Fear

Late fall thunder could be heard to the north as a cold front with snow made its way over the mountains. He tried not to panic as he kept up a moderate trot but often stopped to call out.

"Weyland, Waywhy," he shouted, then followed with his bark call. He had walked through this part of the woodlot with the dog before but never this late in the day. He had lost the path a while back and was now stumbling over logging slash. Then came the shots.

First one, then a series. "Weyland", he screamed. Then more shots as if the shooter was aiming for a moving target. His headlamp was almost out when he rounded a corner and saw his dog's orange vest torn and lying on the ground.

"Weyland, Weyland".

Cohasset, Massachusetts 1956

I am walking in a forest near the ocean. Its fall and my dog Lady and I are watching the wind as it leaves the ocean and roars across the trees. I am eleven years old.

We are safe here but I am still afraid. Something sad happened on a day like this long ago.

Lady scrunches down in the tall grass and I feel alone. It is then that I hear the voices, first the cries of older ones, then those of children. They are calling out but the wind carries most of their words away.

"On a day like this you will come to your end," are the few words I hear. I glance toward Lady but she is busy scratching her belly.

"I am safe, God will protect me," I cry back at the black clouds. Lady scratches more intently.

"It's only the near misses that matter," a new voice with a strong accent replies from the storm.

Maine 2022

Sixty six years later I am walking in our forest near our farm in Maine with our two dogs, Modi and Wayland. It is early morning and the frost is still on the leaves, making the going slippery. The dogs are out ahead on a scent.

All at once there appears ahead on the woods path a yearling moose rubbing his newly emerging antlers on a broken oak tree branch. And flanking our guest, like guards at the gate, are Modi and Wayland. Even today I can find no explanation for their behavior. Wayland's barking is well known in our neighborhood for treeing squirrels and Modi's nose keeps him moving all the time, sometimes closing in on his prey. But today they are quiet, today they are still.

The yearling moose pays no attention to the recent arrival of guests and keeps on rubbing and the collective noise he makes rises into the forest, slowly becomes the sound of braking waves and the wind off the ocean. All sounds then merge into one and there, standing watch on the path ahead, is my childhood dog Lady.

Tears swell into my eyes and my mind obliterates any attempt at reason. Lady was a licker, not a coddler and she makes her way around the moose, sniffs Modi and Wayland, and joins me kneeling on the ground and begins licking the sweat off my neck.

"What are you doing here?" I ask her. "You have been gone for over sixty years!"

Her response is to roll over on her back, reminding me of her favorite place for a scratch just below her collar. The wind is growing and the darkness is soon upon us. All at once a branch from a nearby pine breaks off and crashes to the forest floor just inches away from Lady and me. But nobody moves, the moose and the dogs seemingly in a trance.

"It's only the near misses that matter," comes the voice from the storm with the strange accent of years ago. "Miracles are just a waste of time."

The wind dies, suddenly Lady is gone, and I am shaken that my mind could play such tricks on me, like bringing her back. She seemed so real. As we leave the forest and enter our hay field, I notice a bit of shining metal on the

ground and there attached to a worn collar is a small tag reading "Lady, Atlantic Ave. Cohasset, Mass".

The Portland-Montreal Express

The train came through the kitchen window this morning as I was just finishing feeding the dogs their breakfast. Claude Milton was the engineer, a good one at that, and stopped the train before the coal car dirtied any of my recently washed dishes.

"Oh my dear, Peter," cried Claude. "You are sweating like a pig. I know what that feels like." I like Claude but not when he goes on and on about his ailments.

"Do you have any cooked kale?" he asks.

"Yes," I reply 'But it is all gone. I had it with my eggs this morning. I will have some on the return run".

It is company policy that employees of a railroad cannot receive food on route. But that does not stop them from asking and I have been known to have given Claude carrots and tomatoes when the season is right. Just then Bill Jeaneau, a Canadian with an accent, comes through the kitchen door.

"Bon jour Peter, got to get a move on. Already behind schedule. OK Claude, let's go!" And with that Claude looks at me and rolls his eyes. The train then curved past the woodstove and, as I stepped back, it moved on through. I waved back at the passengers that were waving at me through the train windows.

The train slowed again to make room for the caboose to clear the kitchen window. This car is at the end of the train where the track workers ride. They will soon be called to shovel coal as the train crosses the state line and begins its climb up and over Mt. Washington on its way to Montreal. But for now they are resting, a few of their legs propped up against an old wood stove.

Then all at once the serpentine beast is gone, at least I thought it was gone. But over by my fridge there remains a dense patch of smoke no larger than our bath tub, the only remnant of my morning guests. As I move cautiously over for a closer look, I notice something shiny sitting in the middle of the cloud. As I peer inside the smoke I suddenly feel cleaner, both in body and mind. Then I see something smooth and strong.

There, coiled and stuffed next to the fridge, is the remnant of a retired clothes line. I tie one end onto the kitchen table leg and the other end to my wrist. All at once the floor gives way and I am lying on moist grass with seagulls calling above me. As I gain my balance and stand, there in front of me is the gift that made my tenth birthday the very best one. Here is a brand new American Flyer bicycle, the very one I had ridden double with Bobby Donovan into the Cohasset town pond. And next to the bike is again my boxer Lady, barking.

"It's just not fair," Bobby is shouting. "We have sat next to each other since kindergarten. Why do you have to go to a special school?"

Tears run down his face, then the fog rolls in and he is gone and I am sitting alone in my kitchen with no answer for Bobby. My parents weren't interested in ending my friendship with him. It was just that we had a new president, a Catholic who went to Harvard. Here was the opening for a "Peter" run through the middle but it would take my parents energy and a few years for me to follow Jack to the White House. The Kennedy brothers went to Milton Academy and so would I. And my grandmother Josephine was the first woman Irish Catholic to graduate from Harvard. So it was all set. I would walk in their footsteps.

I stand up and wash the dirt and grass off my pants. All-important memories that woke with me this morning are gone. All I have is the "now". I then realize that I need therapy from the Portland to Montreal Express more often, not just three times a week.

Fall is upon us and the smell of burning leaves mixes with the train's coal smoke. All seems normal now except as the air in the kitchen becomes clear and there is an older gentleman now standing by the sink. The first time this happened years ago I thought a passenger had fallen off the train.

"Good morning," he announces in broken English. "I hope to not interrupt! My name is Abu Abed."

Fortunately I have traveled the world a bit so I reply " Maya Salaama Abu" (may peace be with you father) in Arabic.

"Shookran" (thank you) he replies as he sits down in one of our wooden chair and I hand him a cup of hot coffee. "Afwan" (you are welcome) I say back. My dogs then come bounding through the back door, eager to lick the extended and welcoming hand of our guest, then curl up by the kitchen stove.

"My Arabic is very limited," I confess.

"I do not agree," he smiles. "Your accent is very genuine, like a Bedouin shepherd from the Negev. But we can speak English as well."

"Thank you for welcoming me into your home," he continues. "I am returning to Canada after a tour of your country and the train engineer is an old friend of mine and insisted that I meet you. He kind of kicked me off the train as we reached your farm. Claude is very passionate about certain subjects. So here I am!"

I smiled as I thought back over the years and remember the characters that had been "dropped off" by Claude. There was Pedro the guitar player from Brazil, Sasha the symphony conductor from Kaliningrad who had performed Prokofiev's Symphony #6 in New York, Eric from Cape Town who had been a close ally of Nelson Mandela's, Alberta who was the rodeo queen of Missoula, and Jo Anne who works at a US/Mexico border crossing, just to name a few.

I remember them all and I remember also that they each had a specific message for me. And now here was Abu!

I invite him to see our farm and as he and I walk through the kitchen and out into our hay field, I am greeted by a group of strangers, mostly men but some women. They are smiling as we approach and warmly shake my hand but they also seem a bit cautious. In the distance are a series of greenhouses which were not there yesterday. This was my hay field after all. Abu detected my discomfort and patted my on the shoulder as we began visiting each greenhouse.

A need to explain

I am sure that some of you are now graciously putting down this story, thinking that your friend Peter has always been a bit odd but not delusional. And this is a new side of him you have never enjoyed! So let me put this story into context.

Back in 1845 the Portland to Montreal railroad, now known as the St-Laurent et Atlantique Quebec (SLR) was formed, its cargo consisting of farm and seafood products, lumber and cement. Elmer Walker, my neighbor who is now deceased, worked as a young man in a forest not a mile from our farm and transported, by wagon, wood products, traveling with a team of drafts some fifteen miles to meet the SLR every Thursday in Brownfield, beginning just after the end of WW 2.

As Elmer aged, he began to imagine that a new SLR train line now ran by our farm. So every Thursday I would greet him as he arrived at our front door, no longer with lumber but rather fresh carrots, lettuce, and kale for Claude the engineer. At first I tried to explain how the real train never did run past our farm but to his mind he seemed at rest when I paid him for the vegetables and told him that Claude sends his best. Several times I gave him a short ride home in my wagon pulled by our draft team and he seemed please when I handed him the reins. In spite of struggling with mental challenges his entire life, he spoke to my horses as a true teamster.

Today, as Abu and I walk through the kitchen and out into the sunshine, we are greeted by a group of folks apparently from the mid-east, the men wearing pants and long sleeves and the women covered as well. They are smiling, shaking my hand somewhat cautiously. Just shaking hands is a big deal for some cultures.

"Bevakasha" a well-dressed woman addressed me with a smile, a welcome I might use if I were in West Jerusalem.

"Assalaam alaikum" a young Palestinian man smiled. "Wa 'alaikum assalaam" I replied as if we were somewhere in the West Bank.

I look to Abu for an explanation but he points to my hay field to the north. Today, in front of us, are a series of greenhouses, each one filled with laying hens, some brown, some white. Inside on the tables are eggs, some brown, some white. They had not been there yesterday.

“Jew or Arab, we can all enjoy eggs for breakfast,” Abu smiled. Just then a man and woman approached us.

“You may take some,” they announce in perfect English. I immediately pick a dozen brown.

“But why the brown?” she inquires.

“They are much healthier,” I reply and with this she hands me the eggs and flees across the field to join her fellow workers where, upon her arrival, a level of consternation could be seen passing through the group.

Rack

He was in the corner of the workshop after lunch watching me select lumber for my latest project. He had been in that corner since the arrival of the new Amish clothes line last year. His role with the previous drying apparatus was central to his success. His wooden arms would stretch skyward daily like a symphony conductor, employing all the other parts to bare the weight of our clothing in spite of its waterlogged state.

Nothing fancy mind you, just the old fashioned look of a disheveled umbrella, stained by the summer sun and the winter snow. Marty and I picked it up at a yard sale on Rt. 1, knowing that its best years were already passed. But it had character, was made of maple and we used it for years exclusively for drying woolen sweaters and socks. The remnant of this forgotten tool now leaning in my shop seem to me profoundly lonely but too shy to remind me of our long history. His name is Rack.

I was building a storm window for my 2nd floor bedroom, rugged slats discouraging our ninety pound Bernese Mt. dog from breaking out and landing with a big smile into the arms of an unexpected guest one floor below. Today I had come out to my shop right after breakfast. I needed three 1 x 4“ pieces of 35 inch long maple slats. But hard as I looked I could only find two. Then I spied Rack, thin as a rail, weather worn with a rusted hinge for a neck and a head permanently tilted back as if to say good-by to the last of the Canadian geese heading south.

Rack had stood in the shop, unnoticed and unappreciated, these past winters, listening on occasion to "All Things Considered" or the New York Philharmonic. But now as I studied him, really for the first time, I felt his his loneliness. What would his chances of survival be if he became the third slat in the window and be devoured by Wayland?

The rain came down and I lingered for a moment in my workshop. If I made the purely emotional exception for Rack, then what about all these other wooden tools that have served me over the years, old whiffletrees, worn out pitch fork and Peavey handles as well as hay rake shaves? All these wooden items had, in their own time, saved the day. Can I leave them in good conscience lying in the corner of the barn?

Before I left the shop that night, I set an adze handle that my dad had made next to Rack and left the shop lights on so these farm implements might share their life stories more easily. As Marty and I retired that night, I noticed that the shop lights had turned off, signaling time for bed, even for the wooden tools on our farm.

Two Oaks

My mother and my father both sailed the seven seas,

When the sawmill crew in '42 brought them to their knees.

My father was the main mast and my mother was the boom

And the oak from which our ship was made was stronger than the moon.

The clumps of remaining hardwoods here grew stronger by the day,

Drinking water from the brook, roots firmly in the clay.

Children ran the winding path to Destiny Rock on high

Under which the leafy limbs grew old and slowly died.

The softwood trees our forest birth aren't thriving like the oaks.

Our cousins, they are slow to grow, but shade us with their cloaks.

Each year the south bound geese arrive and bring us welcome news

Of the voyage of our parent's ship, their spars and sun tanned crews.

The saws are once more running but no timber is to fall.

We are staying put to clean the air and make life safe for all.

Maybe someday all the children and the families of the crew

Will come here to the forest and see what we must do. 5/20/21

Hurricane Carol

August 25, 1954

The clock by my bed said four o'clock when it rang. My family had just one phone back then and it was in the kitchen. Cohasset 4-0377. Mary Bristol, the night time operator, would be on the other end and, if I hustled, I could answer before my folks did.

"Good morning Peter, sorry to have to wake you up." I am just nine years old and talking to an adult in the middle of the night. I feel very cool.

"Peter, I have a message from your dad and Cliff Dixon." Cliff Dixon was Cohasset's harbormaster and my dad's best friend.

"The dam at Government Island has been breached and all the water from the Gulf in flowing into the harbor. High tide is due at 8 am and they are afraid of the harbor being flooded. Can you bike down to Doug Martin's

house and the two of you meet your dad and Cliff at Kimball's? Take Beach Street cause Atlantic is already under water."

I have always liked Mrs. Bristol. Her son and I are pals at school.

I check into my parents' room and see mom still asleep. Lady my Boxer dog is waiting at the front door. I soon am on my bike with no flashlight and Lady leading the way. But the rain is warm and slacking and the morning is announcing its arrival. I take a few back dirt roads to get to Doug's and apparently he too got a call from Mrs. Bristol because he is out by his mailbox sporting two life jackets and a bicycle. I start putting two and two together and gulp. He acknowledges my arrival with a nod and takes the lead with no offer of an update. He's got two years on me but I have the legs. I pump past him when we reach the hardtop and shout 'hey, what's going?" All he does is point to Kimball's Restaurant in the distance.

I see Cliff and my dad and a fire truck in the parking lot and they welcome us as if we are fellow workers intervening for an emergency. "Chief Barrows, you know Fran's son Pete and Doug Martin." Chief Barrows tips his fireman's hat. I wave to my dad. Cliff brings us up to date.

"What we are experiencing today is a Perigean tide, usually occurring in the spring. But we have a hurricane named Carol making her way slowly up the coast, forcing the pressure here to drop and thus pushing marshland water out here into the harbor.

"This summer Doug and Pete measured the weight of the anchorage of every single mooring in the harbor. How long did it take boys?"

"Six weeks" replied Doug.

"Six weeks," repeated Cliff. "These two boys with wet suits and a face mask dove at low tide five days a week to ensure that the size of the craft, both length and weight, matched the holding strength of the moorings, mostly large concrete blocks. Over half of the larger craft (over sixteen feet or six tons) did not meet this standard and required extra mooring weight. These were the larger fishing and lobster boats. The smaller boats, four times the number of the 110's and 210's and Herreshoff 12's, were more casual with whose buoy they tied to after weekend races. We hope they will ride this out with their corrected moorings.

“So the problem we face is whether we have any commercial boats tied to any recreational moorings. And the only way we have to check this is to visit every one of our twenty two heavy boats and dive down and measure the concrete. That is what we are asking these two boys to do today. We have a low tide at noon. We have approximately four hours to check moorings. Some boats already out to sea have been called in by the Coast Guard. The storm will be here tomorrow at this time.

“So I have asked the boys to do this job. They have been looking at so many moorings that they can easily sight an infraction. We have extra cement blocks on shore at the ready. We are calling all boat owners tied to a mooring to secure their boats. There will be a lot of activity very soon. Peter and Doug, your wet suits and gear are in the upstairs lockers at the boat house. You will have the Whaler at your disposal. Good Luck.”

It made no sense to head home for breakfast and dad showed up at the Yacht Club’s boat house with rolls and juice and Lady riding shotgun. He suggested that we get dressed in our gear and be on the water ASAP before anyone official arrived with a different position on putting two twelve year old boys under water in the face of a hurricane.

There were many days that summer when the water was warm and we left the wet suits on shore. But today we were glad for the rubber layer. One of us would sit in the Boston Whaler and write on the grease board the name of the craft and I would surface with the painted number and size of the mooring. We first worked with the sail boat area where some folks had already pulled their crafts for the season. But by late morning we ran into a challenge we had not faced before. There was a large sail boats, say in excess of thirty feet, that was tied to a small boat mooring. We had a ship to shore radio and called Cliff for advice.

“We have no record of this boat in our anchorage” replied Cliff, “most likely an unregistered guest. Is there a chance that there might be an extra heavy duty mooring in the commercial boats area?”

“We doubt it” replied Doug. “Anyway, the cabin door is locked.” I had surfaced to listen to the exchange and marveled at Doug’s overall perspective. I then felt a tropical breeze on my forehead. The storm was ahead of schedule. “We are about done here with the light recreational boats and ready to tackle

the commercial boats. How about you drop a "big boat" mooring for this 'guest' here? Then you are covered."

"OK Doug, will do," replied Cliff.

The big boats ended up being a piece of cake. All had 12" high registration numbers on their bow, large enough to be seen by planes patrolling from the air were safely tied to commercial sized moorings. The tide was on its way in and the water cooler. Doug was now in the wet suit and I was on the radio. Right when I could see the end in sight Doug surfaced. I gave him the radio.

"Mr. Dixon, we have commercial mooring line wraped between MS 25567 and MS 14887. There is a strong incoming tide and both cabin doors are locked. What I am worried about is that with the incoming current and onshore wind, mooring number one could become dislodged and bang into commercial mooring number two, dislodging them both. The bottom here is hard pan gravel, no mud or sand and the blocks are sitting with nothing to obstruct both boats dragging.

We were so close to the end. And now this hitch.

"Mr. Dixon", Doug offered, "what if you were to swing both 67 and 87 into the wind with a powerful craft, just enough to have a diver undo the tension on one of the shackles, remove the twist, then re-shackle the cable to the correct mooring. Then have the other boat towed to a safe distance where it is attached to a new mooring. Two boats, two moorings.

"Great thinking Doug. We have a scuba diver on the way. But we may be able to do it an easier way. What if we just cut 87's mooring line, let her drift free except that we have a new mooring line already attached to a new mooring twenty yards distance from 67 which we now attach to 87."

"Thanks Mr. Dixon. What I am worried about is whether we have a large commercial boat powerful enough that could handle the ever increasing wind and current and make this hand off workable."

Silence on the line. Then "Romeo five this is MS 423359 heading home to Gloucester. Am presently two miles off Minots Light and ETA your site in 45 minutes. I have the horsepower for the job if you will put me up for the night.

“Hey Bob, this is Cliff. Have you cleared this with Margaret? Over.”

“All good Cliff” and just before you could say Jack Robinson, Bob and his giant oceangoing lobster boat were leaning into the wind with Number 87 and I was in my wet suit in ten feet of water untwisting one of the renegade shackles. No one outside of the group that was present has ever spoken of this risky role to the general public.

Sixty five years later I had a dream covering a very similar topic. This version placed me underwater in Cohasset Harbor during Hurricane Carol but all the small boats’ mushroom shaped moorings are rising and pounding to the ocean floor like pistons in a commercial vehicle. Not sure of the connection but grateful that it got me in front of a keyboard to write this story.

The Boy and the Talking Horses

By Peter Hagerty

June 29, 2018

Chapter 1

The boy scratched his sunburn neck as he climbed down from the school bus. It was early May and way too early for this heat. He walked up the dirt path to the yellow farm house where he and his family would be spending the next six months. He would be glad when his fifth grade class sang its last song and he said good-by to school for the summer.

There were no cars in the turn around, only an old draft horse named Bud out grazing in the nearby field. His dad would still be at work and his mom probably shopping for supper. Yesterday he had fallen asleep on Bud's sway back and got the sunburn.

"The flies are fewer under the tree," the horse thought to himself as he chewed a mouthful of grass. "And there is that young boy. I hope he is not planning to spend more time on my back."

With this thought Bud began to walk away towards the ice pond, then stopped. "I'm an old fool, a lonely old fool," he said to himself and turned back to meet the boy now heading towards him.

The boy led Bud to an old stone wall where he could climb up and jump on. Bud stood very still and when the boy was on board, carefully stepped back into the tall grass just in case the boy fell. The boy then stretched out, resting his head on Bud's rump and straddling his feet on Bud's neck. As they slowly walked along, the boy felt his young body bend and curve with Bud's. Then the horse heard the boy's story start up where it had left off yesterday.

"So this kid who is always bullying me, he sits right behind me and when the teacher is not looking he jams my chair forward with his feet so I can't move. I have tried to be nice to him but he won't stop. I told my dad I just wanted to pop him one on the playground but he was against that idea."

The horse and the boy made their way over to a giant white oak where a light breeze always seemed to blow through the branches, even on the hottest day.

"So what do you plan to do," Bud said out loud, then suddenly stopped. What had he just done? He had never talked to anyone before, much less a small boy. He had talked with trees, birds and clover on occasion. Now what?

The boy's eyes were shut when he heard the question. Actually he had not heard the question so much as he felt it. He smiled.

"Bud is a talking horse," he said out loud as if such a thing was a daily occurrence. Bud heard this and remained silent.

But as the spring turned to summer and school ended, Bud and the boy talked of many things. The birds in the trees only heard the voice of the boy.

Farmer White's wife told the boy not to swim in the Ice Pond but that was impossible on the really hot summer days. One afternoon she found the boy swimming and hid his clothing. Bud led the boy to the hiding place.

Farmer White lived with his wife Neillie and son Frank in the woods not far from where the boy and his family were staying. He hired the boy that summer to clean out the horse stalls in the morning and harness the big team, Bud and his partner Bill, for haying in the afternoon. Bud asked the boy not

to talk while Bill was around, especially when they were mowing or raking. This was difficult because the boy had grown used to telling Bud everything, especially those things he could not tell anyone else.

One June morning, Farmer White harnessed Bud up to a small wagon with a seat for the boy. "Now today I want you to go down to Sandy Beach and pick up any seaweed that washed ashore from last night's storm and we will put it on the hay fields. Here is a pitch fork. Bud knows the way. Head back when you have a full load".

So off they went down Nichols Road and pretty soon the boy could hear the waves breaking in the distance. As they reached Atlantic Ave. the boy looked over at his regular home, under repair after a bad winter storm.

He kissed Bud up over the sand dunes and down to the water's edge. The storm had washed the seaweed up at the high tide mark and beach goers had to make their way through it before they could dive into the waves. He climbed down and began loading the wagon.

Every once and a while he looked up at his ocean home. He could see the carpenters replacing the red tiles on the roof. He had been so upset when told that he would be leaving for the summer. Then he looked over at Bud. "You know Bud, I don't miss it that much anymore." Bud turned his head and whispered "someone's coming" and sure enough it was Frank, the kid from school.

"Hey you," Frank said, "What are you doing here?"

"Cleaning up the beach," the boy replied.

"It don't figure. Your dad owns a business here in town and you live up in that big house on the rocks. Seems like you should be out playing tennis or something."

Just then Bud turned his head towards Frank and let out a big sigh which made Frank step back.

"It's ok," the boy said. "His name is Bud. He's a good guy. Go scratch him between the ears. He loves that."

“I don’t know. I ain’t been around too many horses.” But Frank slowly put his hands on Bud’s forehead and began scratching as the boy continued pitching the seaweed up onto the wagon.

“That feels good,” Bud whispered and the boy smiled. Soon the wagon was full and he took the reins and turned Bud up and over the dunes and down onto Nichols Road. “Have a good summer,” the boy said to Frank. But Frank ran to fetch his bicycle and together the three made their way back up Nichols Road toward White’s Farm.

2.

The boy, now a grown man, was far from home in a cold, snow covered land. He was visiting his friend Pavel and wife Galina. He looked out over the fields to a young stallion in the distance. His mind drifted back momentarily to another horse, another farm, another time.

“He is our new colt, Valiet,” said Pavel in Russian. “I want you to ride him.”

The man walked out to meet the horse, a simple rope halter in his hand. As he approached, Valiet stood still, not moving a muscle. The man lifted his right hand and slowly began stroking the horse’s neck. Then he heard a voice.

“Не ездите на меня. Я боюсь, и я буду вам больно”. “Don’t ride me. I am afraid and I may hurt you.” Tears formed in the man’s eyes and rolled down his cold cheek.

“Spaceeba! Я понимаю,” “Thank you, I understand,” the man said. The horse turned as the man gave one last stroke and walked away across the snowy field.

Many years passed, the man married, had a family and now lived on his own farm. Sheep, chickens and large horses ate the grass in the surrounding pasture and tall trees climbed the hills beyond the brook. The man often left his wife and children to try and heal the world in which he had traveled for many years. He would come home tired, worried, often more afraid than when he left. He had seen dark times in places where the forest turned black

with the fire of war. Some of his men had died. He often wished he could talk with Bud, tell him about the sadness he now carried with him and ask him what he should do.

His two brown horses, both brothers, watched the man as he grew old, wondering how long they would be working together. In the summer Willie and Nick mowed hay with him and in the winter they harvested wood for the stove. Like him they were slowing down and like him they were sometimes afraid.

"What is to be done?" they wondered aloud and the man heard.

"What is to be done?" the man replied, as if talking for the first time to an old friend he had not seen for years. "Fires in the west, hurricanes to the south and the seals are dying in the ocean."

The team then added "we must be careful what trees we cut and what we leave. The world depends on them."

"Sounds like a tall order," the man replied.

"Don't worry, we will help," came a voice deep in the forest, a voice the man now heard for the first time.

3

It was early spring and the snow would not stop falling. The horses were grazing needles from the hemlock trees high up on the hill. Here the snow was deep and when they stretched their necks they could reach the branches.

"We will only eat a few," said Willie.

"Thank you," replied a voice from the forest over story. Willie knew to browse only the healthy hemlock, green with needles, not the brown. For those trees were sick and fighting to stay alive.

The man would usually harness the horses after his lunch. The harness was heavy and the man, older now, teetered on a wooden box as he threw it over their shoulders and backs. He would often be rushing because he knew that the sun would be dropping over the mountains in the next few hours and the afternoon would grow cold.

"Why the rush," the horses would ask but the man would not answer. Willie was the first to react.

He began by refusing to open his mouth to receive the bit. The man responded by putting molasses on the bit but Willie shook his head and the molasses ended up on a nearby wall. Then the man screwed an eyebolt onto the barn floor to force Willie's mouth to open. Willie tore that out with one pull. On some days the sun would be dipping behind the hills before the bit and bridle were in place. The man became very discouraged.

One Saturday the man harnessed the horses. When he came to Willie, he left the bit and bridle on the barn wall and faced his old friend. He watched the horse for a long time, then touched his forehead to Willie's, breathed deeply and said, "I am lost. I need help."

Nick was still in his stall but his ears went up. Neither horse moved. Then the man heard, "Drink a cup of tea slowly". This made no sense but he had no choice. He went into the house, heated some water, drank a cup of tea and returned. Willie then opened his mouth.

"Why?" said the man.

"Because you are never here," was the reply.

And for the first time the man understood. He could not be with Willie because he was busy managing his fears, his sadness. "I will try and do better, I will work to be here," he promised. "We will help," said Willie.

Last winter's weather was hard on everyone. Christmas saw a week of sub-zero temperatures and by New Years it was up in the 70's. The change was very hard on the horses and might make them very sick. The man gave them salt every morning so they would drink lots of water which he warmed with a heater.

Across the country there were forest fires and hurricanes and tornadoes. Everyone was talking about the climate. Some people said we all were doomed. The man grew more afraid, more helpless.

One day when the team was up in the woods the man set his saw down on the snow without starting it. He looked over at the team and closed his eyes. "I don't know what to do."

The team stepped forward slowly, stopping at a beech tree. "We can take this tree," said Willie. "It is injured and cannot be healed."

The man walked up to the small grove of trees and saw one in the center. Its top had been eaten by a porcupine and the tree had stopped growing. By taking this tree the others around it would prosper. It was a good choice.

Slowly they began working. The horses moved around the woodlot, listening carefully to the trees before deciding which ones should be harvested. The man rarely heard from the forest but trusted his team. He marveled at what was happening, found himself worrying less but still needed a reminder from Willie 'to be here'.

Spring came finally and the man took a long overdue trip to the town of his childhood and the yellow farm house near White's Farm. He walked out into the field, lingered by the stone wall and then visited the ice pond. It was a warm afternoon and he sat down by the tree where farmer White's wife had hidden his clothes. The sun was setting by the time he finished telling Bud all that had happened.

And the man smiled when "so what are you going to do?" came from the voice from the nearby trees. Because he knew that his answer had changed.

"I will listen for your voice because I now know it is really my voice. I never knew that because I was not listening. And I cannot listen if I am not here. So no matter where I am, I will work to be where I am. Then I will never be alone. I will always have you. "

Hello and Goodby to the Navy

June, 1968, Graduated in a Naval uniform from Harvard.

July, 1968, Drove to Prairie View A&M Texas in my British made Rover sedan to join the ROTC teaching staff at this primarily all black college.

August, 1968, Arrived at the campus to observe a poorly orchestrated exercises in drilling with a rifle, then standing at attention in the Texas sun while NBC reporters filmed midshipmen from helicopters.

Nb. The percentage of Black officers in all the branches of service in Vietnam had become staggeringly low while numbers of drafted men and women of color were skyrocketing. Student uprisings had closed ROTC units across the country as the war became less and less attractive. Soldiers of color represented an alarming percentage of the injured and killed. Thus a full or albeit somewhat disorganized operation was underway here in Texas to fit uniforms, handle a weapon and march in an orderly fashion. My course called "Afro American history in the US military" was actually quite popular until the ROTC building and other classrooms were burned by student protesters in the early fall.

September, 1968, in was assigned to the destroyer USS Lloyd Thomas based in Charlestown, Mass. I had made a deal with the Navy that if I accepted my commission, they would assign me to non- war time duty like teaching at a ROTC unit. Somehow that paper went missing and I found myself on board a ship that was preparing for deployment to Vietnam. I was an hours drive from Cohasset and was assured by the fellow officer staff that all would work out.

We spent that winter in the North Atlantic storms chasing Russian subs led by our captain that was clearly deranged. It was a miracle that we were all not lost at sea. He found some solace in me as we had both gone to Harvard. I would often be roused in the middle of the night somewhere off the Canadian coast to meet the "skipper" on the bridge as we plowed through forty- foot seas and as the ship begin to fill apart.

Freeze Up in the North Atlantic

The night is bitter cold. We are fighting a nor'easter and the seas are building to 20 feet. Both port and starboard watches on the Lloyd Thomas are strapped to the hull with safety lines and the ship is rolling and pitching.

“Change heading to 045 degrees and reduce speed to 15 knots” says Lt. Jack, the officer of the deck for the midnight to 4 o’clock watch. I am the junior officer.

“Aye aye sir. Change heading to 045 degrees and reduce speed to 15 knots,” the helmsman replies and the quartermaster notes the change in the ship’s log.

“Mr. Hagerty,” says Lt. Jack, “Send down some of your crew to assess ice on the main deck. We don’t want to roll over. Make sure they are all wearing safety harnesses.”

I head below to wake some of my men and when I return to the bridge, Jack says, “I am sure glad the Captain is out cold. I hope he stays that way.”

We were somewhere off the Grand Banks and we are getting a dose of typical November weather. We passed the New Bedford fishing fleet around 2300 hours and their crews were all out on deck, sliding around with no safety harnesses. We could not fathom how those guys could keep from falling overboard. Their ships were maybe 150 feet in length and ours was over 400. All at once the sonar man comes on the line.

“Sir, we have contact with a submarine, bearing 094 degrees with a subsurface speed of 22 knots.”

“Quartermaster,” replied Lt. Jack, “give me the coordinates of our present position.”

“Sir, estimated coordinates are 42.5 degrees north, 61.5 degrees West”

“Does that put us in International Waters?” asks Lt. Jack.

“Yes sir, we are approximately 300 miles off the US coast and 240 miles off the Canadian coastline”.

“Thank God,” Jack whispers under his breath. “The old man is no fan of subs, no matter where they are from.”

“Sonar to bridge, we have confirmed contact with a submarine, probable nationality Soviet, probable Class Akula, 10,000 tons with a top speed of 52

knots submerged."

The Lloyd Thomas had begun anti-submarine drills with the Brunswick, Maine Naval Air Station four days before. No Russian submarine had been detected in the Gulf of Maine in the last 60 days. We were now ready to go home and the last thing anyone wanted was a full blown drill, especially in the face of this northeast storm.

"Sonar," Jack adds, "get me the heading and speed of this bogey and ask the Communications Officer to come to the bridge".

Before you could say World War Three, Lt. Tom is standing next to us.

"Tom, do we know who this is?" asks Lt. Jack.

"We're pretty sure it's the Rostov. Captain's name is Melnikov, 42 years of age. Left Murmansk 22 day ago. And by the way, the Rostov is nuclear!"

"You mean you don't know Melnikov's wife's name or his shirt size?" Jack replied.

"We are working on it. Give us 10 minutes." Tom laughs and disappears below deck to the Communications Center.

"Shit," exclaimed Lt. Jack. "Standing orders are to wake the old man if we find a Ruskie out here. Pete, will you go down and wake the Captain?"

"Mr. Hagerty leaves the bridge to wake the Captain," the quartermaster repeats out loud, then writes it verbatim in the log.

"Quartermaster" shouts Lt. Jack.

"Aye Lt."

"Quartermaster, from now on, I want you to record every command given tonight here on the bridge."

"Aye aye, sir. That is what I am doing."

"I know that. This is not a reflection of your work. I have just got to make

sure you can handle this. It could get very busy here in a few minutes."

"Thank you sir, I will get some support".

Just then the old man appears, barely awake and in pajamas, wrapped in a Naval Academy blanket.

"What's up Lt.?" he asks.

"Sir, we have a Russian boomer, heading east north east at an approximate speed of 22 knots. We made contact nine minutes ago and just confirmed its name and relevant specs."

"Lt.," orders the captain, "change course to 094 degrees. Increase speed to 22 knots. Let's see what this son of a bitch is up to."

This new course sets us directly into the path of the oncoming waves. The effect is immediate. As the ship plows thru the sea, we crest through one wave and crash down into the valley of the next. Spray towers over the hull and begins to immediately freeze to everything.

I suddenly remember my men working to chip ice off the deck. I make my way down three floors to the main deck and ordered them all inside. As we stand soaked and shivering in the passageway I begin to feel the full effects of the ocean on the ship. Everything that is not tied down falls to the floor. The Engineering Officer comes thru the bulkhead door and tells me that they have burst one high- pressure steam hose on the starboard engine.

I make my way back to the bridge and report to Jack on the conditions below deck. I watch the quartermaster writing furiously everything that I am saying verbatim. Jack is still in command of the ship until the Captain orders differently.

"Lt., what is the state of the HEDGEHOG anti-submarine rockets?" asks the captain. I know that we have these weapons mounted on the aft section of the ship, but they are closely guarded and rarely talked about.

"Sir, HEDGEHOG is at stage 3, covered and locked." Lt. Jack's first job on the ship was is the Weapons Officer so he is quick to respond.

“Lt., take the HEDGEHOG to Stage 2.”

“Sir, with all due respect, Stage 2 is called for only if we are provoked. This sub is in international waters and moving away from us.”

“Bull shit,” shouts the captain. “This Russian captain is no fool. Look what he is doing to us. He knows who we are and why we are out here and he knows the sea conditions and our top speed. He is trying to sink us by dragging us through this storm till our engines fall apart or we roll over. I know his game.”

“Sir, we are in international waters. He has as much right as we do to be here.”

“Lt., I am going below to get dressed. When I come back I want to see HEDGEHOG at Level 2. If we are still getting beat to shit, then I am prepared to go to Level 1 and a possible launch. Am I clear?”
“Yes sir.”

“Captain has left the bridge,” chimes the quartermaster. “Lt. Jack still Officer of the Deck.”

Jack’s face looks pale in the red light of the ship’s night controls but he is composed. “Peter,” Jack whispers as he takes me out aside. “I want you to go find Chief Bishop. He is the Sergeant at Arms for the ship. He has a side arm and handcuffs. I want you to tell him to come immediately to the bridge. If the Captain insists on going to Level One, I am going to arrest him and relieve him of his command. I will make this clear to the Chief when he gets here. Just tell him to hurry.”

Jack is a graduate of the Naval Academy. He has wanted to be the captain of his own ship since he was a small boy. He and his wife opened up their family to me and were willing to respect my position on Vietnam. I have the highest admiration for him both as a leader of men and as a husband and friend. I am now seeing the beginning of the end of his Naval Career. To relieve a Captain of his command is a career ender, no matter if the intervention is warranted or not.

“The Captain has returned to the bridge,” announces the quartermaster.

“Sir, do you want the con?” asks Jack.

“I will let you know if and when I will take control,” replies the Captain.

“Engine room reports damage to # 2 superheated steam lines,” announces the engine room radio.

“Lt., what is our present position relative to the bogie?” asks the Captain.

“Sir, we are approximately 3000 yards and slowly closing.”

“Let me know when we are within 2000 yards and take HEDGEHOG to Stage 1 immediately,” replies the captain.

I can see it now like it just happened. Everything slows to a crawl in my memory. Lt. Jack motions to the Chief who has just arrived on the bridge. They begin a conversation over on the port side out of the Captain’s hearing range. I see the Chief look at Jack like he has misunderstood what he has just been told. I see the Chief unclip his handcuffs, I see Jack make his way across the bridge and then I hear Lt. Tom’s voice on the squawk box.

“Communications Center to bridge, bogie has increased speed to 48 knots. We have lost contact with the Rostov. I repeat, no contact.”

The Chief takes a step backwards, steadies himself on the hand railing while Lt. Jack gives new orders to the helmsman steering the ship.
“Change heading to 240 degrees, change speed to 12 knots”. The captain stands there silent, alone in his thoughts. His knuckles are tight in a fist. He then turns and without a sound, leaves the bridge.

“Captain has left the bridge. Come to new heading and speed. Lt. Jack has the con.

That spring we received orders to proceed to Newport, Rhode Island and the Naval Base there tucked next to the Vanderbilt Estate. We could find on shore housing and I bunked in with two other officers. We watched “Woodstock” on TV and wondered what kind of trouble awaited us if we went.

Then one day the Captain announced that we would be leaving soon for the Pacific and ordered me to do a complete exam of the forward and aft gun

mounts. I enlisted the help of my Chief Bishop and armed with a flashlight, hand-held mirror and manual, we worked tirelessly for three days.

"Look for cracks, both large and hair lined," read the manual. "These are indicators that the barrel may be worn and unable to withstand a premature explosion, allowing for the fire to retreat back into the magazine rather than fall forward and out onto the deck. Such barrels must be replaced."

The barrels in our report could not be better examples of a disaster waiting to happen.

"Well, thank you gentleman" he said to Chief Bishop and me as he slipped our report into his desk and directed us to leave.

"He's not going to do shit, is he?" asked Brodus. I felt my life was really in danger for the first time.

The next day was Sunday. Fall was on the way. Our flotilla had all come together, five destroyers and a tender to carry all the parts. I found myself walking out in Portsmouth, a neighboring town and the home of our squadron commander. When he opened his front door, I briefly said who I was and what I was requesting, Before he could answer, I was on my way home. I had broken the most sacred rule of Naval ethics, never jump the chain of command.

Following morning, 8:00 am, Morning quarters on Lloyd Thomas fore deck.

"Excuse me sir, Mr. Hagerty is wanted on the pier." The Executive Officer running the meeting looked at me with dismay. Who could possibly want to speak with me? But as I approached the quarterdeck, I saw two burly MP's nervously looking my way.

"Good morning sir, we are here to accompany you to a meeting."

"What meeting specifically?" I queried. "To the Naval Commandant's office," they replied. "It is just a short walk."

Our pier was one of the longest on the base, some claimed over half a mile. Summer was over and fall was on its way. And my birthday was only five days off. Everyone and every things was in motion around me yet I imagined that all eyes were on a thin Ensign sandwiched between two burly cops with side

arms and handcuffs. As we approached the shore, a building I knew quite well came into focus, Judge Advocate General, Newport, the home of the base's lawyers and their staff.

"Look fella's, I have got to find a bathroom or I am going to piss my pants. This is a great little outfit, air conditioned and welcoming. I happen to know that they have fresh coffee and donuts every morning as I took classes here all summer."

Hoping our friendships had improved during the walk, I jumped up a set of stairs and disappeared inside. There welcoming me was a hallway with twenty offices, each one containing a Naval Lieutenant and full-blown lawyer. I knocked on Door 8 and a voice announced in a mid-western twang "door's open, come on in."

Lt. Lowell Noteboom dismissed my escorts and did not say a word for over 45 minutes other than question me on clarification. He knew like a typhoon that I would soon blow myself out. When all was quiet, he left the office for another long stretch and returned with a glass of water for me.

Then, as he made himself comfortable, he announced "Peter, I hope it is ok that we speak informally. I have been waiting for over a year for someone like you to walk through the door with such a challenge as you have described. If what you say is true and your ship is about to depart with a time bomb for its crew, there is no question for me that this is a violation of both the military and the moral code of ethics.

"I have the authority to begin an investigation and remove you from your ship until the investigation is concluded. I don't want to appear overly dramatic, but someone ordered you detained this morning. I need to find out who that is and why. Can you now leave with me any and all your possessions that might relate to this case?" I removed a plastic file from under my shirt.

"I have made reservations for you at a small but safe set of rooms on a submarine repair tender. I also have a chaplain friend there on that same ship who needs help counseling Naval personnel. Clients are scheduled from 10 am to 3 pm. Given what you've been through, I am sure you will be an asset to him.

"I have notified your Capt. Meanix that you have been sequestered as a witness to an upcoming trial and not permitted to leave this present location.

Your ship is due to leave in five days. It will leave without you. I know things will lighten up when your squadron leaves port for good. I will send down staff for your clothing. Is there anything else?"

"I can't believe how prepared you are for this," I announced.

" Pete, Where do your parents live?"

"About an hour from here."

"It might be best if you call them right now, saying that something has come up and you might be out of contact for the next week. This is my private number. Have them give me a call this evening.

"I have a civilian attorney with whom I work on cases that involve the Rhode Island and Massachusetts press. The flotilla will stop in San Diego for last minute repairs. Perhaps we can address the issue of barrel cracks then. But let's be clear. For the Navy this is not about firepower safety. It is about one of its own officers who broke the sacred rule, never jump the chain of command, what you did last Sunday."

A member of Lowell's staff settled me in on the sub tender and went shopping for essential meals for the coming days. The sun was starting to set and an early autumn breeze caught my neck. "There are good people everywhere" I smiled and drifted off to nap.

Five days later the destroyer flotilla departed. Crowds lined the Jamestown Bridge as the ships slipped under and family members and loved ones dropped flowers down. That afternoon I met with Lowell and the Providence reporter. I had given him names of friends at the Globe. My Milton Academy classmate David Taylor's dad owner the paper and quickly provided us with a treasure trove of sports articles going back to the ninth grade.

"Your sports is what we will lead with," suggested the reporter but I had temporarily lost any enthusiasm. And I was facing still two years in the service with no chance for advancement and few friends. In June of 1971 I would l be the oldest Ensign in the Navy.

Never Alone

Lowell called every morning to see how I was holding up. Each day I would report to the Base Chaplain's Office where I met with servicemen in need. This was my salvation and very close to the subjects I had studied at Harvard. But I missed my crew in spite of their rough edges. Then one chilly Saturday morning I saw a poster, Family Fun Day, come meet John Chafee, Secretary of the Navy, on a wall. I quickly dressed into clean whites and returned to an airline hangar filling with men, women and children.

Once governor of Rhode Island, he had a reputation as a fair person so I made my way up close and sat down. A band entered from a side door and behind it a tall tanned man smiling and shaking hands. He then took to the podium and waited for the crowd to quiet.

"Thank you for all coming today. I have such great respect for all of you, those that are returning from the war, those of you that are preparing to leave. I would like to send a special thank you to you that held the lines back home and did the essential work of keeping it all together. Both my wife and I have the utmost respect for all of you."

Soon there was not a dry eye in the place. I had to admit to the sincerity in his voice.

"Today is a chance to ask me question, to not hesitate" and then he stopped talking. The hanger was quiet but voices began to speak. These were simple people, not ready to engage a popular governor and congressman, much less the Secretary of the Navy. But soon the raised hands slowed and out back you could hear the band preparing to march the Secretary of the Navy out.

I had been watching my right arm for several minutes, fluttering like a bird on my knee, wanting to rise. Secretary Chafee seems like a truly good man. Let's let him leave on a positive note. But over my best intentions, my voice rang out over the hanger.

"Excuse me sir. Would you have time for one more?"

He looked over my way as I made my way to a microphone. What he saw was a young man dressed in white uniform, white shoes with white gloved hands holding a white hat.

“Absolutely son, I am here for you today.”

“Thank you, sir. What would be your response to a young weapons officer finding a dangerously large number of cracks in the barrels of his 5” guns. Making the captain aware of this unsafe situation, this forward gun mount was deemed fit for combat by the captain and sent off to war in the Pacific. Could you share an initial reaction you might have?”

The hall was so quite you could have a pin drop or a baby squirm. Most soldiers there knew what was happening.

“Thank you, sir” Secretary Chafee began. “What you just gave was more of a statement than a question and deserves some immediate attention. One of my aides is on his way out to you for your contact information.

“Yes sir, thank you. My name is Peter Hagerty, USNR 010-34-1385. Thank you for being with us today.

Three days later I was honorably released from active service. I left Newport a free man. Ironically I had no standing now in a military court. I wondered if Chafee had what it took. Lowell sent him the Globe articles with details of Chief Bishop and my examination but it seemed that the “boat had sailed.”

One year later, Sept 11, 1970 the forward gun mount of the Lloyd Thomas exploded, killing and injuring over ten of my crew members.

Latch Brewster

“Good morning. My name is Latch Brewster and I admit that this might be a strange way to begin a story about a piece of wood and the role it played in the lives of several families. Peter has agreed to help fill in the blanks and he will begin.”

Peter: “You were lying there, helpless on the floor by the barn door, one you had helped to open and close for almost two hundred years, until today. A dowel was inserted through the doorway at chest level and fastened to you by a pin. Twist the dowel to the left and you would rise, allowing the door to

open. One day that pin broke, leaving you lying on the barn floor and the door afloat."

Latch: "A little background of how I became a latch to a barn door. Joshua Brewster had moved his sawmill up to Porterfield, Maine to build a house and farm for his family. He sawed pine logs from across the brook and by the following year the farmhouse was livable. Then came the Civil War and Joshua joined the North and died at Appomattox.

Of course Joshua's family was devastated but his strong wife Mary and her son Adam and daughter Sara had the barn built with two teams of drafts and a milking cow before you could say "Jack Robinson". But there were a few details which his wife Mary called 'loosey goosie" and one was the way the doorway leading from the back right corner on the barn down to the brook where cows and horses drank was secured every day. Adam tied the door shut with some cheap twine morning and night but this just drove Mary a bit crazy.

So one day Sara was over at the old sawmill site picking up sticking to help start the woodstove when she noticed a piece of sawn wood very unlike the rest. It was no more than 10 inches long, 3 " wide and was from an oak tree, not a pine. Sara remembered back to the day when she was helping her dad. It was early spring but still cool so the brook was frozen and the horses and sleds could cross with logs to the mill site.

'Well, what do you know?' her dad muttered and leaned over the log pile and brought out a thin stick of oak. 'Just the thing for a peavey handle!' He then took his sharp axe, shaped the handle just right and chopped off the extra which fell to the ground and became part of the wood yard rubbish."

Until the day Mary brought me over to the workshop and formed me into the creature I am today. (Ha!)"

Peter: "And it was much a surprise to me that I found you lying on the barn floor yesterday, your dowel and pin missing."

Latch: "So Peter, I have an old Maine accent so stop me if you miss something. Sara was tall for a ten year old girl whose job it became on her birthday to water the horses and the cow morning and night. She was excited because it meant that she could finally redesign the swing door to the brook."

Peter: “But what was wrong with the existing system?”

Latch: “First because holding the door shut with hay twine was an accident waiting to happen. Mary had that right! But also the twine was so low on the door that any visiting child could untie it and let the animals out. That may not seems like a big deal but there was enough for the family to do each day and they didn’t need to waste time catching the livestock.

“So anyway, I convinced Sara and her mom to put the latch high enough to eliminate that problem. We then invented the pin and latch system which worked well till today. That’s not a bad track record.”

Just then neighbor Greg arrived and I had to stop my conversation with Latch. I gently covered Latch with a piece of paper and he took the clue and remained quiet. I was unable to return to our conversation until the following morning when I heard a cough coming from the kitchen table. I removed the napkin and gave Latch the light of day.

Peter: “ Sorry” I said.

Latch: “No problem .The time I had under cover reminded me of our flight to California.”

Peter: “What flight was that?”

Latch: “Oh, we were going out to see Marty’s sister, maybe before you had your kids. Somehow I had gotten into your briefcase and had momentarily been questioned by security as a dangerous weapon.”

Peter:” Oh yah, that seemed to be a bit humorous at the time.”

Silence for a few seconds.

Latch: “I often wonder if you would have had me tossed into the airline waste bin.”

Peter: “No way! Do you remember the conversation we got into with the architect from Chicago sitting one seat over? He had noticed you in my brief case and, when I handed you to him, he held you like a precious stone.

Eric the architect: "You know I grew up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin. The small and feel of this wood, oak if I am correct, takes me back like it was yesterday. What is your farm like? Here, wait a minute Peter. I am an architect and can't think without a paper and pen."

And Eric reaches up into the overhead bin and places a 2' X 2' sketch pad into my lap

Eric: "OK, can you draw the layout of your farm, your house, barn fields, forest. Take your time.

Peter thinking: "Oh my God, this guy is probably a big city, million dollar designer.

Eric responding: "Peter, we had twenty milking cows, two teams of draft horses and we put all our hay in loose. I had one pair of shoes to wear to school. So take your time."

So with Latch placed gently on Eric's pad and with Marty's help, I linked out the layout of our modest farm while Eric muttered his approval but with a few questions. Like "but where are your chickens?"

Marty: "Oh, that's my fault. Yes, they should go right here. That wooden latch that you admired earlier, that is what we used to open and close the hen house."

Peter: Then Eric tore off his first sheet and began a second.

Eric: "Show me your town road, then your driveway and then your house, your woodshed and barn, then hen house".

And, like magic, his work sheet soon mirrored, with a few modifications, exactly the design of Joshua Brewster's so many years ago.

Marty: That is amazing

Eric: "Yes those early farmers had a good eye for design. But I do have a suggested modification.

And he drew into the farm layout a hen house, separate from all the buildings.

Eric: "I have always had a great respect for heat in the winter, especially fire when it gets loose on a farm. My family lost a cattle barn when a water heater caught on fire in the night. I will never forget that disaster.

And his eyes watered as he momentarily turned away.

"Keep the hens warm and in a barn away from everything."

"He then tore off our working sheets and gave them to Marty. The plane was preparing to land at LAX soon.

Peter: "Eric, if you don't mind my asking, where are your presently headed and is it for work?"

Eric: "I am the chief architect for my company which is building the Abu Dhabi International Airport. Would you like to see the plans?"

And until the seat belt sign came on, he enthralled us with the billion dollar project he has designed where passengers will arrive and prepare for departure under giant Bedouin style hangers where the temperature will never go above 60 degrees inside or out.

Latch: "May you be safe Eric in such a dangerous place and come to see the door I open and close each day in rural Maine.

Katy the Sheep

October 30, 2021

I can't say I know you that well even though we have been friends for over twenty years. But I think that we have a lot in common, pain to start with, but also hope.

You raise your head in welcome every morning, the same way I greet a friend entering the yard. I never hear you complain even though you have not stood on your legs for many moons.

Your eyes, wide and bulbous, are the first of you I see in the morning darkness. Every chew of apples and grain ends with a smile. You welcome me even if I have nothing to offer. Burps resound off the caves in your body. You chew them again as they surface, then let them dissipate. No apologies, just a shift of the nose for a better scratch. You smells of the barn and the hay, nothing more.

As I lay down next to you under the horse blanket covers, you ever so slightly shift to be closer. And when this happens, all my doubts, fears, life's insecurities, seem to disappear, just for a moment. Your gaze does not seem to be compromised by your pain, but rather grows stronger the more I scratch. You try to move ever so slowly towards my face, only a few inches away now.

Then all at once, the belly belches. The breakfast grains, the apples for lunch, you have no shyness but rather share your fullness as the darkness of the evening softens both our beings.

Nov. 20,2021

Katy in the daytime

Clara the chicken comes early for a visit. She "announces" that she is looking for food. Katy's bowl is empty. She peeks at the page on which I am writing, then leaves in a huff.

Katy welcomes me with her morning belch, a really good one that starts in her third belly and makes its way to the surface as a gift to me. She smiles at me as she re-chews her earlier meal.

So what do I do with such a gift? I close my eyes and remember back to the mornings as a kindergartner, eating my breakfast.

My mother today would now be diagnosed with an eating disorder which apparently I, too, embraced, stuffing my breakfast as quickly and fully as possible, then making a bee line to the toilet where I would throw up all the eggs, bacon, toast and juice. Vomiting became a tried and true method of coping with anxiety which I exploited well into my college years. I am so

grateful to a therapist, Myron Sharaf, who handed me a waste basket when I first entered his office and helped me abandon these coping mechanisms which had burdened me since childhood.

I return to the barn a bit later with a dish of warm water which Katy happily drinks down. She rewards me by regurgitating her early afternoon meal, perhaps for the third or fourth time. Every morning I cut up 5-6 apples and mix in a scoop of grain and it is ideally gone within one hour. I just gave her a mid-day snack as a reward for letting me write about her. Marty does the evening feeding.

It is extraordinary that an adult sheep can live this long without movement. Katy has not been able to stand on her own going on three years now. Ideally she is re-positioned every day when soiled bedding is removed and replaced with fresh hay. Katy has the genetics of our Metinic Island flock. All of that generation has moved on and she is the sole survivor.

Three years ago I was injured and my energy and skill sets grew limited overnight. So in many respects Katy was and continues to be an inspiration for me. She has just one "baaa" and it is one of greeting and not complaining.

I most enjoy scratching her nose and ears to which she does not overly object. Her eyes are surprisingly large for a 100 lb. animal. Even though her face is as large as mine, she is not ready for the night until she finds a pile of hay on which to rest her head.

She is now pushing her white metal dish towards the wooden leg of my chair where it comes to rest with a 'bang' . She wants more feed. Her supper time is still a ways off and the temptation for me to feed her is strong. Her legs are incapable of moving her but she does not know that as they push back and forth under her bed of hay.

Friends have asked us if it would be better if she were put down. She has certainly enjoyed a long and full life. For those of our flock who were born on islands off the coast of Maine, we would often find the older ones choosing a cove or a small clearing in the forest to lie down and die when their time came. Sometimes they would choose the very spot where they were born or gave birth. It seemed the right thing not to intercede.

Katy and her mom came home to our farm when it was time to leave the islands. She is the last living member of that extraordinary generation and gene pool.

When Katy became our sole sheep, alone in the barn except for the chickens with whom she occasionally shared her grain or the horses that looked across the aisle or the barn cats up for a new adventure with the 'big wool ball', somehow Katy just became a fixture. She let us clip her fleece in the spring and welcome the neighborhood kids to feel the lanoline in her wool.

So here we are, approaching another spring with Katy, burping and gurgling next to me in the barn. I am writing these memories because I think that Katy has a message for me, maybe a secret.

Like Katy I am growing old. I have arms that hurt and legs that need help. Yet I am drawn to her spirit. In truth, I have no idea what her days are like. Her head is often moving, either up and down or side to side. I don't see any source of discomfort. Yet when I move around the barn doing chores, I feel sorry for myself and all the relatively mild pain I must endure.

I have begun these "Time with Katy" stories in the hope that I may learn from her how to age gracefully and be grateful for every day. We shall see!"

More on my Degrading Bodies from Katy

So Katy is with me again to help me come to terms with my degrading body. Maybe that is not an appropriate word for my condition. In any case she is taking the lead by working hard with her left rear leg, working to stretch it forward. I try and imaging what degree of pain she is facing. I have started doing my own stretching in her stall and try and reach these places I have not touched in years. I am surprised by what I find.

December 3, First real snow falls

"Katy, I have been watching your eyes lately, especially your left. It is the one that is closest to me. But just now I saw you turn you head so that both eyes seem to be working well. Your legs are quite beautiful, especially the hooves.

They are very long and have the color of South Sea mahogany. We no longer trim them since you can no longer walk.

Today is truly winter. The mornings are dark and cold. But you are awake before everyone else, your head bobbing up and down, waiting to greet me. Not to disappoint you, I have in my arms a bowl of sliced apples, sheep grain, trace minerals like seaweed powder and a long drink of warm water. Over the past two winters you have not moved more than a few yards from your spot on the hay pile. Today your water pan has frozen and your feed bowl has slipped out of your reach. But look, the apples are not frozen. I then notice a subtle nod of appreciation as I push the pan within her reach."

Katie's parents and grandparents were part of our flocks that lived on islands off the coast of Maine. When that era came to a close a small number of ewes returned to our mainland farm, most of them on dry land for the first time. We think that her dad was a Finnish Landrace ram who lived not far from home. She inherited his short tail and fine wool.

Katie lived here on our farm when hand spinning, either on a portable spinning wheel or a drop spindle was the rage. Her fleece she is wearing today is as soft and lustrous as it might have back then when she was a yearling. Oh, if I could only get her to talk.

The second best thing I might like to share with you the reader are some of the stories we experienced together. Her best stories were always just after supper and I would like to share them now.

" Katie, Do you remember the spring we moved the flock to Eleanor's (Mart's sister) just over the border in New Hampshire. You were on horseback with Rudder nipping at our heels most of the way to keep us moving. We were slow at getting underway and even though it was late May it began to get dark just over Norton Hill.

"The piano tuner's farm was the last one we saw that night and about one mile beyond we made camp and began eating local forest flowers and grasses for supper. You tethered the horse to a nearby birch grove where there was abundance of forage. You said this had been an old logging yard. You then gave Rudder some ground beef and kibble.

"What I remember most about that night was how dark it was. You asked Rudder to walk the outside around the flock that was now bedded down in a

giant circle. You told him that you could not see your hand in front of your face so it would be up to him to keep all two and four legged animals together and safe. Now that was a tall order for a three year old dog but when the sun came up the next day we were all still together.

"We had five or so miles to go before breakfast so we started out at first light. As we came down the final stretch on Eleanor's road we met a bunch of cars and trucks pulled over to the side waiting to guide us. It was a surprise to you and I heard you say under your breath 'what the hell'. But I saw a smile return to your face as you were handed a cup of coffee and a doughnut.

"Somehow the local hunting club got word of our arrival which coincided with a coyote sighting the day before in the woods that were adjacent to Eleanor's fields. This was where the sheep would be 'till Fall. There must have been a dozen hunters wearing blaze orange and carrying high powered rifles. As they walked towards us, your horse became quite nervous and spun around several times. The groups then backed up and let us pass through the farm gate, sixty sheep, thirty lambs, one dog, one horse and one rider. I prayed silently that the same numbers would head back home in October."

Rudder and Peter slept in the field with the sheep that night. They were a bit worried about the gun enthusiasts who kept insisting that we keep one of their rifles "locked and loaded" by our side at the edge of the meadow. But they ended up being considerate and helpful. Boy was our sheep happy, some of the lambs kicking and twisting into the air. And we never saw a coyote near that pasture all summer

And you know, there was a ewe lamb in that flock named Bonnie who was to become my grandmother. That was almost forty years ago.

Reflection

As I read over my notes for this period in my life I wonder what Katy does with all those memories when she took her mobility for granted. Every

morning when I enter her stall, she looks up at me with what appears to be an acceptance of her physical condition.

And I wish there was something I could now give her to let her know how much I appreciate her attitude. My physicality has been a driving force for my own well being since the day I was born. There was never anything special about my body other than keeping me alive. During college hockey I hospitalized a person I barely knew. But I spent several afternoons in the infirmary visiting him. He called the other day out of the blue after 56 years just to check in and say he is doing fine.

Another friend in college joined the Marine Corps because he felt it was unfair that he got off so easy. He died in Vietnam during our sophomore year. That summer I joined Naval ROTC and two years later was on a ship bound for the Tonkin Gulf. But no matter how awkward or dangerous the situation, I almost always came out unscathed.

The Beginning of the End.

Many soldiers and civilians were injured or killed by that war. And over the past several months, for some reason, I have started to come undone. I have spent a wonderful life raising a family on a farm here in rural Maine. I worked hard, some would say, too hard. My wife and I often traveled to Moscow to start what would be a thirty year collaboration in wool, first to the Soviet Union, then the Middle East and finally home to our Native American flocks here in the States. But over the past year my body is talking to me. Hot flashes, soaking sweats, leg pain, exhaustion and forgetfulness have become an every- day event.

And as these events pass over me I feel them trying to unlock a jail I have created for myself. Could I have done more to stop the Lloyd Thomas? The memories I hold even today of those last few weeks are starting to cause a melt-down. The Boston Globe and our Providence lawyer might have gotten the ship to stop in San Diego. But this was Captain Meanix's swan song. This was his only chance to get the Vietnam Commendation Medal. He would be retiring soon.

So it was this guilt that sent me to Europe after leaving the Navy. There I met deserting soldiers in Paris and London who ran from combat and were now

struggling with long, sleepless nights filled with drinking, carousing and nightmares. I then returned to Ft. Devens outside Boston and set up "The Common Sense Book Store" a GI coffee house where active duty soldiers could receive counseling. And I ultimately returned to Vietnam, if for no other than to keep the voices of these soldiers at bay.

Last week I went for a walk in the woods with a neighbor who I am just getting to know. Lo and behold, when we started talking, it was about submarines. He was on a U. S. nuclear sub operating in the North Atlantic, the same winter I was on the surface looking for Russian "boomers" as well At the end of our talk I walked back to my car and immediately began shaking. These were so severe that I had to wait for them to pass before I dared to drive. My teeth were chattering and would not stop. And for the first time I began to see a connection to the past.

The local emergency wards never thought about PTSD and I did not think to bring it up. My God, all this happened more than forty years ago. But as each new day arrived, with more chattering teeth and soaking sweats, I began to see an opportunities for a powerful conversation, letting go of all the harsh self judgement I have made, the "could have done mores." I will be back in touch in 10 years and report how I am all doing.

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