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Come in...and be captivated...

"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.



"Proud Bird Contemplates His Next Flight" by C. Michelle Olson; <http://www.cmichelleolson.com/>

The Money Tree

by George M. Flynn

Children are a poor man's riches—English proverb.

Kids love birthdays. Our daughter, Katie, is no exception. Katie is our middle child—bossed by her older sister, Jennie, and adored by her younger brother, Jimmy. Katie's kindergarten teacher comments that Katie is a fast learner and a free spirit.

“What do you want for your birthday this year, Katie?” I asked.

“A money tree,” she replied.

“Katie, money doesn’t grow on trees,” I tried to enlighten her. “There’s no such thing.”

“Oh yes there is,” she argued. “My friend, Savannah, has one.”

“If we can’t get you a money tree, what would your second choice be?” I asked.

“A goose that lays golden eggs,” she bubbled.

“Sweetheart, the money tree and the goose that lays golden eggs are fairy tales—not real. Now that you understand, what would you really want for your birthday?”

“I really want a money tree,” she whimpered.

Carole and I always try to give the kids what they want for their birthdays—within reason. Katie’s birthday always poses a problem.

Last year, Katie wanted dolls that performed bodily functions—Betsy Wetsy and Patty Poop. We found the former easily but couldn’t locate the latter anywhere.

Skeptical, I asked Katie, “Are you sure there really is a Patty Poop doll?”

“Oh yes,” she insisted, eyes wide open. “My friend, Savannah, has one. Poops after she eats.”

At the toy store, I asked the clerk if she sold Patty Poop dolls. “Patty Poop dolls! I don’t think Mattel makes them, but I’m sure it’d be a best seller if

they did,” she predicted.

We bought a Betsy Wetsy doll and told Katie the store didn’t stock Patty Poop dolls. As a substitute, we bought her a Cabbage Patch doll.

“Carole, Katie has her heart set on a money tree. I don’t want to disappoint her.”

That afternoon, Katie asked her mother, “What is Daddy doing with the shovel and rake?”

“He’s digging a hole to plant the money tree,” she explained.

“Hooray,” Katie squealed.

While Carole drove Katie to the mall to purchase new clothes, I dug up a four foot hemlock from the woods and planted it in the hole. I watered the tree well and tamped the soil firmly.

When Katie arrived home, she admired the evergreen. “When does the tree grow money?” she asked.

“On your birthday,” I explained.

The night before Katie’s birthday, I counted thirty single dollar bills and clipped them all over the hemlock.

The next morning, Katie raced to her window. “Look!” she screamed, waking everyone. “The money tree grew money!”

Jennie and Jimmy helped Katie pick the bills until the tree was bare.

“Happy Birthday, Katie,” we all chorused as Katie busily counted the money.

Suddenly, Katie frowned.

“What’s wrong, sweetheart? Why so glum?” I asked.

“I had hoped my money tree would have sprouted twenties, not ones!”

Did I mention that Katie is a fast learner?

Big Mac's Morn in Spring

by George M. Flynn

Irene McNamara was a large, heavysset woman with kind blue eyes and a warm smile. She taught eighth-grade English at the New Jersey public school where I also taught.

When Irene was hired, she had already taught many years at a parochial school. A former nun, Irene left the convent “to do her own thing.”

Judging from her girth, Irene was no stranger to McDonald’s. Her students often spotted her there and affectionately nicknamed her Big Mac.

Irene was a crackerjack teacher who stressed grammar skills. I can still hear her drilling the rules governing pronoun usage. “The nominative case is used for subjects and the objective for objects.”

Irene called on Spencer, a likable student who was grammar-challenged, to solve a problem.

“What’s wrong with the pronoun in the following sentence? ‘Matt and me ate lunch at McDonald’s.’”

“Who’s Matt?” Spencer asked.

“He’s the person who ate lunch with me at McDonald’s.”

“Is he young or old?”

“Young.”

“Was he celebrating his birthday?”

“I don’t think so.”

“I had my tenth birthday party at McDonald’s, and they gave me free French fries.”

“Spencer, the pronoun, what’s wrong with the pronoun?”

“What’s wrong with the pronoun?” he echoed.

“Could you repeat the sentence again?” he asked.

“Matt and me ate lunch at McDonald’s.”

“The pronoun should be, um, you!” he said triumphantly.

“But there is no you in the sentence,” Irene pointed out.

“But didn’t Matt and you eat lunch at McDonald’s?”...

Looking in the mirror that night, Irene noticed a few more gray hairs.

Irene, who suffered from asthma, loved playing cards and regularly invited her priest friends over for “poker nights.” She possessed many caring friends, both lay and religious, who looked out for her. Frequently humming an Irish tune, Irene saw the good in people, even when it was hard to find.

“When I was a teenager,” Irene recalled, “...my father always insisted I set an extra dinner plate. He said you never know who’s going to drop in—probably some poor soul who hasn’t eaten in days. I thought he was crazy at the time, but now I find myself still doing the same thing.”

Irene talked about her family fondly, revealing that her father, as well as her brothers and sisters, died young. Irene, the exception, was blessed with longevity.

Besides frequenting McDonald’s and her favorite Chinese restaurant, Irene routinely visited Atlantic City casinos, which offered first-rate buffets, as well as a chance to strike it rich at the gaming tables. Irene loved to gamble, reveling in the thrill of its unpredictability, and often returned home hundreds of dollars richer. Of course, she rarely mentioned the times she nearly lost her shirt!

“Irene, here’s twenty dollars. See if you can double it for me.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” she said, a twinkle in her eye.

Monday morning, a smiling Irene handed me a crisp one-hundred dollar bill!

“Wow!” I exclaimed.

“I won big time at the Tropicana,” she boasted, “...pocketing six-hundred dollars!”

Curious, I asked, “What are you going to do with your winnings?”

“I have plans,” she answered vaguely.

I found out later that she stuffed the C-notes into the church’s poor box.

Our school community was shocked and saddened when Spencer, then in

high school, was killed in a car wreck. Spencer was an only child and his death devastated his parents.

Irene immediately sprang into action, comforting Spencer's parents like sunshine after the storm. She embraced them—praying, sobbing, and commiserating with them. Offering to help foot the bill for Spencer's funeral, Irene was a wellspring of compassion and generosity.

Even though she carried an inhaler, Irene's asthma continued to distress her. One time when she was hospitalized with bronchial complications, my wife, Carole, and I visited, bringing magazines, peppermints and a McDonald's vanilla shake.

"I thought it was curtains," Irene wheezed, "...but when I read the obituaries, I didn't see my name." Always the comic, she made us laugh.

Irene's worsening health caused her to retire from teaching early and move to sunny Florida where she spent her golden years active in church-related and educational concerns.

In her last St. Patrick's Day card, Irene jotted that she hoped we would visit—her door was always open.

Irene's death was sudden. Mercifully, we heard she didn't suffer. She was waked "home" in New Jersey. A mass was celebrated in the convent chapel where a young Sister Irene once prayed, followed by a sumptuous meal at a four-star restaurant. Afternoon festivities included an Irish band playing well-known selections, with vocals by a choir of nuns who sang ever so sweetly Irene's favorite song:

*When Irish eyes are smiling
Sure tis like a morn in spring
In the lilt of Irish laughter
You can hear the angels sing.*

*When Irish hearts are happy
All the world seems bright and gay
And when Irish eyes are smiling
Sure they steal your heart away.*

An Encounter at a Reading

by SuzAnne C. Cole

Her petite frame was neatly dressed in a navy polyester pant suit and a beaded Indian pouch necklace. Soft short white hair framed a sweet face. She arrived early for my reading at a neighborhood bookstore and presented me with a tiny lapel bouquet of fern and pink miniature rose which, she said, she had grown herself. She sat attentively through the reading, head nodding agreement, and eagerly joined in the informal discussion which followed. Wistful, she said she related to my essay on spending Thanksgiving with just my husband, because she, a widow with four grown children, also spent many holidays alone. I listened carefully to her at first, but when she began reciting the poetry with which she'd entertained her children long ago, others in the audience grew restive, and I had to gently cut her off.

After the discussion, I signed books and chatted with a few women while being aware of her hovering nearby. I was glad she had lingered, glad to give her the opportunity to talk she so obviously desired. She sat beside me and began telling me stories of her life, interrupting herself every now and then with, "I'm not keeping you, am I?" An adventurous spirit, she had attended summer school at universities in distant states, signing up for a single credit hour which qualified her to live in the dorm and eat in the cafeteria for six weeks, providing an inexpensive summer vacation. She'd taken nutrition, ballroom dancing, birding, and fencing.

As a purse she carried a frayed navy nylon camera bag filled with plastic sandwich bags, each containing a clipping. She shared the contents of two

with me—a faded newspaper photo showing her dressed as a clown and her resume which said she offered church groups musical entertainment, “clowning around,” poetry, and religious discussions.

The reading long since over, the bookstore empty except for the two of us and the owner, she tentatively but hopefully asked if I would like to lunch with her. Perhaps too hastily for politeness, I said I was sorry, but I had a very full afternoon.

As I walked to my car, I wondered at my selfishness. Would it have hurt me to have had a sandwich with her? Yet alone among the small audience for the reading, she hadn’t bought one of my books. Did my writer’s ego cause me to refuse her invitation? Or did watching her tell her stories stir too many fears of aging for me to be comfortable for long in her presence? I thought about her all the way home, all the more so after I realized I had left her little bouquet on the table at the bookstore.

Midnight Mover

by Beth McKim

Shortly after the divorce, our nine-year-old son, Jake, began sleepwalking. I always chose to think this was age related or coincidental. But, in his somnambulatory state, he seemed to always be searching for something. By day he was cool, and seemingly unaffected by the changes in our lives, but by night, he was a frantic hunter of some elusive treasure.

Drawers were opened, closets rifled through, cushions removed from couches—events not remembered by the hunter the next morning. In time, the walking became quieter with no visible traces left behind following the moonlight ramblings. It was at this point that I began to place two wooden dining room chairs against the front door of our 1950’s style home. I was haunted by the story told by my parents that I, as a young child, had been found lying on a lounge chair on our back patio in the middle of the night;

sound asleep with no memory of walking out there. I decided I needed to find a way to prevent something worse happening with my son because, unlike the back door, our front door had never been equipped with a deadbolt lock and could be opened by merely turning the knob. The last two things I did, therefore, before going to sleep each night were to lock the door and line the chairs up in front of it. I slept with ears peeled for the possible crashing of the chairs and the rescue I would leap into action to perform.

But I could use this system only at our home. Thinking I had adequately relayed the information to others, I soon learned I was wrong. One night when Jake was staying at his father's house, the father awakened to the sound of someone walking down the hallway toward his bedroom. Grabbing his .22 pistol from the bedside table, he called out "Who is that?" Hearing no response, he yelled again "I said who the hell are you?" Still, with no response, Jake's dad gave one last warning, "Stop where you are, you son-of-a-bitch or I'll shoot you."

The next thing that happened was very curious. For some reason, his dad opened the door to the hallway quickly and instead of shooting immediately, hesitated just long enough to allow the night-light to clearly illuminate his probable attacker. At that point, he found himself face to face with his beloved son and fell to his knees before guiding Jake back to bed.

Jake heard the story the next day, the same day that my ex-husband got rid of that pistol and made plans to dispose of his entire valuable gun collection, vowing never to even go hunting again except with his camera. We had all been given a second chance.

Upsetting the Natural Order

by Mark Barkawitz

With toolbox in hand, I walk out to my truck from the small repair job just completed at an old customer's home in an exclusive west-side neighborhood. Home security signs mark the manicured lawns that fit the landscapes like large, green, area rugs.

Overhead, a flock of sparrows cruises a blue sky highlighted with a hint of late afternoon clouds. Suddenly—as if out of nowhere—a big, black crow dive-bombs the flock, striking a single, unfortunate sparrow. Clutching the prey in its claws, the crow bats its large, black wings and caws, as if warning the panicked flock, which chirps and dives vainly at the crow in an effort to free their captured comrade—but to no avail.

The crow lights on an upper branch in one of the giant cottonwood trees across the street. With one claw, it holds down the struggling sparrow, while caw, caw, cawing at the chirping flock which continues to circle and swoop, but with no more effect than irritating gnats. The crow draws itself erect, pulls its head back, and then hammers its yellow beak down into the much smaller bird.

“Hey!” I wave my old Dodgers cap up at the carnivorous crow. But it pays me no heed. When it draws its head back again and spikes down a second time at the still struggling sparrow, I drop my toolbox, hunt up a couple walnut-sized rocks from the dirt around a nearby bush, then hurry across the street. “Hey!” But the crow still ignores me and strikes down again at the sparrow.

I know the little bird is probably dead meat by now and I know it's the natural order of things—only the strong survive in nature—and the crow's pretty high up in the tree, but I position myself with a clear shot at a familiar distance: about sixty feet away. I line myself up so that an errant throw won't go through a neighbor's window, which I would then have to explain and repair. Holding one of the rocks loosely with my thumb and the first two fingers of my right hand, I lean back on my right leg, lift my front foot off the ground, and fire a would-be fastball up into the tree. The rock smacks the branch under the crow and ricochets—like a knock-down

pitch at an opposing batter—into its chest, knocking the crow backwards, causing little black feathers from its tuft to hang momentarily in the air, until it flaps its extended wings, hovers, and shrieks a defiant caw-w-w! The flock scatters. The wounded sparrow rolls slowly off the upper branch, plummeting, spiraling down, when suddenly its little wings flutter, then extend to swoop and lift the wounded bird just over the ground. Incredibly, the little bird beats its wings and climbs back up to join the still-circling flock.

The big crow lands on another branch, stares down at me, and caws loudly.

“Back at you, buddy.” I drop the other rock and—while still keeping an eye on the crow—head back across the street to my truck.

When I get home, my teenage son—in cap and sweats—is waiting for me. “Can you catch me? I need to throw today.”

“Sure.”

My son plays baseball for his high school team. To stay sharp, he throws with me on our make-shift mound in the backyard, which keeps me sharp, too. I follow him out. He hands me my old catcher’s mitt. “What took you so long?”

“I needed to throw today, too.”

“Huh?” He stands on our homemade pitching rubber—a wooden 2”x 4” sunken sideways into a mound of decomposed granite from the local lumber yard—rubs the red-seamed baseball between his hands, and awaits my explanation.

Standing behind home plate—sixty feet, six inches away—I turn the bill of my well-worn Dodgers cap around and raise my mitt as a target. As he warms up, I tell him about my one-pitch save.

“Lucky throw,” he assesses from the mound.

I correct him: “*Good* throw.” And toss the baseball back into his already-extended glove. “Lucky sparrow.”

Silence isn't golden

by Stephen Goldberg

The therapist at the Children's Hospital told us that our son was globally delayed. After digesting her words, I asked for the report in writing. I still have the report 18 years later and I read it now and then.

My son Robert didn't talk and this caused my wife and I much grief and worry. My father, who worried about everything, didn't worry about this. He said that one day Robert would talk. My mother was also very positive. This was amazing since the family motto was “In front of every silver lining is a dark storm cloud.” When Robert was three and not talking, my mother told me that I didn't start talking till I was three. When Robert was four, she told me that I didn't start talking till I was four. When Robert was five, I no longer believed her but I appreciated the support. My mother was also a late talker. She was around four years old and not talking. Her parents took her to the rabbi in their *shtetl* in the Ukraine and asked his advice. He told them to pray. Eventually my mother spoke. It is amazing what prayer and time can do.

My wife was also a late talker, although my mother-in-law was less forthcoming than my mother about details. However, it is slowly dawning on me why a child with two parents and at least one grandparent who were late talkers might also be a late talker. It is also strangely comforting to know that Robert inherited something from me, because he largely takes after my wife's side of the family.

The daycare Robert attended was also concerned about his lack of speech and one of the instructors, a so-called expert, said that Robert was

“exhibiting behavior reflective of hearing impairment”. She strongly recommended that we get his hearing tested. We asked our pediatrician for a referral so that my health insurance would cover the cost. He kindly humored us and wrote the referral for “the hearing test he didn’t need”.

The results of the test were normal, which we reported to the daycare. The expert on hearing impairment said that Robert stopped “exhibiting behavior reflective of hearing impairment”. It was a miracle. On the other hand, this “expert” might have been wrong all along since other staff told us that Robert was the only one in his age group who could follow a series of instructions. The teachers could only give the other children one instruction at a time. Nonetheless, the daycare declared Robert was “special needs” and assigned him extra help from Shari, one of the regular daycare staff, for a short period each day. We liked Shari who was very nice and particularly good with Robert.

Robert would shriek when he got frustrated because he couldn’t talk and couldn’t always get us to understand him just by pointing, although he was remarkably good at communicating that way. We took him to a speech therapist who said that we should be firm with Robert and not let him shriek. Since Robert was a smart, kind, cooperative child, when we told him not to shriek, he stopped. Just like that. The speech therapist went to see Robert in the daycare situation and reported to us that he had no friends there because he couldn’t talk. We didn’t really believe this so I called the daycare director and without telling her why I was asking, I asked her if Robert had any friends. She said yes that Robert had many friends and that he was a nice kid and the other children wanted to hang out with him. This speech therapist made it onto my list of intelligence-impaired health care professionals.

Our pediatrician was getting concerned about our nagging him about Robert’s speech so he recommended that we register Robert in a speech therapy group at the Children’s Hospital. During the first session all the parents in this group were watching their kids through a one-way mirror. Seven of the eight kids in the group were sitting on the floor, crying. One

child didn't cry; he took action. When the group leader was distracted, he got up, opened the door to the room and walked down the corridor looking for his parents. This child was obviously the smartest child in the group. It was, of course, Robert.

They did a lot of testing at that group, in the belief that 'why have one problem when you can have many?' They singled out Robert for a more thorough examination. The leader of the group, a heartless woman my wife and I called 'Dr. Warmth', sent Robert for a free hearing test. We told her that Robert was already tested and heard normally but she didn't believe us. Meanwhile, another parent in the group may have actually had a child with hearing impairment but she could not afford hearing tests. We felt crappy.

I went to the hearing test with Robert. They made sounds from somewhere in the room and Robert would have to point to where the sound came from. He was pointing in different directions to no sound that I could ascertain. I was very upset. Around a third of the way through the test, the audiologist said that Robert's hearing was fine and she kicked us out. This meant that I didn't hear many of the sounds. I was very upset.

One doctor associated with the hospital asked me about any trauma during Robert's birth. I replied that I had found his birth traumatic and my wife doubtlessly more so. I misunderstood the question.

Dr. Warmth did more testing of Robert and said that he was delayed in all aspects of development. I immediately asked Dr. Warmth for a written report, a big smile on my face. I was Treasurer of the daycare and I knew that there were government subsidies for children like Robert. I also knew that Robert wasn't globally delayed. Normally, globally-delayed children need a lot of extra help, but Robert wasn't globally delayed, Dr. Warmth was. But thanks to her, the daycare got a \$5,000 annual subsidy to help manage Robert. The money went to the construction of a new fire exit to bring the daycare building up to code. The daycare ran a surplus every year that I was Treasurer. I was a hero.

Dr. Warmth wanted Robert to have even more extensive testing but I objected. My wife wanted the testing done so we asked our pediatrician who promptly said that testing was a waste of time. We didn't send Robert for any more tests. The daycare pointed out another child that didn't speak before therapy but with a lot of grueling work, he started to speak. We pointed to an unhappy kid and asked if that was him. The daycare worker said yes. We said no to more therapy. Robert was a happy child and we wanted to keep him that way. One professional even told us that Robert shouldn't have been as happy as he was.

We had another speech therapist recommended by the daycare. She implied that without emergency speech therapy, Robert might never talk or if he did, he would have a severe speech impediment. We didn't like her but we contracted with her anyway. One of the things she said was that Robert didn't know the difference between over and under because of repeated ear infections. He hadn't had any. She didn't believe us. We now didn't like her more than we didn't like her before. One day she asked that one of us attend a session with her and Robert. My wife went but after the session, the speech therapist started yelling at my wife for being neglectful and Shari, Robert's special needs teacher, intervened and defended my wife. My wife felt as if she was set up and this was the last straw. We fired the speech therapist. I learned that sometimes a subjective parent can know their child better than an objective professional.

Robert still wasn't talking when he graduated from daycare. We now had to look for an elementary school. Robert's older sister was attending a private Jewish school in our neighborhood and we wanted both kids to go to the same school. It would be easier for us and for my parents who liked to pick the children up from school. We had some misgivings because the school taught four languages, Hebrew, English, French and Yiddish but when we applied, the school didn't flag any real issues so we thought everything would be okay.

Robert eventually started talking and his first sentence came out when I

wouldn't let him play video games for some reason that I do not recall but that was probably completely arbitrary. He responded with, "Aw, f**k it." I was so happy, I didn't correct his choice of words. I just stood there smiling.

Robert was still behind in speech so the school recommended speech therapy. The school speech therapist said that Robert was having problems making certain sounds and that he should be evaluated by the school's occupational therapist. We agreed. Her report back was that Robert needed occupational therapy because he wrote messily and that when he ran with a hockey stick he only held it in one hand. I told this to my wife who started to laugh. She was a Physical Education teacher and she said that running and holding a hockey stick in one hand was actually an advanced skill. I am sports-impaired. We declined the offer of occupational therapy. Somewhere during this time Robert had yet another recommended speech therapist, but all I remember her doing was feeding Robert different types of potato chips. The school also arranged a tutor for Robert to help with French. She was very kind but as useless as a shoelace in a loafer store.

At the end of grade one, the school speech therapist said that Robert should repeat grade one because of his speech even though he had good grades and understood all the material. We refused and he went to grade two. At the end of grade two, the principal said that Robert could be passed on to grade three but he would need tutoring, plus modified Yiddish and Hebrew programs. At that point, since my daughter had graduated from that school, we decided, and told the administration, that this school was not the right one for Robert and we pulled him out for grade 3. At Robert's annual check-up that year, the pediatrician asked us if we felt that the speech therapy had been useful in getting Robert to talk. My wife answered, "the only thing speech therapy did was help us waste money."

There was a good school in our area, that had two streams, French Immersion, which we felt was not right for Robert and an English stream. We wanted Robert to get into the English stream. I visited the school but they said that we lived outside their catchment area. We were only 100

yards out of the area but they didn't want to hear about it. There were two other schools with English streams but one was very rough and the other was fairly distant. I called the school board and played dumb, an act I have perfected over the years. I asked what English-stream school we could send Robert to. They told me Seymour. I told them that I was told that I was out of their area. The school board told me that the Seymour English stream catchment area was not the same as the French immersion one and that we were in its area. I went back to the school and told them this. They thought I was an idiot. I begged them to call the school board to check the situation. The woman behind the counter finally agreed. I can be very persuasive when I play dumb. She was on the phone for quite a while and then hung up. She turned to the Vice Principal who was standing nearby and gasped, "Oh my God. The number of children we turned away that we shouldn't have."

Every year I clean up the paperwork from the year before, file what I want or have to keep and save some mementos. One of the latter is the report on Robert's global delay. Now that Robert is in year three of an elite university work/study program in chemistry, reading the report makes me laugh. And to the parents who said that once Robert started to talk we would long for the good old days of his not talking, *vous êtes très bête*.

Recital Costume

by Ann Reisfeld Boutté

Somewhere in an album from my childhood is a photo of me posed in a costume from a dance recital. It is a two piece leotard covered in silver sequins. The detachable ankle-length harem skirt is made of lavender net decorated with silver stars and moon crescents and hemmed in midnight blue sparkles.

It was one-of-kind, handmade for me. In it, I felt something almost pretty, almost glamorous. I wore it only once in an acrobatic solo, the last

performance in my dancing school days. I was ten years old.

I began taking dance classes when I was five. Over the years, I began to imagine that dancing would be my ticket into a world of grace, an entry onto a stage where everyone and everything is beautiful.

But along the way, no doubt early on to my instructors, later to me, it became apparent that my aspirations exceeded my abilities. As we students grew physically, the disparity between those who were gifted and those of us who were not became more pronounced. Until finally, dance class began to feel like an indictment of my shortcomings, a chore and an embarrassment.

I turned in the toe shoes that my ankles couldn't support. I gave away the tap shoes that never achieved precision. I abandoned my dreams, knowing I would never spin across a stage in satin and tulle or move in crisp syncopation with members of a chorus line.

I held on to the rust-colored fishnet rehearsal stockings and the black ballet slippers. They are still in a shoe box in my closet after many relocations and five decades. They are a compact and portable souvenir.

I also kept the costumes, the Dutch girl taffeta plaid outfit with matching hat, the rose pink satin bodice and tulle skirt, and my favorite, the two-piece silver number. I packed them and others away in a cardboard box in layers of tissue paper.

At first, I just couldn't part with them. Later, I thought I might one day have a daughter who would wear them with the same joy that I did. But I was blessed with sons.

As my brother's two daughters approached appropriate costume ages, I thought of passing the treasures on to them. My sister-in-law cautioned me that if I did, they would likely not be wearable again. Not to worry, I told her. My recital days are over. With a twinge of regret and a considerable measure of excitement, I repacked the costumes and sent them to the girls.

I know it's purely coincidence, but my older niece, Stephanie, went on to become a modern dance major and a soloist in her university troupe. Now twenty-five, she has taught dance to youngsters. And today, on my desk is a photograph of Stephanie at the age of eight posing in the silver sequined leotard and harem skirt.

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