

A WEEK OF...

m'Eerie Weirdies 2

THE NEW CASTLE GHOST TOUR

Collection of stories and poems set in Delaware as told by

**Cynthia DiSciullo
and
William Zigmont**

**Edited by Marsha Pyle
Art edited by Jeffrey Michael Bader**

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underEarth Properties
2008

$$a/E$$



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A Week of... m'Eerie Weirdies 2
THE NEW CASTLE GHOST TOUR

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Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

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underearthproperties@yahoo.com
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Warning

Any places listed as haunted places and/or of interest require permission to visit or investigate. Many of the places are patrolled by the authorities, trespassers will be prosecuted.

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DEDICATION

To quote Elain Heffner, "The art of mothering is to teach the art of living to children." I believe, though, it goes beyond that, and it doesn't just mean young children. It is also about teaching adult offspring how to live through adversity and how to be armed with tenacity, to show that seedlings fall from dying blooms to bring forth renewal, and that in the end a smile and laughter is your best defense against life's hurdles. My mom taught me that, and at eighty-three years of age continues to do so.

When my father passed, her world had been snatched away, for she came to live with us from another state. She lost her home, her friends and neighbors, and the man she loved for sixty-four years since she was seventeen years old. Yet, her smile emerged through tears and her attitude of making it through day by day despite physical ailments, despite memory snares and despite grief.

As Paulette Bates Alden has said, "Her grandmother as she gets older is not fading but becoming more concentrated." And mom has become just that. She concentrates on people, relationships, loving everyone who crosses her path, the technician who just pinched her to draw blood gets a hug, the clerk who showed her the best lipstick gets a hug, any passerby who shows a kindness received that same hug. She focuses on giving that part of her that matters, warmth and caring. She still bakes and shares those baked goods with whoever enters our home, and she stays active attending the Newark Senior Center for art classes and discussion groups as well as a monthly lunch meeting with ladies from church.

I watch in amazement as she gathers in life, dancing at my daughter's wedding, making me tea when I have a cold, her slow shuffle and shaking hands unheeded, for her spark and sparkle shine from eyes still young with dreams, dreams of the two upcoming births of great-granddaughters, dreams of seeing those births, seeing these children learn to speak and walk, seeing another holiday, creating another piece of art. Dreams that might seem simple to many, but dreams that keep her motivated and growing as a person and as a mother.

I have many memories of childhood that I could share of this woman, but those that mean the most to me are more recent, those of making a meal together, of dancing the jitterbug in the foyer just cause the music seemed right, of crying at an old movie and singing Christmas carols in the car, both of us wonderfully off key, and just laughing. We laugh and laugh and then laugh some more at just the absurdities in life, at just the klutziness of both our ages and at things that make sense to no one but us. "Sometimes the laughter in mothering is the recognition of the ironies and absurdities. Sometimes, though, it's just pure, unthinking delight," said Barbara Schapiro. And I find that delight nearly every day as I discover the special jewel that is my mother.

I dedicate my words that interweave throughout the stories in this book to my mother, Marie Stella Plesh (Benedict). A woman who has taught me you can find light in the darkest cave of life. After all, you might discover diamonds.

A SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To the young people of The Indian Lane Elementary School, thank you for sharing your enchanting views of Delaware with pen, pencil and art. Your gifts and talents will entertain all who linger upon the pages of this book.

Marsha Pyle for her patient editing. Jeffrey Michael Bader for his discerning eye and talents. Part of the vision of this book was to provide an outlet for others to express. We thank everyone who has contributed.

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Illustration by: Stella Plesh

This is one chapter of *Cynangel: Gets Her Wings*, Book Two, an upcoming book in the *Cynangel* series, pending publication

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WEDNESDAY

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT CATS STEAL THE BREATH

GATES AND SQUEAKS AREN'T ALWAYS NEAT

DEVAN SLOANE

~ CRAZY CAT

PATRICK J. CARROLL, Director of Development of the Delaware Humane Association

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~ BENEATH THE SURFACE

THEM BONES, THEM BONES, THEM DOG BONES

JASON CAMPBELL

~ LAVA DUDE

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Illustration by: Cynthia Swanson

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Photo by: Anthony DiSciullo

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

By: Devan Sloane

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

By: Nancy Zeller

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

By: Jason Campbell

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

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~ THE SEA

~ I THE SEA

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Illustration by: Cynthia Swanson

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

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THE NEW CASTLE GHOST TOUR

TAP... TAP... TAPPING

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Illustrations by: Kathryn Szymanski

A celebration of Mike Biggs, a photographer, Immanuel Episcopal Church and Cemetery, and Jessop's Tavern, located in New Castle

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Photos by: Marsha Pyle

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Illustration by: Fred Schmidt

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Illustration by: Fred Schmidt

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Illustration by Fred Schmidt
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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Illustrations by: Fred Schmidt

Photos by: Marsha Pyle

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READ HOUSE ~ FRED SCHMIDT

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

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Illustrations by: Fred Schmidt

Photos by: Marsha Pyle

A celebration of Arsenal on the Green

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TOWN HALL AND MARKET ~ FRED SCHMIDT

CHURCH ON THE GREEN ~ FRED SCHMIDT

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

A celebration of Fred Schmidt and the Oak Knoll Books and Press

THE OLD DUTCH HOUSE AND READ HOUSE

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Illustrations by: Fred Schmidt

Photo by: Marsha Pyle

DUTCH HOUSE ~ FRED SCHMIDT

THE OLD DUTCH HOUSE ~ FRED SCHMIDT

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Photos by: Marsha Pyle

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Photos by: Marsha Pyle

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Legend of the Crab:

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Illustration by: Fred Schmidt

Photo by: Marsha Pyle

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 Illustrations by: Cynthia Swanson
 The written work had been published in the magazine *Writer Journal*
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JAMES WOLFENDEN
 ~ **CYCLOPES** By: James Wolfenden
LIAM NAWN
 ~ **GOOEY WORKS** By: Liam Nawn
Legend of the Delaware's clean monsters: By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont
STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont
Stairway To Heaven has been published in Edit Red, February 2008
CATCHING FLIES By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont
A TRIBUTE TO REALITY By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont
 Illustration by: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont
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THE PERFECT TRAP

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Illustration by: Cynthia Swanson

The written work has been published in the magazine *Hob-Nob*

DELICATE PROTOCOL ~ CYNTHIA SWANSON

SAMANTHA LEE

~ OZZY

By: Sami Lee

PIP'S GARDEN

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Illustration by: Cynthia Swanson

This is a celebration of Elsie Evans' family

GARDEN SEAT ~ CYNTHIA SWANSON

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By: Christopher Gresh and William Zigmont

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

REBEKA PILKAUSKAS

~GRUESOME GHOSTS

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Legend of Locust Grove Farm:

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

CASSIDY MORETTI

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By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

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WITCH WAY DO I GO TO GET TO ODESSA, DELAWARE?

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ATTENTION DELAWAREANS

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INTRODUCTION



FRED SCHMIDT and CYNTHIA SWANSON

Fred and Cynthia shown here at the Newark Senior Center are featured in this book. Their art is of the finest quality and has enhanced our product. We thank them deeply for these contributions. Fred's house portraits fit wonderfully within our celebration of New Castle, Delaware. The gentle lines and perfect muse of Cynthia's pieces add to many of our stories giving them humanity and beauty. Their biographies can be found within the book and there is an in-depth interview with Fred. He is a magical man of the gentle age of ninety-one. We have been blessed by their contributions and we feel confident that others will enjoy their special talents. Photo provided by Cynthia Swanson



TERRY HASKELL-McDONALD

Terry Haskell-McDonald is a 4th grade teacher at Indian Lane Elementary School in Media, PA. She is born and raised as a true Delawarean! Terry grew up in North Wilmington, attended the University of Delaware, lived in Rehoboth, and then lived in Newark before moving to Pennsylvania. Currently, Terry lives in Chadds Ford with her husband, Joe, and together they have four children. She has five cats and loves learning new things, especially with technology. In her spare time she enjoys walking, *scrapbooking*, photography, antiquing, and singing in her church, New Life Christian Fellowship.

Terry has the unique capability of putting a person instantly at ease. Within a few moments you feel as if you've known her a lifetime. She has a sunshine disposition and a light-up-the-day singing voice as well as a profound interest in teaching her students to excel. Young minds entrusted to her care will surely benefit from her insight, inventiveness and willingness to showcase them. Her *young friends*, her way of identifying her students, have been brought to our attention with enthusiasm and professionalism one normally finds only in the upper echelons of literary submissions. Her participation and that of her talented, inventive and creative students has blessed us. Terry, we are so grateful that you chose to partake in this book series that celebrates your home state and birthplace. You are indeed an inspirational daughter of Delaware.

ABBY BURKE

Enthusiasm not only adorns Abby Burke's persona, one of the fourth grade teachers at Indian Lane School, like a buffed veneer, it is the energetic teacher's creed. She said, "I'm really big on getting excited about descriptive writing, and about teaching in a way that is fun and creative. I believe it is important for a teacher to show enthusiasm. It is contagious, and the children respond." In meeting with her students, you can tell that her zeal has inspired them. More than half the class, when asked, wanted to be writers. Abby has taught them the importance of words as an outlet for imagination. "The biggest thing I try to teach my kids is to paint a picture in the minds of readers." She adds a healthy measure of technology

to this, which allows them to learn in multiple venues. “I choose activities that are interesting for the students in the sense that learning is fun,” she informed. It is obvious that Abby has the dedicated heart of a teacher, and it is something she had always wanted to do.

Ms. McKenna, Abby’s third grade teacher, had inspired her, and Abby practiced on her stuffed animals since she was approximately eight years old. Her passion is obvious. She is a very interactive hands-on teacher. “I try to make the lessons fun, even math. We often act out a problem. Not all kids learn the same way. I try to teach in ways that every child will be able to learn.” This is evident in the bright, eager faces of her students. They literally shine with the possibilities of learning. Abby Burke is a teacher to be admired. Even while attending the graduate program at West Chester University, current class Reflective Teaching, in the evenings to obtain a Master’s degree in Elementary Ed, she digs into her reservoir of strength to go the extra step for her students. An example is the book of monsters her class created, which we have shared here. It wasn’t just stapled together or clipped. It was an attractive, spiral woven, laminated book highlighting every child’s prose and artistic depiction with pride. Kudos, Abby Burke on being the ideal every teacher should strive to be.

WHAT TO EXPECT

This book’s genesis was to be a celebration of Delaware, and if you look, you will find something Delaware in every piece; albeit, a place, person, and/or an event. Our small state is full of treasures, some not so apparent, and we hope we have unearthed some of those hidden. Our mantra was FUN.

The construction of this book is simple. It is broken down into days as chapters, thus the title of the book. Whereas, the book is a collection of short stories and poems many written by Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont, foremost it is a vehicle for others.

Additionally, each *day* has guest authors, all having a connection to Delaware, providing a short story(s). The artwork contained is also Delaware based, the *craftpersonship* apparent, each cherished and are all gifts to this work. Delaware is a treasure-trove of talented and generous people. Many stories have *Postscripts* which make linkage to certain ideas oft times expressed in the attached piece. Sections called *Another’s point* are quotes that are intended to add to the stories. *Phobias* noted are both real and faux. Fear is a universal constant, and it is not that we have fear but what do we do about it... maybe understand it. Thank you, everyone.

THE SPOOKING BEGINS



MONDAY

JENNY MY FRIEND

By: Cynthia DiSciullo and William Zigmont

Illustration by: Stella Plesh

This is one chapter of *Cynangel: Gets Her Wings*, Book Two, an upcoming book in the *Cynangel* series, pending publication

Universe: underunderEarth

Place: The Wells of Wishes

Time: Earlier

In a different universe, wood-nymphs and gnomes, angels and Molemen, Spinners and *flies-of-butter* along with many other souls and creatures, flora and fowl existed, most in harmony and some not. This wondrous land had many special places, The Well of Wishes proved to be one of the places spoken of with hushed wonder and smiles. Sprawled out over seventy and six squares, stone pathways trimmed with *pseudoranthemum*, circular, perfectly-formed clusters of tiny, scarlet flowers tipped with yellow, framed a well. Indeed wonderful wells, with cedar roofs and copper buckets held in place by braided manatee's whiskers, given freely on the day of shedding, collected by Melody while on 'er trek to collect sweets and salts.

Nay a soul or spirit would pass by without sampling one or all of the seventy and six wells and their ambrosia water, aye, sampling of several, after all, each tasted different than the next. Seventy and five were for drinking only, but one was a granter of dreams-come-true. If one made a wish upon the mouth of the 'one', that different well, that wish would be granted.

The Grunk, the minder of the wells, lived subterranean, a magical, plump imp that flavored the water. A delightful occupation, but he did more. The Grunk visited a different well each day and that well became the 'one'. If anyone spoke a wish there and he overheard it, he had no recourse but to grant its eventuality. Many wishes, though, got lost and that truly grieved Grunk, especially if it was the wish of a selfless.

Forces embedded in the desires of wishes and dreams-come-true often skew the ethics of many good people. Many tried to trick the Grunk, but he could not be easily duped. Fifty-four and seven hundred harvests provided him apt experience. A *selfish* had been known to try to stand above the same well every day and make the same wish. Whereas, the wells were connected and he heard the genuineness of the calls, he had learned and trained his marvelous mind to never hear the pleadings of the selfish soul, for the Grunk, a remarkable being, remembered every *selfish* and their wishes of greed, vengeance or vile. Thus, a selfish wish never had a chance to be granted reality.

The Grunk pledged he would only gift the *goodwishers*.

Jenny

Universe: Earth

Place: Forest Brook

Time: Now

Grammie Pike lived in Forest Brook, a small town. Small compared to the big cities, but not small enough that anyone knows everyone, yet mostly everyone knew Grammie.

No one ever entered her home without being offered something to eat or drink. “A bit of tea does the heart good,” she told Betty, her neighbor. Betty barely got through the back door, before cups were on the table followed by some tempting baked good.

“Oh, don’t go through any trouble.”

“No trouble, was about to indulge myself.” The petite woman *hummingbirded* about the kitchen preparing the repast.

And when Betty passed on a platter of cookies, Grammie insisted, “Oh, but you are much too thin.” And smiled a sincere grin after her repartee.

No one ever called the rotund Betty thin. But Grammie was like that, seeing nothing beyond the beauty of a person. And the sincerity in her tone made people feel good about themselves from bald-headed Jake the barber to stick-thin Aggie the cosmetics counter girl at Waldrof’s department store and to Steve the Morning Spirit paperboy who, instead of throwing the paper, ran up and put it at her door to save Grammie Pike steps.

Generosity of spirit was second nature to Grammie and obvious like a glow-bug on a summer’s eve. When Mary Belini needed a ride to physical therapy after her stroke, Grammie took her, twice a week. Mary’s son lived in the next town over and would take off work but Grammie insisted. “You work, Max. Us old ladies can manage.” The story was back in the day, when Kathy Sils needed a sitter for her three-year-old after her divorce. Grammie watched the child every day for four years and never took a cent. When the church needed a hand, she was the first to arrive and the last to leave. When the nursing home needed volunteers, Grammie appeared, jeans the attire of the day and a sequin top, that glowed as did her omnipresent smile. Although Grammie was several years older than many of the patrons, it did not stop her from making the residents laugh, holding their hands, listening, or from regaling them with tales of the summer she had joined a carnival, and of course making a joke out of it all saying that she had to go and take care of the old people never acting as they were her peers. She lived young in spirit and yes, she was generous with all she had.

Everyone knew by sight her tiny Toyota with the hole in the passenger’s floorboard, smelt its smoke, and recognized the hand-painted racing stripe along the side. A stripe she applied right after she spray-painted the car a bright blue and upholstered the interior seats in Tartan plaid. She would zip across town in spurts and chugs, spitting out fumes. Bert, the owner of Bert’s House of Plugs and Garage, took care of it for no charge; he was the

brother of Kathy Sils. Claimed her vehicle was his advertising, kept a picture of it on the wall with a hand-scribbled slogan, *I proudly service the oldest car in town.*

“Park that moving smokestack,” called out a local teen with a chuckle as his jalopy spewed a few pollutants, they comrades in motion.

“Better than walking,” Grammie explained out her window. And everyone who had benefited from a ride to the store or sick friend’s bedside or a doctor agreed.

When her hands curled from arthritis, she countered the problem by taking an art class. Blushed like a school girl getting a smile from a boy every time anyone complimented her art. She never had a lesson in her life, but won first prize at the Kyoodle Square Art Show, and then immediately gave her ribbon to Ted Bettle. Ted’s pleading eyes were the subject of her portrait. Mentally handicapped from birth, he did not realize he had not won first place. He wore the ribbon from that day on and no one dared to take it away from him.

And when her back surgery worsened an already pain-riddled back, she joined a dance class. “It’s gonna hurt whether I dance or not, so might as well whoop it up,” she told her neighbors. Clad in salsa style, she spun like a child’s top in molasses. Wearing bib overalls with a bandana, she managed to learn to square dance and wearing a dress, that a rarity, she waltzed.

In time, Grammie’s memory started to fade and her body refused to move as fast as it once had. Her only son and his wife insisted she live with them. She would have fought the move, but knew their worries would be more if she did not accept their offer. Her granddaughter, Lauren had always spent time with Grammie, but being in school and a slew of activities, she did not really know her until she had moved in.

Lauren remembered the day. Grammie had the look of someone ready to start an adventure, but her parents spoke in hushed whispers regarding various concerns about leaving her alone during the day, and how this change might affect their daughter. Any worries Lauren had evaporated as she helped Grammie unpack. She had candy stashed in her suitcase, boxes of chocolate and bags of various assortments. With a wink and a finger pressed against her lips, Grammie said, “Shh, sometimes one should have a snack before dinner just in case it’s something you don’t like.”

It was a Saturday. Lauren, still a little groggy having just awakened, meandered the stairs. Near the bottom, she heard her mother and Grammie Pike talking.

“Mom, do you have any idea how precious you are? How proud you make me? I watch you and experience a renewed epiphany of awe each time. You lost everything, your mate, your home, your independence and pieces of your memory, yet you rise up like that proverbial phoenix and overcome every obstacle. You are tenacious in a way that knocks me over. You won’t take any crap and have the fearlessness of a super hero, yet you aren’t even five feet tall.”

“Pshaw, where do you keep the baking soda. I have to make some Italian cookies.”

The two collected the ingredients, placed them on the counter, the daughter realizing her mother may not have even embraced the heart of her previous words. Lauren entered

the room. Grammie Pike greeted her with a huge hug, “Sleep well, m’dear? You want cookies, don’t you?”

“Yes,” the girl replied with a smile.

“I’ll have to make them.”

Lauren began to leave the room when the older woman asked, “Where you going?”

“To watch cartoons.”

“toons!” responded the woman, “I’ll join you. I love them.” They bubbled off with giggles, leaving Lauren’s mother standing in front of cookie ingredients. She made the cookies, smiling.

Prior to Grammie Pike moving in permanently, Lauren and her parents sat to talk. Though she was young, she recalled a few of the details.

“She’s my mom. I can’t put her in a *home*.”

“I understand,” the wife comforted.

“She may be a handful.”

“We will manage.”

Lauren did not know her grandfather. He died when she was young, and the funeral services were all at the church.

Grammie Pike teary, greeted well-wishers and mourners, her son by her side, his wife by his, and Lauren in the arms of a friend seated behind them.

Beth Denson, a friend, greeted the bereaved, but the pain of loss must have flashed her back to her husband’s death, she crying and pining for Robert Denson. Grammie Pike in the midst of her own grief, at the viewing of her own husband, retreated with Beth Denson, hugged and comforted her, placing the friend’s pain first. The son was startled at first, but knew this was his mother’s way.

Later that day, the son said to his mother, “When you cry, you apologize just in case it might make someone else sad, and then you suck it up and smile, put on that brave face and take another step and then another and another until you start to dance, literally, often pulling me into the dance with you, and daring the world to steal that moment. And if the world dared, you’d smack it and claim another moment just like it.”

“And your point is?”

“You put your pain aside for others.”

“Everyone needs someone. You are a good son. Hug me.” They did.

“Where is the sugar? I can’t find the sugar.” Grammie Pike stood upon a kitchen chair, flashlight in hand searching a cabinet in sheer befuddlement.

“I’ll get it, Mom. Let me help you down. Don’t climb.” The son lifted her down and handed her the canister that was on the counter. “It is here on the counter, it is always here.”

“You know I put extra sugar in my chocolate chip cookies.”

Later that day she managed in the slow shuffle gait to bring a plate of fresh, still warm cookies to everyone as they were playing a game. “Cookies. Eat.” It was not just pride in caring for one’s loved ones, but duty that she found self-warming.

The three each took one, bit, looked at each other, smiled and enjoyed the sugar-free cookies, all taking a second.

“Mom. You have this pain-ridden back that would put someone else in a wheel chair. You ignored the wheel chair and everything it represents, but graciously, for your children’s sake, opted for a scooter. You use it only when it is absolutely necessary. And then you are a hellion on it. You knock down displays, pound on your horn to scoot people out of the way, and then you grin that oops sort of grin and no one can get angry. There is something so rock solid within you, yet there is also such tenderness, such emotion, and such a passion for life. I long to know what that quality is. I want to bottle it. Each day I spend with you makes me realize why Daddy loved you so much. You make people laugh because you laugh. You make me rich.”

“We should make soup, I make the best soup. Your Daddy loved my soup. He was a handsome man when I met him. Much like you.”

“I love you, Mom.”

Lauren stood in the shadow of the doorway to the family room; the record player played old 78s that they had brought from Grammie Pike’s home. Grammie sang and hummed alongside her son who was reading. When she eventually fell asleep, he could have gotten up and turned the music off, but sat and talked to mother though she did not hear.

“I watch your memory fail and ache. I see your confusion at times, but you don’t let even that stop you. You are my *shero*. If no one is about to help you, you find your way; you make a way and endear yourself to people along the way. You are a treasure. You never complain, NEVER. You say... oh whatja gonna do, it’s life. You rarely even get angry anymore. It’s as if you nearly have forgotten how, but when you do, it’s a brief, infinitesimal storm. You are so quick to forgive and think the best of people. You give them the benefit of the doubt, but don’t pull any punches if they do something hurtful.”

Benny Goodman’s orchestra played, the young girl listened.

“I remember when you were dynamite on a stick, rushing here and there, doing everything for everyone, and then your back problems began. That didn’t stop you from waking each day and doing laundry and keeping house. It didn’t stop you from watching a neighbor’s child for no pay. Who does that? It didn’t stop you from driving this one and that one to doctor appointments. Even now, you have this amazing work agenda. When others your age are happy to be waited on, you roll up your sleeves and do what you can manage. Often it is more than most people attempt that are half your age.”

Lauren felt a gentle hand touch her shoulder. She looked up to her mother, who had placed a finger on her lips asking her not to make a sound. The two listened.

“You can tell a tale with an impish lilt and then give a shocking ending in a matter-of-fact way. You see truth in everything. There are no rose-colored glasses, and yet there is still this amazing innocence, a naivety that makes things that are raw and black and bad have clarity. Things are what they are and you acknowledge that, bad or good, good or bad,

whether it happens to you or someone else. It doesn't mean you don't have compassion, you do, but you won't stand for self-pity, especially not for yourself."

Tears of this nature were easy for the wife and flowed, but for an eleven-year-old they were not.

"Mom, you see life as an adventure and you refuse to end the journey. Life throws you curves. Hits you hard. And you keep on. People have taken advantage of you, and you washed your hands of them and found better friends, yet never spoke ill of them. Finances haven't always been great, so you started to make drapes and then undercharged because it was never right to take advantage of people. Every time something painful and hard occurred you picked yourself up. You accepted every challenge in life and bested it with a smile, a cup of tea and lots of homemade bread. I want to be just like you, Mom. I want to have your spunk and your tenacity and your kindness and your ability to love without judging. I want you to live forever because the world would lose, not just your family, but everyone you touch would lose if you didn't."

The two females left the room, walked in silence hand-in-hand to find their bedrooms and their night's sleep.

When Lauren dashed down the church's creaky stairs to the community room to claim Grammie and walk her home, she expected the Tweety Tot class to be over and Grammie to be waiting. Instead, she found parents holding up walls. Grins seemed to be their common muse. Fathers shook their heads and laughed. Mothers had that sentimental flush they often got when a moment rose above all others, a moment they would remember on gloomy days, knowing it would chase that gloom away.

Lauren followed their collective gazes to the sight of Grammie, colorful scarves flowing from both hands. She, along with the children, danced and spun to the song Jingle Bells. The song seemed out of place for July, but the oddly-shaped construction paper hats plopped on their heads seemed strangely appropriate to the array of giggles and ungainly dance steps. Some children resembled spinning tops, threatening to spill but none did, balance kept regaining itself as hazy afternoon sun streams drifted through high windows. It created a natural spotlight as if the assemblage were on stage, performing like the superstars they were in their private worlds.

Lauren watched Grammie, saw the sparkle within her aged eyes and thought no one in the world more beautiful. Joy streamed from her as if she had found her calling, that of dancer extraordinaire. In that instant, Lauren caught a glimpse of the young girl Grammie had been. Specks of pride and tenacity could be garnered, but a craving for life could be seen as well, a hunger that would not let go. Lauren had no doubt that Grammie would live forever. She was old but not in the ways that counted. Grammie gobbled up life, tearing through it as if she could never consume enough of it.

Over the years things happened that defined her struggles as well as her resolve.

They took away Grammie's driver's license a few years ago, and Lauren did not understand why. Grammie liked to drive despite that she could barely see over the wheel,

and they never went further than the ice cream shop or toy store. Grammie liked both almost as much as Jenny.

Grammie, though, acted as if it did not happen. She wanted to know when she could buy another car. With the words barely out, she would shake her head and sigh, admitting that no car could take the place of her little Toyota. Her son sold it for her in the next county.

One time when Lauren had the flu, not the stomach kind, but the sniffles and cough sort, Grammie brought her chicken soup, freshly made with extra noodles. It smelled heavenly, but it was Grammie flitting about, tucking her in and chatting about yesteryear that made Lauren feel better. Her knuckle-swollen, wrinkled but cool hand felt so wonderful against Lauren's dry, hot flesh. Grammie insisted Lauren swallow every bit of soup, and Lauren did even though it tasted very sweet. Sometimes Grammie used sugar instead of salt. She placed her hand upon Lauren's stomach, closed her eyes, and wished the pain out of her granddaughter and into her.

Christmas at Uncle Billy's was the best. He was not really an uncle, but a good friend of Mom and Dad but Lauren suspected it was Grammie he liked most. He always told her she was a hoot, and Grammie would hoot like an owl in response, eyebrows waggling, which made everyone laugh no matter how many times the little ritual unfolded, punctuated by a hug and spin in a strange set of dance steps.

Uncle Billy always had the biggest tree and presents in little sleds positioned all about his house. He lived alone and did not have a birth family. But half the street had become his family, and Grammie had somehow become the reigning queen of that family.

Grammie loved to feed people, and mostly created meals that added ten pounds and garnered an addiction to Grammie's home-baked bread. Every Christmas Grammie made her bread, and everyone looked forward to it. She also gave presents that always seemed just right no matter how odd they would appear to anyone but the receiver. Lauren knew hers were the best, but the greater joy was seeing Grammie's face light up when she opened a gift. It could have been coal and she would still ooh and ahh and exclaim as if it had been diamonds.

Time proved to all Grammie Pike a rhapsody of loving chords played upon an aging instrument with the skill of a virtuoso, she playing a familiar song encouraging everyone to sing along, and they do.

An amazing reservoir of courage, whereas it is known that with age comes incoherence. Doris Sprawl has discovered the depth of that truth. She resides at a long-term care home for the elderly. She told stories of her life as a deacon in her church, tales of bake sales, coat drives, struggling times, and yes, faith. When she started her melodic melancholy march, one was in for a miraculous sojourn, her remembrances vivid, well articulated, and inspiring much because of her pitch of attitude. Memories free of regrets, regrets were a sad fate to those who aged, she seeing life as a perfectly beautiful experience. Surprisingly, there was a flawless beauty in her recollections of fellowship, giving, compassion, cooperation, and her glory of her faith. She metaphorically clenched the