

The More Things Change...

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Summer, more than any other season, is a time of memories and reflection.

Waves of heat, warm sand under my feet and the smell of fresh-cut grass carry memories of other summers long years ago. Sunlight and cool shade, fireworks, burnt marshmallows, fish and vegetables served up in foil packets from the campfire, sandcastles, cold water and hot sun...the characters change, from my own brothers and sisters, to my young daughters and their friends, to my small grandchildren, but there is a comforting constancy throughout.

When the sun goes down and the wind comes up, I am transported back to my teen-age years, riding in cars with windows down, music blaring, and that ever-present sense of danger, adventure and possibility.

The growing season was my Dad's time, and he is most present when I'm tending the garden.

In my family, summer holds many anniversaries of births and weddings and deaths, each with their own poignant thoughts.

I made a quick trip down-state earlier this month, to Lapeer, Michigan, in the thumb area of the state, where I grew up. The trip was occasioned by a combination of events. My Uncle Al, who just turned ninety-years-old, has a granddaughter who was having a graduation open-house. My forty-fifth high school class reunion was also on the agenda. My daughter was driving up from South Carolina, to bring my granddaughter to me.

A visit to Lapeer is almost over-whelming with the memories attached to it. Driving down Lake Nepessing Road, on the way to visit my brother, who lives in the house where I was raised, I found myself marveling at the age and disrepair of some of the homes there. "That is a brand-new house," I would think, before realizing that it was brand new when I was a child...fifty years ago. Road work caused extensive detours, bringing me to places I hadn't seen in years...every one holding mementos of times long ago: the building where I met my future husband at a dance; the little brick schoolhouse where I went to kindergarten; the Catholic grade school, almost unrecognizable now, with additions up and out; the high school I attended, now closed; my first apartment...and my second; the townhouse we lived in when my daughters were tiny; the block where I opened a gallery...I found tears springing to my eyes repeatedly and unexpectedly. Too many memories; too many years gone by; too much to take in.

In anticipation of the class reunion, I had tried on almost every outfit I owned, amongst great sighs of angst and occasional sobs. I imagined my sister Brenda's voice, as she might have sounded when we were children, saying, "that makes you look fat," or "that looks stupid," or "I wouldn't be caught dead looking like that!" I packed every single possible choice, just to ensure that the trauma would continue right up until the last moment. Brenda – who had agreed to be my "date" for the reunion – and I have each grown kinder over the years. We greeted each other with hugs and compliments. She took me to her day spa that evening, where we indulged in facials, herbal body wraps and the sauna.

The open house was a good chance to catch up with cousins, sisters and friends that I otherwise would not get a chance to see on such a short trip. We stayed later than intended, then rushed to make our evening deadline. Brenda and I each considered, for the sake of time, just wearing the clothes we had on. It was a warm day, though, and we had indulged in food and drink. By the time we got back to her house, we decided fresh outfits were in order. I tried on three before deciding on the least offensive, and made a valiant effort at fixing hair and make-up. Again, compliments and encouragement all around, and we were off.

My forty-fifth class reunion was not a stellar success or – rather – *I* was not a stellar success. I cringe, and think to myself, "*why* did I say that?" or "*why didn't* I say that?" or "did I really do that?" I did not lose the twenty pounds I hoped to lose before attending. I did not gain height or poise or wit. I did not come across as someone surprisingly different than myself, which is, I guess, what I'd hoped for. Socially awkward in high school...still socially awkward at sixty-two, attending the forty-fifth class reunion. *However*, it was wonderful to see Chuck, whose mother was a dear friend of my mother, thus giving me memories of him that go back to my infancy. Lola, who attended kindergarten with me, is another long memory. Kate, Barb, Richard, Patrice,

Rita and Walter attended Bishop Kelley School with me, some since the first grade. Minnie, who seemed shy and very quiet in high school, was there. Ellen impressed me with stories of teaching herself how to repair her own car based on what she could learn from the owner's manual. Cerise, very pretty in high school, is still a stunner. Darlene, first cousin of my ex-husband, was as funny and dear as ever, and caught me up on her family news. There were many who were acquaintances in school, but who have become friends as we've gotten to know each other through social media: Lynne, Kate, Richard and others. There wasn't enough time to catch up with everyone, even on a superficial level. Forty-five years is far too long to try to answer, "what have you been up to?" Still, I'm glad I was there. Brenda was a great dinner companion, always better at socializing and polite conversation than I am, always fun to spend time with. The list of classmates already passed away comprised a full ten percent of our high school class. That alone gives pause, and reason to be thankful for the chance to re-connect. The meal was lovely; the wine was good; the memories were sweet. I'm happy that I attended.

My granddaughter Madeline, fifteen years old, is here on Beaver Island now, visiting for a month. We have many conversations about what is new, and what has changed. She notices the sofa ("really beautiful," she tells me) and the flat-top stove ("my Mom thinks those are too dangerous"), the accumulated mess in my studio ("you should stop saving any more paper scraps until you use up everything you have!") and the drawers I've rearranged. She is thrilled by the old, familiar sights, from the old park bench in the side yard to the suitcase full of art materials for kids upstairs. I note changes, too. Madeline has a job this year, working about twenty hours a week at the ice-cream shop in town. She has a make-up bag in the bathroom and a cell phone that she keeps close. I am comforted by the familiar: her ready smile, her love of all animals, her kindness. We talk about her friends and companions, summers gone by and pets that have passed on. We agree that it seems little Rosa Parks – a four-year-old chihuahua mix – shares the spirit of old Maggie – a malamute-lab mix that died just months before she was born. We debate whether it would be wise to get a new companion for Rosa, now that her old friend, Clover, has died. The advantages and disadvantages all seem important until we look at images of available rescue dogs...then emotion takes over. We watch episodes of "The New Girl" on *Netflix*. I agreed to read *The Fault in Our Stars*; in exchange, Madeline will read *Love Story*. We cook and clean, pick berries and work puzzles together. She's a joy to have around.

This summer, like every other, will add memories to hold close, to come to the surface when the days grow long and the warm breezes blow.