



YOUTHFUL DECISIONS

BY FRANCINE PERRINE-WITTKAMP

I should have been praying while I polished the brass altar railing, but I caught a glimpse of my face and gasped. I was suddenly scared because I thought another nun had sneaked up beside me. Nuns were always so silent. I turned. No one was there. I took another quick peek in the railing. I recognized myself. Whoa! I thought, I look just like a nun! My bonnet was cocked just like the cool nuns of my youth. The white, linen-covered bonnet curved at the top then straightened down the sides of my face. It lay tightly

against my temples and cheeks and ended just below my chin. The whole thing jutted out about three inches from my face. My forehead was covered with another piece of white linen stretched over an index-sized square of hard celluloid. Looking straight at myself, only the center of my face was visible. A face I hadn't seen in over two years. Nuns put vanity away with their girlhood memories. No mirrors here, but I had come upon this brass railing. I cracked up laughing. My family would be so shocked when they saw that I was

a real nun. I hadn't seen them since I took the habit. That was almost a year earlier. As a first year canonical novice, I was allowed no visitors. Our whole being was to be submerged in canon law. No distractions permitted.

I missed them, especially my brother, David, who was traveling the world and sipping fine wines. In all the pictures my mother sent to me, his outrageously handsome self was more often than not attired in a tux. He was at his best then. I thought

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8, COLUMN 1

MIRACLE

BY JILL SCHUMACHER

On a beautiful June evening, just after dinner my husband and I drove to get ice cream. Ice cream is one of my favorite things, and this night I deserved a double scoop. Seven months pregnant, I ate whatever I wanted. Vanilla or chocolate chip, which would I have? A double - one scoop vanilla, the other chocolate chip, coated in chocolate. Perfect! I sat back in the seat of the car, enjoying a big bite of the chocolate coating before I reached the ice cream.

Suddenly, I felt a squishy wetness under me. What could it

be? How did I spill something on the seat of our new Buick? Rubbing my hands along the trim of the velvety soft green velour, I gazed around, still wondering what I felt. Thoughts raced through my mind. Why was I not feeling pain? I felt no movement, no little kick, nothing, just water flowing from me. "Take me to the hospital," I said to my husband with fear in my eyes. I couldn't get another word out of my mouth. My body shook from fright and I held back my tears. How could this be happening?

My husband didn't have to

say a word. The look on his face revealed everything. Tears slowly filled in his eyes until he could no longer hold them back. I just stared at him, wanting desperately to say, "It will be all right," but the words wouldn't come out. He needed me as much as I needed him. We rode quietly, not knowing what to say or feel. An impending doom seemed evident in the silence that permeated the car. I touched his hand and he gently rubbed mine, grasping to hold it tighter. Our hands meshed into one. His

-CONTINUED ON PAGE 3, COLUMN 2

THE BEST TEACHERS OF WRITING ARE WRITERS THEMSELVES. THIS NEWSLETTER FEATURES WRITING BY 2002 WRITING INSTITUTE PARTICIPANTS.

MAYBE LATER I'LL THINK

BY MARCY MCGEE

"Hello. Yes, I'm looking for a bed for an adolescent girl... 14... Yes, I'll hold." Hold...sure I can hold...this is only the fourth phone call I've made! The whole world is on hold right now. Chrissy, she looks so small, helpless, a battered ragdoll, worn and beaten. My husband, normally so strong and confident, seems lost, overwhelmed by what life has just handed us, uncertain of what to do, what to say, how to make it all better. Why am I the one keeping it together? Why can't I fall apart, too? God, I'm scared. I glance across the room at the therapist. Shouldn't she be doing this? She is the therapist after all...there's something really wrong here. A hospital, a place that will keep my daughter safe from herself...I should be able to do that. That's my job! How did we get here? It seems like another lifetime.

◆ ◆ ◆
I sit in the dentist's office, the stark, white walls reflect the light bouncing off the stainless steel instruments. My teeth are out. They poke, prod and peruse my mouth. I close my eyes. Listening to the clinking of tools and the whirring of drills, my mind wanders. I can't wait until they're done with this whole process. I never knew that replacing a bridge could be so involved-appointment after appointment, fitting after fitting-you'd think it was a wedding dress. Well, once this is done, I don't care if I ever see a dentist's office again... at least this guy has a sound system. He even provides the walkman! A ringing interrupts my thoughts...my cell phone? The cell phone, which is in my pocketbook, is across the room. The

dentist and his assistant hear it but are otherwise occupied. Eventually, my pocketbook is brought to me. The phone is no longer ringing. I check the messages. It's home and it's 3:20. They're both home from school. It's probably just another argument over which soap opera to watch before they start their homework. It's better they figure this one out by themselves...God bless XPN, it makes things like this bearable. The receptionist interrupts, "Excuse me, Linda. Your daughter, Jessie, is on the phone. She's says it's important." Great, how am I supposed to talk on the phone toothless, shot full of Novocain and stuffed with gauze.

"Hello...what's up, honey?"

"Mom..." The world stops. There is no sound, no movement. The room takes on an otherworldly glow. Everything becomes fuzzy

HOW DID WE GET HERE? IT SEEMS LIKE ANOTHER LIFETIME.

around the edges. A confusion of colors, light and sound...The others are talking. I can't hear them. They seem to move in slow motion, automatons. The phone is cold in my hand, getting colder. And falling...that uncontrolled feeling right before you fall off to sleep, only there's no bottom, only the fall...falling...falling...help me...A sudden rush of air - I force myself to breath.

"Okay. Are you okay? I'll be home as soon as I can. Have you called your Dad? Call him. Jessie, I love you." I hand the phone to the receptionist. "I need to go."

"Now, if you give me just a minute I can do this last adjustment so we can send it back to the lab..."

Can't these people see me falling! I need to go. "No, I need to go NOW!" I scream...or did I? Stop and think, Linda. They're looking at me, concern growing on their faces.

"My daughter just found her sister on the couch, an open bottle of ibuprofen next to her and scissors in her hand. She's okay...she didn't do anything, yet, I think, but I NEED TO GO NOW!" Instantly cooperative, the temporary bridge is back in.

What do I do now? Home is at least a half-hour away and with all the school buses to contend with. Why did I have to insist on using a dentist in Bala Cynwyd? They must have good dentists in West Chester. I've only been living here for 7 years! Jessie. God, Jessie. She's only 12. Trying to be strong, her voice shaking, a leaf in the wind. I don't want her to have to deal with this alone...

As if reading my thoughts, "Linda, is there anything we can do?" they ask. "Is there someone you need to call?" Call...Lizzie! My sister-in-law was recovering from back surgery. She'd just seen the doctor. What had he said? Was she allowed to drive yet? A phone call later I'm out the door. Lizzie will go to the house. She's only 5 minutes away.

Time passes. Life seems surreal. We go through the motions. We seem to hold things together for the next 48 hours. All this happens on Thursday. Chrissy has group therapy that night. Before she goes in, I am careful to tell the therapist, Beth, all that has occurred. As we leave, we make an appointment for early Sunday afternoon. I stay home on Friday, a 'family emergency'-no details, just circling the wagons, protecting the home fires. I call Jessie's school Friday morning. I want her counselor to know what's going on.

Someone needs to be there for her. "Have you called Jean?" the counselor asks. "She's the crisis intervention specialist at East. She's dealt with things like this before. She'll know what to do." Another phone call.

I take a deep breath, amazed that I seem to be handling this so well. Looking at Chrissy I can see that my vibrant, exuberant child is far from vibrant today, a once red rose, wilted and graying from time, from life. But then, what do I expect? She seems okay, though. We talk a bit. Have lunch. Everything seems normal. She is a little subdued, but other than that...*maybe the worst is over...*

"Yes, I'm here. You do have a bed. Yes, please hold it for us..."

In the background, I hear Beth ask Chrissy once more if this is what she wants. "Chrissy, you know that your parents will stay with you...all night if necessary. You'll never have to be alone until you feel safe." Chrissy just shakes her head. My poor baby. She looks so lost, so helpless.

"We'll be there as soon as we can. We just need to stop at home, get some clothes and, I guess, get her dinner. What? Oh, rules: No shoes or belts, no clothes with ties or strings. Toiletries will be provided. No pens or pencils, no spiral notebooks? Oh, nothing sharp, nothing she might use to hurt herself. I understand. Thank you."

I just move forward. I do what has to be done. I'll think later.

-Marcy McGee is a Middle School teacher at the Vanguard School



Miracle

-CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1, COLUMN 3

pure essence surrounded me as I moved closer to his body. I drew strength from his presence.

My thoughts raced to the night before, our first class on having a baby. As a group we were months away from having our babies. We shared experiences, exchanged phone numbers and talked about the meetings to follow. Carrying books and pamphlets, we left excited by the moment and what was to come. Now, rushing to the hospital, my thoughts raced back to last evening. "They didn't talk about this," I said to my husband in a panic. "Why not? What does this mean? What are we supposed to do?"

MY THOUGHTS RACED TO THE NIGHT BEFORE... THEY DIDN'T TALK ABOUT THIS.

I was not due until the last week of July. My mind wandered as so many thoughts rushed through it. I couldn't have a baby, I wasn't ready! I hadn't even started to prepare. I was supposed to have plenty of time to arrange for painters, to have furniture delivered, and to buy baby clothes and diapers. What about all the other baby items I needed? Would I still have time?

Pulling up to the emergency room entrance, no one alerted to our arrival, my husband ran inside and flagged down a nurse. "Who is your doctor?" she asked as I was helped from the car. "Doctor Nadir," I replied, and the nurse sent someone to call her. "Tell her it's an emergency. We

need her at the hospital immediately," she instructed. Tears flowed from my eyes. I was even more frightened. What was wrong with my baby? I wanted to know. I needed to know.

Doctor Nadir had been my physician for years. I knew that when she arrived she would make it all better. Her soothing voice would comfort me. All she needed to say to relieve my anxiety was, "Don't worry." The touch of her hand would reassure me that my baby was okay. Rapidly being pushed in a hospital bed to the labor room, I waited for this mild-mannered woman to appear. My husband held my hand as I cried and said, "I'm not in labor; I'm not feeling any pain. Why don't they understand that?"

All I felt was the urge to go to the bathroom. "Please let me go to the bathroom," I pleaded, but the nurses ignored me. As the sensation became stronger, still no one responded and I became angry. I screamed, "Get this straight, I need to use the bathroom and I am going to find one now!" Struggling to get out of bed I felt an arm restrain me and say, "Forget it, honey, you're just lying in this bed until your doctor comes." Why wouldn't they let me use the bathroom? My husband shrugged his shoulders and looked away for fear of what he might reveal in his face. Again, I caught a glimpse of a tear running down his cheek. He looked helpless and I couldn't reach him. My only thought was to have him hold me, lie down next to me, comfort me. I lost sight of him as my doctor arrived. A sudden sense of peace fell over me as her hand touched mine. I knew everything was going to be all right.

Before I realized what was happening, doctors surrounded me. The room had an eerie silence except for the hum of machines quickly being attached to every part of my body. I was pumped with medication - quick shots and slow drips - and somewhere in the distance I heard a voice say, "This will stop the contractions and help your baby's lungs develop." I watched as my husband, trying desperately to reach me, was jostled from one side of the room to the other. I heard the doctor say, "You're in the way, please move over here." Then "Excuse me, would you mind standing in that corner." Confused by all the commotion in the room, I struggled to find him, to touch his hand.

Finally, after hours, people started to funnel out of my room. Dazed and drugged, I watched as my husband approached me. He lay down beside me and the warmth of his body brought comfort. We held each other close, confused and uncertain; no words were needed.

My doctor entered the room and told my husband, "Go home, your wife needs rest. Nothing is going to happen tonight, I promise. Go sleep and come back tomorrow when you are both rested." A feeling of exhaustion had taken over. We exchanged weary glances and knew that we both needed to sleep. I encouraged my husband to leave. I knew he wouldn't sleep well at home, but he wouldn't sleep at all if he stayed.

I reminded him, "Nothing is going to happen. Go home, I'll be waiting for you tomorrow." He lovingly said, "I'll be back tomorrow before you wake." As we kissed goodnight, tears welled up in our eyes.

Slowly I fell into a deep sleep which seemed to last an eternity. I awoke with a desperate feeling of having to go to the bathroom. "Damm those nurses, I have to go to the bathroom!" I thought. This time, hooked up to all kinds of contraptions, I was immobilized and had to call the nurse. "I need to go to the bathroom. Please let me go." The nurse answered, "You can't go now. We need to see what stage of labor you're in."

"What do you mean - labor? I just have to go to the bathroom. Just one minute, please, I'm desperate." "You have to wait," responded the nurse.



My monitor was registering slight contractions, and I was starting to feel excruciating pain. Again, I was flooded with a roomful of doctors and specialists disconnecting me from all contraptions and rushing me to the delivery room. In the background I heard someone say, "Call her husband!"

My doctor hadn't had time to leave the hospital. My husband, unreachable, was on his way home and I lay in the delivery room with my bladder about to burst. They were telling me to push. "I can't push," I yelled, "I need to go to the bathroom!" Finally I relented and pushed.

"To hell with you!" I said "I'll poop all over the freaking table." To my surprise, I delivered a beautiful three-pound, eleven-ounce baby girl. I looked quickly at my daughter as they wiped her away. "Those doctors are specialists, they take care of ba-

bies like yours," said the nurse. "Don't worry, they're wonderful doctors." What did she mean, "babies like mine"? I wondered what was wrong.

As they wheeled me out of the delivery room, I noticed my husband sitting in a wheelchair, sniffing smelling salts and crying. As soon as he had gotten home, he got the message to come right back to the hospital. I was so drugged, I didn't comprehend what had happened. I knew I had a baby and I would see her the next day. My husband spent the night with our daughter, rubbing her hand as he had rubbed mine. Seven long weeks later, our little preemie came home.

Next month, all of nineteen years old, she leaves for college. She is our miracle.

*-JILL SCHUMACHER IS A LIFE SKILLS
TEACHER IN THE SOUDERTON SD*

**INTERESTED IN
BECOMING A
PAWLPOFFELLOW ?**

**WANT TO JOIN A
STRONG NETWORK
OF MASTER
TEACHERS ?**

**LOOKING FOR A
REWARDING
PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
EXPERIENCE ?**

**BECOME A MEMBER OF
THE WRITING OR
LITERATURE INSTITUTE
CLASS OF 2003!**

**CALL THE
PAWLPOFFICE
FOR DETAILS :**

610-436-2202

A Dance, A Shot of Jack and a Cowboy Hat

BY BRENDA KRUPP

It's not every day you find yourself in a place like the Wild Horse Saloon, so you might as well make the best of it. We were three women. Three obviously northern women. Three obviously northern, conservative women. Oh, hell, we were teachers in town for the Whole Language Umbrella Conference and I'm sure it showed. After all, look how we were dressed. Gail, the principal, dressed as a principal on vacation would dress-sensibly: white slacks, navy blue sweater with very sensible canvas flats for walking. Donna, the whole language first grade teacher who believed in freedom of choice and sitting on the floor with her kids, wore khaki capri's and a faded peach blouse with thick soled Doc Marten sandals newly purchased from Nordstrom's. And I, the third grade teacher who wished she were still in her twenties but was pushing 41, wore faded Old Navy jeans and a sleeveless maroon t-shirt. (I would have been considered stylish in any northern city.)

We had decided, even before disembarking from our plane, that while in Nashville for the Whole Language Umbrella Conference we would have a Nashville experience, whatever that meant. For Gail, it meant visiting the Grand Ole Opry, the original. Donna thought it meant getting to taste homemade southern biscuits and visiting a Fender guitar store. I knew a Nashville experience would not be complete without a shot a Jack

Daniels in a country-music-playing, honky-tonk saloon, wearing a cowboy hat! And I was determined to fulfill my dream.

Saturday evening was my designated night. We had scouted out the local bars and settled on the Wild Horse Saloon because it was less sleazy than "Billy Bob's Bar and Grill" that advertised a 7:00 a.m. opening with the first act appearing at 8:00 a.m. and the final act closing the bar at 4:00 a.m. Also, the Wild Horse Saloon had received a two thumbs up recommendation from the local cabbie who had shown us the Grand Ole Opry and a good place to get southern biscuits.



So there we were. The Wild Horse Saloon. And it was living up to its reputation. Tables, forming a U around the floor, were obviously for the tourists and spectators because the stage and the dance floor were the center of attention. The dance floor was large. It could easily hold more than a hundred dancers at a time. The stage closed off the dance floor and was filled with instruments only a country western band could imagine using. This was more than I could have hoped for.

As we settled in with our drinks (obviously northern: gin and tonic, Kahlua and cream, vodka and cranberry juice), the house lights dimmed and spotlights illuminated the stage. "Howww-dy! Ya'll ready to dance?" screamed a fiddle-

wielding performer. The crowd, which had been fairly subdued, rose to its feet and began clapping and stomping to the beat. The band broke into song and the dancers took to the floor.

Cowboy boots were the preferred dancer footwear. Animal-skinned and intricately patterned boots as well as worn scuffed leather swayed and two-stepped around the floor. Bodies dressed in neatly pressed blue jeans and colorful cowboy shirts maneuvered expertly to the fast-paced southern country tunes. Mesmerized, I watched as colorful partners twirled and pranced effortlessly around the floor.

My toe-tapping feet forgot how much they disliked country music as my body swayed to that southern country rhythm. Oh, how I wanted to join the dancers. But I didn't know how to do that good ole two-step. I watched as others ventured onto the floor. "Susie Jean and Jimmy Ray" were the perfect couple. They dressed in identical plaid cowboy shirts, wore the same boots, and moved in and around the less capable dancers as if they weren't even there. They knew more versions of the country line dance than I even knew existed.

It was then that I realized I was being watched, not by the dancers but by a cowboy seated at the bar closest to our table. He smiled, raised his glass. I smiled and turned my attention back to the floor. The music changed and another quick-paced country song about trucks and ex-girlfriends filled the saloon. Those toes of mine caused my leg to jump and I found myself sitting bent legged, ready to leap to that floor. Then the waitress appeared with a drink, a shot of Jack Daniels for me from

the cowboy. I looked over to smile my thanks but he was not there. He was standing beside me.

"Would you like to dance?"
Would I like to dance?
Would I like to dance! Oh, would I! But I had watched those dancers. I had also watched the whirling dervish dressed in an "I love New York" t-shirt so I knew from observation that young Jewish boys should not attempt this dance, and I had the growing feeling that 41-year-old northern women should only be spectators, too. But my Nashville experience screamed, "Get off your ass! When will you ever get this opportunity again?" So I rose and walked to the dance floor with my "partner."

He hooked his arm securely around my waist and we slid onto the floor. His feet moved quickly and I clumsily attempted to follow him. He quickly realized I had no idea what I was doing and said, "Go lightly and quickly. Just let me lead you." I tried but my northern sandaled feet would not respond. (Perhaps if I would have worn cowboy boots?) The song ended before I was ready to give up. I thanked the cowboy and apologized profusely.

"I'm not from the south."

"I know," he responded.

"I'm a northern girl but I think this dance is really cool."

"Would you like to try again?"

The music started up and before I knew it he had started counting in my ear and leading me around the dance floor. He effortlessly guided my steps and kept me from colliding with "Susie Jean and Jimmy Ray." We seemed to twist and weave and I almost thought I had the two-step conquered until he tried

to twirl me, and I stepped soundly on his toes. When I realized he had said "damn Yankees," I knew my two-stepping days were over. I would forever be a Bristol Stomp girl.

As the music faded my cowboy and I returned to the bar. We toasted my dancing with a shot of Jack Daniels. I thanked him for helping me fulfill part of my

Nashville dream and then got directions to the best damn cowboy hat in town.

-Brenda Krupp teaches 3rd grade in the Souderton SD, is a PAWLP co-director and coordinator of the West Chester Writing Institute

THE PICTURE

BY DIANE DOUGHERTY

In the front parlor
where nobody but company ever
is invited to sit,
hangs an 11 x 14 photograph
of my sister
Theresa
who died of leukemia
way before I was born.

It is her second grade school picture
the one Mr. Cardoni hand colored
as a gift
to my parents.
In it she wears a pink dress
with a white square collar embroidered with
tiny pink rosebuds.

An ivory silk bow ties together
a riot of blonde curls.
She has bright blue eyes
(the only one of us who does) and
her smile is bright and happy.

She does not know what we know:
That she will never be in the third grade;
That she will never see her baby brother
who is born on the very day she dies;
That her mother will mourn her loss
until she herself leaves this earth, or
That this picture will be my only connection to
Her.

*-Diane Dougherty is a retired high school English teacher;
PAWLP co-director and coordinator of the West Chester Writing Institute*

YOUNG AND FOOLISH YET

BY CRAIG SMITH

It was five years newer than my last car, but more importantly, it had more style. I had wanted a '78 Eldorado, but my father convinced me that a boy my age didn't need a Caddie. The Regal was comfortable. It had an automatic transmission, air conditioning, soft bench seats, and a loud sound system. The gas gauge didn't work, and the car sometimes made some strange noises, but I found that if I just turned up the Alpine stereo, I could enjoy my ride.

My cousin Rob and I spent many hours in that car. We ate in it. We drank in it. We passed out in it, and more than once we nearly died in it. Thankfully, we both outlived the Buick.

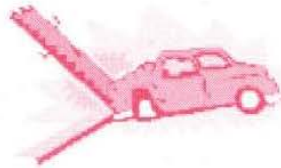
Somer's Point, where Rob docked his cabin cruiser, was our frequent destination of choice. If one of had a small break in his schedule, he would quickly convince the other to drop everything and head for the boat. We were young and foolish, and everything we did became an adventure. In an effort to keep things interesting, we would often explore new routes to the shore. One meandering route took us through farm country, and although it was not the most sensible way to reach the Jersey shore, we took it.

I think my cousin was driving when we stopped moving. The old Buick didn't shift, sputter, or shudder. She merely slowed gradually, until we came to rest miles from anywhere familiar. It was obvious, although not by looking at the gas gauge, we had run out of gas.

The road had a slight incline, which kept us from rolling any

closer to the shore, but after walking a dozen or so yards, I realized we had stopped close to the crest of the hill. "I don't remember passing any gas stations," my cousin reminded me. We concluded that since we hadn't seen a station for a while, the next opportunity to fill up would certainly lie ahead. Then the idea dawned on us. If we could push the car over the crest of that hill, we could roll, perhaps for miles, to the nearest station.

We grunted as the car slowly moved up the grade. A few more steps and we would be back on road. The plan was working. I could see my cousin's face across the sky blue, landau roof as gravity and momentum took over for us. No longer did the Buick need our assistance to



move forward. "Jump in!" I yelled as we jogged alongside the coasting vehicle, but the moment of opportunity was lost. As the car gathered speed, it became clear that we were going to lose her. We kept up for twenty or thirty yards, but in the end the old Buick was just too heavy and too fast for us to control.

As we stood on that farm road miles from nowhere, the Buick quietly rolled out of my life. In some strange way I felt like a proud but nervous father as she took her first solo flight. Keeping true to the road, my Buick Regal didn't stray to the left or

right. She glided down that ribbon of back road, between acres of tall Jersey corn.

Then suddenly, as if in a scene from a movie, she attempted a daring stunt: the fish-tail. Her wheels cut sharply, and she began to spin. Maybe the Regal was turning to say goodbye, but in the end she spun out of control and flew backward into a ditch, her movement halted only by a large tree. The two trunks met with little fanfare as her wild ride came to an abrupt stop.

Standing next to the Buick, her front wheels dangling several feet off the macadam, I wondered if anyone would ever stop to help a couple of dim city boys and their Buick out of this kind of jam. I can see now that my father was right; a Cadillac would not have been any more impressive.

-Craig Smith teaches 5th grade in the New Hope Solebury SD

**PAWLP OFFERS
THREE SUMMER INSTITUTES**

WRITING INSTITUTES

AT

**WEST CHESTER
UNIVERSITY**

AND

**BUCKS COUNTY IU
IN DOYLESTOWN**

LITERATURE INSTITUTE

AT

**WEST CHESTER
UNIVERSITY**

CALL 610-436-2202

FOR DETAILS

-CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1, COLUMN 3

about my cousin and best friend, Jane, too. We spent our childhoods together. Now she was making peace on the corner of Haight-Ashbury. She wore her torn jeans and a peace-symbol shirt. She only sipped wine when she smoked. Meanwhile, I was tripping over long serge robes, wearing horse blinders and being choked by a white celluloid collar and bib. I wasn't drinking any wine. The only thing we had in common was that we were all finding ourselves.

I remember when I announced at dinner one night that I planned to go into the convent. I have to admit my parents were good. They sat in silent shock. I knew the thoughts that were preventing them from speaking. Like any other Catholic family, they were overwhelmed by the joy of having a child in religious life, but they were also thinking I was the wrong child. I think it was equivalent to being hit by a brick.

My brother, who was six years older and 23 at the time, tried to think before he spoke, but I could see the pained expression on his face. "This is not a good idea, Liz. You're too rebellious and you are too much of a free spirit and they won't let you in anyway."

"Why?" I replied in as condescending a tone as I could muster. I wanted to hate him for saying that, but he was the kind of older brother everyone dreams of, and I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

"Simple." He always wanted to frame things simply. He was Mensa club so I guessed he was smart enough to get to the core of things. "You curse," he said.

"David!" my mother jumped. "She does," he replied in a disgusted tone of voice. He wanted me to be a lady. That was the last thing I ever wanted.

My mother managed to change the subject. "It's really ironic that you chose tonight to tell us about your plans, Liz, because David, too, has an announcement."



A very cool segue out, I thought.

David's plans were more normal than mine so everyone focused on him. He had finally landed a job he'd been working on since he graduated from college. He would be leaving the next week for Washington, DC, to work for Robert Kennedy. His large, brown eyes filled with excited delight as he jumped from one great thing to another that would soon materialize for him in this new fairy-tale life. "I'll be in the center of Democratic political life. I'll be working on major decisions that will affect people's lives." He bubbled on and on about the work he'd be doing. The idea that he would be moving from white-bread America to a cosmopolitan city was more fuel for his exploding effervescence. I tried to hold back my tears. I would miss him.

Over the next year my plans moved slowly forward, through three interviews and psychological and academic testing. David's being was caught up in the glamour of Kennedy's political life and his own ever-growing social life in Washington. He bought his first tuxedo and developed the ability to distinguish fine wine from jug wine.

That year I found myself on the train to Washington quite a

few times. He was always fun to be with, but his personality was down-right blooming. Now being with him was like being at a great party. It seemed everything we did together became a starry-eyed memory for me. I rode the train home still tasting the mushroom pizza we ate in the small Italian restaurant around the corner from his apartment. I recognized that he was an unusual brother. He really shared his life with me. He gave me my first adult experiences.

My parents were proud of him and showed off the pictures of him standing with the Kennedys. We all agreed he was the most handsome one in the group. He was definitely the tallest. As word spread about David's wonderful successes, family members called. The day before I was leaving for the convent our hippy cousin, Jane, arrived. In between smoking and hanging out in San Francisco, she had been working for Martin Luther King and was on her way to Washington to join his entourage. Of course, she couldn't wait to see David.

We sat up and talked all night. I think my mother felt bad about that. She really wanted to spend that last night with me.

Jane and I smoked pack after pack of cigarettes and drank wine. We solved all the problems of the world before dawn. She was two years older than I and had gone on what she termed, "educational adventures" after high school. At this time, she was checking out society's version of success for a woman of 21. As we talked on, I realized how committed she was to King's platform. She was trying it on to see how it felt. The next day, I would do something similar myself.

Jane left early. I packed my trunk and put on my postulant's dress and veil. Off to the convent we went. It was a majestic-looking, stone building with two huge, thick, wooden doors. From our vantage point at the bottom of the wide stone steps that lead to the door, we could see the professed nuns standing in a reception line. Each postulant, surrounded by mom and dad, gingerly skipped up the steps then disappeared into the blackness behind the reception line.

The letter we had received

from the motherhouse stated that the postulants should arrive between two and three in the afternoon. Parents were to leave their daughters at the front door. My parents and I watched one set of parents after another walk back down the stairs with handkerchiefs to their eyes. My parents weren't eager to have that experience. We lingered. I asked my dad for a cigarette. My mother said, "You can't stand here and smoke a cigarette in your postulant habit."

With a look of disbelief, I said,

"Mom, this is it for me. Will you deny your only daughter a last cigarette?" My dad lit two cigarettes and gave them to me. I inhaled both and we all laughed. Ten of three. Five of three. Three. "We'd better go," said Mom. The three of us walked up the steps. I turned. They were already crying. It was hard.

I went through the long line of nuns, trying not to cry and not hearing a word anyone said. I was quickly ushered into an endlessly long room and down an endlessly long corridor. I was seated on a bench and my novice hostess disappeared. I looked around. It was a gorgeous huge property. There was a rose garden to the right and perfectly manicured hills sloped to the back and left. There were so many shade trees I couldn't count them.

I suddenly saw all the novices in white veils, and the postulants dressed as I was. They were milling around, laughing and talking in groups spread out all over the lawns.

Sitting there, I knew, that I'd made a serious mistake. Without a doubt, this was not the life for me. In that moment, though, I stood up, smiled at the others and joined in. A lot of time and preparation had gone into making this day happen. I wasn't about to walk away. After all David was working for Robert Kennedy, Jane was working for Martin Luther King. I had no choice but to go one higher and work for God.

I have not written poetry since 8th grade, nor have I wanted to. I decided to write my narrative about Italy to discover why I am so enamoured, entranced, and enchanted by this land I have visited three times in the last five years. When I decided to write about this topic, images appeared – snapshots. I knew then that poetry was my only option.

Snapshots of Italy: History

Lesley Roessing

I walk the steps that she walked,
fitting my feet in the indentation worn in the stone.
Catherine's dainty feet trod this way, on her way to fleeting glory,
And so do I, ticket in hand.

I sit on the throne where he held court,
feeling the curvature of his body engraved in the stone.
What battle plans would Attila share with me as
I wait to have my picture taken?

I visit the Venetian Ghetto –
four thousand or more, locked in by walls at night.
Now the Jews are less than five hundred.
Free, I am dancing in St. Mark's Square.

A sense of history juxtaposed with the values of today –
Can we know what they felt as they walked where we now walk?
What makes us different as we follow in their footsteps?
Is it the fault of modern living, the busy pace of our lives?

Or is it the fact that we are only here on holiday?

-Lesley Roessing teaches
middle school Language Arts in the Ridley SD

-Francine Perrine-Wittkamp teaches
7th grade Language Arts
in the Pottsgrove SD

Make Someone Happy

BY RUTHANN HEYWOOD

For almost as long as I can recall, my dad came home at his usual time of 5 pm. He would turn on his stereo, pull out an album, hold it as carefully as you would a newborn child, gently blow off any particle of dust and gently lay it on the turntable. He'd push the button, and the record would slowly begin to spin at its 33 and 1/3 rate. Grasping the arm of the player, he would ever so carefully set the needle down at the beginning of the song, his eyes never wavering for fear that just the smallest movement one way or another would cause a scratch.

Suddenly, overpowering sounds were blasting through the room. You could hear nothing but the music of Stan Kenton, Count Basie, Maynard Ferguson, or Glenn Miller. My dad would stand between the speakers perched on the bookshelves, lift his hands toward them as if they were his altar, and move them to the music. He was the conductor of his own world, maestro of his universe. No matter what happened during his day, this was his escape and he loved it. Even on Saturdays and Sundays, if the spirit moved him, for about an hour this would be his routine. No one could interrupt. If you did, you would be drawn into his web to sit, to listen, to watch, and occasionally to sing.

Every so often he would play an old favorite. I can't even remember who sang it – "Make Someone Happy." He would look at me, and I would roll my eyes as if singing along would be doing him a favor. But I always sang. And though my face told a

different story, my heart felt good. We were one in this world, if only for the duration of this song.

While other young adolescents were raised on their own styles of music, this was my world. Oh, I had my times. I would walk to a friend's house, holding my AM radio to my ear to hear the sounds of the Beatles, Monkees, and the Young Rascals. Even when I was home alone, I would treat myself to my own version of my father's world. I would sing as if I were on stage.



Julie Andrews was my goddess.

However, dad's were the records we listened to as a family. My brother and I even made pilgrimages to some of the great music halls, like Sunnybrook, to listen to his idols of the big band sounds. There was even a part of me that loved that music, although my teenage angst would not permit me to say so. I did enjoy the rhythm, the beat, the ebb and flow of the sound. I loved to watch my parents dance the jitterbug. It was as if they were born for it, although my mother now says she could really only dance this way with my father. And though I never told him, the real treat was when he asked me to dance with him on the ballroom floor. There is not even a word for the special feeling that filled me.

Twenty-three years later my dad is now gone, as are the records he used to play. Oh, I have some remakes of the originals, but not the real things. One

night though, I sat watching a movie - *Sleepless in Seattle*. It was touching and cute – a real chick-flick. Then, at the end, I suddenly felt my gut wrench. Not because Tom Hanks found the girl of his dreams at the top of the Empire State Building or because Meg Ryan looked so adorable as she fumbled around for the right words to say. But as they walked slowly onto the elevator, the final song began. The rhythm hit my ears and I was shifted back in time. "Make someone happy. Make just one someone happy. And then you will be happy, too." Once again, for just that moment in time, I was with my dad's music, his spirit, and his soul.

-Ruthann Heywood teaches 6th grade Language Arts in the Upper Dublin SD

**SUMMER INSTITUTES
INCLUDE CELEBRATE
LITERACY CONFERENCE !**

**INSTITUTE PARTICIPANTS
WILL ATTEND THE
CELEBRATE LITERACY
CONFERENCE FEATURING
GEORGIA HEARD
JUNE 25 & 26
AND FOUR -WEEK
INSTITUTE
JUNE 30 - JULY 25**

**SIX GRADUATE CREDITS
FROM WEST CHESTER
UNIVERSITY**

**FOR DETAILS
CALL 610-436-2202**



SAVE THE DATES!



CELEBRATE LITERACY IV CONFERENCE

JUNE 25 & 26, 2003

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: GEORGIA HEARD

*Author of *The Revision Toolbox*; *Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School*; *The Words of True Poems*; *Writing Toward Home: Tales and Lessons to Find your Way*; *For the Good of the Earth and Sun: Teaching Poetry*; *Songs of Myself: An Anthology of Poems and Art*; and *Creatures of Earth, Sea and Sky**

SPRING PAWLPL DAYS

Putting the Pieces Together: Strategies for Reading and Writing

A program for teachers

Keynote Speaker:
Patrick Shannon

Professor of Education at Penn State University, Author of *I Shop, You Shop: Raising Questions about Reading Commodities*; *Critical Literacy*; and editor of *Becoming Political: Readings and Writings in the Politics of Literacy Education*

March 1, 2003

Mill Creek Elementary School
Council Rock SD
8:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Registration fee: \$5

Working Together: Encouraging Literacy in our Youth

A program for teachers, parents, and students

Keynote Speaker:
Linda Oatman High

Author of *Under New York*; *Barn Savers*; *A Humble Life: Plain Poems*; *Beekeepers*; and *Maize*

March 8, 2003

Sykes Student Union Building
West Chester University
8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

and

March 22, 2003

Jamison Elementary School
Central Bucks SD
8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
\$3 donation

THE PENNSYLVANIA WRITING & LITERATURE PROJECT NEWSLETTER IS SPONSORED BY

Michaels Associates
BOOKSELLERS & DISTRIBUTORS

DISTRIBUTORS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND
PROFESSIONAL BOOKS FOR TEACHERS

836 E. Pittsburgh - McKeesport Blvd.

North Versailles, PA 15137

Toll Free: 1(800)869-1467

Fax: (412)672-4299

www.michaelsassociates.com

THE PENNSYLVANIA WRITING & LITERATURE PROJECT

Co-Directors

Vicki Steinberg, Lynne Dorfman,
Judy Jester & Brenda Krupp

Co-Director for Institutes

Diane Dougherty

Co-Director for Literature

Patty Koller

Co-Director for Technology

Steve Heffner

Co-Directors for Youth Programs

Bernadette Cant

Chris Coyne, Karen Venuto

Director

Andrea Fishman

Associate Director

Mary Buckelew

Program Coordinators

Mariann Shirk

Ann Mascherino

Secretaries

Toni Kershaw

Lisa Gentry

The Pennsylvania Writing & Literature Project *Newsletter* is published five times a year by and for those affiliated with the Project. Submissions are always welcome and can be mailed to the Pennsylvania Writing & Literature Project, West Chester University, West Chester, PA, 19383.



The Pennsylvania Writing & Literature Project
West Chester University
West Chester, PA 19383
(610) 436-2202 FAX(610)436-3212
<http://www.pawlp.org>

Address Service Requested

Non Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 309
West Chester, PA
19383