

## *The Write Place At the Write Time*

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### "Our Stories"

We have decided to devote a portion of our magazine to non-fiction. These are stories of things that have happened serendipitously being in the right place at the right time or just heartfelt musings, thoughts, and feelings on life. Join us in our non-fiction section. These stories speak to anyone and everyone and are told by anyone and everyone who has a story to tell.





"Still Life Memory" Linda Woods; [www.moonbirdhillarts.etsy.com](http://www.moonbirdhillarts.etsy.com)

## The Sounds of Childhood

By Adina Siperman

No one knew what to expect from Saturday mornings. I would open my ears before I opened my eyes. The best was the scratchy, smoky voice of Bob Dylan. To wake up and be asked, "How many roads must a man walk down?" was to have found my own private Eden. I would ignore my plaqued teeth, my tousled hair and my wrinkled pajamas, and I would pitter-patter down the stairs of my childhood home. The best was when my sister was still sleeping and my mom was frying eggs in the kitchen. My dad would be sitting on the far left of our checkered sofa, tapping his foot to the wane of the harmonica and sipping black coffee from an etched glass mug. My heart soared as I knew the attention about to be lavished upon me. I would climb onto his majestic knee and bounce to the

music or twirl my finger in the tapestry of his beard. Sometimes he began with stories of Odysseus and the Cyclops or Jacob and the Angel. Sometimes with stories of his childhood memories of paper airplanes and boy scout adventures. But the best – the best, the best, the best- were the stories about me. He would remind me about how he had favorite green marbles, but he had donated them to the "Adina Green-Eye Foundation." And he would warn me not to go outside. Curators at the Louvre had been given word of my existence, and they were planning on putting me in their permanent collection. He didn't want to have to buy a plane ticket and wait in a long line and deal with the French just to see his own creation. Sitting there, I would hear Dylan sing, "I'm ready to go anywhere; I'm ready for to fade," and I had no idea what he meant.

But then there was another type of Saturday morning. The rumbling would start from the basement with the sounds of coins falling. Quarters, pennies, nickels would infiltrate my dreams until I could no longer pretend to sleep. And though there were two floors separating me and the record player, it felt like Roger Waters was in bed next to me, thrashing under the covers and moaning, "Money." I would prepare myself by pretending to dress in armor. It covered every bare inch of skin, with double layers around my heart. Achilles would have been jealous and in awe of the craftsmanship.

Slowly, hesitantly and unable to avoid the inevitable, I would clang down the carpeted steps to the first floor and then down the rickety, wooden steps to the basement. In the dim light with the faint odor of books, there he would be in the small bathroom in front of the mirror playing air guitar to Pink Floyd, or if it was really a bad time, Jimi Hendrix. I would stand in the shadows for twenty, thirty, forty minutes and though my armor clanked and I made noises to indicate the arrival of his most grand masterpiece, he never heard me. He would play the same songs over and over and then sprint past me to paint in red and orange and yellow. And then race upstairs and yell and slam doors and leave. I would still be there in the shadows of the basement. And even though I donned impenetrable armor, it still hurt.

But those weren't even the worst kinds of Saturday mornings. There were many, many mornings when I would wake up to the sound of birds chirping and children playing outside. My heart would sink. I knew that once I opened my bedroom door, I was walking out into air as thick and swampy as the Amazon. The silence would be deafening and unbearable. I would prepare myself by

The silence would be deafening and unbearable. I would prepare myself by pretending to put on sunglasses that obliterated my peripheral vision.

Quickly, voraciously and in an effort to make as much noise as possible, I would dart from my room, straight to my sister's, pull her by the wrist, wrestle her down the stairs and set us in front of a TV blaring Shira Princess of Power. I never looked into the room next to mine, because I know what I would see. The blinds would be drawn, the lights would be off, the speakers would be silent. He would be slung over the bed with his eyes staring straight up at the ceiling. Nothing could rouse him for days, weeks and sometimes, months. And though I hated Jimi Hendrix, I would pray for the Saturday mornings when his guitar would shriek from the speakers. Noise, any noise, was better than the sound of silence.

### Take it With you When you Leave

By Nicole M. Bouchard

I've been frequenting sterilized halls with heads bowed low to the chest, music belonging to two generations previous and filtered sunshine hitting upon aged faces that can often only look outside, never to be part of it all again. When a relative of mine needed more medical care than anyone in the family could provide, they were placed in a fine rehabilitation/nursing home for the elderly. While my relative has constant warm visitors, is given little luxuries, outings, and maintains her bright demeanor, others are less fortunate.

A woman with red around her eyes seems wary of unfamiliar faces and she sometimes antagonizes her fellow patients with her apathy. She'd been watching me for weeks. I was walking in one evening and to my surprise, she reached out her arms to me. Knowing she needed, wanted to be held, I bent low over her wheelchair and embraced her. As I was walking out and passed by her a second time, there was a fuss behind her. She had caused a bottle neck of wheelchair traffic in the hall and adamantly refused to move. Another irate resident demanded that I deal with the situation. Softly, a light hand on her shoulder, I asked the woman if I could move her. She searched my eyes and finally whispered, "Alright." Traffic began flowing again and the irate resident gave a curt nod and a salute as she sailed by at a fast clip.

There's the woman who edges near us when we sit in the lobby. Attracted to the magnetic presence of my relative, she wheeled forward once to put my relative's sweater on her in case she was cold. She doesn't really speak English, so I tried a bit of French. Though she understood me, she didn't speak French, she spoke Portuguese. She has a beautifully sweet spirit and as the male friend I was with spoke kindly, sported a light beard and wore sandals, she calls him 'Jesus' in Portuguese whenever she sees him.

These are a few of the familiar faces we greet, some of the hands we squeeze as we traverse the halls. We don't need to know each other's names. Our eyes know one another.

There is another woman, very serious in stature, yet never without her brightly colored Mardi Gras beads. We quietly say hello to one another. Once, she shocked me by asking for a hug and a kiss like the one I gave my relative in greeting. "Where's mine?!" she asked. I happily obliged with a hug around her shoulders and a light kiss on the cheek- I was family-on-loan and I didn't mind. Another time she was quite upset about dropping fruit onto the floor. As I passed by, she asked if I could pick it up and toss it into the nearby Christmas display. With soggy fruit in my palm, I hesitated, thinking that old pineapple in the holiday display would be somehow wrong. I asked a nurse where I could get a napkin and then find a pail to throw it in.

Yet most recently, she stopped me to ask about the weather. "Is it warm out yet or cold?" I know that I've never seen her outside, feeling not one of the seasons. With the feeling of winter's chill spread over my cheeks, I responded that it was still cold. "Well... if it's cold, then take it with you when you leave." This wasn't a request to toss pineapple slices. It had a distinct seriousness to it. Would that I could take the cold away and immerse you in spring eternal. But I don't have the power to. I can't chase away the snow and ice that falls on the grounds. I can't even chase away the snow and ice that still plague a piece of my heart. An assistant nurse in passing laughed when she heard the request, but my friend looked serious as ever and I couldn't take it lightly.

I tapped my pocket as though there was some mystical power to it, smiled and said, "Alright." She nodded solemnly, appeased. I thought about it all the way home. It wasn't so unrealistic in a sense. Don't we all want someone to take the

home. It wasn't so unrealistic in a sense. Don't we all want someone to take the cold with them when they leave? Someone to care enough to remove our discomfort, our pain? And don't we all want to leave the world a better place than we found it? Take it with you when you leave. I'll take your words in my pocket and think upon banishing the dark winter with the humble candlelight I have to offer as an individual to those that I meet.

## Game

By Mark Barkawitz

It's late Sunday afternoon. My teenage son and his friend aren't yet back from shooting hoops at the park. My son plays on the freshman basketball team at his high school. He plays pick-up games at the park to work on his game, experiment with new moves his coach would glower at in league play. So my wife, who doesn't like them to hang-out alone for too long down there, prods me off the couch to bring them home. I put on my old sneaks (just in case my ball-handling skills are needed) and jog the few blocks to the park.

The wide-open, grass-covered square block is filled with families and teams of amateur athletes, playing softball on the diamond, soccer on the grass, and basketball on the courts. Frisbees fly on air smoky and sweetened by barbecues. Friends eat in groups at tables and on benches. Kids swing on playground swings, ride razor scooters on walkways, and run zig-zag everywhere. But as I near the b-ball courts, another sweet, familiar fragrance wafts past me. Three young guys—late teens or early twenties—share a burning roach on the sidelines of the court under a sign which reads: "DRUG FREE ZONE—Increased Penalties for Drug Use or Possession." One guy—with tats and scars—looks like a gang-banger maybe; the other two are just a couple of tight-eyed knuckleheads. No one says anything to them, even though we all know it's not cool to smoke around kids. But why start trouble? Or risk acting un-cool.

Everyone plays basketball nowadays: blacks, whites, Asians, Armenians, Latinos. Even girls. It isn't about color or sex. It's about game. And whether or not you have it—the ability to impose your will upon others. I recognize some of the guys hangin' on the sidelines from past games. I nod. They nod

back. Everyone's cool.

On the court, my son— fourteen and already taller than I— pushes the ball on a fast break, then passes off to his buddy in the corner, who jacks up a three-pointer that clangs off the rim. But their center—tall, broad-shouldered, a little older than the others and obviously the most imposing presence on the painted asphalt—trails the fast break, muscles the rebound away from the opposition, and slams home what is apparently the game-winning basket. The losers swear, hang their heads as they relinquish the court. Another make-shift team runs out to challenge the winners, who slap palms and knock fists in victory. My son spots me on the sidelines and gestures if I want in their game. I shake my head and indicate that it's time to go. Reluctantly, he tells his buddy. They bid goodbye to their center, who offers his fist. Eager to be comrades with the big man in the middle, each boy coolly bumps knuckles with their center before walking off the court.

My son grabs his basketball from the bench. His bud grabs a backpack, from which he produces an iPod; he places the ear-buds in his ears. As they relate the day's exploits, they smell of sweat, not weed. I'm relieved. Not that I have any reason to be suspicious. It's just the situation. And they are teenagers. So I'm still anxious as we leave the park.

I hate sounding like a parent, but it's my job, so as we walk home, I give them the low-down: "Just so you know, this is what's going to happen down there. Someone's going to complain. Cop cars are going to pull up on both sides of the court. Three, maybe four cops will approach. One of the guys in the game—an undercover cop—will point. Him, him, him. Cops are going to bust anyone who's been smoking weed in a public park. Cuff 'em and throw 'em in jail. Just so you know."

My son dribbles the ball between his legs and replies: "We weren't smoking, Dad."

"I know. I'm just letting you know."

"Dude, Big Man already told us," his buddy adds, although I'm not sure how he can hear me with music blaring in his ears.

“Big Man?”

“Our center,” my son explains.

His buddy continues: “Dude, Big Man said you got to prioritize. Get your education, your wife, your house, your fence, and your dog first. Then smoke if you wanna smoke, Dude.”

It isn’t the worst advice I’ve ever heard. They’re a long way from the “then” part. But as I said, it’s my job, so I’m compelled to add to Big Man’s game plan: “Just don’t do it. Okay?” All of a sudden, I’m Nancy Reagan in baggy shorts and high-tops.

Still dribbling, my son advises: “Don’t worry, Dad.”

“Right.”

His friend adds: “Dude, we’re cool.”

Yeah, everyone’s cool. “Let’s not mention this to your mother.”

My son picks up his dribble, “Dad, I’m not crazy,” and looks at me as if I’m crazy.

“Dude,” his bud agrees.

I nod. Right. But when we cross the street together—it’s about game, boys—I reach in, poke the ball away, and push it out front like a point guard on a break-away. Laughing and cussing behind, the boys chase me up the block and follow me home.

Three weeks later, the cops make their bust at the park. Game.

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