

Westland
Writes

2020

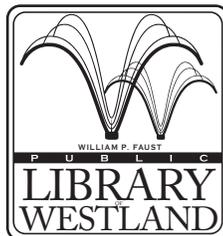


Westland Writes 2020

A Collection of Local Writing

Alexis Tharp

Editor



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Poems

Jerry Connor

Memorial Day

Under the vault of an endless sky
The honored dead in formation lie
At ease, in final assembly wait
Comrades in their common fate

Neither parentless child, nor widow's tears
May irrigate the drought of absent years
Of lives cut short and purpose unfulfilled
When fertile crops into earth are tilled

From age to age we submit our best
And subject them to the warrior's test
To fight the battles till the war is done
The future decides what is lost and won

What monument can we raise to them
But our inconsequential requiem
The deepest wound and sharpest pain
If their deaths be proven all in vain

In war's ruins we expect to find
Unambiguous victory left behind
But sift the ashes and see what remains
Traces of good and bad but mostly change

Still it is right to bestow the heroes' wreath
On the sacrificial ranks that lie beneath
Who gave their lives to posthumous honors earn
And yet, we never learn; we never learn

Far better if these hallowed dead
Lived out their lives and died in bed
When humankind finally and forevermore
Forsakes the cruel countenance of war.

On Safari

The truck lurches forward in the failing light
Like a spear thrust to the heart of the African night
Journey without destination on a road without end
To arrive at a place that we did not intend

Here was planted the kernel that sprouted our family tree
From bits of protoplasm floating in the sea
In whose twisted branches our lineage we trace
Through endless adaptation evolved the human race

But we see a doubtless kinship between predator and prey
And the necessary conflict their instinct must obey
Nature is a cruel master, its brutal plan fulfilled
In the never-ending battle of the killer and the killed

Are these reverberating echoes of an Eden forever lost
When the corruption of our heritage the Peaceable Kingdom cost?
Or evolution's iron mandate commanded long ago and far
With a trillion turns of random chance to lead us to the stars

Bettie Cunningham

#BSyncere #Miss Spoken

All Ends Well

I know that it will all end well for me one day.

Me, peaced out and mildly euphoric with the turns my life has taken

Reveling in that sweet spot where I have landed softly in the arms of abundance and love and peace

Releasing that slow, easy sigh of relief that I once dreamed of during those many years of struggle and strife.

Those years were ones in which it seems I always had one foot out the door and the other in.

Those long years of trying to figure it out, those years had me feeling like a slug trying to find its way home

Dragging along slowly, slowly experiencing every bump in the road, every pothole, every shift in the atmosphere

Attuned to every aura and energy field, every mood swing, attitude and pathological thought that emanated from those in my presence.

Every turn on that long tedious journey always seemed like right turns but always resulted in me feeling like something was off, not quite right.

And if I dared stay in a situation, a relationship, a friendship, a job too long; if I dared stay with that off feeling lingering over my head, I paid the price...dearly.

I mean, I ...paid.... the ...price....dearly.

Spent time trying to escape the grip of narcissistic personalities, selfish motives and inauthentic beings.

Me...hurt feelings, betrayal, bruised ego, used and misunderstood

All the making of damaged goods.

Boy, do I remember those years.

Trying to find that right space in the world where I could just be me
and be one with the world.

But that never seemed to happen! It seems the world just wouldn't let
me be.

That world where everybody thinks that everything important to
them should be important to me

That world where everything is a priority when in fact everything is
just a minute particle of needs, wants and time in the whole big ole
world of needs, wants and time

That world where I was crying out in a voice that could not be heard

That world that sometimes just seemed to be too, too much to bear

That world.... that world....

It challenged me, and tested me and sparred with me in 10 rounds
boxing matches where I felt like an amateur in the ring with
Muhammad Ali, Tommy Hearns or Floyd Mayweather

It threw me down, rolled me over, punched me, kicked me, spit on
me, left me lying in the trash-littered streets of life like somebody's
garbage that had been picked over by alley cats and wild dogs

That's how I felt when I was going thru...Yes, that's how I felt

That world....

That world made me thankful for what I had yet made me yearn for
so much more than what I had

That world kept me on my ass and yet on my toes all at the same
time....one round after the other

That world.....that world....

That diabolical world of beautiful dreams and frightful nightmares

That world of harsh words and caressing laughs

That world of drama and satire

That world of friends turned enemies, of come hithers and disappearing acts

That world of quiet whispers and loud retorts

That world that molded me like a potter manipulating his clay

That world made me ...that world made me...that ...world.... made ...me

That world made me something...

That world made me something beautiful...

That world made me something good...

Something really, really good.....

It made be strong and flexible.... hard yet soft

It made me water and fire.....rough yet smooth

It made me lover and fighter.... quiet yet loud

It made me ordinary ...yet extraordinary

That world made me...

That world made me something beautiful ...

It made me something good....it made me something really, really good

It made me ...ME

And I know that that world that made me, made me a survivor

And I tell you that no matter what happens...no matter what I go through....no matter how much snot and tears....no matter what comes my way....

I know that it will all end well for me one day.... I know that it will all end well for me one day....

I know, without a doubt, that it will all end well for me one day....

And today...today is that day....

Today....

All ends well!

Broke but Not Broken

Life is full of trials and tribulations

Causing some to lose hope, causing some to lose patience.

Years of suffering, the scars of our universal lows

Cause some to resort to actions that put a price on their souls

The need for relief has tainted their good intentions

Incarcerations, long term illnesses, chronic welfare needing social
interventions

Drug abuse, teen pregnancy, crime running rampant

Homeless people living on the streets, USA vets living transient

We cannot accept this!

We must rebuke this!

This temporary situation is not the final conclusion

It's just another chapter adding to the mass confusion

Please understand that you may be broke but not broken

The finality of your being has not yet been spoken

This spirit of acceptance that has penetrated minds

Has caused some to give up, to surrender and stop tryin'

The severity of the pain has depleted their expectation of gain

The pain they've held

Has caused some to be depressed, defeated and overwhelmed

This systemic demise

Causes you to look weak in your own eyes

But how incomplete is Satan's deceit

Leading you to vain solutions, unverified conclusions

His injection of deception
Leads to false impressions etched in your mind
They must be banished, resigned and then redefined
Until you understand that you may be broke but not broken
All things revealed don't have to be spoken
Know that the world's opinion
Has no dominion ...over you
And that a rise in consciousness
Will cause you to have a different view
Be aware of the curses that come to you in verses from society's
universities
From legal institutions and medical solutions
Banish the ill thoughts
Rebel the rhetoric, let your mind be retaught
Stay focused
Cause you don't have to be the brokest
But you've got to fight for the right
To reach greater heights
Their diagnosis is not certain
So, don't you dare just sit there hurtin'
Their opinion is void
The only Word that matters is the Lord's
Your name's in the system? Written down on paper?
May be in the system but not acknowledged by the Maker
So, change your mind, break the chains

Because the worlds' deception has no gain
Repent to the extent that you rise above discontent
Inspire to grow higher
Be candid, demand it from yourself
Be replenished because your life is not finished
Your story is still untold, you've got to take back control
For the price of your soul is always more than gold
Protect your spirit, your identity.... religiously
Cause it is all that you have...pick up your cross and carry your staff
With your head held high, with hope in your heart
If given tomorrow, you have a brand-new start
Broke but not broken.... the finality of your being has not yet been
spoken
Broke but not broken...all things revealed don't have to be spoken
Broke but not broken.... broke but not done
Satan is a liar and he still has not won
Broke but not broken
The finality of your life has not yet been spoken
Broke but not broken!
Broke but not broken!
Broke... but... not... broken!

Philip Howell

Eternal Rome

Marcus¹ gave his all for the Empire.
 He thought, lived, & fought as a Stoic.
 Personally and intellectually he was heroic.
 Yet he fathered Commodus,
 a slave to many a shameful desire.

Diogenes² neither had, nor wanted, an empire.
 He ate, drank, & enjoyed living as an Epicurean.
 He contentedly lived his life on the shores of the Aegean.
 People may not admit it,
 yet for many, his idyllic life is their secret desire.

What is a mere mortal to do—that is the question.
 A patrician needs only a library and a garden.
 A plebeian may feast on cold well water & a wedge of cheese.

Moderation & simplicity in life is my suggestion.
 Too much is no luxury; rather it is a burden.
 Above all else, seek always the golden mean.

¹ Marcus Aurelius, last of the Five Good Emperors and last of the Pax Romana Emperors. Yet, he is perhaps best known as the Stoic emperor-philosopher who authored the Stoic classic “Meditations.”

² Diogenes lived a good Epicurean life. Yet he found time to have Epicureans’ Thoughts carved on his estate’s portico wall for us to see today.

The Middle Kingdom

Confucius, to those above him, he dutifully gave fealty,
To all others, he freely gave of his paternalism.
He sought an individual's place in society, not individualism.
He was a leader of millions through character, and not as a deity.

Lao-tzu,³ to and for himself, followed the Way.
He believed in simplicity and naturalism.
For him emptiness of purpose was the hand of professionalism.
For millions, his way of living still holds sway.

A rich life is living correctly within society.
A life of contentment is living in harmony with nature.

Outward is propriety.
Inward guides behavior.

Two sides of a single coin form a unity.
A good person, a good neighbor.

³ Lao-tzu, semi-historical and semi-mythical founder of Taoism. Disappearing into the barbarian wilderness, he left behind his manuscript "Tao Te Ching." The Middle Way is the Way.

Cheryl A. Martin, M.A.

Melody of Birds

Melody of birds in Picasso's sky,
 Red winged black bird's song conk-la ree, Oh la ree,
 Those in flight share the music,
 Bright cranberry hue,
 With earliest daffodils continuing to spring forward
 After the Ides of March, Sunshine with pearls,
 As another redwing's wingspan lit the sky with crimson on the
 darkest black,
 Later, a pale blue sky with more than three quarters of a moon,
 Silhouette shadows calling Still foraging for some seed about 8:45pm
 on a Sunday evening,
 With temperatures clinging to winter's timeline in mid spring,
 Confusion of birds, in their own twitter, flutter of wings, mish
 mash of melody masked as song,
 Pure tones from creatures looking to land, nibble on some suet,
 Tackle the sunflower seeds before the mammoth grackle, or blue jay
 dives in and onto feeders,
 Blocking all view, Whilst swinging wildly, on the feeder, keeping the
 downy woodpecker at bay,
 Ensuring the mourning doves eating scraps between blades of grass,
 Yet, being a bottom feeder from time to time may be an enforced
 choice amongst the hierarchy of these birds,
 Yet the peacefulness makes one wonder, why do they need to eat only
 the dumped seed?

Spring Flavors

A canary tulip, sheltered between rocks,
Where the formation of the enclosed garden and flowers rest,
This bright tulip shone in a way that was a specimen of the species,
with incredible dandelion pistils basking against black,
Orange and red hues glistened against the sunset as its colors
changed depending on one's physical view of it; with the color
spectrum filled with grape hyacinth right there next to it, bluish-
purple hues lining up in unison, then bowing to the winds, for one
moment, outdoor beau rolled over a patch of them, and, as he pranced
on by to the next flower patch, those grape hyacinth, sprung back,
standing tall, under the coverage of a pear tree, the toppled flowers
from kitty's roll overs momentarily hid that plump bumblebee, with
its traditional yellow and black striping as it devoured some nectar
from each available flower; If only I had a notepad, to study its
migration and habits a bit longer, I thought ruefully, as it flew from
the lavender, to crimson, to the dandelion, back and forth it went,
nervously stopping, and moving forward, perhaps as the competition
for the flavor would be interrupted if one rested too long on a bud, as
yes, there were more than one visitor vying for the sweetness on this
spring day,
And, the lone violet tulip, hidden away in a protected spot under the
matching lilac trees opening
Luscious blooms, soon to release the fragrance of the universe,
second only to my favorite iris'

Yet to share their flavors, however, A hijacked spring brought winter's full thrust of arctic weather, a tune tough for creatures, depending on plant life and temperatures to serenade one another,

Blistering snow, and hailstorms ravaged the spring plants like the daffodils crystal snow covering

Crushing the spirits of the earliest flower, clinging for a last moment for me to see a blossom,

As well as newly transplanted rhubarb, finding its way into the new earth, and other unknown plants

That needed a home before being tossed into the earth where the light of day would not be there another second, as I was told by the lady when I collected the plants, carefully dug up, and handed to me, "I don't grow food", which left me with a chill; As food from one's earth is just that nurtured from one's hand, soil, rainwater, bottled water, and nutrients to fuel the growth, maybe there will be a new tea substitute to try, or just enjoy the fruits of it by looking and watching the new plants that are foreign to most, so the botanist in me will figure that even if it's not going on the menu, the harvest will be just the same, as the growth will bring joy as it's part of mother's earth.

Catherine M. McKenzie

Sunday Afternoon Sun

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SUN
SHINING ON AUTUMN'S GOLDEN LEAVES
MUSIC PLAYING
SPIRITS HIGH
SOUL SEARCHING
HEART REACHING
EACH
DANCING IN HARMONY
AT THE UNLEASHED SPLENDOR
OF LOVE'S RHYTHMIC BIRTH

God's Mystic Art

God took the earth and with his hand
Drew mystic pictures of this land.
He cast a spell for man to see
And from his worldly moments flee
To gather in his heart anew
A land God meant for me and you.
To show he cared in such a way
He didn't have to talk or say
How much he cared for all the rest,
When with his hand this land he blessed.
The majesty of mountain heights
Turns hearts and minds—alive with lights
Of awesome power to reveal,
What lies within our hearts of steel.
This humble showing of man's heart
Reflects to God
His Mystic Art.

Teresa Q. Tucker

Growing: A Meditation on Movement

Haiku in Five Stanzas

Out & In

Out of the cocoon
into the fresh life that is
awaiting my touch.

Holy Spaces

I am learning to
enter the holy spaces
of mind and spirit.

Essence

Essentially, I
engage in word play to build
essences of me.

Awakening

Unfurl, unfold me
from myself into myself
flesh into spirit.

Magic

Sprinkles of stars like
diamonds glittering on air
twinkle, twinkle me.

The Color of Business

Mama says
that idle chatter
doesn't matter
when you're conducting business.

So, I close my eyes
and dream of marigolds,
sunflowers, and black-eyed Susans.

Yellow is like sunshine.

Mama says
that green
is the only color
that really matters.

Shari Welch

The Infinite Awesome Essence of a Registered Nurse

A Registered Nurse is an
educated one.

After completing the science-ologies, prerequisites,
theories, labs, and clinicals
in the academic realm.

It's time for passing state boards before they take the helm. Indeed
their work has just begun.

A Registered Nurse is not just
the jack of all trades,
but the master of many.
They are the caregiver, administrator, therapist, consultant,
Pt advocate,
educator, supervisor, motivator, high-tech specialist, researcher, etc.
With grace and finesse,
gliding from one hat to the next,
and that's not all.

A Registered Nurse is blessed
from up above.
Anointed with understanding
And love.

From Florence Nightingale historically through,
There is nothing that they cannot do.
From saving a life to alleviating pain,
and saying those words that make it
all right again.

A Registered Nurse is meant to be:
Completing awesome tasks,
With indescribable pride,
engaging the infinite humanitarian
experience,
and that's not all.

Anette Wolski

Blue Eyes

My mother's eyes are blue
But who would know?
She simply lies in her bed,
With her eyes closed.
Not moving.
Not eating.
Not drinking.
Not communicating.
The doctors told us it would be five days.
But it has been five weeks.

My father's eyes are brown,
But lately they have been blue, too.
Filled with the memories of 70 years
Gone past.
He tries to be stoic.
I tell him to go ahead and cry.

My sister's eyes are red,
Filled with rage from witnessing her mother
Slowly fade away.
She is losing her best friend.
And the stress,
And the pain,
Are just
Too much
To bear.

My other sister's eyes are...
Well, who can describe the eyes
Of someone who is
Undergoing chemotherapy
In order to prevent brain cancer
From returning?
How much more can one brain take?

Bloodshot...

My eyes are brown.
I sit next to my mother's bed
And hold her hand.
I tell her that I love her,
Because, you know,
They say that your hearing
Is the last sense
To go.

I stare at her closed lids
And watch her breathing.
I stare at the pictures hanging on the wall.
I stare at my mother again and
Memorize her face.

I stare out the window...
At the pictures hanging on the wall...
At my mother's face...
Out the window...
This is how I spend my time.
I am numb.

My eyes are brown.
Just brown.

Imelda Zamora

Because You Were Not There

Lightning ripped the skies in a blinding flash,
Claps of thunder reverberated, loud and deafening.
Daylight turned into night.
And in the darkness I cringed in fear.
Because you were not there.

Black ominous clouds suddenly burst open,
Releasing their heavy burden.
And rain came down in torrents, pelting me.
I was drenched, cold and shivering.
Because you were not there.

But I know a time will come soon,
When the sun will finally break through,
To shine brightly upon me once more.
And I will find myself then,
Dry, warm and comforted.
Because you will be there.

Age

I looked in the mirror
And curiously found
The eyes that looked back
Were no longer clear.
They were now veiled
By a layer of film
That hid their color
And blocked the light
From coming through.
So when did this happen?
My eyes are still black
The sparkle behind them
Still brilliant with life.
Though I need eyeglasses,
I see and enjoy
The beauty around me.
I am grateful, therefore
That I stay young within
And remain unchanged
Behind these shrouded eyes.

Stories

Helaine Binstock

If I Had a Time Machine, Where Would I Want It to Take Me?

I'd take a time machine back to the late 1950s...when I was a young new bride following my husband to Germany while he fulfilled his military obligation. In the 1950s, all males were required to join the military. Unlike today, it was not voluntary. Men were drafted, all men, unless they were labeled 4F, indicating some type of disability.

In Germany, I would scrimp and save—often cooking cheap macaroni and cheese dinners—in order to take advantage of inexpensive trips American Express offered overseas soldiers. We discovered a 2-day trip, cheap even for those times, to the Brussels World's Fair which actually included meals one day, meaning its cost equaled what it took to purchase food had we remained in our tiny German flat. For the second day we planned to rely on snacks—popcorn, candy, chips and pop. Big problem discovered, however! Alas, no snack stands were to be found anywhere—only plush, fancy, obviously expensive, restaurants.

Walking, walking, walking, we eventually became ravenous! Staring into the window of a fancy restaurant, its maître d' suddenly rushed outside and somehow lured us inside. Actually, following him inside was probably due to our inability to understand French. It was full, crowded, but he immediately snapped his fingers, whereupon two uniformed waiters appeared, carrying a small round table they quickly squeezed into a corner. Soon two additional hustling gentlemen appeared. With a snap of his wrist, one of these gentlemen unfurled an elegant damask tablecloth. The second man sprang forward, setting before us sparkling silverware and two crystal goblets. Suddenly, forced into our hands were shoved two oversized menus. It immediately became obvious we couldn't afford a single item listed. In those days, especially within our circles, credit cards didn't exist. My husband discreetly kicked me under the table while staring straight into my eyes and I completely understood. To our chagrin, we rose si-

multaneously, keeping our heads down, facing our shoes as if playing follow the leader. Purple-faced like fugitives, we rushed out the huge, ornate exit door...blood pounding our cheeks...blushing profusely.

Today, with that beloved time machine, I'd revisit the fair with cash in my wallet. I'd replay that day, eliminating that most embarrassing, devastating experience. My time machine would go backwards instead of forward—I would feel great...instead of like an escaping desperado!

Larry Binstock

The Modern Circe

In Greek mythology, Circe was an evil sorceress who had the power to turn people into animals. Those who read the *Odyssey* may remember that she lured Odysseus' men to her island and turned them into swine. Well, there is, today, in our midst, an evil temptress who, like Circe, can transform humans into pigs, and it goes by the name of—the breakfast buffet. It is especially dangerous to food lovers like me, so I have avoided it for many years. But, just a few weeks ago, in circumstances beyond my control, I found myself in the clutches of this evil entity at a restaurant called the Gandy Dancer in Ann Arbor.

As I viewed the place in which the breakfast buffet was held, I could sense the source of its evil power—luxury. The room was beautifully appointed and even had a small musical aggregation playing in one of its corners. These lush surroundings are meant to rob you of caution. When the host seated us, he uttered the magic incantation that would set the black magic into motion. With devious friendliness, he intoned: "Anytime you're ready, you can serve yourself." Now, robbed of my apprehension, I scooped up my empty plate and was actually excited about the morsels it would soon hold.

At the first station was a large metal container, completely closed to preserve the warmth of the food inside. I opened it and saw a beautiful yellow mound of scrambled eggs, one of my favorite breakfast treats. It

spoke to me. "I'm yours, Larry," it said. "Take all you want of me." And so I did. And I took also a goodly amount of sausages and hash brown potatoes, also in the same container. I started to return to my table with this treasure, but halted. I can't be satisfied with this ordinary breakfast. After all, if I went to George's, a family restaurant near my house, I could get eggs sausages, potatoes, toast and coffee for \$4.50 if I'm there before noon. I had paid much more for this buffet and I must justify this expense by taking more exotic morsels.

Sure enough, at the next station, the metal container featured eggs benedict. I cursed myself for my precipitous behavior. Why had I been so rash as to take the mundane scrambled eggs when I could have had eggs benedict? I can't get those at George's. Wait! There's no law that says I can't have two kinds of eggs. And so I snatched up some eggs benedict.

The next station stopped me in my tracks. Golden brown waffles! My absolute favorite breakfast. Some restaurants allow you to substitute pancakes for potatoes when you have eggs, so I assumed it would be okay to have waffles with eggs. I put two waffles on my already crowded plate, and ladled syrup on them, which also saturated the eggs. At the next station I noticed a minion of the breakfast buffet with a large knife in his hand. At closer range I could see he was slicing prime rib. Prime rib! How could I possibly not take a treat like prime rib when it's included in the buffet? Thus, I offered my plate. and the server slapped a large piece of meat on it.

I had truly intended to end the search and return to my table, but there were still battles to be lost. A platter on another table contained smoked salmon, and there was no self-argument there. Without hesitation I piled pieces of smoked salmon atop my other goodies. And then I spotted the ultimate temptation: the dessert table. As I scrutinized these offerings, my powers of decision went out of control. Should I take up the lemon poppy seed muffin or the pecan roll? As my mind agonized over this decision, my hand moved quickly to take both of these prizes. And then I saw it: rice pudding. If I were to have my choice of a last meal before I left this earth, it would be rice pudding. I took a large helping, which immediately inundated all the other food on the plate.

When I at last returned to my table I stared at this mountain of incongruent food on my plate and saw there was no systematic way of eating it. I just had to stick my fork into this conglomeration and eat whatever got impaled on its tines. And that's how it went. I kept taking forkfuls of food combinations whose flavors canceled out each other. I finally came to the two pastries and felt too sick to eat them. But what else could I do? I couldn't leave them and couldn't take them with me. So I soldiered on and consumed both pastries. When I had eaten all the food, I felt as if I had swallowed a huge boulder.

Leaving the Gandy Dancer, I could hear its cackling laughter. It had succeeded in its mission to turn me into this porcine character. I wanted to get home before I felt even worse manifestations of my gluttony. And as I drove home, I looked forward to the next day's breakfast, which I knew would consist of a bowl of corn flakes.

Erin Knape

A Beautiful Reflection

The scent of crisp air nipped at my nose as I hopped along a bridge of stones. The water that surrounded the stones was still. There was a beautiful iridescent glow emanating from the crystallized river that inundated them. I adjusted my footing on the last glistening stone and leapt towards the solidified ground. The impact traveled from the base of my feet to the top of my head as it stretched to the tips of my fingers. I stood, reflecting on the stunning view that enveloped my mind and diffused across my vision.

The leaves had departed from their trees, leaving only barren bark. The sounds of creatures preparing for their long rest echoed throughout the dense forest. The wind howled as it dove, twirled, and danced through the brambles and what was left of the recently barren trees.

I sat, the Earth stationary beneath me, and reflected.

"Why am I so captivated by this scene?" Why do I see this as

beauty? The wind is at the will of its uncontrollable nature. It howls in protest as it is whisked in all conceivable directions. The trees give no sense of consent when the leaves depart from their branches. They had remained in unity for a time just to be separated months later. The animals, preparing to defend against the cold presence of death, ever-looming in their consciousness. What of me, viewing this despair and hardship as purely and solely beautiful?

I stood once more and reflected.

As people, we have the capacity to see beauty in the face of such loss and struggle. A leaf leaves its tree, a husband leaves his wife. There is no perceivable difference. The wind is unable to object to its current course, a child is unable to object against the way of society. There is no difference. An animal restlessly storing food for a trying winter season, a person working tirelessly in preparation for a long-awaited chance to rest. I see no difference.

Why do I see these things as beautiful? The danger, abandonment, fear, and lack of feasible control are not inherently beautiful things. Yet, I recognize beauty in this forest. What if it is the struggle that makes life beautiful? What if it is the pain and suffering in it all that gives life purpose?

What if all that I see is beautiful upon reflection?

Sherry Nichols

Magic

It hurt! It hurt real bad! It felt like my heart had been captured and yanked real hard. Cracked, broken beyond repair, and pulled from my body, leaving an empty vacuum where it once beat in a peaceful and calm rhythm. A total eclipse of the heart. A numbness overwhelmed me, leaving a longing to rewind the last hour so that the conversation of just moments ago had never happened.

But, it had happened. Rising up from the chair, moving through

the room, floating out the door, I found myself walking out into the rain. Barefoot, tears falling like the rain. I was hoping the raindrops would wash away the pain and despair, healing me and making me whole again. After all, when the rain falls upon your face it feels like it will wash away any unwanted or spurious misgivings that may have been laid upon your shoulders to rest and cause chaos and disruption. But the pain kept coming, falling like memories, pulling me into this tragedy. It felt like the great northern winds beginning to blow with a storm of emotions approaching. Oh God! I felt like I was falling from the sky without a parachute.

Blinded by tears and numb, I wondered how I was going to bring a new life into the world alone. Six months pregnant. God, please help me. Becoming wetter was not helping. The rain was not washing any of the pain away. So I turned to retrace my footsteps, heading home. Back inside I realized how foolish that walk had been. Wet, cold, empty and alone now. I had to face the reality, even as horrible as it was.

I heard the bells! I know I did! You know, the first time your kiss is true, you hear bells. Love is a mystery. My pulse quickened the first time I saw him. I thought true love had found me. I believed it. Soulmates! How could he leave me in such turmoil? Such utter heartbreak? The happiness and joy had run like a river from my heart. Shades of blue had moved in, the weight on my shoulders immense. I had been dancing through seconds, minutes, hours and years of a dream. Now, he was killing me softly with his words. He told me his love for me was gone. He added he would stay until the baby was born. No! He had to go! He was not wanted here anymore. No warning, no hint of trouble, no indication that a marriage was in jeopardy. The dream of a forever love with him had evaporated in a matter of moments. How could I have been so blind?

This child was planned, created with love, hopes, dreams, and expectations. How would I survive this? How was I going to carry this bundle of joy another three months alone?

One call and mother came. She came a long way from Michigan to Connecticut. She worked her magic. She knew what to do. She knew how to help me. I heard her words and it felt like home. It made me feel safe. I had to get through this. Mother would make it easier and help

me work through the pain. She would help to keep me sane through all of it. She would help take care of the other little one, a treasure given to me a few years before. He was only three but quite a character, rambunctious and mischievous and wonderful. My first real true love. A part of what was left of my heart that couldn't be ripped away. A part that was still left behind. He was a forever love.

Couldn't seem to place one foot in front of the other, one thought after another, one heartbeat after another, one breath away from falling apart. Couldn't sleep! Couldn't think! Couldn't focus! Screaming in my head and no one could hear me. Like a ship afloat without a compass. Lost! Help me! Please help me!

I knew mother would help. And she worked her magic. A mother's love shapes and molds you. It's like a magic potion. You drink it in and it becomes a breeze that washes over you. You breathe it in and you feel it flowing through you and it is absorbed into your very being and soul. It becomes part of you and gets you through anything you think you can't handle. Whatever it is.

Then, poof, like magic again, three months were gone and on this day the angels got together and created a dream come true. Just like them I wanted to be close to you. My second baby boy. My second real, true, forever love. Another piece of my heart that could not be erased nor taken from me.

I am stronger now and able to maneuver situations better. I cherish my two small treasures. I can do this! I will do this! I have changed and morphed, like a butterfly through metamorphosis, into something new, and I've emerged a different being. I have moved from being weak and broken to bold and strong, assertive and confident. Changes that have happened over the years, like a good wine that has aged over time and is sweeter than ever with just enough of an edge to keep me balanced. Dedicated to be the best person I can be.

And then, like a piece of the puzzle you have been working on all your life, mother is gone forever. The infinite loss tends to overwhelm me at the slightest moment. Mother is gone and her magic has departed with her. I wonder where she is, if I will see her again, or are the memories all I will ever have to hold onto. In my heart I feel that when my time on Earth is over, perhaps I might see her again. I miss her, my

mother. I just long to be close to her once again. To feel the magic. Even though she has left some of her magic here with me forever. Maybe, just maybe, I can pass it on to my boys. That enduring magic of a mother's love. Thank you, Mother, for coming to visit me in my dreams. See, there's always magic as long as you believe.

Ann O'Shaughnessy

Maintenance

The meaning of maintenance is to keep in good condition.

I know it is necessary to take my car into the service department for maintenance at the dealer where I had signed my lease. But it suddenly dawned on me that as I grow older, I spend a great deal of time and money on maintenance for myself.

Starting at the top of my shrinking torso and working my way down, I have appointments on my calendar for a hair stylist to cut my hair, an ophthalmologist to check my eyes, an audiologist to repair my hearing aids, a periodontist for cleaning and checking my teeth.

Continuing on down from my head, I am pleased to say, so far I do not need a cardiologist or a gastroenterologist. But, I do need to check in with my orthopedic specialist who is concerned with my brittle bones in my hips, my spine and my knees.

When all of these appointments are completed, I will see my practitioner. By then, I should see better, hear better, smile with confidence, walk better and in general be fairly spry, thanks to all the doctors whose titles end in "ists." Hopefully, after my doctor double checks me from top to bottom, she will say, "See you in six months."

It's obvious to me, at this stage of my life, that it takes a village to keep me maintained and there is no warranty.

My motto is "Keep on trucking til you run out of gas."

Sally M. Pinchock

Funerals

When I started journaling at the end of 2006, I had set my notebook up according to periods in my life and that has worked well. Eventually I realized that I needed a section that I call Philosophy for those times when I get reflective about what is going on or not going on. So, my thoughts on funerals are going to be filed under Philosophy.

On Veterans Day, November 11, 2011, 11/11/11, I attended the funeral of Bill Schwab.

I had been involved with Bill for many years and actually was his Power of Attorney. Within the last 5 years I had to exercise the POA because of his declining health and memory problems. Veterans Day was appropriate for both Bill and his wife Ronni. Both had served in Europe during World War II.

Bill took frugality to an extreme and it had a detrimental effect on his family. But he was a paradox because while he lived frugally, he allowed some people to take advantage of him and he gave them money. I think that there was a secret wish that these people would take care of him in his old age, but they never had that intention. His 3 years in the nursing home depleted his life's savings, going from a rich man to a poor man. Bill died at 93 tormented most of his life by people who would not do what he thought that they should.

There was one flower arrangement by the casket, and his granddaughter who owns an organic farming operation made a beautiful grave blanket which was used as the spray on the casket. The funeral was very simple.

A few years ago, when I attended the funeral of my uncle Frank, a very generous man who spent over 15 years between assisted living and nursing homes because of blindness from glaucoma in his early 70s, dying at 92. Frank also had a substantial savings account that was virtually depleted by the time he was gone.

For years he and his wife owned a wholesale florist business, and he loved fresh flowers. When he was laid out there was one flower ar-

rangement by his casket, and before we knew that, my sister Sue and I decided to buy a dozen red roses to put in vase for the funeral. When we arrived, we learned that there was no spray for the casket and the funeral home personnel were happy that they could use the roses for a spray.

The year before, I attended the funeral of a single 32-year-old man who had died from cancer, his father's only child. Many flowers and pictures and videos playing. He was a doctoral candidate in college and posthumously was granted his PhD degree. There was an air of deep sadness and deep relief at the funeral.

A year ago, I had a neighbor that I really didn't know who died outside when he was taking the garbage out. I had met his wife briefly at a class that we had both taken. I went to the funeral because it appeared that the wife did not have a strong support system and they had been having marital difficulties. Interestingly, that was true for her, but his work colleagues presented him as the most generous, talented, brilliant co-worker that they knew.

So, as I reflect on all of this, I think to myself, what really matters? Most newborn babies come into this world loved and cared for, at least their most basic needs are met. And then when we leave, we leave everything behind including our bodies or our ashes.

It doesn't matter how many flowers are at the funeral or whether we are rich or poor. We leave a legacy and that actually is in the minds of the survivors.

People in the community saw Bill Schwab as an activist for governmental justice, his family saw him as stingy and hurtful.

My uncle Frank was noted for his loyalty to his country and his family, but his sister saw him as a burden and woefully going through a small fortune that she would not inherit.

Chris Swindle was known as brilliant and kind.

My neighbor was seen by his wife as overbearing and aggressive, his co-workers saw him as wonderful.

So, when I go, what is the legacy that I am leaving behind? What will my funeral be like? What will I leave behind for others to have to deal with?

I guess we have to wait for the rest of the story.

Lavonda Robinette

The Little Brown Suitcase

I remember how frightened I was as I moved with determination across the hall of the Michigan Central Station in Detroit. The year was 1963, and I was ten years old and on my own. Back then, I found it easier to ask for help, but I didn't want anyone to know why I needed it. Small for my age, an oldest child, accustomed to taking care of myself, my siblings, and housekeeping, I must have appeared to onlookers like a spirited and competent little girl. The truth is that when you have no one to lean on, you learn to make decisions for yourself. I don't remember how I knew which train to board, but some things remain so fresh in my mind, even after 50 years. Kindness expressed when truly needed is unforgettable. Thus, the beginning of my story...

It all began two days earlier when I wanted to spend the night with a friend. But let me preface my story by describing what I remember about where we lived. We lived just around the corner from the Masonic Temple downtown Detroit. When I think of this time in my life, I have images of concrete, barbed wire, black people, brick buildings, roaches, plastic curtains tied in knots, and windows opened wide, praying for a breeze. Oh, and I must not forget our basic meals: oatmeal for breakfast, bologna sandwiches, and pinto beans and cornbread for dinner. These were served in good times. In bad times, oatmeal for every meal. I'm pretty sure I thought everyone lived the way we did. The only difference was that, at that time, my Mother was seven months pregnant, and the father of the child lived with us. I never really knew whether they were married, or not. I did not like him. I was afraid of him. I did not know why, but I knew.

After loads of begging, I was finally allowed to spend the night with my friend. I honestly don't remember my friend's home or anything we did that night. What I do remember was the struggle I felt in deciding whether to go directly home the next morning, or to take a little side trip to her Grandma's to pick up a swimsuit with her. It sounded like so much fun just to see her grandma. I surely missed my

own and would have given anything to see her. I did not choose wisely. I walked the few blocks with my friend to her grandma's house, then headed home to the apartment building where I lived.

Did you know that you can feel danger at least 2 blocks from home, even from a distance? As I approached my home, I could see right away that I was in real trouble. My Mother's man stood in front of the apartment building holding a board in one hand, softly tapping it to the other hand. I knew this was obviously intended for me, and I regretted my decision to see my friend's grandmother. No doubt, I could never have anticipated the outcome of stretching my boundaries, even a little. I remember walking toward him knowing what I would face. Even so, I had no idea how horrifying it would actually be. A great and heavy weight fell on my shoulders as I walked up the three flights of stairs to our apartment. I could feel him quietly behind me. His rage was palpable, and I was more terrified than I can describe. My Mother, huge in pregnancy and obviously distressed, simply watched as this man beat me through the house.

I remember him beating me into the bedroom, the board falling hard on my frail body. Pain exploding all over me. It was like he could not stop his anger, and I felt a searing hate for both of them, especially my Mother. She did not protect me. It was the worst beating I had ever experienced, and I had had many, and would have many more in the future. After his anger was spent, they decided to then talk to me about...whatever. I have no idea what they were trying to say, and I did not care. What I did want was to see my grandmother. Sitting on the side of the bed, I told them they would need to send me to her, or as soon as I could leave our apartment, I would tell what they had done to me, that I would tell my teachers, that I would find a police officer, everyone. I'm pretty sure they believed me, since a few hours later, they gave me a train ticket to Williamson, West Virginia, where my grandparents would pick me up the next day. My guess is that they either borrowed the money, or my grandparents wired money to pay for the ticket. The next thing I knew, I was on my way. Ten years old! On my own! All I could think of was getting to my grandmother.

As I boarded the train, I felt a little unsure about where to sit, or what to do next. A very sweet older black lady reached out to me, ask-

ing me if I would like to sit with her. I remember feeling so relieved, and I could feel her compassion. I'm not sure what she knew by observation, but now that I'm older, I'm thinking she knew that I truly needed someone to be kind to me. Now that I was on the train, I was unsure about the next steps. I was supposed to change trains in Cincinnati, and I had no idea what to do. I might have expressed this to her, but I simply do not remember after all these years. What I do remember that matters most, was that when I was cold, she pulled a little brown suitcase from under the seat by the footrest. When she opened the case, I saw that it held a little pink blanket that she wrapped around me, assuring me that everything was going to be alright. I believed her, and I felt safe.

My layover and change of trains in Cincinnati went without a hitch, since this sweet lady made sure I had breakfast, a hardy one that she paid for, then she escorted me to my train. She was going on to Mississippi, at least I think so. As I sat there waiting for the train to leave the station, she came back to me with a couple of comic books and a few snacks to keep me busy on my journey. She gave me a little hug, then went on her way.

Once I arrived in Williamson, as I stood to leave the train, I could see through the windows my darling grandparents anxiously waiting for me. What I did not know then was that it was obvious that I had been severely beaten. I was covered in bruises, especially about the head and arms. And nothing has ever been more comforting than the feel of their arms around me as we stood outside the train station. All I could think was that I was home where I belonged, and safe...but most of all, I will never forget the kindness of the lady with the little brown suitcase.

Nancy Louise Spinelle

The Tale of Black and White

Dedicated to my Grandchildren:

Nicholas, Megan, Natalie, Mary, Michael and Sarah

Before any of the colors of the rainbow were created there was just black and white.

Black and White were at opposite ends of the universe. Black didn't even know that White existed. Nor did White know of the existence of Black.

And it may have stayed that way forever, if one had not intruded into the space of the other.

White would've gone on thinking that Black never existed at all until, ever so slightly, White leaned into Black.

Now mind you, it was so small of an intrusion that White didn't think it mattered at all. But then something happened.

The silence that existed in the quiet of Black, for the first time, was felt as a definite interruption!

White became aware that bright light had bumped into the darkness of Black. White had never seen or felt this before.

White was brave as the feel of small bits of light began to let go, appearing to mix together at the very place darkness began.

The further and further into darkness White went, the more and more of a trail, of bits and pieces of light, were left behind. White was quite amazed!

Why, it didn't even hurt to share light!

Surprised at the creation, both Black and White, understanding each other from their inner voices, decided to call this new shade, Color and named it Red.

Black and White saw each and every color that was made as they merged, each more different and distinct than the other.

White's light had indeed turned Black's absolute darkness into seven different shades of color.

Together they could see all the creations of colors they madeRed, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet.

They squabbled back-and-forth until they finally decided to call the colors they had named and gathered together a RAINBOW.

White placed them, one by one on top of another, just as in the order of their creation, spreading the seven colors into the shape of an arc.

Leaving the rainbow behind, White began slowly fading away, out of darkness, back into light.

But just before the very last bit of light left the existence of darkness, White turned and spoke aloud to Black.

"I'm leaving now," White said, astonished at hearing words spoken aloud! It was White's own voice.

Black, who had never heard the spoken word either, called back, finding this deep echoing voice impressive.

"And what am I to do with this so-called rainbow?" questioned Black.

"Push the colors out into the universe," White said speaking with a bit of authority, "and they'll find their way."

Before the two slowly began to separate into the opposite ends of the universe, White quickly called out, hoping to have said the last of the spoken words.

"And even though we will never be colors," White said with crisp, precise, pronunciation, "we will always be part of their creation!"

Surrounded once again completely by light, White's newly acquired voice slowly let go into eternity.

Finally, White's memories began fading away from the whole experience, disappearing into complete peacefulness.

Now, back into darkness, Black too was content to return to where there were no interruptions and where light could never enter again.

"And besides," Black said quickly, just as both voice and memory faded away forever, "White made me squint!"

The End

Arthur Williams

Putting My Two Cents In

"No, you can't do this. I've been staying in this house since my wife died," a ragged old man said in front of a house that would be no longer his. His tone of voice was deeply filled with emotion and anger.

"I don't have time to argue with you, Mr. Patterson. My office has been in constant contact with you since our decision was made," a clean-shaven man said as he pulled the collar of his coat to the height of his ears. "You have constantly made promises of payments that you never kept. So don't even try to pretend that you are surprised that the mortgage company is putting you out."

"I've never talked to you people before. I don't know what the hell you are talking about. This house has been paid for for years. You guys are running some type of scam. You thought that because I was old, I'd just leave willingly. But no sir, you got another thing coming. I'm calling the police," the old man said as he turned toward the house that should have been his.

"Stop! As far as calling the police, I am an officer of the law. The papers that I gave you give me every right to evict you. But if there was some type of mistake made, I ask you now Mr. Patterson to show me the deed to this house."

"I told you I couldn't find it. I've looked everywhere. It wasn't even with my most important papers. Someone must have stolen them."

"Do you know why you can't find your deed, Mr. Patterson? I'll tell you why. Because the mortgage company has it," the man said loudly while waving a sheet of paper in front of the old man. "Try to pretend as though you don't remember re-mortgaging your house. If I weren't so used to all types of excuses, I would perhaps have believed you. Now please stand out of our way!"

"Why you no good honky bastard," Mr. Patterson said as he grabbed the throat of the younger man. "I'll teach you to treat people right."

Mr. Patterson grabbed at the law officer, who just broke his grip from his arm.

“That little stunt just cost you a night in jail. Stevenson, come take him downtown, and don’t forget to read him his rights.

“I could have you arrested for ethnic intimidation, striking an officer, and interfering with police work; yet I’m just going to have you taken in for interfering with the police.”

“What about my stuff out here in the snow?” the old man said as he was dragged away.

“You should have thought of that before you attacked me. But I’m sure most of it won’t be there when you get out tomorrow. Let that be a lesson to you, Mr. Patterson. You don’t mess with the law.”

Five years later, at a convenience store inside of an office building downtown.

“Michael Jackson and Michael Jordan; O.J., and Oklahoma. I’m telling you, Leonard, these things always happen that way. I don’t know what you call it, but all the controversies happen in pairs and the first letter of each name is always the same,” the stock clerk is saying to a customer.

“I don’t see that that’s true. It is just a coincidence. Besides, if you want to do it that way, what controversy or questionable subject was before the public when Michael Jordan was in the public eye when he retired almost two years ago?”

“I seem to recall Magic Johnson being in the news, don’t you?” the stock clerk says with a smirk.

“Okay, although I don’t know about the time difference between the two, I’ll let you have that one. Next you’ll be telling me that you have a fail-safe formula for hitting the million-dollar lottery,” Leonard says, smiling.

“Laugh now, but when I hit, we will see who will be laughing. But now that I think about it, it’s always guys like you that win. Guys that don’t really care about the money. So for that reason alone Leonard, you should at least play every now and then.”

“You just a riot Cliff. You don’t ever have to worry about me getting a million dollars ‘cause I will never play the lottery.”

Both men laugh, and then the neatly dressed man pays for the bag of peanuts that he gets just about every day before he leaves for

home. He pays the dollar ninety-eight out of two dollars. His change is two cents.

Leonard gets off of the crowded expressway thirty minutes later to escape the rush-hour traffic that he has grown accustomed to for the ten years he has worked at the bank downtown. He always gets stuck at the first light off of the ramp. While adjusting his radio station from one station to another without a commercial on it, he looks up at his driver-side window in response to a knock. He pushes a button to let the window down.

"Excuse me, sir, but I see you every day and I thought perhaps I should introduce myself to you," the man says, lowering a sign that Leonard has often seen him with. He holds his right hand out toward Leonard.

"My name is Charlemagne Patterson, but my friends called me Pat," the familiar face says. "I fell on hard times and am really a homeless guy. I don't drink, smoke, or do drugs. I just live day-to-day not knowing where my next meal will be coming from. You seem like a nice guy, yet I always have noticed that you never look my way when you exit the freeway here. I just thought you needed to know of my existence. And unlike the others, I really will work for food.

"Do you need your car washed, grass mowed, hedges trimmed? I even have done interior painting in my day," the old man pleads.

"No, sir, I have no work like that for you. I live in an apartment, and I just got the car washed yesterday."

"What about spare change for a hungry man? I'll take whatever you can spare."

The light changes as Leonard takes out all the change in his pocket. A car blows its horn at him.

"All I have is this two cents."

"I ain't ashamed to take pennies. Thanks sir. Every little bit helps," the old man says sincerely as the man in the Chrysler drives away.

That night, Leonard dreams about the homeless man. In the morning, while getting ready for work, his thoughts center on the politeness of the old man. He had indeed known that the homeless man was there, but had subconsciously ignored him. After all, who wants to be reminded of unemployment or hunger after working a hard day? He

pays taxes, so why aren't these people taken care of properly? Why should he feel so guilty?

It's rather embarrassing, Leonard thinks, to have a bum tell you that you're ignoring them. But then that's just it: Leonard is still living with the '70s ideology on the homeless situation. Political correctness has even invaded the realm of what one is to call someone without a job or place to live. A homeless person.

"Why am I even thinking about this," Leonard says to his image in the mirror while he shaves. "Every man controls his destiny, right? Mr. Patterson could perhaps have a job, have a home if only he had better prepared himself for living in the world."

The mirror does not answer back, but Leonard's conscience does. It reminds him that even some college graduates have a hard time finding jobs. And to add to that problem, a lot of jobs have been downsizing. It seems that every employer is involved in the trend of seeing who can make the most money by paying out the least. If one man can do this much, how much more will a younger man be able to do? Any one of those reasons could be why a man as old as Mr. Patterson appears to be begging for money.

"But then Mr. Patterson isn't begging for money. He's asking for work so that he can buy food," he says into the mirror. "Food is a necessity for one's survival. Money is a necessity to get food. And money is needed to purchase the food. So a person without one of those three things will have a hard time of it. But a person without all three of those things could just be a footstep ahead of death."

It is then that the normally uncharitable Leonard chooses to be charitable.

Leonard works his normal workday without incident. At the end of his workday, he is once again engaged in a conversation with the stock clerk in the store in his building.

"I'm telling you, Leonard, over half of the people out there with those homeless signs are scam artists. They just wanna sucker you out of your hard-earned money so they can get boozed up or high. I personally think it's some type of conspiracy that the government hasn't alerted us truthfully about."

"How do you mean, Cliff?"

"If homelessness is such the problem that it is reported to be in the media, why aren't there as many commercials asking for help for them as there are for contributions to feed the people starving in other countries? Because the problem isn't as big as that, I tell you. Why aren't there skinny, stomach bloated homeless people? And if you should happen to show me a skinny homeless person, I'm willing to bet that he is on crack," Cliff says and then bends down to open a crate of apples to stock up.

"I can't buy your reasoning, Cliff. Everyone knows we have homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and other programs. I didn't say that the homeless don't eat, I'm saying that they don't eat good. It is good to teach a man to fish rather than give him a fish, but what about when there are no more fish to be caught? So we can teach a man to work, but what happens when his type of job is no longer in demand? What happens when there are no jobs?

"All I'm advocating, Cliff, is that perhaps maybe each one of us should be more charitable and help a brother that's down. What's the matter with giving them change?"

"Okay, Leonard, let me put it to you this way," Cliff says after putting the last apple in its fruit bin. "You give a homeless person money, what are you accomplishing? Will he be able to use the money to rent or buy a house?"

"No, but he will be able to buy food," Leonard says, smiling.

"And there is America's problem, Leonard. The man's sign asked not for food, not for a place to stay, but work. But a homeless person is not dumb. They know that people like you will give them money without having them work. America has homeless people spoiled. Why, I bet if you offered one of those people an opportunity to come do some work for you, they will all turn you down flat."

Later that night at Leonard's apartment, he is enjoying a well cooked meal that he didn't cook.

"I must say, Mr. Patterson, I mean Pat, you cook better than a lot of women I know. I'm glad I invited you home with me," Leonard appreciatively states. "You've totally cleaned my apartment. You even done the dishes that have been in my sink for days."

"As my sign says, young man, I will work for food."

"If it isn't too personal, could you tell me how is that you are homeless?"

"To tell you the truth, young man, I don't even remember. Since I've been on the street, I find that my memory isn't what it used to be," the old man says, disgusted. "Sometimes my thinking becomes muddled and my speaking gets gibberish."

"You have to remember something? You sound educated. You know how to cook, and you're not lazy. You must used to work somewhere."

"That is correct," Mr. Patterson says. But for the life of him he can't remember where, so he elects to take the focus off of himself. "Where do you work?"

"I work at a bank downtown. I'm a teller," Leonard starts. Then he goes to tell more about himself to the homeless man.

Leonard feels good inside because he is actually sharing something that he often takes for granted with someone that needs it desperately—friendship. Leonard surprises himself as he insists that the man spend the night. Pat gives in and stays overnight.

After that night, Leonard never sees the old man again. He hopes to see him again so that he can learn more about the old man. Yet, for months after his encounter with him, Charlemagne Patterson is nowhere to be found.

Almost a year later, Leonard is doing dishes when his doorbell rings. He dries his hands and goes out his door to the building's main door. A suited-up business man is on the other side of the door.

"Hello sir, I'm looking for Leonard Slater. Are you he?"

"Yes, I am. Who are you?"

"I'm Jack Darsmouth and I work for the Smith and Wessonheimer Law and Investigation agency. May we please step into your apartment? I have some bad news for you."

"Of course, follow me," Leonard says hesitantly. The men go to the apartment, and once inside, close the door.

"Mr. Slater, I'm sorry to inform you that a friend of yours died yesterday. Charlemagne Patterson asked us to deliver you this envelope in the event of his imminent death," the man says as he opens his briefcase and takes out a 14 x 10 envelope. "Once again, I'm sorry for your loss. Have a good day."

Leonard lets the man out and rushes back to the apartment to see what the envelope contains. When he finishes reading the letter, he kisses the key that was in the envelope also. It seems that in a little while, a safe deposit box at his bank will make him a millionaire. You see, Mr. Patterson had seen his name on television when he was over to Leonard's house. The news he was watching was scrolling the names of Michiganders that had unclaimed money. When he called the number, it was indeed him.

Also during that time, Mr. Patterson took a physical and discovered that he was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. And although he had A.D., Mr. Patterson never forgot the kindness shown him by Leonard. So in reality, Leonard became a rich man because he put his two cents in.

Westland Writes began in April 2009 as a small poetry book by local authors in celebration of National Poetry Month. Since then, it has grown into an eclectic annual collection of poems and stories from in and around the community of Westland, Michigan. The William P. Faust Public Library of Westland is proud to present this eleventh installment of Westland Writes. Happy reading and writing!

