

The gnarled old oaks bend slightly toward each other. Branches touching high above the twisted ropes form the comfort nest I call my hammock. It's old. The trees supporting it are ancient. Indentions in the bark show the many times the ties have been moved to allow more girth for the trunks. None the less, the hammock beckons me to join in the half hidden path to the shelter of the passing struggling sun. I watch from my window as a breeze, soft yet still having a firm hand on yet the winters unfettered power move the ropes in a gentle sway. Now I spot the bushy tail of a squirrel as he scampers up on the old time worn oak to rest in the hammock while shelling a pecan from a neighboring tree. The broad blades of the emerging yellow daffodil from the soft earth beneath will reach for sunlight through the yet bare branches, yearning for that first faint and elusive warmth. But they too sway in the last of the winter winds. My gaze takes me further into the darkened woods, where only patches of waning light filter through the still winter sky. The roof of a long ago proud barn lies grey and ghostly among the vines now threatening an overtake . The thought of loosing this staple in my life washes over me like a tidal wave. I've often wondered about the past lives that worked or slept on the damp dark earth that still smells of long forgotten tobacco crops and cattle. Years have faded this structure into just a distant memory for someone. Now, the pond catches my eye. Light shimmers from it's surface like a skipping stone. I pull my old overcoat from the hook, drawn to the outside to once again see the ruins of this old barn lying in decay beside the pond. My wandering to the destination finds fallen leaves thick and brown, yet the bare branches from which they fell will burst forth with green once again as the light shifts and warm breezes return. My journey takes me to the old barn. It's timbers are lying in ruins at my feet, near the bank of the pond. I think of how the past, present and future are intertwined into one. The barn once proud and strong withstood the winter winds and harsh summer heat, but now it's future use moves to yet another stage of it's life. As I pick through the old timber, I find new life for some of the wood. How pretty this piece would be made into a shelf for my home. This one a wood carver may work his magic and make a beautiful mantle for someone's new house. How proud the old barn would be as with life, finding new amongst the old. I move a larger half rotten board to find it shelters a small den of rabbits. Leaving it intact, I must leave this one to do it's well selected job of housing God's creatures. Winter wind picks at the new emerging growth near the pond bank as I turn my back to the passing cold, chilling my cheeks. The past. The present. The future. As with the trinity, mysterious in so many ways, so are my musings of how the barn bears much of the

same symbolism. I turn toward my distant hammock, still calling me for a short visit. Just a peek into the future. Once the winter winds blow their last puff, I shall return to the old hammock. For now, just a quick moment to sink into my overcoat and lie in the strong holds of it's inviting ropes. Just for a few moments I can reflect on yesterday, today and now tomorrow. My future just as the barn finds it's usefulness, I too am changing to embrace a new place in my life. The old hammock strong and sturdy will stand for future summer visits when the soft wind blows and the old oaks are full of their glory. I shall plan on this a rest place while I move timbers from the decay of the barn to my home. We all have our place in life. We move forward just as the old barn has to a new phase. I will find a refreshing start to my next venture.

SUNDAYS; WRITING AND PAINTING

So easy for me to get away from the idea that I have these on my everyday "to do" list...I can do it with little effort if I stay at it, continually, and even if am very tired, the process, works, probably better, when tired as then I do not become so critical and some of my freshest ideas "COME OUT".

Best way that I write is when I make a note, tuck it in to my pocket and sit down shortly thereafter and start with it....and it almost leads me to a trend of thought, almost as like a BIG THREAD, and I can just keep on going.

In the old days, when I only typed from a typewriter, a full length page (best for sending out to be published) was over and done with very shortly, as the typing was smaller and used twice as much room on the page.

Now that I do it from WORD ON THE COMPUTER, I get to expand my thoughts and include much more of my feelings, knowledge, references, etc. It took me a long time to adjust to the idea of using the computer to produce. It seems such a sterile method, and the keyboards are not the same, regardless of what others say. It truly is not, and I think that those who do say so were not really typists. I know this as I made a lot of my salaries as a typist, and I could tell by the sound of the key-stroke if I had used the correct key and I could correct "as I went" just by the sound. And the sound of the plinking keys of the typewriter were truly music to my ears. That music helped me to create.

Lots of folks use the pocket-note they wrote to do the first RENDITION. I HATE renditions. The reason I hate them is that was my job, for my bosses, almost always men, and I have no idea why the saying is that: "women have the right to change their minds"...ha...we cannot hold a candle to the men in that department. I finally had to quit one job, as the engineer I worked for made me type and retype the same piece over and over till he made me so crazy I said, THANKS, I will be leaving in forty-five minutes when it is my lunch hour, and I did, and I told him I would never be back...have never regretted it, as *then got a better job, for a less-compulsive-undecided person. PRAISE THE LORD AND HE HAD PASSED ME THE AMMUNITION !*

When I use the "just the note" theory, I start typing as if I am giving a 30 minute speech, unprepared and spontaneous, and it really is one of those conversations that a person might reply, "OK, THINK I GOT THAT NOW, ENOUGH"!...BUT WHEN IT GETS LEGS, my mind is treated to exploration, and variety.

From there I can add personal touches, and at the age of 81 years in a few days, there is hardly anything that I or any other eighty year old hasn't rubbed shoulders with... At this age we have the joy of picking and choosing things we want to hear, say, watch, listen to, and program our lives with...and it is truly delightful. Sometimes we still get too busy, as the saying goes, HOW DID I EVER FIND THE TIME TO WORK?...SO THEN WE PULL BACK AND TELL OURSELVES, whoa, I am old now and need to take advantage of this fact and slow the "shoulda coulda" items to a minimum. After all, SUNDAY IS COMING SOON AND I CAN KICK INTO MY WRITING/PAINTING MODE. Ciao.

Mary Ann Carrico-Mitchell, RN, BS

A week or so ago, just before eating my evening meal, I paused to give thanks. The first prayer that ran through my mind was one that I often hear others pray before a meal, it begins with asking God to bless the hands that prepared the food. As is typical, I was dining alone and had prepared the meal myself. While there is no reason for one not to ask God for blessing upon one's self, that just didn't feel quite right. Next, my mind recalled a phrase that I have seen several times posted on social media that asks, "What if you woke up today with only the things you thanked God for yesterday." I looked at my plate and started thinking about all the people that had played a part in the creation of my meal.

Those that know me personally understand that I have a quirky, if not weird sense of humor. Immediately, my mind jumped to a cute children's book I had seen years prior. The words of the story were simply the lyrics to the song The Twelve Days of Christmas, however, the illustrations were hilarious. The illustrator created pages that showed the literal collective of each day's gifts given by the recipient's true love. On page one the recipient appears to be a combination of happy and confused standing in their living room beside a large potted pear tree adorned with a live partridge. By day twelve the recipient is hard to find in the illustration and looks incredibly stressed and annoyed to have twelve pear trees each with its own live partridge along with 352 other gifts, such as 30 Lords a Leaping and 36 maids a milking their 36 cows, all given by their true love.

I looked back to my plate. The dish was a new recipe for Cuban beef served over rice. I first considered the ground beef. I know a little about the processing of meat from living on some mini-farms as a kid and from watching documentaries (If you have ever wanted to be a vegetarian you really must watch these) the pound of ground beef I had purchased at the store didn't come from just one animal and in all probability came from multiple farms. My crazy sense of humor kicked into overdrive and started urging me to envision the following day, heading bleary eyed into the kitchen for coffee only to be greeted by twenty or more farmers that strangely resembled Eb from Green Acres. "Howdy Mame" My imagination failed to picture me looking anything even remotely like Eva Gabor and stubbornly remained stuck to a realistic view of myself. Darn.

Imagine if all of the cattle had showed up beside the farmers!

One of those farmers went to the front door and invited in all the other workers from the various farms that played a part in last night's ground beef. There were suddenly dozens and dozens of farmers in my kitchen. Some had grown hay and grain that fed the cattle that ultimately landed on my plate as Cuban beef. Others had farmed the cows that gave birth to the beef cattle. Next came the people that slaughtered and butchered the cattle. After that my kitchen couldn't accommodate the huge flow of workers that continued to pour in. There were inspectors from the FDA and all sorts of agriculture people that had been involved to make sure that the meat was not only safe but wholesome. There were nutritionists that determined the information that was on the label along with the people that created and printed the label and all the other parts of the packaging.

By the time the various truck drivers joined the crowd of people that played a part in my pound of ground beef had the group spilled out from the boundaries of my yard and into the street. I realized I didn't have anywhere near enough coffee pods or mugs and got worried. The people that designed and built the trucks along with the folks that work in the oil and gas industries all started to fill in the spots along the horizon, not to mention the mechanics that service the trucks for the drivers who started squeezing into the crowd beyond my line of vision.

The concept of farm to table takes a huge number of people. It really is something worthy of contemplation and gratitude.

I may have mumbled, "Holy Cow", as accountants, business executives, forklift drivers, store clerks, custodial workers and dozens of other professions lined the streets around my home and that was only for the ground beef! I could almost hear my grandmother, who loved to feed a crowd, exclaim, "Childern (that is how she pronounced children), do you suppose we'll have enough food? The family used to laugh about this because even if Granny had thirty mouths to feed, she would have enough food for fifty. I wanted to look behind me, find Granny standing by my stove and beg her to help me. Alas, Granny was already in heaven and most likely having a good laugh at my expense.

As I ate, I contemplated the origin of the other ingredients in my meal. The rice probably came from California or Texas but it might have been grown in Bangladesh, China or another eastern country. Enter ship captains and crews along with dock workers and customs staff. The Olive oil most likely came from Spain or Italy. Green Olives could have been grown in California or Oregon but they were almost as likely to have been imported from Peru, South Africa or Spain. I imagined the newcomers to the crowd that now spread out for several miles in every direction asking for coffee but many of them didn't speak English and, unfortunately for me, I never learned a second language. I would have needed multiple languages. I won't even go into the garlic, tomatoes, raisins, vinegar and all the spices (Did you know that over 50% of the spices sold in the U.S. are imported?).

A typical U.S meal contains ingredients from all over the world. There is nothing wrong with shopping local, but if we think we can still adhere to this notion in today's global economy, we are fooling ourselves.

As I cleaned up the kitchen, I thought about how the ingredients for the meal had been purchased from at least three different stores each of which all use different distribution centers. Add hundreds more people to the crowd. I thought about the appliances and utensils that played a part in the meal and the people that had been a part of that process. The workers that are essential to my electricity and natural gas humbly joined the group. I thought of the teachers that trained all those workers how to do their jobs which made me think of the workers that are involved in the manufacturing of school and business supplies. My imaginary village of people that I needed to thank for their part in my meal overflowed the boundaries of my entire town and it continued to grow. As it grew in size it also grew in diversity. What was I to do?

Finally, I noticed their smiles and kind eyes.

My over active imagination forgot about being stressed about where I would seat so many people and what I would feed them as my mind went back to my prayer and being thankful for the abundance in my life, abundance that encircles the world and ties us all together. I thought about when Jesus fed the masses with a few fish and two loaves of bread. It was no longer important that I couldn't say thank you in all the various languages. We all understood one another. It seemed we had found peace that surpasses understanding.

My imagination asked a new "What if". What if in heaven I can invite every last one of these people to my table and we can all share fellowship and appreciation for the gifts we offered to one another even when we had not met while on earth. We would magically all understand the languages and there would be no jealousy or pride about who played the more important role. We wouldn't have to hurry to leave the table to return to jobs or other obligations because we would have eternity to fellowship with each other and with our God.

I realize I am smiling at my laptop because the image in my brain is so wonderful. Perhaps my imagination isn't that quirky and weird after all.

My Literary Lions by Patricia Holland

I've always loved the large lion statues that flank the steps leading up to the main doors of the New York Public Library. In New York, the friends-of-the-library members are called Literary Lions.

While I do not have a large library, I do have large dogs who often stretch out, still as statues on my porch and calmly, majestically look out over "their" farm. Now I know that two of them are Literary Lions.

This story really should begin with a few details about the farm's odd ball trash service. The trash man picks up my trash once a week. He often reminds me, "There are rules." He won't do driveways---so the trash must be left at the edge of the road down at the end of the farm lane. He'll only pick up three big leaf bags of trash per farm. He's trained his clients to call 48 hours before trash day if they plan to leave furniture at the curb for him to haul away---because he has to bring a helper to load it on the truck. He won't take more than one piece of furniture per week per client.

Over the years, my neighbors and I have developed some techniques to keep our trash man happy even if we have a lot of trash. For example, one time when I piled up four bags of trash---not three---I called my neighbor to see if I could give him one of my bags to set out with his trash.

This week, I got a call from that neighbor. His daughter had just graduated from college with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. That was the good news. After the graduation ceremony, he pitched it to help his daughter clean out her student apartment. For some reason, that day they didn't spend time sorting her things into a keeper pile and a discard pile. They brought everything home with them. He laughed about it over the phone then he said, "Now, for the bad news. Most of her old furniture has to go and the discard pile filled up nine big trash bags." The neighbor asked if he could bring over an old bookcase and two bags of trash to put out on the curb with mine.

Now the story gets more interesting.

Sometimes, Kentucky weather is perfect. Trash day this week was one of those perfect days. It was just too nice to stay indoors so I whistled up the dogs and we all moved out on the porch. At first they stretched out calmly, majestically looking out over the farm. Then they heard the rumble of the trash truck.

My oldest dog, Rudy, considers himself to be the farm dog on duty. He jumped to his feet and took off down the lane to make sure the trash truck driver did not carry off anything valuable.

Lately, Rudy has had Woodford in training as another farm dog on duty. So Woodford followed Rudy down the lane.

Both of the dogs came trotting home a few minutes later. Each one held something in his mouth. First Rudy, then Woodford, came up on the porch and deposited a book at my feet. When I read the book titles, I knew I had pretty smart dogs. My own Literary Lions brought me a copy of *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman and *The Poetry of Robert Frost*.