

Word Worth



On line monthly magazine of ideas and the arts

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January Issue Coming Out December 28

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by Marien Helz

Whenever I think of December, I think of darkness: short days with violet colored nights. Always there is the evergreen and the lights. The darkness and the glow bring back memories of those with whom this time was once celebrated, those for whom one's simple existence was cause for them to celebrate—



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BAH HUMBUG!
by Susan Johnson

Our family is small but through marriage has become rich in detail. Five religions, four generations, smokers and non-smokers, carnivores and vegetarians, and a couple of other opposing variations turn Christmas into a nightmare of sensitivities. Navigating this maze of sore spots when we could be having fun seems like a waste of time.

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Father Heart
by Banwell Goddard

Epilogue: ...I know that some people will find fault with how Father raised us. But I can't. Every cell in my body came from my parents. I am them. And what I became depended on them. All children are at the mercy of their parents. One can only hope that one's parents will do the best they can to protect you and bring you up so that you can navigate successfully. We, Grace and I, were rich in terms of the culture....


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Editorials

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Days of the Evergreen

by Marien Helz

Whenever I think of December, I think of darkness: short days with violet colored nights. Always there is the evergreen and the lights. The darkness and the glow bring back memories of those with whom this time was once celebrated, those for whom one's simple existence was cause for them to celebrate—mother and father, the grandparents, aunts, and uncles for whom one's birth was joy untold. From the



darkness of the green tree, from the glow of the lights, those shades emerge and the connection is recalled.

Christmas is a celebration of *The Child*, but that child becomes *Every Child*, and Christmas becomes a celebration of each one and of the promise that each represents.

Nearly every religion celebrates at this time of year, and those who don't claim a religion celebrate also, celebrate peace, celebrate promise, and celebrate the

promise of peace.

Once again in this season, we do not have peace. Over the world, people are threatened by sudden death from those who, bereft of the capacity to create, choose to destroy.

Yet it is the lights shining out of the darkness that bring back the feeling of the hope and the promise that the world we envision can be achieved. Christmas, then becomes a holiday of all religions and all people.

The house of my childhood was on a quiet street that ran up to a major road where a simple string of lights was hung each Christmas season. Beside my bed was a pathway to the closet, and on the other side of the pathway another bed with another child. One of us would say, "Let's hold hands," and we would extend our hands over the reach for the comfort of touch in the cold darkness. We wished we had a board to extend between the beds so our arms would not tire, and blankets just for the board, so that in warmth and comfort we could touch and watch the swaying lights.

The Child represents peace and the promise thereof, and represents what we all

want for *Every Child*. What I want for my children, for the children of my kin, for the children of my neighbors, for the children of my country, for the children of the world is this:

The freedom to use their talents

The freedom from those who would use corrupt views of fine religions and noble ideals to twist beliefs for the purpose of subduing and controlling others

The freedom to enhance and give back to the cosmos from the gifts with which they were endowed

In the long velvet nights of December, let us look at the lights and make the world safe for *Every Child* that *Every Child* may reach across the pathways of the world and say, "Let's hold hands."

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Columns



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BAH HUMBUG!

by Susan Johnson

A HOTBED OF TRADITION

"What fresh hell is this?" was Dorothy Parker's response whenever she heard her doorbell ring. I say the same thing whenever I hear Christmas music. What new misery will this year's hollidays bring?

Our family is small but through marriage has become rich in detail. Five religions, four generations, smokers and non-smokers, carnivores and vegetarians, and a couple of other opposing variations turn Christmas into a nightmare of sensitivities. Navigating this maze of sore spots when we could be having fun seems like a waste of time. It makes me loathe not only Christmas but also its entire gestation period beginning the day after Thanksgiving.

Of course, my friends and family think this attitude is awful. My father still believes in Santa Claus or, if not in the character himself, at least that all manner of magical things are possible at this time of the year. Cynical observations of the season and its pressures aren't part of our conversations.

Western New York, in fact, seems saturated with people for whom traditions are sacred. Our young people may be flocking to other parts of the U.S. to find jobs but they fly home for the holidays as religiously as the swallows return to Capistrano. And when they come they want it all: snow--lots of it, midnight mass--preferably by candlelight, tobogganing at Chestnut Ridge, skiing at KB, and big festive parties with their families.

Try suggesting an alternative type of celebration and you're met with puzzlement, as though you'd lost your mind. Four years ago, I'd had enough of tradition and more than enough of dreariness. I wanted sun, fresh air and exercise, and to be with my family without one single element of Christmas ruining it. No tree, no presents, no caroling, no roast beef dinner. The only trick would be to get them away from Western New York.

"Not have Christmas?!" they gasped. It took some discussion, but the family troops will try anything once, and so off we marched to Florida. (Except Daddy, who stayed here to put the cookies and milk next to the fireplace on Christmas Eve.)

Royal palm trees and white sand beaches in Naples looked radical compared with the mental postcard our family carries of how the season should look. That disparity made it as easy as key lime pie to forget about red velvet and reindeer. We had a great time, swimming, collecting shells, playing tennis, and kayaking. I loved it, but I suspect my sisters paid a pretty price in bribes to their children so that they'd humor their demented aunt and postpone their "real" celebration.

CHRISTMAS IS NOT WHAT IT SEEMS

Four years later, nothing had changed. The "jaws of Christmas" were descending on me once again, slaving like Jabba the Hut, waiting with fetid breath to force me to do their bidding.

In one last attempt to sidestep the nightmare, I started looking in earnest for kindred people who, despite their upbringing and the fact that they reside in this hotbed of tradition, celebrate in a non-traditional way. Though I didn't find many, I did find a few, and I learned that Christmas is not what it seems, and it's definitely *not* what we were taught.

"Christmas isn't as old as many other holidays," explained Mason Winfield, a well-known local author and former professor. "May Day and Halloween, for instance, are truly ancient, even pre-historic. Christianity adopted a lot of shrines and festivals from indigenous pagan religions. They just gave a new name to an old rite. Some people say that doing this made it easier to convert the heathens, but behind the scenes Christianity has always acknowledged a sense of the sacred in other traditions. Unfortunately, this isn't the first thing Christianity presents of itself publicly, and many of us within its tradition were brought up to regard it as a religion apart in every sense, sometimes to its own detriment."

Donata Ahern, a practicing Druid and Wiccan who lives in Holland, was raised in traditional circumstances but now observes the ancient rituals referred to by Mr. Winfield. "Druids mark the year with eight festivals that closely follow an agricultural cycle. The date of Christmas was intentionally chosen by the Church to be near the pagan's winter solstice celebration called Yule as a way to counter its popular appeal. Yule is the festival when pagans "await the child of promise". For us, this child is the sun returning after its absence. It's a time for hope and renewal. Our star is five-pointed, representing the five elements: earth, air, water, fire, and at the top, above all material things, the spirit."

It's easy to see why Ms. Ahern was drawn to beliefs that emphasize the spirit. Retired after twenty-two years with the Erie County Department of Social Services, Ms. Ahern has a kind look in her eyes and when I introduced myself, she took my hand in her two small soft hands in the most welcoming way. "Whatever were you expecting?" she chuckled when she noticed my surprise. Oh, I don't know, but certainly not the gentle person leading me to her back porch overlooking a forest of pine trees and within earshot of a gorgeous double waterfall.

"Our Yule log is traditionally oak," she explained. "Each of us places a candle on the log and then expresses what we wish for the year. Light is hope and promise and so we think about how we'd like light to manifest itself within our lives. Another tradition is mistletoe. For us, it's considered sacred and only gathered at the winter and summer solstices when it's used in relation to fertility. So, it makes sense that other observances include kissing beneath the mistletoe. In fact, every religion has a celebration of some sort at the winter solstice, and most of them have a story that's very similar to the Jesus mystery."

"Druids believe that there's divinity in every living thing," continued Ms. Ahern. "We're very connected to Earth and to her cycles. For us, life is circular not linear. We believe in reincarnation and that you are born, you die, and then you are reborn. In other words, you get another chance to work on yourself. We also believe that there is one Unknowable Higher Being from which both a Goddess and a God

emanate. There's a problem when a religion recognizes only a male deity. It denies equality and forces men to suppress their feminine side. In addition, it denies women a devine image of their own."

Franklin La Voie, an artist in many genres whose precise rendering of the surreal has been exhibited at the Calumet Arts Cafe, Hallwalls, and the Elmwood Art Festival, was raised traditionally but he also finds inspiration in celebrating the winter solstice. "For several years, I was part of a sound circle that met in Colden to celebrate the return of the light. We prayed and sang and danced. Our celebrations recognized that when light returns to the earth, consciousness goes into the soul. It's a time to give thanks and to acknowledge the spiritual dimension of our lives."

An astronomer and visionary as well as an artist, Mr. La Voie finds great significance in the year 2000. "The cosmic rays and radiation of the 1987 Super Nova are expected to reach the earth this year. I believe that this offers evidence that we're living in an intelligent cosmos. It's a sign of a great awakening, a fingerprint of proof that the year 2000 is a new age."

FOILED AGAIN

Though he hopes to join what his brother refers to as the "granola tribe" in Colden for the solstice, Mr. La Voie also plans to be with his family. "My sister has an extraordinary gift for decorating with Victorian themes. For almost 15 years our family has gotten together at her house to sing Christmas songs. It's our way of being close. When we first started we sounded like a pack of animals, but we're improving."

Ms. Ahern plans to have a dual celebration as well. "I'll have a mainstream get-together with my family and then celebrate with other Wiccans. It's the time of year when we want to connect with everyone."

Just when the ancient rituals were looking like a major improvement, it became clear that they'd be *in addition* to the other details. Once free of the bland characters in "Twas the night before Christmas", who'd have guessed that you'd ever have to go back to them, or that even a Druid has to compromise to be with their family?

"Rituals," said Mr. Winfield, "are very comforting. Everyone should be able to express their feelings for the holidays in whatever way that they want. I try to use Christmas for its inspirational effects, making sure that there's time for meditation and for writing. There are many different layers of meaning to the season. You have to listen carefully to hear its message. Getting into ideal private circumstances, at home by the fire is part of my tradition. It's important to participate in life but it's also important to know your own life as it goes by. A yearly apex like the Christmas season seems an ideal occasion for some of that reflective down time that makes it all come together."

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The word "Arts" is written in a stylized, green, serif font. It is centered within a horizontal rectangular banner that has a textured, slightly mottled background. To the right of the word "Arts" is a small, square, framed icon containing a stylized signature or initials.

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The earlier chapters of *Father Heart* are available in the April, May, June, July, August, September, October, and November, 2001, issues in the Archives page.

FATHER HEART

by *Banwell Goddard*

Epilogue

Emma.....

Philip hates me, of course, for keeping the children. He hated me anyway so it doesn't matter. For some reason, he thought I should've moved to Kansas to take care of the children when Annie died. I was right in the middle of nursing school and even if I hadn't been, I wasn't likely to move to that godforsaken farm in the middle of nowhere. I can't imagine how Annie stood it. I guess it was love that kept her there. She fell in love with him at first sight when she was ten years old and couldn't forget him. The whole time she was growing up, she compared the boys she met to Philip and somehow, they didn't measure up to this image she had of him.

He was good looking enough and well-spoken but you've never met a man who was as chary of money as was Philip. Annie said it was a habit left over from when he was a child and had no money whatsoever. He didn't even have a pair of shoes for the winter, went around in socks. His mother was in prison for murder and his father was off somewhere in a snit, so the child was on his own from the age of ten. I completely sympathize with his situation but for heaven's sake, you can carry frugality too long and too far.

In some cultures, it's common for a surviving sister to marry the widower. Luckily, the women in Boston have evolved beyond that. Can you imagine me married to him? We'd have come to blows in less than a day. When Annie wrote to me suggesting this, she was delirious. I could tell from her handwriting that she was out of her mind with fever.

After Annie died, I did feel rather guilty about the children—not having a mother and having to live on that farm—away from any kind of civilization. I know that Philip tried to educate them himself, but I don't know why he didn't just take them back to Boston. It seemed as if he got stuck out there in Kansas. If he'd gone to Boston, my family would have helped and he has relatives near there as well. I'm sure they would have pitched in.

He said he wouldn't move back because he had some ridiculous horror of illness, and that changing the children's diet would weaken them. He and Annie lost their first child and though they rarely spoke of her, I think perhaps her death terrified them.

Anyway, his worry was all in vain since the children both had his constitution; nothing could kill them. Healthy as horses, they were. They ate their way across Europe with not one stomach upset which is more than I can say for myself.

After William died and I realized the shocking amount of money he'd left me, it seemed the right thing to do—to make up for when I couldn't help. It was quite a gamble on my part. The children could have been beasts. I really had no way of knowing before I went to get them in St. Louis whether or not we'd all get along. Of course, Philip and I wrote back and forth for months before he agreed and by the time we did meet, I had a fair inkling of what they were like—but you don't really know.

It took a few months for the children to get to know me but from then on, it was clear sailing. I couldn't be a mother to them—it's not in me—I didn't want children of my own. I was more of a good-natured big sister to them.

We went everywhere; Switzerland, France, England, Spain, the Netherlands. I can't think of a place we missed. It was amusing for me to see the sights myself and then it was equally interesting to hear their impressions. I probably wouldn't have stayed so long if it weren't for their company. We made friends in the cities. Grace, especially, is so outgoing that people couldn't resist her even though she's rather a heartless devil—she couldn't care less if someone likes her or not.

Roy was the man of our little family group. He had beautiful manners, I'll grant Philip the credit for that. Of course, he had to look after Grace when Philip was working so I suppose that's how he came to be so responsible at such a young age.

They both took to Europe as if they'd been born there.

I still correspond with Roy at Christmas and birthdays, and I wish he'd bring his second son over here to Zurich. The oldest boy, who's nearly thirty now, works for the government and visits whenever he's overseas. But the younger boy hasn't come here. I'd love to see him in person. Grace and her three children come here for holidays and we have a grand time. Roy refuses to even respond to my suggestions that he come for a visit.

Roy's wife sent me a strange letter one time, I'd almost forgotten about it. She practically accused me of kidnapping Roy and Grace. Absolute rubbish of course. I didn't intend for them to stay in Europe more than a year or two, but once we got here, it seemed a shame to send them back to that dreary existence. There was so much more to see and the children were quite content to stay. Their father moved to Boston about a year after the children left Kansas but even Boston can't compare to Paris and London or any of the other fine cities over here. There isn't the art or music or the delineation of culture. They had a much nicer life here with me.

Grace.....

Ah, moi enfance. Il est depuis longtemps... Oui, a long time since then. All the years in France have overwritten the years of my childhood. Plus, it was not such a happy time for me. To think of it brings me some sadness that I did not have a mother and that our lives were rather hard.

Roy remembers it differently—he worshipped Father when we were young and I think he still does. He was Father's favorite. Even though Roy got into nearly as much trouble as I did, he doesn't seem to harbor the resentment I feel for what were too many rules, too much studying.

Mais, j'y réfléchirai. Perhaps I can recall a few things.

I don't recall seeing Mother—she died shortly after my first birthday—though I have an idea in my mind of how she looked because Father spoke about her often. She came up to his shoulder, so about 5'3", brown eyes and thick chestnut hair that Father braided for her in the morning. I wish I had a photograph of her because I would like to know what she looked like and if my children resemble her.

All of the time, Father spoke to us about her character. He said she had integrity. That she was true to her principles. Generally, Father didn't consider it necessary to justify the way he did things but sometimes he attributed a tradition to Mother whom he said used to do something one way or another. For one thing, we slept with the windows open because, he said, Mother wanted to wake up to the scent of flowers and fresh air and the sounds of birdsong.

She was a lover of nature. I have two old books, inscribed to her by Father, that he used to read to us so we could learn the Latin names of flowers and birds. Father sent the books to me when our second child was born so that we could use them to teach Philipe and Marie. The books have color plates of watercolor paintings that are quite charming but far too fragile for the children to touch.

I spent a great deal of my childhood in trouble. Father was quite strict with us—much stricter than I am with my own children—though God knows—they are such little devils. Too bad he isn't here with his strap. He would straighten them out for sure.

I was always being punished for one thing or the other. We had so many rules, it was impossible to remember them all. Don't touch this, put out the fire with water, feed the ponies at the same time each day, check their hooves, practice your verbs, don't go out riding alone ...*et ainsi de suite*. On and on.

We got away with nothing it seemed. Not like some of our friends who did far worse things and never got caught. One time, I did get away with a small thing. *Un petite* revenge. We had, the three of us, ridden to the Townsends' which was south of us near the river. Father was to buy some spring lambs and so Roy and I went to help herd them home. When we got there, he talked to Mr. Townsend for a long time. We became quite bored since they had no children to play with.

I noticed a wire strung from the house to a large tree in the yard. Probably a clothesline though there was nothing hanging on it. I rode Pierre a ways toward the river, and Father called me back as I knew he would do. When I turned around, I gave Pierre a little kick so he would go into a gallop. We headed straight at the wire and when Father saw what was happening, he yelled, "Turn away Grace, turn away!" But I acted as if Pierre had a mind of his own, and we kept going as fast as we could. At the last second, I tucked my head down next to Pierre's neck. It was thrilling to make Father think that I was going to be beheaded. He had such a horror of something happening to us.

It was not long after that that we went away with Aunt Emma. We didn't want to go at first because we didn't know what she was like. We were afraid the trip would be awful in some unknown way. It's strange how a person's life can change for the better but that person continues to miss the old life simply for its comfortable familiarity. For more than a year, I could close my eyes and see Father and the ponies and the farm perfectly. It felt good to do that. But then the pictures in my mind began to blur. After a couple of years, I couldn't see any of it with clarity.

As it turned out, moving to Europe was great. We didn't actually fit in Kansas anyway. Nobody else had to study the way we did: languages, calculus, physics. In the end, I guess it was lucky we learned French, German, Spanish and a little Italian since we had an easy time of it once we got there. It felt more like a continuation of our lives rather than living in foreign countries.

We went to England first and then to France. Tante Emma and Bridget, our maid, didn't know any French. Roy and I had to translate for them—especially menus because we ate so often in restaurants. Sometimes when I was mad at Emma for one thing or the other, I would tell her that something on the menu was chicken or beef when it was really goat brains or something equally vile. Plus, if I were really angry, I would speak to Roy in French, calling Emma the bad words I knew with a perfectly straight face. Roy didn't tattle on me but the waiters seemed amazed.

We found a semi-permanent base in Zurich where we went to school during the year. Summers were spent in different countries. St. Tropez, the fjords, Scotland, wherever Emma had a friend or acquaintance to visit. At first, I sometimes wondered that she didn't want to return to her own family. As I came to understand her better, I began to believe that her newfound wealth made it awkward for her to live among her old friends and family. She had quickly become fond of her moneyed status and I believe that Roy and I endowed her with a sort of respectability that she wouldn't have otherwise enjoyed.

Living with Emma was relatively painless. She didn't yell at us often, and it was nice too because we didn't have to do any more chores. I can't imagine going back to living on a working farm. Father moved to Boston about a year after we went away. I haven't been there but I've read a lot about it and Emma says it's a nice city—much more civilized than Kansas. Even so, I doubt I will ever go back to the U.S.

Father could come here to visit, I really don't see why he doesn't. Too stubborn I guess. There's tension between him and Emma—something about Mother's death—but I don't know what.

It's been hard growing up without a mother. There are times even now when I, if I think about it enough, can lose myself slogging through a swamp of self-pity. But, *c'est la vie*, you can't go back and change history.

I resented the fact that I didn't have a mother. Emma was kind to us—but she said she had no maternal instinct and I think she's right. The things that she did for us, the things that she gave us, were easy for her. All of the traveling, all of the clothes and schooling merely required money. It was easy for her to be good to us, requiring no sincere effort or heartfelt love.

The biggest difference is that if you had a mother to teach you things, about how the world really works, you wouldn't have to learn so much by watching other people and figuring it out for yourself. You wouldn't be committing so many first-time faux pas—learning the hard way. I like, as much as anyone does, to be original and to not behave like just another sheep in the flock but there are other times when being one of the sheep makes it easier to get along in the world.

Aunt Emma and I never had a heart-to-heart chat or anything you'd expect to do. In fact, Bridget taught me more about life than Emma did—more about girl things and about boys. Bridget was young—just a little older than I was—and she talked to me all the time. I think she was lonely for her own family—there were twelve

children altogether—hard for me to imagine with our tiny tribe.

It wasn't entirely bad—growing up with people who aren't your real family. People you don't really love—because you feel that if they do things that you don't like or that hurt you—that you can leave—pack up your wounded heart and go elsewhere. You feel you're not responsible for their acceptance of you—that if they don't like some things that you do or the way that you are—that the problem resides with them. It's much easier to absent yourself from their feelings. You feel freer than if you loved them with all your heart.

My life now is happy. I have three children, two boys and one girl. All of them are mischievous but basically good. They are being brought up as French but they speak and write in English as well. It's customary for the children here to learn several languages.

There's nothing that I miss about the U.S. I am accepted here and feel that France has what I need or want—including that great basin of water that separates what we were from what we became.

Roy.....

Of course, it's difficult to remember much of one's childhood, isn't it? General recollections come easily but my specific memories have been blurred.

Parts of our lives were much like the lives of children at nearby farms. We had ponies to ride and calves and lambs to raise for food. We all went to the same school although I have a notion that it wasn't the same experience for us that it was for the other children.

There was no one else at our school whose mother had died—and the fathers were not like ours at all. The other fathers seemed more taciturn. They didn't talk to their children nearly as much as Father spoke to us—we were the only people he had to talk to. We couldn't spend even one day without learning something or having him explain how something worked. Grace and I learned how to do practically everything it seemed. Cooking, sewing, building things, biology, languages, shooting, astronomy.

When he wasn't busy teaching us something, Father's next favorite activity was thinking up labor-saving devices. He was never happier than when he could think up a way to make a chore easier or shorter. We had a horse-powered washing machine that he invented when we were babies so that he didn't have to wash anything by hand. Then he invented a special hay-baler that prevented spoilage and made baling so simple that even when I was quite small, I could help with the haying.

We knew when Father was on the trail of an invention because he had a special box of drawing tools. Whenever he fished that box out of his desk, we knew we were going to have a lesson in engineering. There were different sorts of pencils, compasses, rulers and other measuring devices in the box. He prefaced one of these sessions with "Now then, it should be quite easy for the three of us to think of a way to make this job a little easier."

Our life with Father was interesting but at times he was awfully strict with us—and Grace got the worst of it. She just wouldn't behave. Father had a set of rules we were obliged to follow but she'd do what she shouldn't anyway and then he'd strap her. It wasn't that I was that well-behaved or docile, I just didn't like what happened when

I got caught. And believe me, we always got caught. Father was a good athlete—he did everything well—he could run so fast and he was so good at figuring out what we were up to that there was simply no opportunity to get away with anything.

I think most of it was because we didn't have a mother and he had to take care of us alone that he worried so much that something would happen to us. He worried about everything. Storms, disease—he was terrified we'd die of disease—in spite of the fact that his own parents lived to be well over eighty and never once sick. He worried that we would die in a fire, or drown, or that Indians would take us.

He even worried about malevolent baby-sitters. One time, he hired a woman from the city to come and care for us. "The Treasure" he called her afterwards. She lasted less than one day. Grace hated her and when she tried to drag Grace into the house for some purpose I've forgotten, Grace screamed and started kicking her in the shins. I joined in and started pulling Grace away from the woman just in time for Father to arrive on the scene. He fired the "Treasure" immediately and drove her to the train station where she had to wait until the next day to go back to Kansas City.

Father's only defense against these imagined evils seemed to be education. He thought that if he taught us enough that we could surmount anything. For instance, he taught us to swim when we were babies. Five strokes we had to learn, the front and back crawl, the breast stroke, sidestroke and butterfly. Plus diving—the jackknife and the cannonball.

Actually, it was a lot of fun when we did go swimming because Father seemed to relax in the water and he could stay under for a long time. You didn't know where he was until he'd grab you by the ankle and pull you under. Then he'd disappear for what seemed like forever and you'd think he'd drowned but then you'd see just the top of his head slowly coming out of the water—way down at the end of the lake—looking like a sea monster surfacing.

We were not allowed to swim when he wasn't at home—even though we swam like fish.

Here's a funny story about Father—to this day I don't know how he did it. It was the last week of the summer before school started and it was miserably hot. Grace and I were doing our chores, we were about eight and nine years old, mucking out stalls, feeding the animals and so forth and Grace said, "It's too hot to be doing this kind of work," throwing down her little sawed-off pitchfork. "Let's go swimming."

I said, "We're not allowed to go alone. Father will kill us."

"Roy, just one swim out to the raft and back. There's no way he could catch us," she said. "If you won't go, I'm going alone."

It was probably three o'clock and so we had two or three hours before Father came home for dinner. Grace was always putting me in this kind of a predicament. I knew we weren't supposed to break the rules but I also knew it was my job to look after Grace when Father wasn't around. So, we went. We didn't bother to change our clothes, just ran down to the lake, jumped in, swam out to the raft and heaved ourselves up out of the water, flopping onto the raft like a pair of seals.

"We're going to have to work twice as hard to get all our chores done before Father gets back," I warned.

"We'll make some excuse—like one of the ponies got out and we had to chase it all the way to Taylor's or something," she replied.

"You'll have to think of something more plausible," I said. "Our ponies aren't in the habit of running off."

"You sound exactly like Father," she said sleepily in the hot sun.

"Grace, we better get back," I said, starting to worry about what would happen if Father came home early.

"You go back if you want, I'm stayingRoy, Roy!!" she shrieked. "Something's got my leg! Roy!"

The raft was tilting towards the water. A large hand had wrapped itself around Grace's ankle and was pulling her over the edge of the raft. Just before Grace would have been pulled off the boards, the hand released her. The raft rocked again and Father popped out of the water, landing right beside us.

Grace gasped and dove into the water, swimming faster than I'd ever seen her swim towards the shore. I did the same. It was the only time I remember going unpunished. I think Father found our fright and utter astonishment so amusing that he couldn't stop laughing long enough to strap us.

I know that some people will find fault with how Father raised us. But I can't. Every cell in my body came from my parents. I am them. And what I became depended on them. All children are at the mercy of their parents. One can only hope that one's parents will do the best they can to protect you and bring you up so that you can navigate successfully. We, Grace and I, were rich in terms of the culture Father created for us and in terms of the opportunity we had to travel. I guess we were paupers in terms of material things and later in terms of emotional closeness.

Father rarely told us how he felt about things, and he did not ask us how we felt. He taught us principles of right and wrong, and this was supposed to take us where we needed to go. In retrospect, I wish Father had taught us a little less about languages and principles and more about how life really works. Idealism will only take you so far unless you're a minister. A little cynicism can be quite protective—can save one from exposing one's feelings to a person who has no regard for you whatsoever.

With my own sons, I am trying, as my father did with me, to teach them to do things well. There is no reason to do anything unless you try to do it to the best of your own ability.

In each of them I see a refinement of their grandfather. My first boy, Philip II, inherited Father's love for languages. He speaks six of them and is a translator for the US government. He's lived all over the world, though primarily in Europe. Keith, my second son, sprang straight from the womb as an engineer. From the first, he had to know how things worked. He has an insatiable curiosity coupled with relentless principles. Too many principles perhaps. They tend to get in the way of his relationships with others. These traits are accompanied by an uncanny photographic memory. I'm not sure where that came from—not me at any rate.

So, you see, our family lives on. My chance at life came from Father. I cannot help loving him as I love my life. Some of the roads we've had to walk down have been difficult, some filled with sadness, but the only reason we've had any road at all is because he gave us life. All he wanted in the world was to have a family. Yet, when he finally accomplished that—he loved us so much he gave us up so that we could have a better life. How can I find fault with that?

Joy.....

For quite some time after Philip's birth, I blamed myself for Adeline and Seth's separation. I told myself that I should not have helped her conceive the child. She didn't speak of it to me, and I didn't bring it up but it was there, between us. Lately, though, I've come to the conclusion that the damage was already done. Seth defined himself by his physical strength. Without it, his sense of worth was defeated and there was no hope of their marriage surviving his injury.

It was Philip himself who convinced me I had done no wrong. He intrigued me—even as a young child. I watched him from a distance—curious to see if he was different in any way. I felt as if I was responsible, as if we were connected by a spiritual bond.

When I watched him struggle with Adeline's imprisonment, and then with poverty, my heart ached for him. I felt I could do nothing directly to help him but my dearest friend, Hattie Briggs, came to see me one day, and it was then that I saw my chance. Hattie wanted children. Unfortunately, she was born to be infertile. I mentioned to her that she had a special student whose situation was such that he was, for all purposes, without parents. I asked her if she could find it in her heart to take a special interest in him, in spite of his crude behavior.

It was nothing short of miraculous, the change she produced in him and in herself as well. She had been a rather meek person but overnight, she became like a lioness, protecting her young one from angry villagers. She found a spark within him that ignited his intellect and extinguished his anger. He became a model student and she, his proud advocate. With her help, he rose above his circumstances.

For a time, I lost track of him when he moved to Kansas. Now, near the end of my life, I've learned the rest of his life's story and I've come to believe that he was meant to be born.

If I hadn't responded to Adeline, someone else would have. How else is there to account for Philip's life? So much of destiny depended on him. It was Annie's destiny to meet him, a man who would raise her children without her. It was Roy and Grace's destiny to be born to him, a man who would educate them and then, a man who would sacrifice his own happiness so that his children might have a life filled with adventure. That they have themselves had children proves the rightness of his existence.

It's true that Philip had a lonesome life. But who among us hasn't? Our souls travel through this earthbound life alone on our trip from womb to grave. It's only in heaven that we're promised an eternal marriage to God.

Philip's life, in a way, was a triumph. A tribute to the depth of a man's love for his children.

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