

WRITING OUR LIVES:
personal stories by older gay men

Center on Halsted
2007

Tears

The film was sad
but I did not cry
but on the el platform
just now one eye
(as always) waters
I dab it with a tissue
as I shudder with the cold
with the others under the heat lamp
objects of value
in a lit vitrine
Do they wonder what's the matter?
Fanaticize my private issue?
but I'm not crying—
only old

Adrian Robert Ford

WRITING OUR LIVES

In the winter of 2007, a small and dedicated group of writers and story tellers, ranging in age from their late forties to eighty years old, gathered each Saturday at Center on Halsted to share their life stories.

The group members wrote each week about the same particular facet of human experience—family, loves, hates, work, money, health, sexuality—and then each person shared aloud what he had written. We agreed from the onset to make grammar, punctuation and style secondary to telling our stories.

Each contribution was enlightening to the other group members. Each piece was unique and rich in its own way. The writers continued to marvel at how differently each one of them approached the same topic.

Here is a sampling of that work. It is as varied as its creators, and will appeal to readers who share, with them, the delight in seeing a life illuminated on the page.

Carol Sadtler
group facilitator

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TURNING POINTS

Philip A. Hannema

Monday, June 24, 1935, I was extremely excited. The Van Vlissingen Grammar School, located at 108th Place and Wentworth Avenue, was closed for summer vacation. I was to begin the vacation by going to the Lincoln Park Zoo for the first time. The zoo was far away—way, way, way on the north side of Chicago. And we lived way, way, way south, Roseland.

My cousin, Frieda, twelve years older than me, was taking me there. She had just recently moved to Chicago from a small town in Northwestern Iowa, Hawarden, and had come to live with us.

Early in the morning, using the “119th and Morgan” trolley, and for a few pennies, we took the very long trip from 10800 south to downtown Chicago. When we were in the Loop we walked over from State Street to Michigan Avenue and boarded a large double-decker bus. The double-decker bus was a new experience for me; it took us to the zoo, 2200 north.

Once there, I was eager to see all the animals. While there we bought a bag of popcorn, an extravagance to us then. It was also fascinating to see a street photographer take a picture of Frieda, another extravagance at that time, standing next to a man in a big brown bear costume. What particularly fascinated me was that the photographer, with a camera and film developing chemicals on a wood tripod, made the small sepia picture appear before my own eyes in just a few minutes. And this was way before the days of Polaroid cameras. This fascination probably influenced my later interest in photography.

It had been a glorious day. I was so anxious to get home and tell Mom and Dad about my adventures.

After the long streetcar trip back home, we were late for the usual “suppertime” at 6 p.m. However, Dad wasn’t home and I couldn’t tell him about my adventures. He had already left to attend a painter’s union meeting at the Old Dutch Hall on 111th street.

After telling my Mom about my adventuresome day and eating supper, which she had kept warm in the oven, I went to bed in the front bedroom, off the living room. My four-year-old brother, Alvin (Al), and I shared this room.

Shortly thereafter, Mom and Frieda also went to bed, Frieda to her room upstairs and Mom to Mom and Dad’s bedroom located off the dining room. My year and one-half old brother, Charles (Chuck), was in his crib in their room.

Suddenly—what I thought was the middle of night, around 10 p.m. I was awakened by loud noises and strange voices in the living room and dining room.

Something crashed near my bedroom wall. (Later I learned Dad had fallen against the large Victoria next to the bedroom wall.) I heard dining room chairs being shoved around on the oak wood floor. I could hear my father swearing. It seemed like he was fighting and hollering at some men. (I later learned that there were two men in the house.)

My Mother was crying and calling to my Dad: Tjerk! Oh mei!

Tjerk! Tjerk was my father's name in the Friesian language. I could hear my cousin saying to Dad—Uncle Ted! Oh Uncle Ted!—Dad's American name.

In my bedroom I noticed outside lights going up and down the window. I crawled up to the end of my bed and pushed away the curtains and shade from the slightly open window. There appeared someone with a flashlight saying: Let's get going.

Shortly thereafter the men did leave, leaving Mom and Frieda alone with my injured Dad.

Mom had looked into our bedroom but for some reason, I don't know why, I pretended I was sleeping. I was very afraid.

Frieda called the police. Mom felt lucky they had a three party telephone line—because with the Depression many of our neighbors could no longer afford a phone; some used ours.

The Kensington Avenue police arrived very quickly.

They saw the living room, dining room and my Dad covered in blood. My father was still uttering fighting words when they arrived.

They said they thought he was drunk and would take him to the Roseland Community Hospital for treatment, three blocks away on 111th Street and Perry Avenue.

At the hospital they informed Mom that they could not keep him there because it appeared she had no money.

My parents were extremely hard hit by the Depression. Dad had just begun working again as a painter. The income they did receive was in the form of "Script". They were IOU's from the Chicago Board of Education. Many stores and businesses would not accept these IOU's for payments.

Early in the morning, Mom called the Service Officer of the Roseland Post 49 American Legion to ask if Dad could get into Hines Veteran's Hospital. Dad had served in the Army during World War 1. By joining the Army in 1917 he became an American citizen.

An ambulance did take Dad from the Roseland Community Hospital to the VA hospital.

Mom went to the VA Hospital with the helpful American Legion Service Officer.

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There at the VA hospital it was learned that Dad had a fractured skull and lost a lot of blood. There wasn't much hope for this 45 year old.

Late that night the Service Officer drove Mom back home.

The next morning Mom received word that Dad died.

So the question came up: How did Dad wind up with a fractured skull?

An inquest was held in downtown Chicago. A representative from the union reported that Dad had the heel of his shoe caught in a metal doormat and as he struggled to get it out of the mat he lost his balance and bounced down a flight of stairs. Nobody questioned the union report. The story was published on the front page of the local newspapers, The Calumet Index and The South End Reporter.

The question came up—if this was true, why didn't these men take Dad to the hospital rather than to his home? There was something fishy.

Stories circulated in the community that Dad got into an argument about some union matter, (Maybe something to do with the dues?) and that a union official struck him over the head. That probably explained why he was "fighting" to his dying day. Everyone at the union meeting and its members were very closed mouth; probably in fear it could happen to them too. Many of them were recent newcomers to this country. They were scared of the strong painter's union.

It was thought that someday someone would confess or someone on a dying bed would tell what happened. It never happened.

Mom, for some unknown reason, never wanted to pursue the matter further. Our family doctor, and family friend, as well as other friends talked to her many times about it. Whenever the subject came up, she became very emotional and said that she did not want to ever talk about it. She never did—not even with her three sons.

So there was Sarah, a homemaker, a widow at thirty-five with three young boys—with little money, with no income and with a mortgage to pay to the Home Owner's Loan Association each month.

Because Dad could no longer afford to pay the union dues, they said there were no insurance benefits whatsoever. Also, he no longer had life insurance. Because of the Depression, Mom and Dad had recently stopped paying the insurance man who came bi-weekly to the house for the cash payments. And in those days, there were no Social Security benefits.

What was Mom to do? How was she going to survive?

But first Mom had to make funeral arrangements.

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At that time it was customary in the neighborhood to have the wake at home, with a tall basket of flowers and a black ribbon at the front door, clocks stopped, shades pulled, lots of fragrant flower arrangements (some from home gardens), people dropping in and out night and day, bringing food, comfort, etc. Mom decided she did not want this. She wanted it away from her home—in the Doty Funeral Home—with military services. The Legion's Chaplain was to conduct the services on Saturday afternoon, June 29, the day before my ninth birthday.

Dad had been active with the American Legion. As an artist, he had made individual detailed pencil sketches of all the past commanders of Post 49. They had been presented at the Commander's Installation party earlier that spring and were then displayed in the legion clubrooms, located above a store at 115th and Michigan Avenue.

My Aunt Sarah and Uncle Charley (Mom's brother) drove in from western Iowa, Hawarden. It was the only family Mom had here. All of Dad's family was in the Netherlands including my Dad's mother, my grandmother. It was very fortunate that Frieda was there to give wonderful help and support to Mom.

With so many men unemployed and with the services on a Saturday afternoon, it was a huge funeral—particularly from the Dutch/Friesian community and the legionnaires.

The gravesite service in Beverly Cemetery had a profound effect on me that has lasted my entire life. There was a gun salute and the playing of taps. As a very sensitive kid who had never been to a funeral, I was bewildered by it all. Every time I hear taps today I am transported back to that moment in time and think of Dad.

At the graveside services, Mom was presented the American flag, with 48 stars, that had been on my Dad's coffin. In later years Mom gave me that flag, which I still have in Dad's trunk. It's in the huge steamer trunk he had used for his voyages back and forth to his mother and three sisters in Sneek, Friesland.

Strange turn of events: Dad invested in a few eight-person lots in Beverly Cemetery when it was new. Later Mom sold them, keeping one lot for our family. Today, Mom, Dad, Aunt and Uncle are buried there. Headstones are there now waiting for the burials of Al and me.

After the funeral, someone told me that I was now the "man of the family." It was a turning point in my life. But what was in store?

As Mom's parents had offered and recommended, would she return to her childhood home in Wirdum, Friesland, the Netherlands, with my two brothers and me?

H. D. Bushong

**"It is our choices we make
which truly define who we are."**

– HDB

"If you don't like the way things are, you can leave," Fred said. "The witch was about to hit me in the face with a wire clothes hanger!" I shouted back. I had had enough of my stepfather, of his second wife and of life in suburban Cleveland.

Those words: "You can leave" were the words I had longed for. I had been planning my escape for months. I had told everyone I was in art class. In fact, I was working after school at a local food market to save money for my escape. I was fifteen years old.

I headed out from Cleveland, Ohio, or more exactly, Maple Heights, Ohio, to the place where my mother resided. This trip was most adventurous of me because I had only spoken to my mother a couple of times over the telephone before packing and leaving for New York City. I hoped that the City would offer me the anonymity for my well-kept secret which I was finding it harder to keep in Maple Heights.

I purchased new shoes, and all white clothes to wear for my new beginning. I wanted to be fresh and clean-cut. I yearned to escape from all the pain and grief I had suffered.

Fred had told me that my mother, Dot, lived a glamorous life in New York City. She wore furs, designer clothes and jewelry to match. The hotel she owned and operated was a busy place. Dot had what I wanted: glamour and a job so I could manage my own life the way I dreamed.

Mother arrived in grand style. She met me in a limousine with a fur draped over her shoulders as if she didn't really care whether the fur fell to the ground or not. Dot was a lovely and welcome sight for my eyes. Her skin was the color of coffee with cream. She always smelled of jasmine, inviting. Her make-up was laid down as if it painted on a canvas. Perfect.

We greeted each other with tears in our eyes. It had been two years. The limousine driver drove slowly—and directly to my mother's hotel. I was given the tour. My mother kept saying, "Someday this place will belong to you and your brothers, when I am gone." She made this statement with pride. The sentiments stirred deep inside. Someone was keeping something for me. I had arrived to be with the only person who I believed really loved me.

Pause point?

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Dot turned out to be a strange and disappointing “bird.” She worked all through daylight, and at night she would spend her time planning the next day. I rarely saw her except at work. Sometimes we would dine together at Tad’s Steak House on Fourteenth Street. I would come to look forward to these times as something special.

That first night we had a sit-down dinner in her living quarters at the hotel. A close friend of my mother’s, Mrs. Phepps, jointed us. I retired early. I was tired. I was also aware of feeling a vague tension that surprised me.

I recall my first morning in New York City. It was a morning after a heavy rainfall which seemed to wash away all my doubts about leaving Ohio and being with my mother. The sun came pouring through the open window shades like warm milk traveling through my body; I remember how comforting the warm sun was.

Straight away my mother put me to work after breakfast. She believed I would look good and do well at the front desk checking new guests in and helping direct current guests. It wasn’t a hard job to adjust to. In fact, I was ecstatic and stimulated to fit right in to prove myself worthy to be helpful.

Mother stayed close by, being sure to proudly introduce me to current residents as her oldest son. She was radiant. I was blissful and optimistic about my future. I felt animated with the clients. I was dazzled, eager and helpful. The clients were very appreciative that “new blood” in the house was enthusiastic.

I was puzzled why mother would receive me after all these years that had passed between us. Why she had kept her distance puzzled me indeed. My mother’s motivations troubled me. But then, I have always been a suspicious child.

In this case I felt like a trophy. Bewildered, I allowed myself to be the crown trophy of her accomplishment for the time anyway.

Somehow I knew “Dot” was a woman you did not disappoint. So, I allowed mother to continue to introduce me as her trophy to be polished and admired or sometimes placed aside to be only taken down from the shelf to be displayed before company as an accomplishment.

I could already see the “like mind” was shared between us.

The search for beauty and glamour was another trait we shared, and of course our shared love of men.

Dot always kept a husband, usually someone older, for security reasons, she said. A younger man for beauty and strength, not to mention the sex, and someone her own age for back-up. For as long as I can remember Dot kept three men in her company.

One warm early summer day, just about midday, mother announced she wanted to introduce me to someone. She said it was someone special, an important someone she had kept from me all these years, but now I was ready to meet.

I was astonished at how much this man looked like me, only older. Burt was his name. Burt was my father who had been out of my life for fifteen years. All at once I was flooded with emotion: optimistic, ebullient, and despairing. At last I had found the connection which joined me to the universe. Truly this was a unique experience all done in ten minutes that would change the course of my life.

FAMILY

Daniel Devine

“Remembered Happiness”

It was a Saturday, parents and two sisters dressed, gone to church. In the summer of 1947, my grandparents were home and it was a beautiful day in Park Manor. I was alone with my playmates, Nonno and Nonna, my Italian grandparents. Nonna packed me a lunch—sandwich and a carton of milk. I took a strap of books—Albert Payson Terhune, Marguerite Henry and a child’s book of Greek heroes and myths. Fortified, I set out for the forest—the trees in the back yard.

My favorite and the greatest shelter was Crabapple. The others were pear trees and one scrawny mulberry, which caused Nonno much grief, preferring the soil of Sicily to its home—a tub in Chicago. It lived in a barrel, Nonno explained, because we had to bring it in every fall for it wouldn’t survive the Chicago winters. It didn’t seem to care much for our summers, either, hence Nonno’s despair; he could coax anything to life and fruition except that temperamental overgrown bush. When Nonno repotted or fussed with it Nonna never said a word. Rather, she just twinkled and gave her trademark Cheshire smile.

Mulberry, however, was not for me. I lived most summer days in Crabapple. Its capacious shelter of split black arms provided a jungle.

But this was a very special day. After lunch the backyard was transformed into a circus ring by the clown and ringmaster, Nonno! And so it was “Showtime”—at least that’s what it was to us whenever we three were alone, and chores and weather permitted. We trekked out to the forest. I to the arboreal support of Crabapple, Nonna underneath in the shade on a capacious wooden armchair, built for her specifications—short, wide and low—by her loving sons, my uncles.

The audience was in place waiting for the show to begin, I above, Nonna below and the gallery between full of generations of chitttering squirrels. All that the circus lacked was the one and only Ringmaster Nonno. He was an eminently talented and learned man, learned not in the way of books. I was learned in that way—learned enough, it seemed to me, for the three of us. I was always telling the things I learned in the schools they had not attended. I explained to them things that came from books which they listened to with rapt solemnity and an attitude of layered incredulity, for they were both cum laude graduates of the School of Quotidian Reality.

But the ringmaster was tuck-pointing the house now, a task he found relaxing. Way up on the side in the hot sun with a sack of bricks which he tested for fortitude by tapping with a cold pipe, ever-present in his mouth. There were always one or two which earned low hummed rejection, and with his good peasant sense of parsimoniousness he set aside for shoring up our perfectly horizontal porch, achieved with a rock and a string.

His other talents included dehiscing a piece of fruit and eating its contents, then putting the skin back in the fruit bowl in what seemed complete perfection and waiting until his victim, Nonna or I, usually, grabbed a piece of fruit only to have it disintegrate in our hands. That was always good for a low silent chuckle. And so we waited, for enjoyment has its own timetable and mustn’t be rushed.

He lowered himself to the ground, dusted himself off and strode center stage, finding a sunny/shady spot, pipe in mouth, suspenders just so. He stood not like anyone else has ever stood. No. When Nonno stood he became the Rock of Gibraltar. Strong as a temple and apparently eternal as Nature he was one with the landscape, with limbs that mimicked Crabapple. Unmoving, not even breathing, so it seemed. Curious squirrels edged ever closer and closer to this new object. They ventured up and even touched him, scampering away, frightened by his body heat, a quality not even he could overcome. Birds, jays, cardinals, starlings flew close, even attempting a landing, but they were of no interest. Nonna and I held our breaths, squirrels stopped whispering and even Nature itself became silent at his wish.

Then it happened. A finch no bigger than a half dollar flew too close. He struck so quickly that we—Nonna, I, squirrels and the finch—didn't see it happen. But it had! The finch imprisoned in Nonno's huge strong hands was peeping wildly. So down I clambered to Nonna's lap and we made a cathedral of our six hands. Nonno roofed the fingered prison for the finch with his hands and all of us could feel its pricking, stamping feet, wild beating heart and hear its incomprehensible aria of peeps.

We watched our terrified prisoner through fingers, Nonno proudly twinkling and puffing on his cold pipe, Nonna singing softly to calm avian terror, me agape. Now this was something that no one else's grandfather could do; they might drive Chevrolets, write checks in a big book, do things in rectangular buildings downtown. But they couldn't catch a live bird. Nonno could!

What a gift! They were my grandparents; they were school, a locus of warm, moist, leathery kisses and magicians. The finch. He survived inspection, and then on wordless command Nonno opened the roof of the cage. Nonna and I lowered the walls. Finch hopped and with a few more indignant peeps glared at all of us and soared away to an assembly of cheers. Even the squirrels were laughing, it seemed. The finch had a story for his nest mates and the Saturday games had just begun at 7334 South Eberhart. Was ever there such a day? Never! Were grandparents supposed this much fun? No! Was love deeper or sweeter? Not! Was I the luckiest of beings? Yes!

Summer, Chicago, 1947. Dante Alighieri was right.*

*The title of this piece, "Remembered Happiness" is from a quote from Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*: "The greatest sorrow is to remember happiness in times of misery."

WORK/CAREER

Philip A. Hannema

HELP WANTED

Office Manager

Accounting Background

Loop Location. Part Time.

PO Box 3456, Chicago, IL 60610

This blind ad appeared in the weekly issue of the Near North News. I thought it was a rather unusual ad—and thought: What the heck, I'll give it a try. It could fit into my plans for building up my accounting business—a business I had started after retiring with 30 years of government service. It led to being an important work decision in my life and a unique work experience.

A couple of weeks after answering the ad, I received a call from a gentleman. He told me a little about the position. Asked if I wanted to be interviewed for the position. Said sure. He gave me the address of a law office on LaSalle Street. There I learned he was a lawyer—an older man, very stern and a little intimidating. After the interview he told me there were other candidates and that he would let me know if I were selected.

A week passed. I received a call. He indicated he was interested in me. Could I meet him at the offices of the Northern Trust on LaSalle? I did. There I met with two more gentlemen, one a vice president in the Trust Department at Northern, and the other a partner from Arthur Young Accounting. They grilled me about my work experiences, getting along with people, etc. Needless to say I was very nervous and curious—they were sometimes hedging when I asked questions.

Again some time passed. The lawyer called me. They were interested in me. At that point, he told me more about the position. It was working for an elderly woman, with a prominent Chicago name, partially blind, sometimes difficult to work with. The present incumbent was leaving because she had cancer.

Yes, I was still interested. So I was to meet the lawyer at a mansion on the corner of Schiller and Astor, just a couple of blocks east from my condo. There I met the potential client. She was upstairs, along with a nurse and a personal maid, in a sitting room off her bedroom. We were served tea while she did a lot of questioning. She was pleasant but did make it quite clear she was not enthused about having the position filled by a man. (I latter learned that the “recruiting team” had persuaded her to consider me.)

At the end of the interview, I was asked to sit in the downstairs living room while she and the lawyer talked. After their meeting, the lawyer came down and told me the job was mine. Could I start the next day?

So who was this woman? It was Dorothy Wrigley Offield, the daughter of William Wrigley, Jr., the founder of the Wrigley Gum Company.

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The next day I was to go to the Wrigley Building, where she had an office and where I would meet the lady who was leaving the position.

You could see that the present incumbent, a very pleasant woman, was not well. I worked with her for a few weeks. Three times a week I'd go to the office to learn the ropes. Each time after being in the office, we'd take a taxi to the Astor street home to have Mrs. Offield sign checks, read mail to her, act on requests for donations, etc.

There were times I wondered what I got into. She was taking more and more of my time—to do things like taking care of household help problems (22 employees, four locations), helping her select Christmas gifts from catalogs, constantly changing her mind about them, calling me at home to stop at her house, etc.

One morning I called her lawyer saying I wanted to leave. The work at the office was fine but the other aspects of the job were getting to me.

Almost immediately after I called, the man from Arthur Young came into the office. He asked me to please, please stay. He reported they were all, including Mrs. Offield, very pleased with my work. They knew what I was going through. I said I'd try a little longer.

The chauffeur began to pick me up at the Wrigley Building. I had tea with her in the afternoons. During the summer, when I went to her Lake Geneva home, her chauffeur would be waiting for me at the train station.

Incidentally, I really learned up the upstairs-downstairs mentality. The first time I went to Lake Geneva, she invited me to sit at the table with her for lunch. The servants - houseman, gardener, cook, maids, chauffeur, nurses, laundry woman, etc. didn't take too kindly to this. They made it pretty clear that they thought my place was in the kitchen with them. In the long run, it did work into good working relationships and friendships with all. I was no longer "Mr. Hannema"—I was "Phil," to all, even to Mrs. Offield.

Well, I continued to work with her for three years until she died at the age of 91. After she passed away, I worked, along with her son's secretary, on her estate—actually going through hundreds of items, room by room, drawer by drawer, in three locations, determining what was to be auctioned, what was to be donated, what was to be pitched, etc. There was very little that the surviving son and his family wanted to keep.

It was a rich experience in many ways; something I could never have planned. (Yes, I was remembered in her will.) Word then spread, and I had offers for similar positions. I had two more clients with similar situations and then I retired for the second time.

MONEY

Frank Rotundo

“Money Makes the World Go Around”

Money makes the world go around, or so I’ve heard Liza and Joel say so. My upbringing was lower middle class so money was available but not disposable. My father’s family were immigrant farmers that could be described as frugal. There were only the two children in their household so even through the depression they were able to save.

My mother’s family on the other hand, wasn’t so lucky. Her being number ten of thirteen meant that funds were stretched beyond adequacy leaving them always dipping or borrowing. Through the depression my mother and her two sisters would go to the butcher’s shop and ask people if they could spare a slice of meat. The butcher took pity on them and would sometimes send them off with liver that was just about to spoil. My grandparents were immensely pleased that my mother married into a family that had meat every day, if not every meal. My parents had very different relationships and attitudes toward money.

My earliest recollection of how money mattered was when I was in second grade. The Catholic school I attended had a Cub Scout troop and my mom was a Den Mother. We paid out dues and my mom would send the money to the bank with my dad on Fridays and he would deposit it for her. This routine would probably have gone on indefinitely if it hadn’t been for that one incident.

My aunt, who didn’t marry as well as my mother, had thirteen kids of her own and a husband that either couldn’t or wouldn’t hold down a job. He was the youngest of his family and they always felt he married beneath himself. Once a year he, along with his old high school buddies, would make the trip down state to Champaign and watch the high school basket ball play-offs. Every year at this time he would hold back on things like the electric and water bills so that he would have extra cash for the weekend, leaving my aunt to deal with the utilities being shut off. She would always turn to my mother for help, knowing that my dad would gladly help her especially for the kids’ sake.

One year, however, was unusually stressful. My aunt called my mother to ask if she could help and my mother assured her she would as soon as my father came home from work. That particular day my dad’s helper on the truck was sick and my dad was slowed down with the extra work load. In those days the banks closed at five and the utilities were paid at the pharmacy where they could halt the shut offs with a phone call by six o’clock.

Logistically my dad could not make it home in time to save the day, leaving my mother and aunt in a state of panic. My mother had a great idea. She had just collected the fees for our Cub Scout blue and gold dinner and had that cash which my father was going to deposit for her. She decided she would use the cash to stop the shut off, and then have my father replace the money on Saturday morning when he cashed his work check at the bank. She dashed off to the pharmacy and put out that fire, giving my aunt the reprieve she was praying for.

Later that night the phone rang and my mother answered in her usual sing song hello. Her mood quickly changed when Father Vaughn said, “Gertrude, we have a problem.” It seemed that the lady in the pharmacy who also belonged to our church noticed my mother pulled out the cash from a zippered

envelope which she recognized. She then alerted Father who contacted the bank to see if the deposit was made. My mother explained to Father the entire situation, knowing full well that he knew exactly what had happened.

Father told my mother that the home and school board would be meeting on Saturday and that my uncle would have to explain once he returned on Monday. My mother knew Father hated my uncle and viewed him as a dead beat who was a drag on the community. She pleaded with him not to do that since it would embarrass my aunt who she felt was an innocent victim. "No," Father said, "this can not be ignored." The conversation was over; the consequence for the action was set.

My mother's mood for the weekend was somber. She went to the bank with my father and made the deposit herself, adding extra money for the use. That Sunday morning we all dressed for church and set off for mass. My mother brought with her the envelope along with the folder containing all the scouting paperwork. She sat straight and tall throughout mass, her eyes fixed the entire time on Father Vaughn.

At the end of the mass, my mother knelt down and said a silent prayer. I stayed with her as my brother and sister headed out to the car with my father. We waited in line with other members of the congregation to shake hands with Father Vaughn who stood outside the church doors. When it was our turn to approach him I could see the look of, "Oh no," on his too-pink a face.

My mother said, "Father," as she extended to him the envelope and folder. "Now Gertrude," he said, but before he could continue my mother firmly pushed the packages into his chest, forcing him to grab them. "You'll notice all the books are in order," she said, "You'll even find a little extra money that I added for the inconvenience."

"Gertrude, we can talk about this later. We had no intention of you resigning as Den Mother." "I'm very sorry to have borrowed the money from the Cub Scout funds," she said, her voice becoming increasingly louder, "please apologize to the home and school board for me."

"Gertrude, I want you to take this back," Father said looking around at his cronies with indignant disbelief.

"No," my mother said, "I want you to take this and stick it up your ass. That way you'll know exactly where everything is at and who is dealing with the money."

"Gertrude," he said, but by then we had already headed for the car. My mother walked proudly with her chin up in the air. Squeezing my hand she said, "Let that be a lesson to you. They can make you eat shit, but don't you ever say thank you."

LOVE

Daniel Devine

“Don’t Worry ‘Bout Me”

She stepped out of the elevator—tawny hair, long legs, warm, enigmatic smile (was it mocking or enchanting? I never knew). We worked together in the same corporation, yet worlds apart—she in the executive offices (one of the first in her generation to break the glass ceiling), I in the mechanical end of the business.

We took a language class together at a local university. She, a native speaker, was again in the lead; I was a neophyte. Yet she seemed intrigued when I asked her to lunch. “The dark, leather-boothed joint” was my suggestion. “Too expensive,” she replied, and I gratefully accepted a move to a less expensive, more convivial restaurant. Later I learned the executive staff dined at the dark leather joint.

I knew who she was from company gossip: talented, intelligent, capable of using corporate philosophy to further her own interests, also able to use her enchanting sexuality to her advantage. I wondered as I perused her cashmere-clad, gray-blue breasts—wondered if she had assumed her corporate position by assuming “the position.” “Who cares?” I replied to myself. “Could we re-enact that particular position tonight?”

Too much to hope for, I opined. Yet the rise and fall of cashmere gave action to hope. She seemed interested in my attentions and easily assented to my suggestion of a new somewhat racy, I hoped, French movie that evening. My knowledge of French, two years at the university, plus three years living in France, might put me firmly on equal footing.

Since there is no completion without aspiration, I pressed on.

Our first date was a modest French restaurant on Clark Street next to the site of the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre (something I later found ominous) was successful. The movie was a make-out fest. (I was voted the best kisser in high school; it was an all-male school.) Then a walk along the beach, moonlight on gelid sand, the lake—first as calm as a ditch by Monet. Then, a sudden squall put me and my trench coat (grey Burberry Aquascutum) to our protective best. At her doorstep she was unscathed but I had sand in places that shouldn’t happen to a clam. She insisted I come up. I modestly assented. I was in love and even better inside, grateful to the gods of tempest. This was the first instance I recall a prayer being speedily answered.

“You’d better go now,

I like you much too much,

You have a way with you.

You’d better go now,

You have the lips I love to touch

The night was gay with you...

There’s a moon above...

You’d better go now.”

Saturday morning arrived early and we spent the day and many Saturdays thereafter in an urban playground. I made breakfast (There was a great short order cook within me.) Apples, tangerines, grapes, yogurt and brown sugar became impromptu fruit salad; open-face pepper and egg sandwich; strong Italian coffee brought to Love in bed with my strong Italian bicep brushing her cheek. Then shopping, a snack at a local Greek diner, a race home to listen to the opera on the radio, nap and dinner. (She could cook, too.) I was in love. She was intrigued.

My sexual confusion didn't seem to faze her; rather it became a piquant incentive to making love. It bothered and seriously impacted one important aspect of my life—my career. I didn't have one. I never could bond with any organization that advocated the traditional values. I never had anything in common with the guys in the country club set except for checking them out in the john. So I careened from one job to another, never finding that niche that would have completed me. And there I was, in charge of a Xerox machine, in need of a supportive livelihood, wallowing in a loving relationship without a map or a compass. Being a will-of—the-wisp suited my personality. My love, however, needed a serious man in her life.

Nights were ours. We'd either go to bed and get up early or stay up all night. Ours was a news disseminating enterprise. We'd vet piles of periodicals—Esquire, The London Times, Figaro, Elle, L'osservatore Romano—at one of two restaurants, an all-night cafeteria peopled by a crew of late-night deaf mutes we called "12 cents plain" due to a sign that read "2nd cup of coffee 12 cents plain," or to a Greek diner run by a maternal Amazon. Clearly six and a half feet tall, very much in charge and in love with our being in love. She would laugh riotously when I'd stagger in with an immense pile of reading material. Mother Amazon brought our food on a platter, for, like good Italians, we ate off each other's plate. We were like flowers in a vase leaning towards each other inhaling the perfume of adoration and existing alone together. We sat in the window booth, not across but next to each other, intertwining and inhaling love. Knees, shoulders and feet touching, fingers creating love's invisible tracery on the other, making adoration's map for future exploration.

One night, the firm's most skilled gossip walked by, recognized us and came in. We had been unmasked. "Oh, shit," said Love under her breath.

"Blaine," is that you?" she asked. "You're in love," gave way to moist assent. "I've never seen two people more in love." That was a common refrain we received during the Special Olympics of Love held in Lincoln Park 1968 to '70. It was though we were the center and distribution point for romance.

Why couldn't we remain in this limbo of pleasure untethered to stability? I had always existed on dreams and illusions but now another was living there with me. Love's celebration lasted as long as it could, burning on its own fuel. Then life barged in to stay.

I never found out how our relationship impacted her work. I knew it did. I preferred not to ask, and she was grateful. Occasionally there was a company function to which I was not invited. I'd help Baby dress, and then watch as a grey limousine whisked her away. She returned early, replied "boring" to the obligatory "How was your evening?" and fell into my arms for an evening of make-up love. Was it feigned nirvana? I was in love. Were we?

One night I came home to have the keys snatched out of my hands and was sternly asked to leave. Noises came from the locked bedroom. Was someone in there? Yes, we were both frustrated at my attempts to find a career; couldn't we work this out?

But there was my life in a suitcase (clothes) and (records: Mahler, Mozart, Carmen McRae and the Beatles) and I was banished to the street, where I remained.

I became the doppelganger, “the ghostly double” celebrated in 19th century literature, a creature malingering in the lamplight, haunting for a last look at the former beloved, perishing for a final kiss. Nowadays we call it stalking.

Frank Sinatra once told us: “Don’t worry ‘bout me I’ll get along,
Give your heart and your love to whomever you love don’t be a fool...
Baby why should we cling to some fading thing that used to be,
If you can forget, don’t worry ‘bout me.”

So I picked up that suitcase and traveled, hoping to find in movement that which I could not create in fact. Finally, I learned to embrace the improvisational quality I bring to life situations. After years of wandering, the gift of reliable manhood occurred in me one day without fanfare or passport and left me grateful for the gift of love.

I pray one day the elevator door opens and it steps into your life.

—Chicago, Illinois, St. Joseph’s Day, 2007

SEXUAL IDENTITY, SEX ROLES, SEXUAL EXPERIENCES

H. D. Bushong

When I was a child of seven or eight years old I recall one of those events we all as children experience in some secret place at home or in the neighborhood: “You show me yours and I’ll show you mines.” The other two boys showed their stuff proudly, but I could not bring myself to pull down my pants to show mines.

When I was fifteen years old this experience repeated itself, only with a girl this time. What prevented us from going all the way was the untimely assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., April 4, 1968. We were at her house in her bedroom with our clothes off having a look at each other’s private parts. When her mother came screaming up the stairs to announce Dr. King had been shot, I jumped out the window onto the roof with clothes in hand. The plan was, I was to appear at the back door to announce myself as just appearing.

When I was twenty-two years old, I was taken to my first ever gay bar and was picked up by a man twice my age. Barry was a well-known television producer. Drove a Rolls Royce and lived in a penthouse in Manhattan. We arrived at his home late and had more drinks. The time became too late for me to go home and besides, I was feeling the effects of the alcohol. Barry suggested we go to bed. Upon entering the bedroom, Barry started to undress. I waited politely for Barry to give me some PJs to sleep in. But apparently we had different ideas about sleep. Barry announced we were going to sleep without PJs because we would only have to take them off soon enough.

“Whatever do you mean?” was my response.

I remember the look of shock on Barry’s face when I announced I had never taken my clothes off in front of another human being before. Barry continued to disrobe, all the while assuring me this was okay and this was the way it was done. It was what was being done that had me worried. What would I do after I had disrobed also? You see, at twenty-two years old I had never had a sexual experience.

Barry, of course, made me feel as if I had missed out on one of life’s greatest treats. I do not remember performing very well that evening in bed. I did what Barry suggested and what he wanted to happen. Barry and I lived together for three years after that night and I learned how to perform to please him. I never thought I was supposed to be pleased too. I was just happy that someone wanted me around.

After Barry, sometime in my thirties while single I became aware of the three sexual experiences becoming the foundation for my sexual behavior. Reflecting back now over the years, I realize no one in the family or outside the family ever gave me the “heads-up” on sex or what to expect; it was just there and no one ever spoke openly about sex with each other. Barry was the only one in my life who ever spoke directly about sex to me. The rest I learned as I went along on my round of clubs and bars and social venues.

The sexual avenue I have traveled has been difficult because I never learned how to flirt or cruise and I did not believe in anonymous sex for sex. Every person I slept with became my partner or long-term lover. My family’s (at the time) views about sex were: no sex before marriage and only after marriage was it allowed and never ever spoken of.

By the time I was forty years old I realized I secretly characterized myself as a female in a male body. I shared this notion with no one. I just continued to behave as a gay male and push down the feminine character whenever she came forward.

I remember in school the other children calling me a “sissy.” I really did not care so much because deep down inside I felt it to be true. But most importantly they labeled me something I had no name for. So I grew up believing my childhood days of playing with my beloved paper dolls, my love of aprons, girl toys like doll houses were “sissy” behavior.

But now, in middle age, I realize I am not “sissy” but a “Transgender” and its name is GID; Gender Identity Disorder. I am still looking for the appropriate sex role. I have better tools for my search for my sexual identity; a transgender therapist is one of the main ones. Another is the experiences of other GID people.

DEATH

Frank Rotundo

“The Death of Robert”

Death is never really far from my mind. The blessing of having a large family is that there is always a baptism or wedding just around the corner. The curse of course being there are plenty of funerals. One thing I learned early in life is that you will not know the time or place. I've lost relatives to long painful illnesses and sudden coronary arrests. I've also moved through many instant and untimely deaths related to accidents and war that continue to touch me even to this day. I don't have a problem letting go of what is ripped from my arms; it's when swimming against the current that I hold on to whatever thread I can grasp until I'm emotionally and physically drained.

Robert was my first relationship with an older man. He had just turned forty when we met and I was only thirty two. Our meeting was by chance and we clicked immediately. He would introduce me as his mid-life crisis. We both worked long hard hours, 12 to 16 hour days six days a week. Our only full day together was Sunday, so we made the most of our late Saturday nights and slow Sunday afternoons. Me, the intense Scorpio would mess with the sweet, indecisive Libra. I tortured him with decisions like, “Should we eat out or order in? Do you feel like Chinese or a deep dish pizza? I heard that action movie is really intense or do you want to see a comedy?” Yes it was cruel, but it was also fun to see that twisted puppy dog look on his face.

He was one of the sweetest men I've ever known. Being raised in poverty taught him humility and he would go out of his way to keep from hurting anyone. He told me his time in Vietnam was extremely difficult because he feared having to use his gun directly at someone. He was fine shooting into the brush as long as there wasn't a face staring back at him.

His biggest sorrow in life was when he finally put his foot down with his sister and refused to baby-sit her three children while she went out with her friends to party. Early the next morning he was contacted by the police who got his emergency contact information from her landlord. The complex she lived in had a fire and the children were found dead hiding in the closet of their locked apartment. They could not find his sister and needed him to identify the bodies.

Our lives were comfortable if not extravagant and we planned on buying a place together where we could live as a happy couple. Then things started to change. Robert would call me at odd times and he started to see little furry animals with red eyes. I knew he didn't do drugs, not even for his HIV. He quickly lost his job because of his excessive days off without calling in. He told me he would go to work but nobody would be there. Later we found out that he had his days and nights mixed up. He had seizures periodically and his insurance was cancelled because of his job.

We had to go to the VA for his treatment and it was there that we found out that the little red eyed furry beasts were side effects of his exposure to Agent Orange. He also had a four centimeter tumor that was about twenty years old and had probably developed during his stint in Vietnam. There were now three other growths in his brain that was either toxoplasmosis or Cryptococcus, both fatal. One had duration of 18 months; the other if properly treated could allow up to four years before he would succumb to the disease.

I started wading through the mounds of paperwork while my Robert talked about the wondrous feelings he had for lemonade, watermelon and chocolate éclairs. His family was of not help and actually cleared out

his house once we were forced to sell it. While we were at the hospital, they quickly divided up the spoils and I had to ask them for my clothes back.

My days now had become up at five, off to work, watch the clock until four, dash off to the hospital and sit with him until he fell asleep. Then I would drive back out to the suburbs and do it all again. I was on automatic pilot and felt the alienation from all sides. The VA shunned us because we were fags who got what we deserved. The AIDS organizations wouldn't help because he lived in the suburbs and they didn't have the man power. My family didn't know how or what to do to comfort me and his family just stood back waiting to the inevitable. I was at wits end.

One night in my dead sleep, I felt a calm shake and heard a soft, "Frankie." I opened my eyes and there was my grandmother with her sweet slight smile. She was standing with a look of "I have something to tell you." A warm breeze passed my face and I looked up to a beautifully clear blue sky.

I looked over to the side and there was Robert standing on a sand dune smiling at me and playing with a little girl and little boy who were dancing around him. Just behind him stood a boy of about ten years old who stood looking at me with an expression of sorrow and pity. I looked over to my grandmother who just stood there, her smile gone replaced by a peaceful yet blank expression.

"Robert," I called out. He looked up at me with his smile and then his attention went back to the kids whose squeals of laughter kept drawing him back to him. I looked off to the boy, still standing looking at me, then over to my grandmother whose eyebrows raised slightly. The clear day melted to pitch darkness and I was sitting up in my bed. That was the first time my soul started to cry.

I remember holding my cigarette and staring at the ground when I heard the sound of the electric doors opening. There weren't any footsteps so I looked up and saw the messenger who said, "Frank, the doctor says it's time." We rode the elevator in silence. I looked up at him realizing he just didn't know what to say, his eyes searching the panels of the walls, the floor and buttons, then back at me and to the doors. I forced a smile and said, "I hate this." He just nodded his head, relieved with the acknowledgement and probably thankful that he didn't have to respond.

In the room, I moved to one side of the bed and sat on the edge holding his hand. His mother sat in a chair on the other side holding his other hand and saying, "Me hijo, me hijo." We looked at each other as two comrades facing the firing squad together. Our attention turned back to Robert who squeezed our hands and moaned as he tried to pull up.

It was then that I could feel the energy flowing from him into my hands. My heart tugged at those strands of hope and I wanted to just pull him into me like you would a drowning person from the rough waters into the life boat. All my hope, my love, my fears, my every emotion came to the surface to grab and hold on. But just then, like the waves of a strong tsunami barreling towards me, it peaked and held started to recess.

No matter what I grasped at, hope, faith, whatever, I was not strong enough to hold the flow of his life as it passed through me and off the tips of my fingers. When he fell back for the last time I felt a pop of emotions. I could hear his mother's cries and looked over at. She looked up at me and asked, "He's gone?" "Yes," is all I could say and then the floods came.

Every fluid came to my eyes and blurred the scene before me. I kind of saw the doctor move me aside while she checked for a pulse or heart beat. I remember hearing her say, "Time, 8:48 pm." I muddled over to his mother where she and I held each other weeping. We both knew we didn't have the same pain, but we knew at that moment the loss was just as great.

I left the radio off that night for the ride home. The October air was cold enough to keep me sober from my sorrows. I remember thinking that I'll never take this path to the hospital again, but yet the road will still be there. I won't be rushing into Jewel for watermelon or éclairs but they will still be there. The building he lost his life in did not topple and so neither will I.

Adrian Robert Ford

“Ideas about Death”

I am a Spiritualist and will use this opportunity to explain my religion and interest in the psychic.

When I came to Chicago in 1970 I looked for readers and psychic groups. The New Age people were coming into their own. The Illinois Society for Psychic Research (ISPR) met at the Lawson YMCA. ISPR did some minor research but was mostly a forum for psychic journalists, readers and ghost hunters, etc. Before long, I was in charge of getting speakers. One coup was the consultant for “Close Encounters of the Third Kind” the same year the film came out. But I digress.

The vice president of ISPR was Clettis Musson. He had gone around the Midwest debunking mediums, even though he was a believer—to a point. I remember his exposure of one mystery. There were two small metal hands and they would rap out messages on a glass table. It was done with electromagnets. I was already familiar with tricks like “ectoplasm” emerging from the medium’s mouth or armpits during “trance.” Wadded fluorescent cheesecloth stuffed away.

One of our programs was a couple, Don and Marti Sladek, who had traveled to the Philippines and written a book about psychic healers. They had great film and slides. At the time I had a Filipino lover named Deogracias. One psychic surgeon said the spirit of a discarnate doctor possessed him while he performed operations where he opened the body and also performed non-invasive healing.

One month Deo and I took a bus to Indianapolis. I wanted to show him Butler University, where I attended 1965-1970. We took a bus to Muncie then over to Camp Chesterfield, the largest Spiritualist camp in the Midwest. There were many cottages and two large rustic hotels. We enjoyed the evening enclave and both got evidential messages. There was a medium doing blindfolded billet reading.

In my church in Chicago we write our questions on small slips or billets. After the singing of hymns, Declaration of Principles, healing prayer and other order of service, Minister Marrice Coverson “touches in” with congregants. Our names are on billets. She will call out “Adrian!” Then she’ll say “Adrian, as I come into your vibration I see a man...” or whatever. She likes us to stand and also to give her the sound of our voice which increases the vibration. The Chesterfield medium was impressive because he was blindfolded and would blurt out information. One could make appointments for séances in the homes; that is when the medium would go into trance.

I call myself an orthodox Spiritualist. That religion got formalized after the Fox sisters heard raps in a cottage in Hydesville. It isn’t far from my birthplace of Rochester, NY.

Messages from Marrice often confirm what I conjecture on a problem or situation. Our church is far more like Protestant churches and very similar to those in London and all over England. Since the 1920s, England has emerged as the capital of world-wide Spiritualism.

I am suspicious of some New Age phenomenology. Channeling, for one. I believe mediumship is a rare neurological function. Yes, my church believes everyone can attune to spirits to some degree. But channeling seems to devolve into texts from Atlantean seers, secretaries to Cleopatra and other nonsense. Is Brad Pitt, say, likely to leave a message on my cell? The afterlife is not as divided by class and station as ours but the Laws of Attraction apply. If one never got a Christmas card or call from that nephew or grandmother while they were alive...why expect contact later? And for what?

And what do I think of “Medium,” the TV show on Wednesday nights? On my 60th birthday, May 11, 2006, I saw the real Allisson Dubois at Transitions bookstore. She is more composed than the Patricia Arquette

character. So cool and chic she reminded me of a hotel concierge. She does still work for the Phoenix district attorney, does have those daughters and one is also psychic. But she almost never gets visions while asleep. That jerking awake is a device the director came up with to transition scenes. She did say she can get impressions just by shaking hands. And she coyly noted that, although facts and names were changed for the series, no episode was more bizarre than what she had done at the DA's office.

SPIRITUALITY/MEANING

Ron E. Patterson

“A Spiritual Epiphany”

I don't know why it occurred that particular day. Prior to waking up from a nap in my bedroom that summer afternoon, it had seemed like any other day. Nothing had happened that day nor previously that would have indicated that such a miraculous and powerful event in my life was about to occur.

I think I was about 12 or 13 years old on that afternoon when I awoke to a ray of sunlight beaming into my face. Lying in bed on my back, hands behind my head, I gazed out of my bedroom window that was on the second floor of our townhouse in Princeton Park Homes. Of course, I had woken up this way many times before, but this time...something was different, something... felt different. The sun was hitting my eyes, but there was no blinding sting. I felt no need to turn away at all. In fact, I didn't want to turn away. It felt warm as one might expect, it felt inviting and even nurturing, sensations that often are ascribed to the feeling of sunshine upon one's brow. But now it felt ...loving somehow, as if the sun had become a compassionate, living entity. I looked directly into the sunlight without any discomfort whatsoever. Feeling drawn to it, absorbed in it, the sun urged me to come to the window.

As I looked outside into the daylight, I saw the familiar alleyway and the familiar backyards of the townhouses that flanked it. I saw the usual clotheslines—some draped with the usual laundry—stretched from pole to pole, and I saw the usual cars parked here and there along where gravel met grass behind all of the townhouses. The same people that I had known for years were engaged in typical summertime activity; a couple of neighbors were washing their cars together and I seem to recall another doing some sort of repair work on his own car. Kids that I had long called friends were playing in the alley; some were playing softball, while others were playing basketball at the makeshift hoop on the telephone pole at the alley's exit.

But it was as if I was seeing the world for the first time. Everything and everyone that I was looking upon seemed to beam with a pristine splendor that should have been beyond human comprehension. It was as if the world was inundated by a flawless and overwhelming grandeur, as if God had blessed me with a glimpse of His omniscience. My soul was consumed in ecstasy. I simultaneously laughed and cried uncontrollably, enraptured with such joy that I had never before experienced. At that moment, there was no evil in the world. All at once, I knew that everything—past, present, and future—was all right. Utopia was before me. I mumbled over and over again, “Thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus!” I sat back down on my bed and continued weeping, laughing, and praising the Lord.

After gaining some composure, I ran downstairs to tell my mother about my experience. I needed to know just *what in heaven* had just happened to me! She told me that I had just been touched by God.

I still carry that experience in my heart and I bring it to my consciousness whenever my faith wavers. I will always remember that day and the magnificent event that came quietly and quite unexpectedly, yet with such tremendous fanfare. I had always heard about Him and I had always believed in Him; but until that day, I had never met Him. That summer afternoon, God came to my bedroom window—and He laid His hand upon my heart.

Adrian Robert Ford

This week's theme rather vague. Reminds me of a Gertrude Stein story—probably not true. Gertrude is about to breathe her last. Alice Toklas bends over and gently asks, “Gertrude, Gertrude...what is the answer?” Stein rises slightly and asks, “What is the question?”

How do my life goals fit into my values? Black and white like negative space in art? As a Spiritualist, I do not consider space—the cosmos—negative. But here are dark social situations which suck energy and would absorb our happiness. As Mozart noted the inscription on the sundial in the archbishop's garden: I count only the sunny hours.

My urgent cause is animal rights. It is the rationale of my being a vegetarian and the cause I support financially. Animals have given me unconditional love from my boyhood to my two apartment cats.

What goals do I have? For the rest of my life to give modest but continuous contributions to animal rights groups. To educate persons about the vegetarian lifestyle and horror of animal factory farming.

Were their religions traditions in my home? Not really. Both mother and father came from truck farms. Respect for nature and animals a given but still called some animals pets and others dinner. Was it somehow a rejection of hippie values? Oh, well. No one in their families had ever been vegetarians. So how could they give themselves permission?

Material goals? To live simply and divert more to just a few causes. To replace that table, dresser or bed with an upgrade, but not more. For instance, unless I opt for a roommate, my square footage is adequate. “Adequate” was a favorite word of Emily Dickinson. Mine also.

Social goals at 60 are to meet others in Prime Timers, GO VEGGIE! and other groups. To better know and enjoy folks in front of me. To avoid interaction where for reasons of status or \$ I am peripheral. Another favorite word.

As for universal values, that term puts me off. I suppose in all those poems. Many published but still no book. My poems are the truth told slant. As Emily said in her poem.

One goal I have not achieved is finding a Significant Other. Had one 1973-1987. Perhaps the key is not living together. I have to decide if I want to cohabit, money concerns aside. At my age I want an old shoe not glass slipper companion.

What are the principals that guide my life? What does it mean if I don't live up to them? As I progress beyond problems with alcohol—my only drug of choice—I came up with an epigraph for what may be a poem of closure, though that is a word I do not like. Poem has yet to be, but this is the epigraph:

Doing the same thing over and over but expecting
a different result—one definition of insanity.

It describes any type of addiction.

Heroes? That word scares me. The elegant poet Richard Wilbur, artists as disparate as Andrew Wyeth and Andy Warhol? The Rockefeller family for the correct uses of wealth through philanthropy? Not many.

Books that inspire? My former roommate introduced me to “The Four Agreements.” And as a New Ager...”The Course in Miracles.” I think often of one maxim from those teachings: The universe gives us only two choices, lessons or love. This seems rational to me. The on-going cruelty of man to other species and to the environment overshadows, to me, the pieties of religion.

I had a dream about a hummingbird. I interpreted it to mean I should pull my beak (nose) out of negativity and zip on to other more extravagant flowers.