

IT IS FOR US

Spring 2015
Anthology

INPRINT SENIOR MEMOIR WORKSHOPS

at

Amazing Place

Led by Miah Arnold

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the generosity of Inprint and Amazing Place donors, Inprint has offered a weekly writing workshop for Amazing Place participants. As Houston's only day center for adults with mild to moderate dementia, Amazing Place offers innovative programming, wellness, and fellowship to enrich the lives of those with dementia and provides education and support to families and the community. Inprint is dedicated to inspiring readers and writers through an array of literary and educational programs, from the most exciting and affordable reading showcases in the city to hands-on writing workshops for adults of all ages.

These two organizations have teamed up to offer this innovative class to help people with dementia write their stories. The class has clearly demonstrated that, even with dementia, these participants can collect their memories in a written form to share with their fellow classmates and loved ones.

The class was led by Miah Arnold, a local award-winning fiction writer who has a PhD from the University of Houston Creative Writing Program, where she won an Inprint Diana P. Hobby Prize.

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My Grandparents

My grandmother's name was Sophia Malon. And after thinking about her, I thought of her as being very, sometimes, how do I put it? Better be good or else.

I often wondered about my grandfather. My grandmother was very strict. Somehow she was very scary. She was Polish or Russian. And how did she marry anybody like my grandfather I'll never know.

I was very much in love with my grandfather. I had many times that I wanted to see him with my grandmother, but my mother would come and invite him over for a drink, and we had a good time. My grandfather and grandmother had ten children, and of all of them, she had one girl.

I never could figure out how my grandpa ever married my grandma who was about six feet tall, and he was about five feet ten. He was definitely Polish, and I felt somehow that he was a part of the Polish people, and he was a teacher. I never could figure out how this Polish person ever felt he married a peasant. He was very, very much nicer than she.



I felt that he had married a peasant because he was such a different person; after all she's the one who had to feed ten children. I don't know what she ever did, but she had to cook. I remember her cooking. They had chickens and two cows. They had pots, giant pots, to feed ten children, and when I would go there, if they gave me something I didn't like and I didn't eat it she'd have ten fits.

But my grandfather was really a doll. If my mother was calling me and I didn't come right away, I'd run to my grandfather and run around him in circles. He was very nice. But my grandmother, oh my God.

My Dresses, My Coalminers

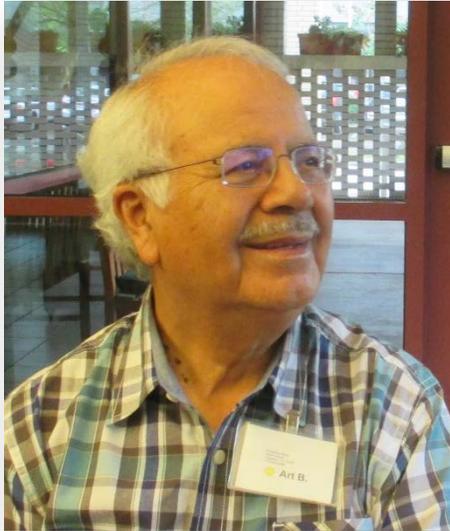
I can remember, when I do remember, what it was like as a new person, as a small child. I knew of one small thing about growing up, and it was wearing a dress, which was not a pair of pants. I thought it was something. I remember once we had something going on in my life because I was wearing a dress. However, then thinking of this dress, it must have been for a reason. For something new in my life. I did not own many dresses.

I'm a daughter of a coal miner. Everyone, all were poor, and all people worked very hard, and everyone went to Catholic school. We had only one public school. The nuns did teach all of us children.

When I was very young I had a new dress, and it was really a job to have a dress like that. Whatever reason it was, I did know how important it was to have a dress. I did not get many dresses, so when I wore a dress, I knew something was alright.

My Life in Bolivia

I was born in a rural community in Cochabamba, Bolivia. I was the fifth of eight children, growing up, taking care of sheep before and after school. I stayed three years at school in this community, then moved to a city located five miles away. My sister would bring lunch, and the mayor's office assisted me by buying books and school materials.



I was declared the best student in the schools. I was transferred to Cochabamba, forty-five miles away. Then I registered at Ibarra College.

I succeeded at being the best student every year. With the help of the Rotary Club, I was nominated as the Bolivian student representative to assist the World Student Meeting in Venice, Italy. It was a wonderful meeting. After the meeting was over, and before I went back to Bolivia, I visited Germany, France, Ireland, and England. I returned home.

I worked as a pediatrician in Cochabamba, and stabilized community clinics where pediatricians, interns, and students delivered healthcare services.

During this process, the political organization of the right thought I was stabilizing a communist system in my medical services, and they put me in jail. The Pan American Health Organization found out and had them release me after eight days. They told the authorities that if there were any more problems they would stop all of the projects they had in my country.

I went home and the telephone rang and the voice said, they know what street I go to work on and what school my children go. I decided to leave the country and come to the USA.

Grandmother

My father's mother, Nieves Arrandia, was a wonderful lady. She had five children, three boys and two girls. Her husband died early, leaving her with a good amount of money and other material things.

I lived one block away from her home. Before and after school I fed the sheep at the family backyard and then I visited her.

Later I was authorized by my parents to spend nights with her.

It was a wonderful experience. She taught me how to read, to do addition and subtraction and exercises, and long division training, and thanking God for all his blessings. She taught me to have a strong commitment to be good in everything we do, and with everybody in the family and the community. Her strongest advice was to be the best as a son, brother, friend, and student.

I left her to go to college in another city. She passed away a few years later.

It was a wonderful experience in my life and I always share spiritually in my prayers with her. God bless her.

Houston

I'm writing a book about my life, about the first time I came to Houston. It was to attend the wedding of my uncle who left New York in the middle of the Depression, to a place of greater opportunity. A place called Houston, Texas.



My mother and I came to Houston to his wedding and she fell in love with the city, and within a few months we were living in Houston, Texas.

The reason we moved was because in Houston, Texas, as distinguished from New York, people had houses and the houses had porches, and you could sit on the porch at night and fan yourself, and cool off. The second reason was you could get a maid for \$4 a day.

We moved to Houston, and I ended up going to the University of Texas. At the University of Texas I had a very unusual experience. I was in an organization called the Silver Spurs, and they needed to have a mascot. I'm from Staten Island, New York, but I was one of the three guys that went out to buy Bevo. They have today, maybe, the same steer. The three of us were chosen because one of

us had the steer account, the second reason was the second guy knew how to pick out a good steer, and the third guy, me, was because I was a Jew and could negotiate. We paid \$50.

I started out to become a doctor but to be a doctor you have to pass organic chemistry and I made a D. That ended the doctor. Then I decided I better become a businessman, so I did. I went to start a business in a hostel at the business school and studied accounting. I got a job as an accountant and I passed the CPA exam, and then I realized that being a CPA is really hard work. You're working between January 1st and April 15. Many days I worked till 5 o'clock in the morning. I thought this is going to be too much work, so I had to do something to improve my status. I enrolled in the first class at the University Law School and became a lawyer.

My Youth

My first job was selling shoes at the shoe shop at a place called Working Man's Store. It was on Travis Street in downtown Houston.

Later, at the University of Texas, I joined a fraternity, AEP, which thrust me into being introduced to girls. I was not bashful, but the pressure was on. The first girl I got dates with was as bashful as I, and that was probably why we got along well. Her name was Peggy from San Antonio. We stumbled through the first steps of getting acquainted. Easy questions to ask, and so forth, and shortly we understood each other, and I learned how to kiss.

Wow!!

One kiss goodnight, and I was hooked. She taught me how to dance and kiss. I was doomed by both. My social life soared, but my education fell out of the window. Leonard, the doctor, decided to become Leonard the businessman. And in that school, I did well in accounting and decided I wanted to be a professional accountant, or C.P.A. I got a job with an auditing firm at .75 cents per hour. My job was for three months. On the 91st day, I was fired without even a thank you after working until 9 p.m. 5 days a week. I decided I wanted to get more education, so I decided to go to law school at night.

The problem was my father was not financing a life in Austin, or Houston either, so I got a job as the accountant for the Lucky Seven Stores, and advertising co-op of local groceries, and at night I went to law school at the University of Houston, in the first law class that started the school.

I remember that I was only 23 when I married and shortly thereafter my wife gave birth to the first of our five children. We named our first child Andrea. How we came up with that unusual name in 1953 I don't know, but we did.

I was hardly making a living and all of a sudden I had serious responsibility. Today Andrea tells me what I have to do, as concerns her, and back then I told her what she had to do. Andrea was followed after that by three brothers over a period of many years. And the finishing up of the family happened with Andrea's only sister Agnes.

Joyce

Every Friday. A place in Houston where singles could meet and feel safe.

I noticed Joyce checking-in. I let her pay her ticket, a graduate student with not too much to live on. Asked her to dance.

Found out later, she had noticed me too!
"Who was that good looking guy?"

Later she would wonder why she let a total stranger take her home. We had a few drinks. I balanced a bottle on my head in front of her roommate's TV. Good chemistry. The kind you feel with another person.

Three times I called on a Friday, and she already had a date. Finally I called on a Wednesday for a date.

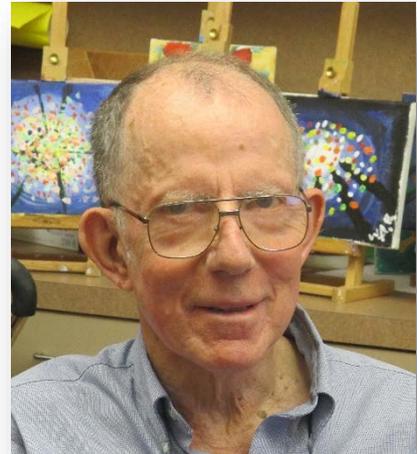
Five dates later we were engaged.

Came to Houston, with my aunt and my Catholic brother .

Putting hubby through PhD. Teaching job in Alva, Oklahoma. It was very hard on Joyce. Two years we were back in Texas. Working for IACB. Fun times. And in May at UT again, then back to A&M for PhD. She was very upset with guys' only parties.

Had fun going to dances. Daughter, Angela, who slept through all the voices talking.

Gosh, we were poor. Only my stipend to live on. Dad gave meat when he came to visit.



Bill Kwie

Bill Kwie was an encyclopedia of organic chemistry. Just about any question I had about a compound or a reaction mechanism, he had an answer. We were both PhD organic chemists, and that played a lot, his strong suit was again organic.

His life and mine merged back around 1982 when the state was hiring whomever they could find to do fieldwork – measuring what we called point source emissions from sources – combustion, boilers, furnaces, various events, streams. We worked on techniques that could be carried out in the field. So we were taking things that worked in the lab and trying to adapt them to field conditions, which we got pretty good at. We found out the hard way about some things we could not do. We had our acronyms like FIDS, TED.

We went to the Rio Grande Valley to measure emissions in cane burning, and came back from that trip with a car full of grapefruit. My cousin had a grapefruit orchard and had harvested the grapefruit. We were quite a sight, a station wagon full of fine ruby reds.

My education put me in touch with some other chemists--the name of one was Tony Cantu who worked for secret service, and I worked with him in Washington DC and he showed me some of the things that the secret service technical branch does. He had a technique for measuring the atmosphere of a car trunk if explosives had ever been inside a car trunk.

Bill was kind of persecuted for being Oriental. I was his friend from the beginning. He had no one really to be a companion and to help him with his ideas. It seems strange. We would go on trips together and went to Amarillo to sample emissions at American Smelting and Refining Company.

One of the trips was very dangerous. We were sent to a hoodry unit in a refinery and our gas comadograph heated up its oven, the ballistics were, we tripped a circuit breaker and turned off the feed to the unit and the temperature to the reactor in those rooms was balanced by whole feed coming in and heat generated by the reaction. I was up on top of this thing and I saw people running from the control room. So there were some interesting experiences we had together.

We learned that we needed to work with the plant guys and try to understand the processes we were sampling. Bill moved to Houston in the 90s and one of the projects we had had to do with an orchid grower whose orchids were being damaged by ethylene. It turns out there was a salt dome where Dow Chemical stored ethylene. They were pumping ethylene into the salt dome and water would come out that was saturated with ethylene. We figured, well, we're going to go down wind and figure out what we can find. We measured the trace emissions we predicted we would find, so we felt like we had accomplished a significant task. We got lucky. We had a strong Northern, and we were able to get into a strategic position where we could pick up these emissions.

Well I still miss Bill, and think about the influence he had on my life. The things he'd do to help people. That was my inspiration today.

My Family

My childhood home was at 1616 Cortlandt Street, Houston, Texas.

My parents had five children of which the two girls were the oldest, and of the three boys I was the youngest.



My oldest memory of the family situation was back in the time of World War II. My eldest brother was in the Army and his family lived in a house that was about half a block from my parents' home, in which my parents, my aunt Rita, and the two boys lived.

Eventually, both sisters married, with the eldest sister's marriage not lasting very long, and she didn't have any children.

The younger of the two sister's marriage turned out to be a lifelong relationship for her and her spouse, resulting in them having three children, including one boy and two girls.

The oldest sister lived until she was in her seventies but never remarried.

This family was very musical with my sister playing the piano and an organ. Her husband was a very good tenor singer. The older of their two daughters went to college and became a very good opera singer in New York City.

My Father, the Breadwinner

My family was made up of my parents, four siblings and me. The children were made up of two girls and three boys, with the two girls being the eldest of the children, and making them surrogate leaders in the absence of our parents.

We lived in a home located at 1616 Cortlandt Street, in the Heights.

The house itself was located two blocks from the nearest bus stop. Which was good because until 1939 we did not have a car.

My father's job was downtown, near where the train station was at that time.

Every weekday morning he walked two and one half blocks to catch a streetcar bus going downtown. When he got there I am sure that he had to walk a number of blocks to get to the place where he worked.

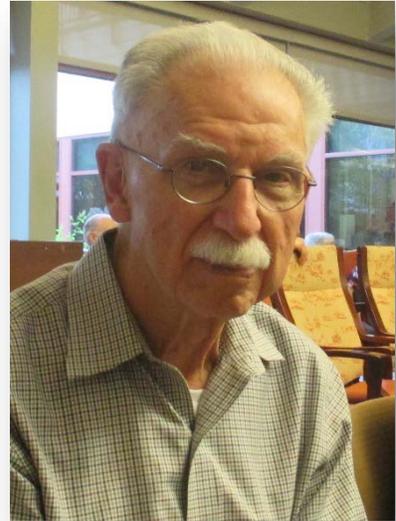
Obviously he had to reverse the above operation to return home in the evening.

One of the most interesting things about his job was the fact that he worked for the local railroad that carried both passengers and freight. If the freight should become damaged, it was my father's job to try and dispose of it in some fashion that would help the railroad to pay damage claims to the people to whom the merchandise was going.

He usually sold that material to vendors who disposed of that type of material.

It is For Us

I had a very profound and beautiful experience with my grandparents when I was growing up. They were from Sicily, during the war. My brother and I would spend time with them before and after school, and during that time, they would sit down and talk with us about the miracle of their own survival from the war. They were in the middle of all of it. Their Catholic faith was important to them, not so much the rituals of their faith, but their faith allowed them to keep hold of the issues in their life and the places they grew up in. As they would talk about things they would say, "Eugene, this is not just for you, it is for us." The beauty of sharing the life and death experience of my grandparents was profound.



Butterfly

Excitedly, I slowly approached the Monarch butterfly as it fluttered erratically to my dismay I saw that it had only one working wing. What beauty and tragedy. I, too, frozen in the moment. An early death was growing in the hope of life, A hope that would never fly.

Snakes

"Eugene!" screamed my mother, "Get that snake out of that kitchen!"

I tried to counter, but mom was not counterable at that moment. I screamed, "I want you to know it is not poisonous!"

She said, "I don't care what its credentials are, you get that out of here NOW, or you will not see tomorrow!"

"Okay, okay," I lied.

Now, she really got hot.

I remember even to this day about the mixed emotions she had about one of her sons who, apparently, didn't bother letting people know the credentials of snakes. I remember remarking to her, that this will happen again, and again, and again, until the day that she made me do the laundry. She was a woman who was not going to back away from anything.

Birth after midnight: Tom

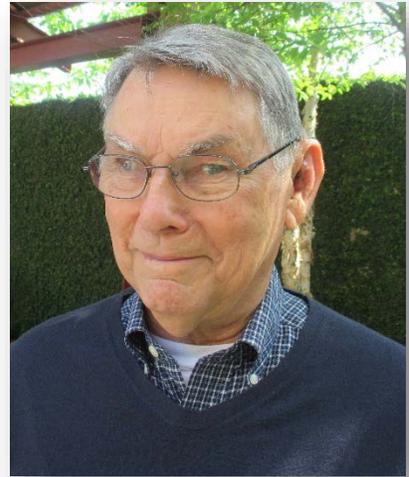
Birth after midnight
Dr. in suit and tie, looked
like he stopped by after
a house party.

Delivered the baby to me.

John, second child:

Extensive practice at home
with Lamaze methods.
Easy delivery with no
complications.

Mother was smiling and happy
that John arrived.



My Father and the Navy

My dad had two sons seven years apart.

My mother raised two only children, seven years apart.

My dad spent a lot of time with me and showed me his world of work and play.

His oldest son weighed about 90 pounds, stood about five foot two, and wasn't going to dominate anyone.

He took me with him on many jobs and showed me how to do many electrical jobs related to electrical wiring. Electric motor repair. And all the tools to do the work.

We spent many hours in the outdoors. In short he spent a lot of time with me.

My father was number two of a family of fourteen children. Many were in the military.

When I was 18 I joined the Navy.

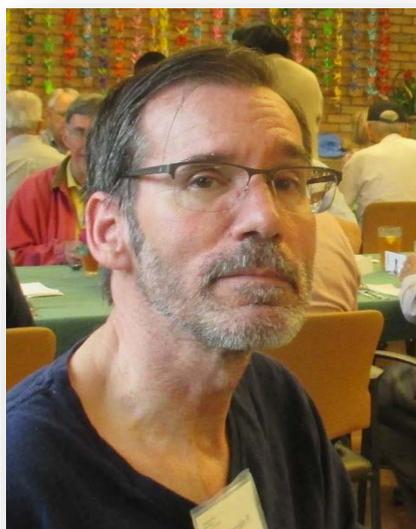
I met a lot of new friends from all over the country. After learning the basics of military training I was assigned to serve on an aircraft carrier. That taught me how to take off and land on an aircraft carrier. Most did the operation well, but a few failed. This took place Monday through Friday, with weekend liberties.

This project went on for several months. I later attended several service schools and was assigned to a regular carrier and toured the Caribbean and Mediterranean.

I served that ship for several years

Aliens

Joe determined to win the Halloween Costume contest. He supposed he would prove for all that aliens are real--high school kids are pretty gullible.



Joe thought about aliens that he'd seen. Skinny suits to handle the hostile Earth environment. Joe is pretty smart and very informed about aliens. Joe has seen a lot of aliens in pictures and movies, the usual sources. *National Enquirer*, *Lost in Space*.

Joe took a gamble. Joe had emptied and used all of Mom's aluminum foil in the empty house, the Mothership foil drawer.

Joe's mom's foil bin was used for emergency repairs.

Mom, AKA "The Leader."

Before this writer goes adrift, Joe hastily donned the suit (completely) 100% NASA-grade. Protective foil. Jack cast-off to 7th grade homeroom base.

Before getting to homeroom, Joe realized the protective environmental suit had a major malfunction. Wrapped in Aluminum foil is not well-suited for San Diego's atmosphere (no cooling units).

Sadly, 7th grade was not fooled. Too bad. Joe felt like an alien wearing a malfunctioning environmental suit, perfectly disguised as a hot potato wrapped in foil.

Changes

Looking and looking, now and to the future, now looking back six years, to the stroke year, it really [SUCKED]. Tried my patience and pride. For example, I can't walk, I can't do this or that.

It was a very similar situation after I moved from San Diego. Growing up with a life of plenty, from our private plane and private schools, new Cadillacs, and season skiing tickets.

We had everything.

Suddenly, I realized now, I had nothing, really, except plenty of pride. I recall meeting "Mr. Frank," who was a very talented man. He had taken pride from accomplishment, independence, and ability, rather than social position. Pride of accomplishment or ability. The pride of capability, not social status.

Growing up in Tennessee was striking compared to growing up in California, in a life of privilege, from pride of what we had.

Mr. Frank appeared unkempt. He was dirty, a tobacco farmer with no formal education except high school. He grew up on the tobacco farm, trailer trash. At the time, I didn't realize I was trailer-trash too. Mr. Frank, dirty, dirty poor tobacco farmer, he taught me the life-lessons I needed.

Pride is sweet, real as water, pride is earned, is earned, not something born into.

The Television

I was home for the weekend after my first month at boarding high school. My mom and dad had driven up on Friday afternoon and it was about 6 o'clock in the evening. My dad had told me he had a surprise for me when I got home. My mind was wondering but I kept my anticipation to myself.

But as mom, dad and I drove down the driveway to the house, I became excited. What could the surprise be? When I stepped into the house and entered the living room, I saw my first television, a console with a black and white picture. I was amazed and surprised.

That evening dad and I watched the hit parade, a show of the top songs of the day sung by some TV performers. Dad was proud of his new purchase for the family and I enjoyed his happiness with him.

Later in the evening, wrestling came on. I have never seen two guys beat each other like those two wrestlers did. I sat in the living room with Dad, listening to the words of this commentator, and cringing at the painfulness of wrestling moves.

That weekend was filled with the excitement of the whole family enjoying our newly found entertainment. Television opened our eyes to experiences of other people and places. It opened up the knowledge of living in just a small farming community.

I went back to school on Sunday evening relishing those special moments with my family at home.

The next month when I went home, Dad had bought a special screen to place on the face of the TV that was shaded blue on top and green on bottom and yellow in the middle. La! We had colored TV.

That weekend I enjoyed watching Roy Rogers and a Lone Ranger in color.

These memories of a few weekends at home each semester are treasured because I missed my parents, brothers, and sisters a lot. It was fun to look forward to my next visit home to share family life again.



My Brother Francis

My favorite memories are playing with my younger brother, Francis. We were two years apart in age. Francis and I would do our morning chores as fast as we could. Then we would race to the grove in the back of the house. There we would assemble a playhouse from branches of trees.

We would break twigs of 6 to 8 inches long, then draw a floor plan on the freshly swept spot on the ground. We would pound our twigs into the ground to define our rooms: a porch, kitchen, dining room, and two bedrooms.

Then our imaginations ran wild with things to do. First we would usually make cookies out of mud and water. We would cut our cookies with the top of tins can we found from mom's waste basket in the kitchen.

First we would make a batch of dark mud cookies. We would sprinkle light sand on top of each cookie for decoration. That was about as far as we got with kitchen duties.

Then we would get busy marking off a path in the grove to the area we would clean for fields. Our paths could be marked with twine from one tree to another. We would tie it around each tree, three feet above the ground, then to the next tree so we could see our path.

We would mark each field with twigs, as we did our floor plans for the house. When we had the boundaries arranged for fields, we would crush up the leaves and throw each in a "field" to represent planting our oats and corn.

As we planned our day we talked of the fun we had each year, having dad tell mom what he had done in the field each day during the summer

The Family Business

My grandfather is what people call a self-made man. I don't know how much schooling he had, but I suspect it was probably only grammar school, if that. Most of my memories center on the time in his life when he started his own business. He owned property on the outskirts of Latonia, Kentucky. He built his own house, and then he decided to build a nightclub attached to his house. It had a large bar and still a larger club room with many tables and chairs and a pool table and a piano. Because he was calling it a country club, he required customers to become members, and pay a small initiation fee. I never heard he turned down anyone who wanted to become a member.

My cousins and I became acquainted with most of the customers and we addressed them by name. My grandfather tended bar, my grandmother fixed sandwiches and bowls of chili for the customers. There was a ping pong table, a piano, and tables and chairs. During weekdays the club was closed during the day, and opened after six. During the day Saturday and Sunday the parking lot was filled with cars.

My cousins and I spent many days roaming the hills and creek. I remember wading in the creek and the scolding my grandmother would give me when I walked in the house with wet shoes and socks. At night, when we stayed at what we called the farm, we fell asleep hearing the loud talking and laughter and music. In the morning we would wake up and help our grandparents clean up and restock. We had a lot of fun.

I remember the cemetery which lay adjacent to my grandfather's land. My cousin and I would walk around in the cemetery almost daily. We became familiar with the tombstones and the names on them and greeted them as friends as we walked around.

My grandfather was small, smaller than I am now, and kind of profane. We learned all the cuss words real early. We couldn't use them, but we knew them. We heard them. He used them a lot. Grandma was very sweet and kind, reliable. She never said a bad word about anybody.

I had a good time, I really did. She was my mother's mom. I don't know much about her background, I know where they lived initially, but I never knew more. They never told me. I don't know why my grandfather went into that business, but he had two sons, and whenever they had a day off, they tended bar. That was the family business.



My Grandparents' House

I always looked forward to eating meals at my grandfather's and grandmother's house. The food tasted different from what my mother prepared, somehow. The flavors were more apparent. There were a lot more vegetables, especially tomatoes.

My grandfather would always insist on saying grace, but we could never remember the words of the standard prayer, so he would make it up as he went along. We never knew what to expect what to be grateful for at a particular meal.

The meal was always tasty, especially the dessert which was a lot of fresh fruits in the sauce, or a pie with a particularly crispy crust. Somehow as I grow older food doesn't seem to taste as good and the meals are less interesting, or perhaps this is what happens when you get old.

I Want a Cat

My subject is cats. In my life, as far back as I can remember, there have been cats in my life. I come by them naturally, my mother was a cat person so there was always a cat or cats in my home. Now, for the first time in years, I have no pets since I'm presently living with my son and daughter-in-law, in a place that's not my usual home. In a couple of weeks I'll be heading back to Florida, and once there, I will begin to hunt for feline companionship.

It's not always easy to find a cat when you are ready to have one. Sometimes you can go to the SPCA and find a homeless cat, sometimes there's an ad in the paper for a family that is overpopulated with kittens. The personality of cats agrees with my own, they are independent and solitary. They have to be sure of your goodwill before intersecting their lives with yours. They are attractive to look at and good companions once they're sure of you. They've relatively easy to care for and often long lived, they are testily pleasant, and always enjoy being stroked and cuddling on or near you. Kittens are almost irresistible, but finding homes for a litter can be challenging. They often let you know exactly what they want, and will persist. Soon I'll be going back to Florida. I'm certain that the SPCA will be one of my first stops.