basked beneath the cocoanut-palms of an uncrowded Waikiki Beach. After an arduous lesson, there were moments of perpendicular glory upon a surfboard before blue green waves of manageable size. With greying matrons among our classmates the necessary courage was at hand. Back across the lagoon site of our thatched-hut hotel village and the refreshing rums of a Mai Tai accompanied by the succulent marinated savor of steak teriyaki.

Rested and refreshed we set out two days later for, after crossing the date line, our anxiously awaited return to Tokyo where we had been recently stationed. All that we had heard about the dramatic changes of post-Olympics Tokyo proved surprisingly true. No sooner had we arrived at Haneda Airport than it seemed we were through customs, on the Monorail and encamped in one of the world's most modern hotels, the Okura, in downtown Tokyo. The city

bristled at modern metropolis tempo. Thru-ways, subways, the glistening glass and steel of newly-erected office and apartment buildings. Almost eleven million people industriously at work and play. Tokyo at night - an electrician's paradise. Neon everywhere! The fabulous Ginga with its numerous intimate cafes resistant to change. Similarly, the geisha houses but a block away from sumptuous Western styled nightclubs in the Akasaka district. And the reverence of the ancient tea ceremony in the afternoon tranquility of a Japanese stone garden. A fine setting for reminiscing. Sayonara, Tokyo!

Three days later and four and a half hours southward we alighted at Kai Tak Airport overlooking one of the world's most picturesque harbors. Within twenty minutes we were at the Star Ferry for the seven-minute crossing from Hong Kong. The extravagant Mandarin Hotel presents marble and mosaic walled lobbies with sumptuous glass chandeliers more than a hundred feet high, all in conservatively smart old mandarin motif. Rooms with balconies overlooking the harbor and light-spattered hillside are the last word in comfort.

A three days' visit allows Kowloon's armies of tailors ample time for third and fourth fittings for those with one shoulder higher than the other. However, respectable suits for either sex can be turned out within two days. Between morning and early evening visits to one's tailors - and it pays to select a good one like Jimmy Chen - one can easily justify the entire trip or double its expanse by taking advantage of some of the numerous bargains at hand. Gentlemen, beware: Beaded sweaters, pearls, jade, embroidery, handbags, cosmetics, etc. Nor is the man to stray far from sight, ladies: cameras, tape recorders, transistors, golf clubs, sport shirts, pipes, etc.

In conclusion, we found this is a highly rewarding itinerary - guaranteed to broaden any person's horizons. And anyone who thinks this trip sounds more expensive than the grand total of shopping bargains en route, please see me.

The Fearless Feline

Barbara Moeckel

We brought him home from the shelter about 16 years ago where they had named him Fred, and Fred he has remained. He's a loving cat, a lap cat, a couch cat, a table cat. You name it, Fred owns it. That is his winter mode. In the summer he lives on the front porch. Really, he lives there except for an occasional potty break in the garden.

One morning early I went to feed him and found him lounging comfortably under the porch box, while staring fixedly at his food dish. I stared too and Behold!!! A big fat raccoon was eating the remains of last night's supper. I chased it off the porch and went in to fix Fred's breakfast.

Some dry food, some wet food and some fresh water, the menu for the day. He ate greedily, then returned to his lounging position under the porch box. Lazy cat.

Suddenly he leaped from his place, snarled and lunged down the steps Behold!!! The raccoon! And Fred chased it. I can't remember ever seeing him move so fast. "All is well" he meowed at me when he returned and started to snuggle down on my feet, but not for long. The sneaky raccoon's nose appeared again at the top step. Fred snarled, leaped to his feet and chased that Raccoon clear into the woods. Then he walked proudly back to his porch spot where he can be found any time of the day or night. He's Fred the fearless feline who really knows his place around here.

SCHOOL DAYS

Barbara Moeckel

Almost every town has an old school, one that changes with the times but continues to serve thousands of kids through the years. My town has one of those. It's a handsome brick building named Salem School.

I went to Salem School from kindergarten to eighth grade, as did my three younger sisters, as did my three children. And when I got my degree in teaching music, I, alas, was assigned to teach music at Salem School. I was given the attic to use, echoes and all. But it had a good piano, a record player, chalk boards, tables to put things on or to work on, and about twenty-five chairs. Things worked out because we made them work out. We had classes of kindergarten through fifth grade with enough books and records to do a good job.

And we had concerts...two a year. Right now I'm thinking of the fourth grade portion of a spring concert a good many years ago. We were singing happiness songs and our main fourth grade song was "Walkin' Happy". You know: "There's a Kind Of Walk You Walk When You're Feeling Happy". I chose kids to walk in the different ways of the song, and I chose Billy to be the business man. The night of the concert Billy arrived dressed in a suit and tie and carrying a brief case. He walked across that stage with great poise and dignity. I was very proud of them all as they did their walk.

It was the following week as the fourth grade filed into our music room that Billy handed me a note. It was from his mother. She wrote that Billy had always been a bit of a problem child, acting up in class and such, but since he had walked the gentleman walk his behavior had improved and he was no longer trouble in class.

Well isn't that the way it goes sometimes? You move along doing your best and Wham!!!, suddenly you've made a difference in somebody's life.

Eventually I was moved to two different schools, more modern, better equipment, but I kept watching for the special kid who would make beautiful music with me.

North to Norfolk

Barbara Moeckel

We lived in Naugatuck in a nice old house, dated 1872, on a quiet street, in a nice neighborhood. We could walk to church and school and even down town. We had a nice yard with flower gardens and a vegetable garden. It was an ideal house for us. Yet when the opportunities came for travel we went. The most fun was camping in a big tent with sleeping bags and a camp stove and all that kind of stuff.

Then I got an invitation from Ken's cousin Evelyn to visit her in Florida Ken doesn't like to fly so it looked like it would be my very own adventure.

First Evelyn made me comfortable and then we started out to see some of the many sights there are to see in Florida. First we went to church on Sunday morning. Then after lunch we headed for the Psychic Community nearby, a very popular visitation spot. That's where the unusual began. In the Psychics Church there was hymn singing, scripture and prayer and then the guest psychic was introduced. She knew a lot of the people in the congregation and offered them "Psychic readings" Her gaze moved to Evelyn and she said "I see a man standing behind you whose name is Ed and who meant a lot to you". Well, Evelyn's departed husband was Ed.

Then her sight shifted to me. After a moments pause she said "I see the man named Ed standing behind you and a woman named Mary. Mary says she could help you open up and be more outgoing." Well, both my grandmothers were named Mary. I wondered what Mary would have done for me. The psychic said "I see you in April signing your name to some papers." And again that made me wonder...there was nothing I could think of that I'd be signing in April! Oh well, time will tell.

I finished my visit with Evelyn and flew back to Bradley, picked up my car and headed home. I had hardly gotten in the house, and been thoroughly hugged by Ken when he grinned and said "Welcome home. How would like to go look at some property in Norfolk?" My first question was "Where's Norfolk?" He answered, "A little town up north." My second question was "Why not?" So within the next few days we had contacted the realtor and headed north. It was a large property, 41 acres that was mostly woods with a wonderful cabin about a quarter mile into the woods. There was a big meadow for building and a small pond to play in. So we arranged with the realtor to buy it...the whole thing! The closing would be in May. But as things sometimes go the owner had problems with her schedule and couldn't be in Norfolk in May. She'd have to sign in April. Well, I gulped and laughed and reminded Ken "What did the psychic say? I'd be signing papers in April! Well I'll be darned!" And so it was.

We fixed up the cabin and weekendend there often. Eventually we built a house on the meadow near the pond. We learned about wells and septic tanks. We landscaped with flower gardens and a vegetable garden. We learned about commuting to work in Naugatuck every day. We learned that a walk was recreation and if you really wanted to go somewhere you drove. Some said of Norfolk "You can't get there from here" but we learned that you could. I went to church and soon joined the choir. I also joined the Choral Union which performed magnificent concerts in the summer.

So there we were in Norfolk...started on a new life. I wonder what else the psychic would have said had I stayed on in Florida longer.

Thank you for the interesting adventure, Evelyn, and again, thank you.

THE EVOLUTION

Barbara Moeckel

It all started in my parents living room at the old upright piano. We kids just liked to play around and make up songs. I was eight years old when the folks decided it was time for me to take piano lessons. We found Mrs. Becker, a gem of a teacher who started them young and turned out the advanced

Our music teacher was Mr. Davis. He provided many opportunities to sing and play in elementary school, and in high school he provided even more. I joined the chorus and instrumental ensemble. We did two concerts a year as well as music trips around the country. It was quality music and I learned a lot.

At Sunday School they needed a piano player so I filled that spot for a couple years. I also helped organize a junior choir and we frequently sang in church services. The ladies made us white choir robes and we were quite angelic. The next step for me was to join the adult choir. That was great fun...only two of us teenagers in the whole choir. Dad was so pleased that he found me a voice teacher and we stopped the piano lessons. It was a big step forward. I studied with Mrs. Fenn for about four years learning art songs, arias, and church anthems to name a few.

And that was the end of the beginning! It was time for college!

Mr. Davis guided me into a course of music education at Danbury teachers College. Four years of concentrated music taught me much. Beside the regular courses, there were lessons on the flute, the clarinet, the baritone horn, the violin, and the cello. I was less than successful in all of them. I was a singer and a pianist. I even got a job accompanying other students voice lesson. There were a multitude of opportunities to sing and play piano and study. I even had a chance to play the lead in HMS Pinafore.

After graduation I was offered a music teaching job at Swift Jr. High. Oh yes! It was a great school but teenagers will be teenagers whose joy in life is to bug the teachers. But I prevailed for three years until I got my permanent teaching certificate. That was it!! Time for us to start a family!

While we raised three children I was called to be a substitute teacher. In all classes. I remember one day the secretary called me in the middle of the laundry. I couldn't decide whether to earn some money or finish the laundry until the secretary said "Well, make up your mind", so I went.

I earned enough money that year to buy a piano and I started teaching piano lessons. That was fun and very satisfying.

Then one day my big opportunity came. The superintendent of schools called me to say the music teacher in the elementary schools was retiring and did I want the job? I surely wanted that job and it didn't take me long to apply for it. The next fifteen years was a blur of

music classes, choruses, dance groups, concerts, operettas and more. I even had chances to be in operettas. What a marvelous job!

Next we moved to Norfolk and I commuted to Naugatuck for a couple years. Our kids were through with college and we were settled down.

Everything had fallen into place, when I had a nervous breakdown. I had to resign from my job and spend nine weeks in the hospital. Everything was now falling apart and I was lost. Then Dorothy Card took me walking. I think we walked all over Norfolk. She saw that it really helped so she took me to Geer Nursing to volunteer for a job.

And where did they put me but in the chapel to play piano and sing! What do they say? What goes around comes around and a new life came around for me. I formed a music appreciation class for Friday mornings and attended chapel after lunch. That went on for years. I said I was getting pretty old for the job and they said I'd be there past ninety-one.

After a while the music appreciation petered out and we added a sing along chorus to sing favorite songs after chapel. That went so well we even sang Christmas concerts. I added newer songs for them to learn and they really enjoyed. It. My activities now are finding new songs that are appropriate, typing them, copying them, and teaching them.

Geer has become as much of my life as my schools were and I probably will go on until I'm ninety-one.

FALCON

Pat Steele

I was 18 when I first came to live here. My previous owner had rejected me, but the Master took me in-- a 1963 Ford Falcon convertible, white on the outside with red leather seats and white sidewall tires. He washed and polished my white surfaces, repaired the rips in my red seats, and took me for a thorough checkup. After a complete tune-up, the family adopted me and gave me my own home in the small garage.

I became the family mascot, going on weekend outings to the countryside. They outfitted me with something called seat belts, and the children were allowed to ride in the back seat with the top down. On the Fourth of July, they decorated me with banners and balloons, and marched me in the parade, surrounded by eager grade-schoolers. The Master waved, I honked and the children cheered wildly. I loved my time in Montclair. I figure that I marched in ten parades.

Then one day a large truck arrived. They told me to drive up the ramp into the cool interior, where I sat surrounded by furniture and boxes. It was cold and dark inside the truck that February day and I was scared. Were they getting rid of me?

Three days later, the doors opened and the ramp went back in place. There was the Master! He told me I now lived in Illinois, near Chicago and the big lake. He drove me down the ramp, along the long driveway and into a new garage, much larger than the old one. The children were in high school now, and their cars soon joined me. I had found a new home with new companions.

I still got to march in the Fourth of July parade. In Illinois, women blowing on kazoos walked alongside me, but the parade felt the same as it had in New Jersey. I honked, the Master waved and the people by the side of the road cheered.

I didn't get to go on as many outings. The children were older and had other plans for their weekends. I was older too—I was not just a used Ford Falcon anymore; now I was a "classic" with special plates to prove it. But my brakes didn't always respond right away, the passenger door had an unnerving way of popping open when we went around a corner, and every now and then I would stall out in the middle of the street. The Master still loved to take me out, but the Mistress seemed afraid of me. Maybe it was my fault—the passenger door, you know.

One day the Master came and spoke quietly to me. It was time, he said, to find a new Master. He and the Mistress were moving to a place called New York City, where there would be no room for me. He brought around a friend, a young man with young children who said he had a love for classic cars. He wanted to buy me— a 1963 Ford Falcon convertible, white on the outside with red leather seats and white sidewall tires.

I still get to march in parades. Every once in a while, I wonder how the Master and Mistress are doing. And I bet my Master still misses me!

THE CABIN July 10, 2016

Pat Steele

We come down the dusty driveway in the red convertible, my brother and I in the back seat (no seat belts back then!). He is ten and I am five. For us this is a great adventure. The yellow cabin with the green roof appears before us. It is the same as always, drooping slightly after the long winter. The house is inching ever closer to the hill in back, which falls off toward the dirt road below.

Inside, the old furniture is stacked willy-nilly, covered in old sheets. We spend the day sweeping up the debris and setting the old beds and tables out on the sleeping porches. Dad checks the roof for leaks, hoping it survived another winter.

The cabin is a genuine antique. Its storied history included time spent as a bath house for a Colorado frontier town, then as a post office serviced by horses and old cars. Even my grandfather used to drive there in the 1930's, parking his Model T on the circular drive in front of the cabin.

Inside too it is a throwback to another era. We get a box of ice for the old icebox, and fetch some coal from the cellar for the coal stove. There is a wire toaster and a pedal sewing machine. And on the wall is a height chart, capturing generations of our family's time at the Colorado cabin.

Summer is a time for the family to gather. My parents and the two of us await the arrival of my aunt and uncle from New Jersey, with their five children. We children will spend the summer outdoors, running up the small mountains, sliding down the hill behind the house and climbing back up, crawling through the cobwebs under the house, and playing endless games of hide-and-seek and kick-the-can. Cowboys and Indians is one of our favorites, with me in my red felt cowboy hat and my brother in his coonskin cap. The grownups sit on the wraparound porch and watch the endless games, amid the dusty novels and jigsaw puzzles with missing pieces. They too had been children here.

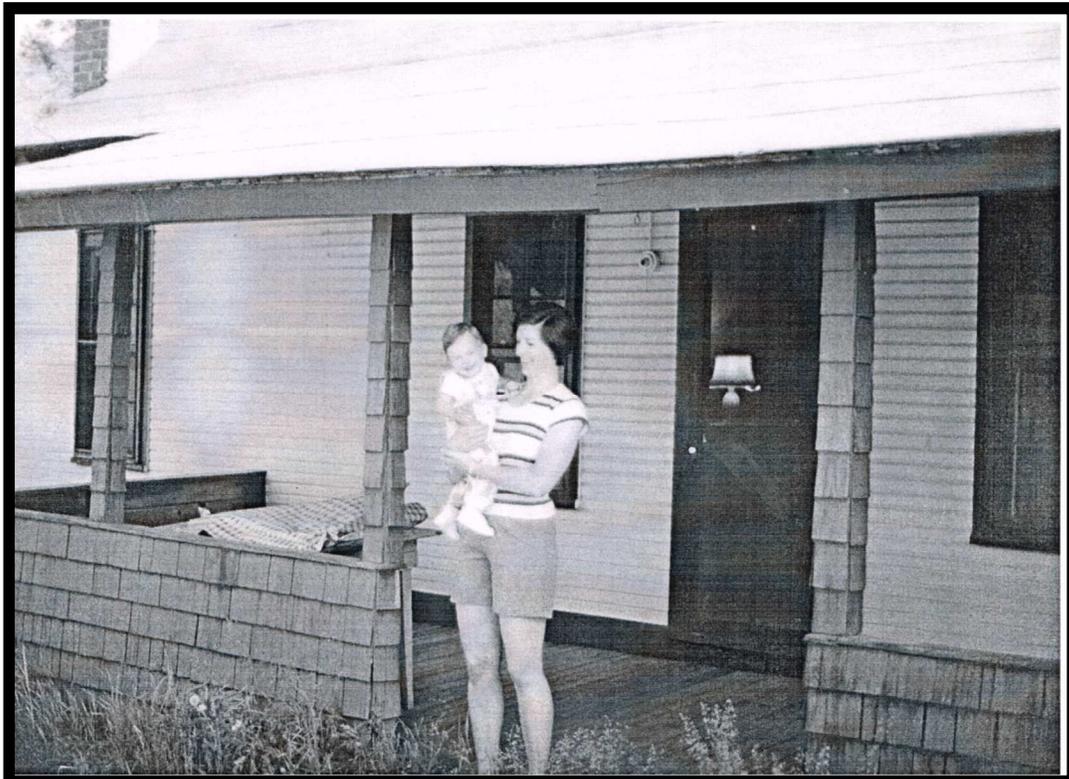
In the afternoon, we pile into the cars and ride to the local lake, frigid from the summer's snow melt. It is here I am supposed to learn to swim, but I recoil from the cold water and huddle under a towel. The older children are not so timid, and splash in the lake to cool off.

Back home when evening comes, we are called inside. The coal stove is a challenge—Mom heats water for 7 dirty kids to bathe, and checks us all for ticks. She struggles to cook on the old coal stove. Gourmet we are not, but somehow all of us sit around the giant table and share a simple dinner. Then we wander off to the various corners of the porches where the old mattresses sit on their saggy wire frames. We are two kids to a bed, balanced on the edges or tilting toward the cavernous middles.

When summer ends and school awaits, we say goodbye to our cousins for another year and return to our lives.

I went back to the cabin to visit a few years ago but it is not the same. The sliding hill is gone, all reinforced and secured, the road paved and the house converted to a typical suburban home. Sad memories flood in. Those summer days are over now, parents are gone and the families are grown and scattered.

The only thing we have saved from the old cabin is the height chart. We had it cut from the wall and framed when the cabin was sold. Now it hangs on the wall in my Norfolk home. Names of new cousins join the frame as the old chart greets new generations of the family arriving in the summer.



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MIDNIGHT IN THE CHICKEN HOUSE

Eve Thew

Rattle, rattle, rattle, cackle cackle, erch erch erch.
(Translation: Little chick, little chick, let me in, I'm hungry.)

"Help, it's happening again.. Got to get to my safety spot.." The spot that the old hen was referring to was a board up by the roof.

Anxiously, she looked about There was one little new chicken left. "Where is she?"

Relieved, she saw her huddled in the corner. "Guess I can't do any more for her." She looked up to her hiding place. With effort she mumbled, "I used to be able to do this so easily." and she managed to fly up to the board up by the roof.

Reflecting while sitting there she remembered her old friends, their lives, the past year. My world used to be so nice, life was a joy, every afternoon we would go out and run in the grass and go under the apple tree. She even remembered September when she would peck at those delicious apples. First thing in the afternoon we would run down to the house while those nice people would laugh and give us pieces of hot dog rolls. What a treat! The lawn mower, that monster, never could get under the apple tree. Life was different. She and her friends would chp chp to each other. They were so happy.

"Guess we're the luckiest old biddies in the world!"

Then came those endless months of white ice outside. They would get fresh water every day and feed in the trough. The henhouse was lit by that warm light. My goodness we all began to feel young again and even gave eggs to those people. Thought those days were over.

Spring returned. The apple tree was covered with blossoms. The sun shone warmly. The grass turned green, the monster mower kept it cut. It would be so easy to run about, but now. she would be alone! In the last few weeks a horrid creature had taken all her friends away. She was the only one who had found a hiding place. And now even the last of the new girls had been taken.

Last night, after all the people had gone to bed, through the newly repaired window she saw the porch light go on at the house.

It was hot. Annie had gone out to the cool porch. She knew we last two birds were safe as she and her dad, Farmer Thew had mended the window this afternoon.

Annie heard something up by the chicken house. Anticipating no real danger, caution insisted she should investigate. Clad in her pajamas, she armed herself with a big knife, a shovel and a flashlight and ventured out into the night. She is a courageous girl. "Whatever it is it must be mighty big! as there was nothing left of the disappeared chickens but a few feathers."

She shined her trusty flashlight at the chicken house window. Two wide eyes had reflected back at her, raccoon eyes. She'd screamed at it. They disappeared immediately like magic. When she opened the door there was only one old bird left hiding up near the roof.

The next day was a lonely one for this old hen, She spent it on the porch of the house in a dog crate! How degrading.

Annie and her friend Jan hunted high and low for an unknown access to what had been a cozy home for their chicks.

Finally satisfied they repaired a spot where the chicken wire around the window had been pulled loose.

So home I went and in familiar surroundings I settled onto my roost.

.....

Meanwhile at Annie and Jan's house- Another night, another apprehensive morning trip to the henhouse, another cautious opening of the door.

Empty. It couldn't be, but there it was. Nothing.

Man, who inherited the earth, who can walk on the moon, who can photograph and analyze the rings around Saturn cannot keep a raccoon out of the henhouse!

The only solution can be hardware cloth across all entries.

Five new chickens live in this bastion now. They have spent one safe night there. What will happen tonight?

APPLE TREE TRAIL

Eve Thew

In 1929 a new housing development opened in Westport CT. It was on a dead end street boasting 18 houses. It ran straight back about 500 feet from the Cedar Point Yacht Basin which was a safe harbor for the new group of boats owned by a new group of commuters, formerly New York City apartment dwellers and their young families who were thrilled to find a place in the country in walking distance of a Long Island Sound Beach. Apple Tree Trail was the continuation of Murvon Road. Its beginning was conspicuous by the apple tree in the center of the road.

Now, Compo Beach the attraction for these young city dwellers, was not a beautiful sandy beach, but one covered with round smooth stones coated with the sparse supply of sand that found its way ashore on the changing tides. The sand would scrape the bottom of bare city feet as they struggled over the round stones.

We walk along a boardwalk, much easier, along the beach in front of the changing rooms in a long wooden building. There was a pavilion at one end for folks to sit while escaping the hot rays from the sun. It adjoined another building which in today's language would be called a snack bar. We kids called it all "The Pavilion". The other end of the boardwalk housed the First Aid Station where you could get your latest cut bandaged by Eddie Wildfoster a husky man who was also the Life Guard in the tall chair atop a ladder right by the Lifeboat just in case of someone swimming- too far out. We kids were the offspring of the commuters who were escaping New York's summer heat.

All of our dads caught the 7:27 each morning and returned on the train that left Grand Central at 5:25 each afternoon. Our mothers would pack us into the back of the family car and each day after our supper, and in our pajamas, we would see each other at the station. We met twice daily in our pajamas, mornings at 7:15 and evenings at about 6:45.

Come meet our families...

We'll start at the Apple Tree, run down the dirt road and back up the other side and meet again at "The Tree". As you can imagine we never were at a loss for playmates. Occasionally houses were swapped, but essentially most families stayed while children grew. At "The Tree", as you walked down from the beach, on the right was Miss Beecroft. Hers was the house that proved the rule, "there were children in every house" on the street. She had none.

We would ride our tricycles up to her house. We lived at the other end, by the "brick wall". (I'll describe that later.) Every Thursday Miss Beecroft made cookies. She was a great old lady, she must have been fifty, and mixed her cookies by mashing them in her hands. She had a gas stove, we had an electric. I wondered why, it seemed so easy to turn ours on. One Thursday, I remember clearly, a strange old man came out her back door. He was wearing a black visored cap. "Hi kids, my name is Chester. I'm Mary's brother. I've been at sea ever since she moved here. Glad to meet you all." He was about Daddy's height, stood taller than Granpop, and needed to shave. His clothes were kinda wrinkled. "Have you come to see her?"

"Today is Thursday." we responded. To this unexpected response he said, "I'd like to meet you all. What are your names? Where do you live?" Dick Hanson answered, "Weee all lllive down the street." Dickie spoke up 'cause he was the biggest. He was bow legged. He had rickets. He even went to school. "All seven of you?" Suddenly the back door opened again and Miss Beecroft's smile shone at us, "Come in children. The cookies just came out of the oven. Chester, these are my new friends. I make cookies for them every Thursday." We jammed our way through the door looking at the cookie sheet.

Hands reached out. "Not yet children. They're still hot." Finally with each hand clutching a cookie the invaders left Mary Beecroft grinning in her kitchen.

Mary Beecroft, we later found out had been a nurse and ambulance driver in France and had daringly rescued many wounded soldiers. This was long ago. Our fathers had fought in that war. When she moved to Apple Tree Trail she ran a nursing home. All we were aware of was there were a lot of sick old people living there and we should keep our voices down. One day when we were playing Kick the Can, a kid came out of Miss Beecroft's house!

"I'm Jacques Istelle. I live in Paris." His accent astonished us. He was different. Jacques even wore short pants. He could not have been happy on "The Trail", after all he was different. He did manage one year with Miss Beecroft. How he landed on Apple Tree Trail I never did find out, but he went off to school and we lost track of him.

Later, another contact with Jacques. It came at the end of my sophomore year in college. I'd just gotten home for summer vacation when the phone rang and Jacques asked me to the movies. It was uneventful but I was impressed that after four years at Harvard he had not lost his accent. There was another time he showed up. A bunch of Westporters were at a friend's house holding beers standing around her piano singing. The phone rang and are friend proudly announced she had a surprise. A young man from France was coming over. She thought he should learn how Americans have a good time. She went to the station to pick him up and I'm sure you've guessed who walked in. He had her enthralled since he announced at midnight in loud tones that he made the "best squambled aikes in ze East". After that I didn't run into Jacques again, but after we moved here to Norfolk we watched he popular TV show, "What's My Line?" on and there was a group of young men lined up, one of whom had made more parachute jumps than anyone else in the country. His name was Jacques Istelle. Nobody guessed correctly who was the real Jacques Istell. So he got the prize money. Guess the accent finally paid off.

16 Apple Tree Trail was our last address in Westport, but as I said, people traded houses as their needs arose and at the time I'm speaking of, the Joneses were feeling squeezed. This comparatively small house was occupied by the Robert Haydon Jones family. Bob Jones was an account executive for the Coca Cola Company and his work days were spent on expanding his career and his nights were spent on expanding his family.

Joan, his wife, spent her days taking care of her family of three boys and one baby girl with the help of young girls who came in. Mother's helpers were easy to find in the thirties as young people eagerly tried to contribute to the family income during the depression. The Jones boys were Bob Jr. the oldest, who suffered from importance position, Kit who became Chris Jones of CBS News, and Jeff, a charming young boy whom everyone loved. Jeremy,

the long anticipated pretty girl to whom they surprisingly gave a boy's name, was a delightful kid. I never turned down a baby sitting job at the Joneses.

Joan Jones ran a strict home. She had a pallid personality which matched her bleached white hair, talcum powder complexion and beige clothes. She was thin, a perfectly nice person though constantly tired, who let her husband dominate their lives.

The offspring responded to their colorless background by becoming a sparkling fun bunch. In the late afternoon or early evening the three boys went out on their front lawn mimicking baseball games taking the parts of the announcer, major league player and fans drawing attention and entertaining all within the listening area.

When my father found our house becoming too large, as John and I were engaged and my brother in the NROTC (Naval Reserve Officer's Corp), he suggested we move across the street into the Jones' house and they relax into ours. This move was a bit confusing to the movers who repeatedly moved possessions of each to the house across the street. After the movers left each family took its own treasures to their permanent home.

14 was an average size house with all the accoutrements of the others on the street. These were a maid's quarters, a master bedroom, three or four bedrooms, a living room with fireplace, dining area, a screened porch and garage. Not one of them was planned ahead, but the enterprising man who planned them all would walk down the street each morning and tell the builders what he wanted them to do each day. He must have been a genius as he planned and executed three or four developments and contributed much of Westport's early charm.

Fourteen Apple Tree Trail was rented to families each summer so we regulars had little contact with the summer kids as our only contact with them was at the beach.

12 was another small house. It belonged to Marie Wilson, the widow of Forest Wilson, the author. She was from Hawaii and took in her niece, Carolyn. We called her "Nyllie" and that she remained throughout school. She complained about her aunt who made her scrub the kitchen floor with a toothbrush. Whether or not she thought we believed her I never knew, but eventually she and her aunt moved to Weston as the house caught fire. The only fire I remember in all those houses.

#10 was where Hookie Hochstetler lived. He was a good baseball player, had a freckled face and went to elementary school with us. More than that I really do not recall. These houses occupied the center of the parade so moving three times starting at #2 and ending at #16, I didn't really know them well.

I do remember Bondy Hollenbeck lived in the next house. He was a tall good looking popular boy who had gone to early grades with John in another one of Westport's three elementary schools. John remembers a substitute teacher, at the mercy of a devilish third grade, who tried to take the attendance. Finally, after putting up with imaginary names, she sat all the children at their desks and told them emphatically that she must have their true names. As luck would have it the next child to query was Bondy. When she heard his serious response, "Bonderico Hollenbeck" she threw down the ledger and stormed from the room uttering "That does it!".

The next house I knew well. It was occupied by a colorful family. I must tell you about "Ducky" (Donald) Wood and his family. He had a grandfather named "Grandpere" who understood little of what we kids said in spite of our screaming to him. He had a mother who was missing her upper lip and replaced it by drawing it with lipstick, she had long black eyelashes, very pink cheeks and long white hair. Ducky's father, Bill was a Westport realtor, a good looking quiet man whom everyone liked though he seldom was home. We all kept track of Ducky's birthday which was, to his embarrassment, on April first.

We all anticipated Ducky's birthday from year to year as he had a superb birthday cake made by Grandpere! His mother idolized her little boy, never failing to give him a party with hats and blowers and all. He grew up, married and had a little boy. I heard he had died a few years later. His mother, Eleanor, became his father Bill's secretary and worked with him. Together they were most successful. She outlived Bill, tied up her flowing locks, told delightful stories on herself and was a guest in demand in the growing town.

Eleanor came into her own. What did it I do not know, it may have been the loss of her father, the respect of her husband, the New York influence on her appearance or people turning to her for advice. She found herself at most of the cocktail parties and she was a delightful guest usually telling stories about her malaprops. There is one I must tell you. My Aunt Peg told me this one after we had moved to Norfolk.

Eleanor went to a party exhausted. Here is why. I've mentioned her long white hair, her missing upper lip and the fact that she needed quantities of rouge. Well, this happened at around midnight on a sleepless foggy night. She got into her car and drove to the beach thinking she could refresh herself with a walk along the shore. It was difficult driving in the thick fog but she arrived there with no mishap and parked closer to the water than she usually did. She got out clad only in her diaphanous white nightgown with long sleeves. Her hair, unfettered, held the mist giving it a sparkle down to her shoulders. Her long white nightgown with flowing sleeves clung lightly to her. Mind you she was about seventy at this time and with many years of exposure to the sun had dry wrinkled skin which she cleaned of makeup faithfully every night. She walked until she felt she could go home and get some sleep. Turning, she headed up the beach to find her car. The fog was even heavier than when she'd arrived. After walking back and forth for about an hour she was unable to find the car. It must have been 2:00 AM by now.

With her natural logic she went up to one of the waterfront houses lining the beach and knocked, finally rousing a man who opened the door who took one look at the apparition standing in the fog and slammed it. She tried the next one. A woman opened it, screamed and slammed the door. The next house belonged to someone she knew. As the woman opened the door she called out her name. To the woman's unbelieving look she heard her say, "Mrs. Wood ?" "May I use your phone?"

No offer of a cup of tea, a distance maintained between them, the woman replied, "Certainly" and Eleanor phoned the police, stated she had a problem. After fifteen minutes of awkward silence a knock at the door announced the arrival of a State cop who looked at her, unbelief on his face, and asked what she wanted. Eleanor responded meekly, "A ride home ." "OK. Lady", he said, "Get in the car. Where do you live?" Strange, thought Eleanor. State cops are usually so cordial.

As she sat dripping water all over his car she again saw unbelief on his face as he drew up to her door. He looked at her, apologized, and said, "I'm sorry Mrs. Wood. I didn't recognize you."

When she got inside she rushed to the mirror and burst out laughing. She understood.

The Cadwells moved into the next house by the brick wall. This is the house my family originally rented. They had two boys Johnny and David, aged eight and ten. Johnny was my first crush at the age of about six. Mr. and Mrs. Cadwell went off one Saturday and were never heard from again. Neighbors phoned the police as the boys were still alone on Monday. I never heard more about them. It was a devastating occurrence to me rather like one of Grimm's fairy tales as I spent my early childhood terrified of being left alone each time my parents went out.

That house was occupied next by Russ and Dottie Blair and their Rusty. Rusty and his wife, Isabel are still two of our closest friends. Rusty's handsome father, Russ Blair joined the Navy in WWII and looked wonderful in his officer's uniform. Dottie, unable to keep an eye on him died of a broken heart and cancer about ten years later. My earliest memory of the Blairs was that Rusty caught his sleeve in the wringer while helping his mother do the wash. We sent our laundry out so had no washing machine. I still am impacted by the thought of bones being crushed between the rollers.

The other house next to the brick wall facing the Blairs was occupied by my aunt, uncle and cousin. Our two families were close, my cousin Maclear and I being a mere three weeks apart. We spent many childhood hours together in our imaginations.

The popular Jacobys had moved from Brooklyn Heights and brought many other Brooklynites to Westport with them. Maclear and I were like brother and sister, a relationship which still remains.

Badminton, Ping Pong, Tennis, and Archery were the dominant sport interests in our lives. Maclear and I spent our first six or seven years as Aunt Peg's and my parents' audiences. Uncle Mac did not share the same interests as the rest of the family as he loved the sea. He had achieved fame by sinking a German Submarine as the captain of a wooden Sub Chaser in WWI. Finally, Uncle Mac bought a boat and we children were included on many excursions and our lives became more centered on the water. Aunt Peg's and Uncle Mac's house became one of the social centers of the town. She loved to entertain.

Now we are recovering our steps down the road and heading back toward the apple tree. Another family of Joneses moved into the house next to the Jacobys. This was occupied by the Kinsey Jones family. Madeleine Jones and Aunt Peg became good friends hanging their clothes on the lines which, despite the picket fence between them, formed a straight line. The two of them were sun worshippers and would frequently be seen sleeping in adjoining chaises in the hot sun of Aunt Peg's driveway. Kinsey Jones was another product of Madison Avenue advertisers. He fathered three daughters, more of my baby sitting jobs, and with whom we have crossed paths in the last few years as they too sought refuge in the Berkshires.

Next house- The Ekstroms. They were a nice family but our families had little contact because of children's ages, high school instead of elementary school. I think they had several blond boys who had little to do with the rest of us Apple Tree Trail kids though they did play a great game of baseball. I do remember Glen Ekstrom married Molly Ann Healy who was the subject of much high school gossip. I had known Molly Ann in growing years and did know that she was always in trouble. Her mother, Dickie, was admired by Aunt Peg for taking up a career after being divorced in middle age. She ran a successful dress shop on Westport's fashionable Main Street, (By Gum that could be another story! Don't panic, I haven't the time.)

The Smiths, summer people, lived in the little house next to our house. The Smiths' was another house without children. This house was immaculate outside, perfectly manicured grounds, tan paint with no flaws. Mr. and Mrs. Smith must have been happy in their solitude. They emphatically informed us that we were not to play in their yard. As I remember, no one disobeyed them, we would not have thought to, and for that reason they stayed on there summer after summer, living alone, not sharing in Apple Tree Trail life. No one knew anything about them. They never had visitors and finally after all those years Mr. Smith died. That was the first time neighbors knocked on their door. Mrs Smith was so delighted that it left me wondering why they acted as they had. No, she never invited anyone in, but she was so appreciative of the attention. Had she been starved for it? The house sat unoccupied after that and I'm tempted to go see if it is now.

My dear brother was the reason we moved to that end of Apple Tree Trail. We had rented until then and were in need of more space. This house was large having servant accommodations in an apartment over the two car garage. It was styled like a single chimney New England farm house, as they were in the 40s, ruined by a front stoop with pillars. Each house was unique depending on the mood of the owner who had walked the street directing the builders to his whim. Unique style to each house even seemed to carry with it unique stories. The Van de Waters occupied this house long enough to collect many stories. Ed and Eve Van de Water had two children, John and Peekie, who were six years apart. Eve was the sister of Maclear Jacoby, the occupant of the big house by the Brick Wall. As I said earlier, we were a close family, all from New York. Peekie adored her little brother despite filial jealousies. He was a beautiful child who became the Sheffield Farms Baby of the year. Not only that, he was outstanding scholastically as she certainly wasn't. Johnny and Peekie lost their mother to a heart attack in 1942. Johnny started looking for attention by seventh grade breaking windows in the many empty beach cottages. In a neighborhood filled with kids he had no trouble finding an accomplice. Ed, a commuter unable to keep track of his newly delinquent son, sent him off to Deerfield Academy removing him from the Apple Tree Trail influence. By now Peekie, to fill the emptiness in her life, had become one of the fattest girls in high school.

Poor Ed, suddenly had a difficult family and time kept making things more difficult. The next problem to hit him was Petit Mal. He lost his memory. This was especially difficult for a man trying to run a real estate business in New York City without a secretary. This struck midway through Peekie's Freshman year in college in the middle of one night when Peekie fortunately was home on vacation. At about one AM he went to her room asking, "Where is your Mother?"

She had died only a few short years earlier. The shock of that question gave this devastated daughter's new maturity another boost and somehow she rose to the occasion, got up, and took her badly shaken father to the kitchen for a cup of cocoa and a bit of solace. He responded hereafter by depending on his daughter for immediate help who in turn depended on her Aunt Peggy for immediate help.

The last house on Apple Tree Trail was adjoining the Van de Waters and was inhabited by the Westings. The Westings were the most prolific of the Apple Tree Trail parents. Ralph was a tall good looking man who was married to Helen. He had been a flyer in WWI and his picture in uniform was proudly displayed in their living room. Ralph and Helen had five children, Midge, Ann, Grace Mary, Murphy and Suzy. They were all in demand socially and were lots of fun. Ralph was the son of wealthy Long Islanders who lost all his inheritance in the stock market crash of '29. He was at a loss to find a paying job as were many men at that time. He went further in debt by starting a magazine to compete with the Readers Digest. I doubt he had any experience in publishing and he picked a field that gave him plenty. He was always immaculately dressed and we found later that Helen made all his clothes as well as the children's.

Their house had a front porch which faced the street and covered three quarters of the front. We spent many hours out there playing Monopoly. The older girls seemed to have no problem with the house being filled with young kids so all that went on at the Westings was happy times. As the girls grew up, Midge went on to college and eventually had a position at UCONN. What it was I have no idea. The next girl in line was Ann who joined the WAF (Women's Air Force). She met her end here being killed in a crash with her boy friend. How terrible! That was the first war casualty many of us had known. The next girl was the middle child, Grace Mary, and I have no idea what happened to her, but would not be surprised if she married and had a beautiful family. She was followed by Murphy (Ralph Jr.) a tall good looking boy whom I am sure ended up being a heart throb though he disappeared from our lives into the throes of California. Suzy, my dear friend, would come over every Sunday when my father was washing the car and enchanted him, undoubtedly making the task easier.

Then one day Ralph Sr. did not come home from work. Helen, being nobody's fool, went to his California address. She bought a roundtrip ticket to California on a Greyhound bus, asked directions, walked to the address, went up to his apartment, let herself in, opened the bedroom door, saw him in bed with a blonde head next to his, quietly closed the door, walked back to the bus station, handed the return ticket to the bus driver and returned to Connecticut and divorced him.

AND THAT'S HOW IT WAS ON APPLE TREE TRAIL

Pepper

Holly Tarrant

Sitting on the couch, resources surrounding me, I plugged along with my writing plans for the next day. As I thought about the usual... *What materials do I need for the mini lesson? Will the students understand the objective? Is there anything I'm forgetting about interruptions to our daily schedule?* ... something was different. An old friend, a friend I had known many years ago kept nudging her way into my thoughts. I smiled reflecting on our good times together, but quickly returned to thinking about my students: *What will I give for meaningful homework tonight? How shall I group them for the activity?* There she was again in my thoughts.

Setting the plans aside, I made my way to the top drawer of the hutch where all of my photos were stored. I rummaged through the pictures until I found the one I was searching for. It was of a teenage girl with her head nestled into the face of a Holstein cow. They both seemed relaxed. The year was 1982 and that young girl was me and the Holstein was my cow, Pepper.

As I glanced at the photo I was reminded of a story that touched me deeply.

I had been anticipating this day for months. Waiting impatiently...like a child for Christmas. *I wondered ... wondered if the calf would be the color of Pepper... wondered if the calf would have the personality of Pepper ... wondered how Pepper would be as a mother.* All I really knew for sure was that I would be the owner, the proud owner of a dam and daughter. Pepper would be giving birth soon for the first time. She did not live with me anymore, but the farmer promised to call with the news as soon as he knew something.

I remembered when I first met her almost two years ago. In the corner of the barn I saw her. She was so young, only one day old. She stood alone looking at me. It took me a moment to find her eyes. They were hidden by fur as black as coal. It was easy to name her. She stood about three feet high. I could only find a few places of white: on her tail, under her stomach, and on all legs below the knee. I felt a connection from the start; she was special.

Pepper was entertaining. She was always making me laugh. She was curious about everything and, as a result, was drawn to trouble. As a young calf, when I put a bale of hay in front of her, instead of eating it, she would head butt it dispersing the hay in all directions.

As I remembered the year I led her in the town Memorial Day Parade, I began to chuckle. I wore a t-shirt with the 4-H logo and Pepper had red ribbons tied around her ears. We joined the end of the parade where the children carrying American flags walked. I led her past the laughing spectators, who did not seem to bother her at all. However, the sounds of the band became too much for her, so we headed home. I will always remember the only time I marched with a calf in a parade. I had calves that made me laugh, I had calves that I cared for. And I had Pepper.

She was a friend. She would always make her way toward me as I walked to greet her in the field, meeting me halfway. I could work on her for hours washing her, brushing her, petting

her, talking to her. I had calves that I brushed, I had calves that I pet. And I had pepper.

As she grew older, she kept her entertaining personality. At the fairs, she would sometimes fight the rope, resisting my lead. Sometimes she would decide to lay down in the middle of a class if she was tired, while I struggled to keep her standing or moving.

She was often times the center of attention. People were drawn to her, her black fur; it was irresistible. Young and old enjoyed her. She was pet many times by friends and strangers, and it never seemed to bother her, not once.

The sky was gray, it was a late November afternoon. I was in my room reading when I heard my Dad's footsteps approaching. He entered. At first, I was not sure what he was saying; he was not speaking in complete thoughts. I began feeling nervous; I sensed something was very wrong. "There was trouble ... complications giving birth...calf twisted ... exhausted ... gave everything she had."

"Is Pepper OK?" I asked.

"She gave everything she had and wasn't left with anything to fight with," my Dad responded. My ears heard those words. My heart felt those words.

"Is the calf OK?" I asked.

Dad did not say anything. The silence gave me my answer.

I had anticipated this day for months. Waiting impatiently ... like a child for Christmas. There would be no celebration, no new package to open. Instead, the day brought the news of two deaths. One, an animal I had never met. The other, a friend I had loved since I first saw her almost two years ago. She was an animal worth knowing. I would be the owner, proud owner of a dam and daughter, not at all.

It was not the gift I had expected, but I knew I would hold the gift of her memories wrapped tight within me, untying them occasionally through the years. Then, wrapping them back up, so they would never escape. But for now, unforgettable pain.

There are friends that touch our lives so deeply, that even when they have departed from us physically, their influence is so powerful it seems as though they are still here. Pepper was that kind of friend. She was my cow, my 4-H project, my pet. I realized when that happened that sometimes a loss can cause our hearts to hurt for a long period of time, especially when we are not prepared for what's coming. However, I also realized some friends will visit our conscience when we least expect them to. Maybe that is their way of saying, "Hello," and checking in once in a while to be sure they are never forgotten.

Pugsley

Holly Torrant

How will I get this all accomplished, I wondered, as I scurried about my Sand Road House. I would rush into one room, begin working on something, think of something else, and rush in the direction of another room. There were so many unfinished tasks at the moment, but the anticipation of the next few days made it all worth it. It was 7 p.m. and I was packing for my trip to Florida with Jeff. We would be staying in Naples with his Uncle Pete and Auntie Pat; I loved them. They were the first family of Jeff's I was introduced to and, immediately, I felt comfortable around them. "Oh, I need to get to Stop and Shop for more kitty litter," I realized. I left the house with lights on in all rooms, many things unfinished, and headed to the center of Canaan for a quick trip in and out of the grocery store.

While out, I decided to fill the Hyundai with gas, and visit the ATM for some cash. It was a rather warm evening (considering it was a New England January), so pumping the gas was not an inconvenience. I was watching the numbers flip on the screen when a white SUV, with Florida plates, pulled in. I thought I recognized the man, but could not place from where. I began thinking about Kaitlyn Victory, a former fourth grade student. Something was hinting to me that he was a relative of hers. He jumped out, with the car running, and began asking if anyone had seen a pug around. He was obviously very concerned about this missing pet. No one had seen the dog (There were only two of us pumping gas at the time). He ran into the Mobil to let the attendant know in the case there were some sightings of the pug.

As I turned right onto Rt.44, leaving the fuel station behind, I thought about what a frightening situation this man was in. I sent a little prayer to the pug, held onto my visor angel pins, and thanked God Fenway was safe at home. *Only one more stop and I'll be able to finish packing, I thought.*

Canaan is usually quiet at night. I love driving through this small hometown no matter what time of day it is. The Clu Clunk of the railroad tracks... The Salisbury Bank sign showing the temperature, then the time, the temperature, then the time... I put my right blinker on and turned into the quiet, dark ATM drive. The machine booth was lit making the empty lot seem somewhat awake. I left the car running, grabbed my card, and headed to the booth. My eye caught something moving off toward the drive in teller lanes. Next, I heard it, the bark of a little dog. It was making its way toward me and I could easily see now that it was a pug! He was talking away. I was so excited, I needed to get the pug in my car, and find that man with the Florida plates. At that very moment, Jody Law (Vice-President of the bank) was leaving work; Jody often works long hours. He was headed in the direction of the parking lot when he saw me. I was relieved to see him. I love Jody; he has the best laugh - lippy and fun. Wearing his three-piece suit and chuckling a bit, he helped me hoist the pug into the front seat of my car. There was one problem: No tags!

The dog reminded me so much of my friends Kim and Russell's dogs, Willie and Doogie. He positioned himself on the edge of the front passenger seat. Soon the little paws were on the dashboard and he was looking out the window. He made me laugh so hard with the noises he was making - a lot of grunting and panting at the same time - not to mention the slobbering.

Clearly, my windshield was in need of cleaning after having the pug in my car for less than two minutes.

"Which way to go?" I pondered. I took a left onto Rt. 44 and headed back to the Mobile. I darted inside to let the attendant know that I found the pug. Unfortunately, the man with the Florida plates did not leave a number. "What now?" I questioned. I decided to leave my cell number with the worker in hopes the pug's owner would check in again. I drove around the center of town desperate to find the white car with the Florida plates, but there was nothing but disappointment. If only the owner knew I had his precious pet. The pug continued to communicate with me and I was growing fond of this little guy by the minute. I decided the next stop would be to the Troop B Police Barracks. As I pulled in, I was reminded of a previous visit and thankful, this time, to have the purpose be to reunite a dog and his owner. The officer on duty was kind enough, but explained there was nothing he could do. No one had called to report a missing dog, so he suggested I call the dog warden.

I have known the dog warden for years and knew he would help if he could. I decided to make the call. I drove back to the Stop and Shop and parked with a view of Rt. 44 in hopes of spotting the white car with Florida plates. As I dialed the number, my eyes caught a glimpse of the time: 7:53! It was approaching 8 p.m. *Oh no, how am I going to get everything done? What do I do with this pug if I can't get ahold of Glen (the dog warden)? I can't bring him home; Fenway will go crazy and I'm leaving for Florida tomorrow!* There was no answer at the Wheeler home, so I left a message for Glen and my cell phone number.

"Well little guy, let's head back to the streets of Canaan," I shared. At least I had a full tank of gas. I knew the pug's owner must be frantically searching for his furry-slobbering friend. There were no signs of progress towards this hopeful reunion yet. I drove back to the Stop and Shop, parked the car, and began talking out ideas with the pug. I really was at a loss. Without Glen home, I did not have a direction. Just then, the phone rang and I prayed it was Glen. It was even better the gas station attendant was calling to say the owner stopped back in! Yeah - I told the pug this was going to be a happy ending after all.

We quickly made our way to the station. It seemed so bright after sitting in the dark parking lot. There it was, the white car with Florida plates. I pulled into the spot next to it and the man immediately approached my car. When I opened the door, he grabbed the pug in his arms and yelled, "Pugsley, Oh Pugsley!"

Aah, what a name, I thought. He thanked me over and over. After that, I watched the two of them get in the car and drive away.

As I headed back toward Sand Road, the anticipation of the next few days was present. I really was excited about this trip to Florida. And now, I felt even better. I did not want to think about how the night could have gone. As I pulled into my driveway, with a lit house to greet me, I thought the man with the white car and Florida plates really needs to get Pugsley dog tags.

Travel in Russia

Peter Anstay

As is often the case, travel in Russia has its own little moments of excitement:

I was traveling from Moscow, where I was living, to the city of Penn to meet with a manufacturer of high technology plastics.

Penn was founded by Tsar Peter the Great as an industrial, arms producing area. It's three hours by small, three-engined Yak 40 jet and two time zones from Moscow. Appropriately the name means far away land in the Finnish language of its founders. That puts it almost in Asia. Except where it has been cleared for either barley or cows the land is mixed deciduous and evergreen forest. It's gently rolling, building into geologically old and rounded hills as they become the Urals. The Urals' impressiveness is greater in the South than up near Penn. However, it's still the dividing line between Europe and Asia. That's impressive. Stalin moved much of the military industry that had been within striking range by the Nazis out to Penn during WW2, taking advantage of its "far away" location. During Soviet times it was a closed city.

The flight departed from a newly refurbished airport, designed by a Dutch company. It was modest and therefore quite non-Soviet.

As the plane approached the city the landscape changed without gradation from rural to city. The city is long and slim; hugging both sides of the Kama River. By Russian standards small, but by any other standard the Kama is enormous. The main bridge connecting both sides of the city is over a mile long and about 300 feet above the water. Over the ages the river has sculpted a gorge into the land, so the city is on cliffs. That makes it attractive. You see fishermen in the middle of the bridge with their lines hanging way down below them. I'm told that when they catch something they have to walk to one shore to haul it in. They pray a barge won't cut the line.

The plane descended for the landing and it was clear the single runway was closed for resurfacing. The pilot, who was presumably not surprised, did something distinctly Russian in its directness - he landed in the grass. When he applied reverse thrust, clumps of grass and clods of earth stuck the fuselage and windows, but I've had worse landings at Philadelphia. I learned that the resurfacing had been a condition established by Lufthansa before they would agree to consider having direct flights from Frankfurt.

Quite a contrast with the departure airport.

Great Barrier Reef - Saturday, 8 November 2008

Peter Anstay

Did three dives on the Great Barrier Reef today, each around 45 feet. Water temps were 80 degrees on the bottom, and horizontal visibility exceeded 90 feet. The last dive presented a 4-5 knot current, which was hard slogging away from the boat, but a delightful drift in a vertical position back. Conditions were as close to perfect as it gets.

By any measurement the reef is beautiful, and the portfolio of sea life gives a diver everything. I'll tell you about the two highlights for me. On the second dive we were going along a 45-foot wall at a depth of about 35 feet. About 10 feet above us we came across a Green Turtle eating algae off the coral. He was about 3 feet in diameter, just munching away. I approached to within 3 feet and watched him. He wasn't bothered at all, just kept munching. It occurred to me as I watched that he was a fellow air breather down there, so in a way we were fellow adventurers. After some time he finished lunch and then pushed off from the reef and swam past me to head out into the blue of the ocean. I watched him slowly swim away until he was out of sight. I don't know why, but it was emotional.

On the final dive we had just gotten down on the bottom from the boat and were equalized and neutral in buoyancy. As we headed away, the guide, who by the way was the same nice young man I had several months ago, made a karate chopping gesture over his head. That's the sign for shark. Dead ahead was a five-foot whitetip reef shark

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitetip_reef_shark

He passed about 20 feet away swimming from left to right. That was another gripping moment. It was so fascinating to see him that I felt only curiosity. He didn't look in our direction; he just kept going.

The thought that crossed my mind was how perfectly Mother Nature had made him that the design hasn't changed in millions of years. He was so streamlined. He looked like a jet fighter, or that Ferrari we saw, Dan, in the Cincinnati Museum. Really quite an object of beauty.

The contrast of the slow passivity of the turtle and the determined intensity of the shark was impossible to miss.

What a day.

OBSERVATIONS

Rae Foster

There she was as always, standing at the kitchen stove, stirring the breakfast oatmeal, whistling a bright cheerful tune. Her gray hair tied back in a bun, her pink house dress covered with a blue flowered apron.

"How come you're always so happy in the morning," I asked? Her reply, "because today is the day the Lord has made. And that means anything that went wrong yesterday is over and done with. And today we can start all over again. Each new day is a gift from God for a fresh clean start."

This was her philosophy, each day a gift from God to be lived to its fullest, and to be cherished as a new beginning.

A typical day, I recall, would begin by getting thirteen of us, herself included, fed and dressed; father off to work; the eight of us older ones, with lunch boxes in hand, trudging up the hill towards school; the two preschoolers put on the potty to do their daily job; and the almost totally deaf and blind elderly lady she had taken in years ago, settled in her chair by the radio, with a pan of apples to peel.

While we were at school, the house would be quickly cleaned, beds made, laundry for 13 done in the old wringer washer and hung up to dry. When we arrived home we would smell the freshly baked apple pies that were for supper plus chocolate chip cookies. Each of us were allowed to take a handful before we had to go out and help bring in the wash and then do our homework.

Sometimes one of the children might come home sad and in tears. The kids at school had been teasing him because he was an orphan and didn't have a real mother and father. He was a state kid.

Mother would take him by the hand, stand him in front of the mirror and tell him to look long and hard. Then would ask, what do you see?" Usually the answer was, "just me." Mother would strongly and firmly say yes, "you! A child of God and what your earthly parents are or aren't has nothing to do with you. You are first and foremost a child of God and you can do and be anything you want in life. You are accountable only to God."

You are first and foremost a child of God and accountable only to Him. This she instilled in each and every one of us. This she lived herself till the very end of her eighty-three years on this earth. A total of twenty-two foster children had the opportunity to experience her love and benefit from her teachings.

One Mothers Day, years later, after the children had all grown, she was given special recognition in church for the humanitarian work she had done with children over the years and for her work in the church and Sunday School for more than forty years. She accepted the flowers and the recognition with her usual poise, graciousness and gratitude, but when she

returned to her pew she leaned over to me and said, "my goodness, I had no idea I had done all that." She was too busy living and doing to spend time taking account of what was being done.

Indeed, she had done "all that" and more. People from all walks of life came to her for support, understanding and counsel. She opened her home not only to mentally, emotionally and physically handicapped children but to the elderly as well. She helped restore their self-respect and dignity. Made them feel wanted, needed and useful.

When she was sixty years old my father had a stroke and she insisted on nursing him herself. Again her philosophy being, God never gives you a load to carry that he doesn't supply the strength to go with it. Dad was chair-fast and needed care several times during the night. For the next twelve years she never got a full night's sleep and she filled her days by caring for three to five preschool children for working mothers, plus three to five elderly who were living in her home. All this in addition to grandchildren coming to visit for a day or weekend and continuing all her church work.

Her life was one of continuous prayer and expressing love. She herself had been a victim of child abuse. She would tell us how at age twelve she was taken to church for the first time by an aunt and uncle she was staying with, and how they sang a hymn called "Just As I Am." She came home and questioned her Uncle about the hymn. "You mean that God loves me just as I am?" He told her yes and that was all she needed to know and from that day on she accepted God as her father and Christ as her example to follow.

She left this earth at age eighty-three serving and providing as always. Her granddaughter had just had a baby and because of a work situation, needed to have a place for the baby to stay for two months. Mother's heart was weak but she had people living with her who agreed to help so she offered to take the baby. She spent the next two weeks making her home ready. She was so happy to be able to help. Granddaughter and great-grand daughter arrived and they had a beautiful day together.

The next morning as preparations were being made for breakfast and saying goodbye - someone asked, "where is Grammy?" She had been in the kitchen earlier but had gone to her room. They went to call her. When their knock was not answered they opened the door and saw that she had peacefully and quietly left them.

She had no fear of death. She had often said it was just another step in life and she was quite looking forward to the journey when the time was right for her to go. Mother was off on her journey. We said our goodbyes, cried our tears and wished her well. We thanked God for letting us have her for as long as He had and then we each went back to our lives to get busy living and doing as she had taught us to do.

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF A HYMN

Rae Foster

Sunday, May 29, we sang the hymn, "Just As I Am" and I was reminded of the story my mother told me of the transforming power that hymn had in her life. She told of how she grew up in poverty, ignorance and abuse. However, when she was twelve her mother was very sick and the family was broken up and sent to various relatives to live until they could return home.

My mother was sent to the home and family of an Uncle and Aunt who believed in church and Christian values. It was in that family she learned what it was like to be treated as an equal. She shared equally with the other family members in all the chores involved in living in a large family. She also experienced for the first time, what it was like to have free time to read and play. She loved to read and this love, was supported and nurtured by her new family. She was experiencing what it was like to be part of a Christian family who lived and taught Christian values.

One Sunday, she told me, she went to church, a new experience for her, and they sang the hymn "Just As I Am". Upon returning home she asked her Uncle, "does this hymn mean, that there is someone up there who loves me just as I am?" Her Uncle assured her that that was indeed what the hymn meant. For my mother that was the beginning of a complete conversion experience. She dedicated her life to God and decided to follow the way of Jesus.

Two years later she returned to her home but insisted, in spite of family resistance and ridicule, she would attend church on her own every Sunday. She had decided that a Christian way of life was what she wanted for herself and for any children she might have someday. She was true to her conviction. She attended church regularly, taught Sunday school and served church in any capacity she could for the rest of her life. Many over the years turned to her as counselor and friend. She took in and raised 22 foster children, several nieces and nephews when it was needed, and had two children of her own, my older brother and myself.

I started attending church at nine months old. I grew up knowing God was always there for me and that I could count on Him as companion and best friend.

With so many growing up in the family and very little money, we often had our struggles. But through it all my mother was steadfast in her faith and we grew up knowing God and His love, care and provision was always there for us. As I grew up in this environment, I developed a strong faith of my own. I raised my children in the church telling them my deepest desire for them was to know for themselves that there was a presence of love and care that was always there for them and they were never alone.

So this past Sunday as we sang the hymn, "Just As I Am", I was once again reminded of my mother and the gift of love and faith she lived and embodied for us. I thought of a lonely unhappy girl, twelve years old, back in 1909, being transformed by the words of a hymn and realizing she was of worth and value and loved for herself alone.

Now here I am in my late 70's, singing this same hymn, filled with gratitude and awe because of the impact this hymn had on an unloved lonely girl of twelve. How the words of this hymn blessed her, and all who were and are still touched by her example of love for God 107 years later.

Note: A few years after my mother's passing, the Methodist Church she served for so many years designated her a Saint of that church. To this day every Easter Sunday a bouquet of flowers is placed on the alter in her memory.

Grandpa

Rae Foster

I sat next to him on the back steps. He was whittling away on a piece of wood, making something --- I couldn't figure out what. But it didn't matter, Grandpa was there and I could sit beside him contented and feeling safe from the world. Grandpa was my shield and protector.

There was a reason I was so close to Grandpa and why he was the center of my world. When I was born my mother became very ill and could not care for me. So I was turned over to Grandpa while she healed. He fed me, held me, rocked me to sleep, talked to me and played with me. We were constant companions the first three years of my life.

One morning however, when I came downstairs for breakfast, Grandpa was not at his usual place at the kitchen table. I went to find him but the door to his room was closed and I was told I must be quiet and not go in his room. This went on for days. I begged to see him, but was told Grandpa had to rest. He was not feeling well. Finally, the day came when Mother told me I could see Grandpa but just for a few minutes.

I was so excited I could hardly contain myself. Being only three years old, when the door was opened, I rushed in, jumped on his bed and shouted, "Grandpa"! He winced in pain and said, "get her off". My stomach turned over and I crawled away in fear. Grandpa had never spoken to me like that. He never pushed me away. I was devastated as I was quickly taken out of his room.

That was the last time I saw Grandpa. The next day the door to his room was open but Grandpa was gone. "Where is Grandpa, I asked?" Mother, knowing how much I adored him could not bear to tell me he had died in the night. So she simply said, "Grandpa has gone away for a while." She had decided she would tell me the truth later when she thought I was old enough to understand.

I thought it must be because of my jumping on his bed that he went away. I had hurt Grandpa. I never mentioned him again, but this began my silent wait for Grandpa's return. I waited and I waited and waited. Then it happened. Two years had gone by and there he was. An elderly man, tall, thin, with white hair moved into the house in back of us. I watched him every day as he worked in his yard. I was sure he must be Grandpa; he had come back. I said nothing to anyone and I did not dare say anything to him. I kept the secret of Grandpa's return deep inside. But my excitement and joy was too much for me bear so I decided to tell my sister. I mustered up all my courage and told her I had found Grandpa. That he was living in the house out back. She bluntly told me, "you are crazy, Grandpa died over two years ago". "How silly you are," she said in her superior, a whole six years older voice.

What happened next I was told about years later, as I could not remember. The pain was so great I blocked it out. Evidently I ran into the house and screamed at my mother, "why didn't you tell me Grandpa had died. I would have known where he was." I sobbed and cried and screamed in anger for a long time I was told. Mother said I changed after that and became

very quiet and withdrawn. She tried to comfort me, but I couldn't be reached. I was too hurt and angry.

The next thing that I remember was being in Sunday school. I was six by then and we were sitting in front of the children's altar singing some of the children's hymns. I remember looking deeply into the picture of Jesus with the children sitting at His feet. I just sat there while everyone was singing about God's love, the flowers of the field and the beauty all around us. I remember vividly, to this very day the wonderful feeling of love and peace that flooded over me.

I was home! I found that safe, loved feeling I had with Grandpa once again. In that moment I said good bye to Grandpa and my relationship with God began. God became my best friend and companion. I was no longer alone. There was so much chaos at home as we had so many people living there. (How that came about is a story for another time.) Mother always so busy and Dad endlessly scolding us for something or other, that church became home to me.

It was that day in Sunday School, gazing into the picture of Jesus with the children sitting at his feet, and I felt so strongly, the overwhelming presence of God fill me with peace and love, that my life began.

DANDELIONS

Rae Foster

Yes, I admit it, I was listening in on the conversation of the two ladies in front of me. "Dandelions", they were saying, "are such a problem". "No matter what I do with my lawn, no matter how much weed killer I use, nothing stops them. They are relentless."

I smiled to myself as I listened and allowed myself to be transported back in time. To a time when my four-year-old little girl's love for me began my love affair with Dandelions. Each spring when lawns are covered with Dandelions I remember that fateful telephone call from my neighbor. To this day I can hear her irate angry voice saying, "Your daughter just picked every one of my hybrid tulips. Every one of them! Do something!" Then promptly hung up.

I remember glancing out the window and there trudging up the stairs to the back door was my little girl carrying a large handful of Tulips. She was so happy as she came in the back, slamming the screen door behind her. She looked up at me and said, "here Mommy, these are for you." I looked at her shining, smiling face and thought, "I can't scold her." She didn't mean to do anything wrong, she just wanted to bring me a gift." But I knew I had to talk with her about it being wrong to pick the flowers from a neighbor's yard. I bent down, hugged her and thanked her, but gently told her that these flowers belong to Mrs. Appy. She planted them in her yard so they belong to her and we must bring them back and promise not to pick flowers in her yard again. I took her hand as we went out the back door to return to return the flowers and apologize. As we walked across our lawn I noticed Dandelions everywhere. I said to her, look honey, you see all these pretty flowers, these are called Dandelions and God made them special for little girls to pick for their Mommy. You can pick as many as you want." We returned the flowers, Arlene promised not to pick any more from her yard. Mrs Appy with a sad look on her face as she took back her tulips, said it was okay if she never did it again. Arlene promised. I thought that was the end of it but much to my surprise for several days afterwards I received handful after handful of Dandelions from a very happy little girl. To this day I can see her smiling face as would hand me bouquet after bouquet of drooping Dandelions, saying "here Mommy these are for you."

Dandelion season ended. That fall we sold our house in New Canaan and moved north to Lakeville, Conn. As spring rolled around Dandelions started sprouting once again. One day I needed to go to the corner store and buy some milk and bread. I took my daughter's hand and said, "Let's go for a walk." We started down the street until we came to the green and there was a man carrying a tank, spraying the Dandelions. We stopped to watch and Arlene asked the man, "whatcha doing?" The man proudly said, "I'm killing all the Dandelions". "What?", said my little girl, as she put her hands on her hips and drew herself up to be as tall and big as she could be, and angrily said, "Don't you know God made Dandelions for kids to pick for their Mommy?"

I do not know who was more surprised, the man or me. I thought she had long forgotten about Dandelions. She put her hand in mine turned her back on the man and said, "come on Mommy, let's go." As we walked away I turned back to look at the man as he stood there

looking sheepish. He shrugged his shoulders and gave me a little wave as if to say, I'm sorry, I didn't know".

That day brought an end to the Dandelions. I received a few bouquets that spring but then the enthusiasm for picking flowers gave place to other interests. But for me the memory remains. Every spring when I see the Dandelions, I smile deep inside as I see the face of a little girl handing me a fist full of Dandelions and saying "here Mommy these are for you."

Divine Protection

Rae Foster

Psalm 115:12 "The Lord hath been mindful of us: he will bless" -- King James

Ever doubt that the Lord is mindful of you? Ever experience an event that confirmed the ever presence of the Lord?

Ever experience that divine protection when driving your car? I have experienced God's mindfulness of me on several occasions over the 50 plus years I have been driving. God has gotten me home safely more times than I can even remember. However, two times especially stand out to me.

Once I was attending a meeting in Poughkeepsie. It ended late about 11:00p.m. I started driving home to Lakeville, sure that all was well. It is a somewhat long and very dark ride from Poughkeepsie to Lakeville. All was going well when suddenly there was a "bang" and I was on the side of the road with a flat tire. Looking around there was not a house in sight, at least none with a light on; I had no cell phone at the time. I said, "OK God I am in your care, please help me out here." (I had never learned how to change a tire). I decided to start walking on the side of the road and look for a house with a light on. I got out of the car and went about three steps, when a car came along, stopped, and the driver said, "flat tire?" I affirmed his diagnosis and he promptly jumped out of his car and began to change the tire. He was magically done in a short time and was back in his car. I offered to pay him but he said, "just pay it forward someday." I thanked him and he was gone. I thanked God profusely for sending his angel and continued home safely.

The second event took place when I was living in Rochester, N.Y. and was moving from a Condo I had just sold, into an apartment a few miles away. Since the move was such a short distance, I was able, with the help of friends, to make the move myself. The big stuff was loaded into a truck and the rest I loaded into my car and made several trips back and forth until all was moved and safely in my new apartment.

I need to tell you that even though the distance was short, it required going down a long steep hill and stopping at the bottom at a four way very busy intersection. I had to make this stop more than eight times that day but had absolutely no problem. However, the day after all was safely in my new apartment, I went I went out to the carport where I was parked, to drive to the store for some groceries. I got in the car, put my foot on the brake and it went straight to the floor. The brake line had snapped. I sat in my car aghast, thanking God that this had not happened on the hill or that busy intersection, the day before. Instead here I was safe in my carport and all I had to do was call triple AAA and have my car towed to the nearest garage where the problem was fixed. I have never stopped thanking God for His loving care and protection. To me both of these events as well as others I have experienced are miracles demonstrating God's mindfulness and care for His creation man.

1Peter 1:5 God is keeping careful watch over us and the future. The day is coming when you will have it all - life healed and whole. (Message Bible, Eugene H. Peterson.)

Mike and Gus

John Thew

The date was March 2, 1964. I was sitting in my father's chair in his studio where he had created so many works of art sold by our small three-person company. The studio was converted from the barn about 60 feet behind his house. I was sitting in his old chair in tears. My father, Robert Garret Thew had died on March 1st, the day before. I had worked with my father for 27 years, ever since I was only 10 years old. My first job was to bring coal in my little red wagon for the mid-room stove. When I was only about six he had made me a little car he called a push-mobile. I sat on a board seat with my feet on the ground for propulsion. A tiller controlled the front wheels for steering, and the wheels were sawed from two-inch-thick pine. I loved that little car and named it "Foo-foo". It wasn't a store bought toy like other kids had. It was made by my own father! A father who always trusted me and I knew I could always trust him.

After school I would go the house for a sandwich and then to the studio to work with Dad. At those times we weren't father and son. We took on new names. He was Mike and I was Gus. Mike and Gus made all kinds of projects. Toy cars, airplanes, boats, bird houses--on and on. Mike and Gus were very productive.

When I was ten he taught me to sail our 18-foot day sailor. His spine and neck for years had been locked tight with arthritis; couldn't bend even the slightest. He had bought the sailboat knowing he, unable to look up at the sails, could not sail and that I would have to be the helmsman. That trust was shown when at age 14, I proposed to sail our day-sailor across Long Island Sound with my 14-year-old friend, Raymond. The sound is about 12 miles wide where we lived in Westport. It would be a three-day trip. Dad thought it an adventure of learning and heartily agreed. My sister Robin later told me she had worried the whole three days and kept asking Mom and Dad how they could let me go off into the unknown like that?

When I was off serving in the Navy in WWII Dad would write me letters in pencil long hand on 18 by 24 inch sheets of drawing paper, and often; two or three times a week. He kept me closely connected to everything happening in our family and our town.

Returning from my stint in the Service I could see he had aged considerably. I knew I would have to be his hands and feet to produce his ideas in our studio/shop. We were a good team with his creating, my producing and my mother running the office.

We made table lamps, decorative estate signs and silhouette weathervanes It wasn't big business and we were struggling to make a living.

In 1950 with world war II five years behind us, there was WAR again. North Korea had invaded South Korea. But it wasn't war. It can't be war unless congress declares war. President Truman said it was a "Police Action", but it certainly looked like war.

There was much distress and despair in America. My father carved a trivet hot plate holder of all letters "BLESS THIS HOUSE OH LORD WE PRAY MAKE IT SAFE BY NIGHT AND

DAY". We had it cast in aluminum in a nearby foundry and ran an ad in the Sunday NY Herald Tribune. It struck people in the heart and orders came pouring in. We made production patterns and were filling orders as fast as we could. When war demands took away aluminum, we switched to cast iron and it was even better.

The checks pouring in allowed Eve and me to many, and we did, in June 1951. Yes, checks were pouring in, but at two dollars and a quarter per check it takes a lot of checks to support four people. Eve got a job in a children's clothing shop and I invented a "solar cigarette lighter". We all smoked in those days. Just look at an old movie. They all smoke and all the time. That was another hit. Whenever I lit a smoke in public I could count on selling two or three solar lighters. Dad encouraged me to create and design. We were making traditional sundials with only a little success, so I thought why not make one backwards? Put the numbers on top cut through a curved band so they appear on a back plate. It worked and was awarded a patent with several claims or features. Now life got much better. They were easy to sell to store buyers looking for new products.

All these memories were going through my mind that March day in 1964. How could I go on without that old guy to work with? My mentor. My inspiration. How could he just die? What would I do? Dad, where are you?

He had always told his kids, obey your hunches, and now what I will call a hunch was rolling around in my head. Go into the house. I did. Go up into the attic. I did. Look over there behind the chimney. I did. There on the floor was a box full of books; Grandfather's books. Dad's father's books about Spiritualism and mediums and messages from the beyond. There was a set of four by the Reverend Dale Owen who found he could do "automatic writing" where something would take charge of his hand and write longhand with no spaces. The messages were mind blowing. But even better was the closeness of my beloved father and I might say Our Father.

Even today while working on a new idea or on a new project I think "I wish you could see this, Dad" and I get the feeling he is saying "What makes you think I can't"?