

ADULT ENTRIES

Alain Adnan
Eileen Consiglio
Dolores Grissom
Edith G. Harris
Verda M. Lindberg-Keenan
Lang Mach
Gail Moberg
Sylvia Montoya
David Norris
Helen Rafferty
Avelina Serrano
Jeanne Stewart
Stacia Briana Weeks

From Memory's Labyrinth

by Adnan Alam

Inspired by a true story

1.

He was a passionate loner.

Even when he was a boy, he liked to spend his time in total isolation.

He loved to think of himself as God. At ten he said to his father, I am as lonely and as creative as God, only in total silence and isolation you can be creative. It awed his father.

He loved to write poetry and he wrote many; but I am sorry to inform you that none survived.

At twenty-five, two days before he was captured by the Pakistani army, during the 1971 war in Bangladesh, he won a wrestling award in the village. And almost over night, he became known as the “*strongest man ever lived in Nokh-khot-ro-polli.*”

I assure you, nothing more than this is known about his life before his capture.

2.

He never talked. Well, I'm almost right, he almost never talked.

He lived in his country house alone and without a friend. He was educated enough not to live in *Nokh-khot-ro-polli*, all his life; but he never wanted to live anywhere else. He wanted to be close to the soil of his birth place. He was never married, because he never wanted to bring his children in this world. He once told to my mother, how beautifully time will forever sleep within my unborn children.

I never liked him much, mostly because you had to ask him a hundred questions to get a single answer. But when I learned about his 1971 war experience, I began to respect him.

Once, after asking many other questions, I asked him, “Why don’t you talk?”

Without looking at me, he said, “Why talk, if you can do without it?”

3.

My mother told me about his 1971 war experience. I would tell you his story in my mother’s voice:

“He was locked up in one of his high school rooms for about two weeks. He remembered how he learned to be a good person many years earlier in these high school rooms, and now how people are being killed systematically within the same rooms so ruthlessly. Many of his friends, along with people he barely knew or didn’t know at all, were beheaded in front of him and in the next room and in the school yard; he could see it all, smell the fresh blood, almost could taste the destruction of all hope. Before the war, he won a wrestling award in Nokh-khot-ro-polli, and he was famous in the surrounding villages as well for his strength. His family members thought that he would be killed instantly because everyone knew how strong he was; they believed his fame would kill him. His hands and legs were tied up with ropes, and he always felt betrayed by those ropes, ropes that were made out of jute, jute that grew in his own village. Eventually his father managed to bribe some of the officials, and he was released along with some of his friends. He came home and immediately burned all his poems; when asked, he said pointing to the ashes, every single word of these poems has lost its meaning, and they are all worthless now, they have nothing to say. He always said that he survived because there were others scheduled to be killed before him, he survived because they didn’t. He also used to say, luck had nothing to do in there, it was all a number game.”

4.

“Would you ever be able to forgive them?”

“Does God exist?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, if God exists, then I would never forgive them, even if I live forever, over and over. And if God forgives them, I would never forgive God, even if I have to burn in hell forever, over and over.”

“What if God doesn’t exist?”

“That is what I want, because I want to forgive them. But I wouldn’t forgive them as long as I live. The moment I die, they will be forgiven. I can never forget; therefore, I can never forgive; but I want to forgive, but I can’t. Not even God can forgive them, if I don’t forgive them; God has no right to do so.”

“Does God exist?”

“Whatever the case, you can’t will the truth to vanish.”

This is the only full conversation I’ve ever had with him.

He died in 1997; and eight months before his death I had this conversation with him, in his house.

5.

My mother likes to say that he died naturally; but the truth is he committed suicide. Our family had to keep it a secret, fearing that if others knew about it, then the *Mullahs* might not give him a proper *Janaza*.

I might be wrong, but I would like to believe that he committed suicide because he wanted to forgive them sooner.

And I can tell you for sure that he wasn’t suicidal.

He left a note, where he described a dream he had the night before he committed suicide, in the following way:

“A son writing back to his mother, telling her how terrible it is to live in twenty second century. Telling her how he hates her for giving him life in this bizarre world, where he can only read about trees, grass, flowers and birds and see them only through his memory’s thousand eyes; but they are all extinct now. But then he forgives her, because he was allowed to see the brutality of mankind, and the destruction of planet earth.

Forgiveness: an essay

by Eileen Consiglio

The cancer diagnosis was as shocking as it was odd. How could my grandfather get this disease? He seemed so healthy. But there it was, written on a prescription pad, peeled off and handed to my father's father, unceremoniously. The word *cancer* preceded by some scribbled adjectives. No doubt he asked the doctor to write the precise name of his disease, to refer to those words a few hundred times over the next weeks and months. He put the paper in his folder, along with some clippings he'd later come across, outlining recent treatment breakthroughs and side effects. After all these years, he knew what was going to kill him.

"You and your sister better get over here fast. I don't know how long I've got. Might be today," he'd say dryly. Grandpa wasn't trying to be dramatic. He was scared naturally, but never admitted such a thing. He longed for our company more these days. Suddenly, the normal school activities were of interest to this man, who preferred to hear about, but never attend, our school functions. He's rather be home, he'd say, despite our invitations to see a play or a game.

"Your father wants me to go for some medicine clear into the city. I told him I'm not going. No thanks."

The man had an uncanny need, or so it seemed to be home. Maybe being in his house brought him comfort of some kind. He didn't seem to want to go anywhere. He was like this before he had cancer, so it was nothing new. Grandpa didn't want to have his chair, and all his familiar things, teasing me when I was little that he wanted to be able to reach the candy dish Grandmom kept filled with his favorites. So when the subject of going to a teaching hospital for treatment came up, he wanted no parts of it. "Why can't I just die here?" he'd ask, arms waving. He got his wish' Grandpa died at home a short 5 months later.

During the funeral and family visits, I was struck by how angry I was with my grandfather. Not so much for dying and leaving his family, but for his stubbornness about not getting the medical treatment he needed, and could have maybe extended his life. Why had he refused to even consider an hour long car ride into the city to participate in a clinical trial? Despite how thick his folder became with information, and the constant pleas from his own son, Grandpa did not seek medical help at any time.

My grief was stuck at the same spot for months after he died. And my thought about him seemed to gravitate back to the same questions in my mind: why not choose life over death? Why wouldn't this dear old man venture into the city for care? Did he want to die?

I vacillated between anger and sadness for I don't remember how long. My Dad saw how miserable I was, which called for one of his sit down meetings, reserved for the delivery of big news. He reminded me how well he knew this man, and what a puzzle he was from time to time as my own Dad was growing up under him. I knew his stories well. He knew his father simply could not deal with what he called "those people." He realized that going downtown for treatment would mean he might be poked by all kinds of medical staff. He held deep prejudice against most everybody that didn't look and sound just like him. The thought of some foreigner giving care to this man was enough to sour him on the idea, no matter the consequences.

My Dad knew this about his father, but wanted to spare my sister and me from this truth as a way to protect his memory. Grandpa's prejudice was deeply rooted, a part of him.

"Did he know it was wrong of him to think this way, Dad?" I asked, trying to understand.

"He did, but he couldn't help it, he told me. Things were different when he was growing up, he said. He didn't want you girls to feel that way, too."

I thought about that for a while. I needed to move past this odd feeling I had, this resentment and sorrow. Forgiving my Grandpa was not easy for me. He could not accept care from people because prejudice had him in its grip. Just like the cancer did. I had no foolishness. And I could forgive this old man.

My Dad explained it to me. "When someone is found innocent by reason of insanity, they are no less innocent in the eyes of the law. The issue before a judge would rest on whether the person had the capacity to think differently." He said. It's hard for me to think like that. It was nearly impossible to put myself in his shoes, and I'm not sure I was ever able to do it completely. But I wanted very much to understand Grandpa's thinking, and his reasoning.

I still miss him. When friends tell me of a family member recently diagnosed with cancer, I think about him all over again, and wonder if they will feel the same odd grief and anger that I did. I remember Grandpa's life, and how much he loved being a homebody. Now that I know more about what made him tick, and more about what his capacities were and weren't, I remember how lucky I was that he never told me the real reason he denied treatment. He didn't want to hear the argument from anybody, the tough old man. Though he never lied, he did care enough about his grandkids to protect us from his poison.

Forgive
by Dolores Grissom

Looking back at past hurts
trying not to hold on to the pain
Knowing that there's no comfort there
but your thoughts are not in vain

We walk this fine line
between the past and present
and it's so easy to just drop down
To fight to stay above it all
or simpler to just drown

Nothing can erase the wounds of the heart
not words, no rhyme nor reason
Only love can rise and lift the soul
it matters not what season

There is always a choice
to sink in sorrow
or pull ourselves up and live
The ability is within us
So go, be free...
forgive

FORGIVENESS, PLEASE JOHN -- MY PRAYER

By Edith Georgianna Pennington-Cox Harris

My Prayer is, please Forgiveness,

I did not understand;

Please take this purest incense

To New Vistas, Promised Land;

So proud and free, no fetters now,

Sweet Liberation fills

Your Soul and Breast:

God called you,

Turn your Final Page,

I bid you,

“Bon Voyage” ! ! !

FORGIVENESS

by Verda M. Lindberg-Keenan

One of my earliest childhood memories, at age three, is not being able to sit down because of the bruises on my behind. The reason for the pain was the spanking my father administered when he thought I had gone onto the back porch without clothes on while neighbor boys were playing in their back yard.

My brother (sixteen months younger) and I experienced frequent corporal punishment throughout our childhood. The strap marks on my back hurt when my clothes touched them, and I could not sit comfortably at my school desk. But the beating that caused years of nightmares occurred when my brother was eight or nine years old. He stopped on the way home from school at his friend's house after Dad had told him, "...the next time you don't come straight home from school, I'll whip you 'til you can't stand up."

It's hard for me to type this now seventy years later as my hands tremble from the memory of listening to my father beat my little brother 'til he was bleeding and bruised and could not get up again when Dad demanded he stand up. My five year old sister and I cried together in the living room as this horrible beating took place in the kitchen. I left home permanently at age 15 to escape the frequent beatings I endured for any perceived infraction of the rules. But reliving the beating of my little brother was the source of 25 years of nightmares.

In my thirties, when I was in a good marriage and we had our own four beautiful children the nightmares continued. I realized they were affecting my health. The fear that shook me when my husband even slightly disciplined our children caused me physical pain. I also realized my father was living in Colorado with his fifth wife, ignorant of the lifetime harm he'd inflicted. From some unknown source – perhaps Mother's Christian teaching – I decided to write to Dad.

I told him he had ruined my childhood but that for some reason I would like to establish an adult father/daughter relationship and forgive the past. He wrote back that he would like that too. On our next family vacation trip to Michigan we stopped in Denver to see him. We didn't talk about the past.

Amazingly my nightmares stopped. I had not known that forgiving him would heal me. The facts of the past are the same but my life has changed. I was able to be with him several times – especially during the last year of life in the Veterans hospital in Denver.

Betrayal

by Lang Mach

It was a hot and dry mid-summer afternoon yet his hand and his heart felt icy cold when he inscribed his signature on several sheets of papers, officially terminating his twenty years of employment with the firm where he started his first job.

“We would like to amicably terminate your employment and to ease your transition. We want to offer you an extra two weeks of termination pay for each year of your employment with the company, to be paid as regular salary....”

The cruel and impersonal words performed a dizzying hip-hop dance in front of his eyes, each fast beat and change of gesture inflicting a hurtful wound to his bleeding pride. For a split second, a sudden sense of despair and panic swept through him and shook to the deep core of his soul as the vision of his professional career collapses into a hollow abyss. To his complete surprise, the person who handed him the dreaded white envelope containing his severance package and confiscated his badge on the spot, was the young ambitious engineer he mentored three years ago. He felt utterly humiliated and ashamed to receive such a reward for all his years of hard labor.

“Reduce spending,” “Job transferred overseas,” “Improved productivity,”came in a flash to remind him that the politics of the business world were cruel and unforgiving. The changing of the guards at upper management levels gave momentum to a total reshuffling of the complete organization and the fittest survived.

A misspoken word, a misinterpreted gesture, a misunderstood email message or miscommunicated decision can all tarnish the brilliance of two decades of excellent job performance reviews. He always had the reputation of a hard working and dependable contributor until his manager was replaced by the energetic corporate ladder climber whom he supported whole heartedly during numerous long nights laboring together to meet project deadlines. He was always viewed as the exemplary quality employee and he always admired and was always willing to assist and this time it was at his own detriment. This time he made the mistake of encouraging the wrong individual and now the hand that fed the dog was bitten. The bite was bloody and the stab was aimed straight to his vulnerable heart.

As a young college graduate full of hope and ideals, getting an engineering job offer from a high-tech company in the Silicon Valley was a dream comes true. He was completely ecstatic when he first settled in the heart of this center of creativity and energy. Over the years, he went through comments of joy when the financial executive announced annual results exceeding stock holder expectations. In the mid-nineties, he watched his stock options go up every day and dreamt of the leisure homes in front of a white sandy beach under a bright blue sky. In the early 2000’s, he endured a lot of hardship and lived through dark moments when the market was extremely competitive and the company implemented many cost cutting initiatives. He was subjected to accept a ten percent pay cut and six month freeze in salary. During that period of hardship, instead of seeking

position elsewhere he chose to endure the difficult time with his core team despite of very strong disagreement with his family.

Work was his life and his joy of existence. If Descartes' saying was "I think, therefore I am," his was "I work, therefore I am." His world orbited around the workplace and his comfort was derived from achievements in the projects that he undertook. Losing his job was identical to losing his life. Without his career, he was only a breathing human shell devoid of a spirit. He felt complete betrayed by his country for policies allowing fierce foreign labor competition, by his company for practices without consideration of employee loyalty and by his co-workers for sacrificing him as a scapegoat.

Mechanically with controlled calm and dignity, under the watchful eyes of the impersonal individual who was once his friend but now his enemy. He placed all his person belongings into one empty cardboard moving box, leaving all the meaningless plaques of awards hanging on the care wall. Avoiding a final handshake or mayhap an uncomfortable confrontation, he walked emotionless away from his office, his home, without turning his steps back even once.

As he drove farther and farther away from the edifice which sheltered him for the past twenty years, his sentiment of anger, bitterness, deceit and self-pity gradually dissipated replaced by acceptance and inner peace. A new source of energy began to surge back to awaken and uplift his defeated spirit as he regained control of his emotions. He just lost his job but he was determined to preserve his pride and integrity.

Although he knew that in the current uncertain economic environment, the job market would be extremely competitive, he was confident that with his entrepreneurial spirit and his broad technical skills, he would be able to find a new employer who could recognize and appreciate his talents. With every end came a new beginning. Already he could see many new open doors leading to many new successful opportunities waiting for him to explore and conquer. Dwelling on unchangeable unhappy past events would only damper his hopes. Making atonement would heal his grief and sorrow giving freedom to his survival power to soar above any heights and break through any storms to reach new secure horizon. Already he could envision the joy of excelling in job interviews and the satisfaction of selecting amongst many interesting job offers.

Social Forgiveness, A New Definition

by Gail Moberg

My personal definition of forgiveness is that “it is a process of releasing one’s feelings of grievance or resentment towards an individual or groups who have committed transgressions against that individual or group.” Forgiveness was first considered a religious act of repentance. More recently, it has been regarded as a way to make peace with one’s self. I propose that there should be a third type of forgiveness—a social forgiveness at the global level.

In other countries across the world, it has been estimated that there are more than 50 wars occurring at this time. These are not countries fighting other countries, but rather people within countries fighting each other. These wars are caused by conflicts over religion, ethnicity, tribal grievances, and political differences. We in our blessed country have a social responsibility to make a global impact by promoting forgiveness in these countries.

As citizens of a first world country, we need to be leaders by both example and by action in fostering forgiveness globally. We need to model forgiveness as an integral step towards conflict resolution. Next, we need to aid other countries in stepping back from their secularly vested interests and help them begin to understand the steps they need to take toward the process of conflict resolution. Lastly, we need to collectively teach our children to resolve conflict so they can become citizens who can make our country a model for other countries and one that they can actively teach to other countries.

It is our responsibility to model forgiveness (and also tolerance and acceptance) for other countries and also teach them how to be forgiving. We have the freedom from internal conflict that allows us to step back, reflect, and focus our actions. Because we are fortunate to not be torn by such strife—to not be living each day in fear of such atrocities as are occurring in other countries—we subsequently have an obligation to these strife-torn countries. There are many countries where hatred and feelings of injustice are rampant. These feelings fuel resentment and retaliation. These feelings (and the horrific acts they lead to) cannot be resolved without knowing how to manage conflict, accept differences, and forgive. Besides modeling forgiveness ourselves, we need to teach internal groups in other countries how to forgive each other.

We also need to set an example not only of forgiveness but also acceptance. In 1993, a 13-year-old boy in Sierra Leon named Ishmael Baeh was forced into the army and fought in combat for two and a half years. The rebels and the national army were in brutal combat and during this time, he killed more of his own people than he can remember. Most of this conflict was a result of perceived injustices. Ishmael was eventually rescued and relocated in New York City. Now he has a plea for American—to be more accepting and forgiving. He says he was a rural boy from Africa and didn’t know things like “roast beef sandwich” and “scrambled eggs.” People laughed at him for this. He pleads with America as a country that has so much. “Please, model acceptance of differences.” We need to learn to accept others and not reject them merely because they are different. Acceptance is a part of the forgiveness.

Lastly, it is our social responsibility to demonstrate to our future generation, our children, how to model acceptance and forgiveness to the rest of the world. We should have the expectation that our own emerging citizens will have the skills to forgive both to set a model for other countries and also to outright help those in other unforgiving but not so distant lands. We can begin to do this within families and through schools. We need to collectively teach our children to resolve conflict so they can become citizens who exemplify forgiveness and teach other countries how to do so.

In her book, "The Distant Land of My Father," Bo Caldwell deftly addresses the topic of forgiveness through the protagonist, Anna, who forgives a father who for most of his life put his personal needs above those of everyone else, especially his family. He betrayed everyone, yet Anna reconciled with him. This reconciliation could not have happened without forgiveness. Anna forgave by understanding and having some sympathy for his past, by not seeking retaliation for her father's lack of compassion, and by her desire to restore their relationship. These factors were essential for her forgiveness.

It is my hope that our country can imbue tolerance, acceptance, and above all else, forgiveness in our young citizens. They will hopefully be empowered to set a model for and directly help other nations that do not have the resources to do this on their own. Bo Caldwell's writing exemplifies the worthiness of forgiveness. Examples such as this can lead to an increased understanding and responsibility for our country to help in the resolution of international conflicts. Modeling and teaching forgiveness is critical for this.

I WILL GIVE YOU A GIFT

by Sylvia E. Montoya

You have told me that you are leaving
That God is taking you away,
But father's day has arrived
and I want to give you a gift;
but what gift?
Since you have no room
to take anything with you on that trip.

Precisely now
that you will no longer be there,
I must find something
that you can take with you;
I will look for the space,
I will gather small pieces of paper
and small notes of love, of kisses
and of that tenderness
which I always wanted to give you.
Yes,
I will place them in your inert hands
And you will leave clutching
in those now immobile hands,
the many memories.
I will place my love as a daughter
Among your gray hair,
and anoint your closed eyes,
So that you may feel
that I will be with you,
loving you, always.
Even though you have never asked
my forgiveness for your neglect.

I will give you an embrace
With which in your cold and dead skin,
my existence will stay alive.
That existence which you gave to me.
You say that you have nothing to leave,
But you forget one thing;
That box full of memories,
which one day I made for you with my hands;
That box full of letters and photographs of my mother.
Leave to me the love which I did not feel from you
enclosed within it.

Put it there and close it so that it will not escape.
That way when I long for you,
I will open it and find within it
Your memory and that of my mother.
After all that is all that remains
in those four walls in which you live.
Only that box remains,
And your clothes hanging in sadness,
And that scent, that scent of misery
impregnated in each thing.
It will be the last father's day
What more could I give you?
Only what you can hide within your hands
Inside your eyes, your hair.
That embrace which you can feel on your dead body forever,
so when you awaken,
you can feel that even within death I still love you.
Even though you have never asked
my forgiveness for your neglect.

Please do not forget to leave me your love in that box
Fill it with letters full of words of love
which a father must have had for his daughter.
And in this way, perhaps this void
will be removed from my soul.
The void of your love as a father.
Don't forget to ask for my forgiveness before you leave.

COMING CLEAN

by David L. Norris

They say confession is good for the soul. Back in junior high school at Haven Drive, then finally at Arvin High School in 1960, my friend Gary D. Smith and I were members of "The Untouchables." This was Arvin's very own model airplane club where we met once a week at the Arvin Community Center and built model airplanes which you either bought at Fox Appliances or Gannon's Cycle Shop. You built these using model airplane glue, and with 20 people building models at the weekly meeting at the Center, you could get quite a buzz in a close up room, no one thought of "getting high" from the sniffing the glue fumes, after all, you could always go outside where all of the advisors were smoking and breathing that instead.

Back in those days they did not have RC (Radio Controlled) airplanes. We built "U" control planes that were flown in a circle attached either two wires or two string control lines, free flights (motorized gliders) or un-motored gliders. Either of the last two, you released into the wind, never to see again, but the event usually involved a 10-mile chase in carts and pickups careening down narrow roads and through farm fields with three or four guys screaming directions to the driver, who was also looking up for the plane. Eventually they would realize they had been following a crow or turkey vulture instead of their plane and would return back to our Saturday flying area. This was the grass covered physical education playing fields just north of the boy's locker room at Arvin High School where we had room to fly our planes in an open, cushioned field with no trees.

This was also the time when America and the USSR had started the space race with the *Soviet Sputnik* (October 4, 1957) and *American Echo* (August 23, 1960) so a few of us were into building quite basic rockets. Our first rockets were powered by water pressure. You filled the rocket most of the way up with water, then pumped it up with air and released it getting soaked during your effort. Next were fizzy rockets with baking soda and vinegar, Alka Seltzer or anything else that created pressure, then on to solid rocket fuel engines. We would go to Dick Miller's Drug Store and buy jars of Salt Peter (potassium nitrate) power then we would roll moistened cotton twine into the powder until it became heavily coated. We would then use these as fuses to set off our rockets.

Ah, but I have digressed!

It is now our freshman year at Arvin High School and our first exposure to science. As an experiment, the teacher had each of us go to the Arvin Dry Cleaners on the southeast corner of Haven Drive Boulevard and Bear Mountain Highway to buy one dry cleaner bag which they sold us for 10 cents each. As a school project, everyone filled their bags with natural gas from the Bunsen burner spigots in the Chem Lab classroom, and then tied the open end tightly with string, the other end of the string was tied to a pill vial in which each student placed a note asking anyone who found this to write back with the location it was found. In a mass release, everyone who found this to write back noting the location where it was found. In a mass release, everyone turned their balloons loose at the same time in a quad area of Arvin High School. Several students received responses from thousand of miles away, but alas, Gary and I did not.

We were really disappointed that our balloons were not found, so we decided to release additional balloons from my home at 301 Grove Street on our own. Pretty quick, it became an obsession, and Gary and I were spending all our lunch money every day to buy more bags. But we never received any responses even though there was not a pill vial left in the house and piles of pills out of their bottles in the bathroom medicine cabinet. We never thought that we could have blown the house totally down, if our stove, where we filled the balloons, would have been equipped with pilot lights meanwhile with 8 or 10 bags floating in the living room.

Gary was making some fuses with a new bottle of powder we had just purchased while I was filling the bags when I thought "Heck, why not tie the fuse to a bag?" At first, we tied a short fuse to one balloon, lit the fuse and released the balloon into the air. Up and up it went. Finally at about one thousand feet, we saw a flash of light and heard a small boom. "Wow! That was exciting! Let's tie all the rest of them together, use a longer fuse and see what happens!" By this time, it was getting dusky and dark, but determination prevailed and we finally got all the balloons ready, lit the fuse and off they went. The balloons climbed out of sight, and we figured that the fuse had gone out when suddenly there was a giant flash in the night sky and the sound of a giant boom.

Alright! That was fun! A short time later, the siren from the Arvin Volunteer Fire Department sounded and we thought "Wow! There's a fire someplace!" Then I heard our telephone ring. I answered it and found that the fire chief was looking for my father who was the county road foreman. It seemed that their phone lines had lit up with calls about a mid-air collision; flaming debris was seen plummeting toward the ground. The search for the crash scene and possible survivors was on. All of the police and volunteer firemen were scouring every back road and field. Reports were coming in from everywhere. "It was north of town!.....No! East of town!.....No, tell your dad to try south of town!"

This event had taken on a life of its own with crews driving aimlessly around searching for most of the night. The following Wednesday, the *Arvin Tiller* headlined with a story about the flaming mid-air collision. Was it an UFO, the explosion from a solitary plane or the collision of two planes? No wreckage was ever found despite hundreds of hours of spent searching which cost thousands of dollars. The last line of the article was a plea asking anyone with information to come forward.

That was the end of our model rocketing and amateur ballooning for a while, but most of all, I hope that the statute of limitations has expired by now.

Forgiveness

By Helen Rafferty

Forgiveness is a gift. It is neither deserved nor earned. It is outside of and beyond the law of crime and punishment, of due justice tailored to the degree of offense. Rather, it is a free act of grace.

Forgiveness goes against our natural inclinations. Our basic instincts (and feelings) want retaliation, or at least a sense of closure with “just deserts”, retribution, “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”.

At its basic level, forgiveness occurs one-on-one between individuals, whether close kin or perfect strangers. In its truest sense, forgiveness between persons cannot be lightly rendered but involves heart-rending issues, raw feelings of hurt and anger that cannot be glossed over. There is a pain element which cannot be denied in “getting real” with ourselves as we grapple with these issues.

In addition to pain in facing up to feelings of victimization, injustice, and violated rights, there is the pain of recognizing our inadequacy ever to truly forgive. We feel helpless and hopeless at the prospect of doing something that seems impossible. We naturally want to avoid pain, even if just the pain of becoming humble through recognizing our shortcomings.

It is difficult to be on the receiving end of forgiveness as well. We are too ashamed or too proud, unwilling to accept something for free that doesn't require us to earn or repay it in some way to save our dignity. We are unwilling to face the magnitude of our error, the impact of what we have done. We recoil from fully acknowledging our weakness, our flaws; we really don't want to accept the condition we share in common with the rest of humanity – that of being, without exception, less than perfect human beings. And if we are truly honest with ourselves: less than all-good at the core. It is a hard truth.

But that's why there is and always has been an ongoing need for forgiveness in this world. The fact is, everyone falls into the category of needing both to be forgiven and to forgive at various points in their lives. The familiar saying, “Time heals all wounds”, is a platitude to mollify those in denial. It ignores the basic human need that exists for gut-level forgiveness with its powerful, thorough healing effects. Thus, our exploration here is into the full concept of forgiveness and its crucial importance for us as persons.

We have seen that forgiveness does not come naturally, and is fundamentally not a comfortable process. Indeed, it takes more courage to embark upon a course of forgiveness than not to. But to press through the necessary pain is to come out beyond it, not only stronger and more mature, but also with a peace which will last forever. The law's retribution and having the offender “suffer the consequences” can never ensure the particular inner peace and freedom one emerges with when the choice is made to give, or to receive, forgiveness.

But how do we finally come to exercise this will, to make the decision for taking first steps toward genuine forgiveness? How do we deal with the feelings, the pain; where do we put the hurt, to move over from it, to go on? We cannot in ourselves just lay these things to rest.

On a shallow and more mechanical level we can try to muster up “forgiveness” dutifully – just to get it over and done with. Satisfactory perhaps superficially, this form of forgiveness will not be life-long or complete. If forgiveness is to be a done deal once and for all, it must not allow us to retain one tiny thread of bitter thought, one scrap of indicting evidence, or any vestige of self-righteous judgment to hug tightly to ourselves . . . later to take root and expand. It must break us out of the rigidity we’ve grown accustomed to, the box we have come to live in, nailed shut.

True forgiveness is to release that person from owing you anything ever – even so much as an apology. Only then can you be set free. And only then can there be redemptive possibilities for all those involved, beyond our own control or even imagining. It’s hard for many of us to visualize what this experience of release and freedom is like, to know if this step into the unknown, this act of letting go, is worth the attempt.

To be able to give as well as to receive permanent forgiveness means allowing ourselves to be open to the source of forgiveness which beyond us. This greater resource, which any of us can tap into if we are willing, lends “grace” to the situation, enabling a change in our perspective and priorities, actually placing deep within us the desire and the ability to forgive. The only way to avail ourselves of this grace is to earnestly ask for it with reckless abandon and a willingness to be humble and “get real”, regardless of what it takes.

So we base forgiveness *not* on an understanding of the reasons behind the offense, whether it was unintentional and done in ignorance or whether it was deliberate, *nor* on perceived remorse, the presence of good excuses, or the potential worth of the offender. We don’t necessarily forgive someone because they are lovable; you may not have any warm feelings toward the person at all.

But still we forgive, since forgiveness is not based on feelings but on a choice made to align ourselves with an altogether different option – the way of grace, costly grace. And the lasting results are worth it. For forgiveness sets us free.

There was someone who once hung, slowly dying, on a makeshift wooden apparatus of torture whose whole spirit embodied forgiveness and tough grace. Intimately in touch as he was with the source of grace, his last few words contained this request: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Signed,
Much Forgiven

FORGIVENESS

by Avelina Serrano

I want to say I forgive my father; I want to pretend that he was a great loving father, much like other fathers that took their children to the park, played baseball and hugged them when they fell. I didn't spend quality time with my father, he never hugged or loved us, he was cruel, heartless, and never showed us love. I have very few loving memories of him, but one thing I do remember about my father was his ability to cook and how could make beans taste like meat, and lard to taste like sweet butter.

My childhood memories were bitter, full of darkness, pain, and hunger but there is a dim light of fond memories in which we took trips to the rivers of Mexico. Once as children when it was time to take that long trip to river, we realized we had run out of food. I remember my father waking us up early in the morning, a dark blanket of the misty cold dawn in the air, and my father forcing the boys to take a bath outside with cold water from the old metal tanks, as they stood shivering, shaking, and accepting the cold water that was being poured by my father. As my father would always say "cold water makes boys into men." We walked for miles on the dirt road, which was steaming hot, so hot that our bare feet felt as if they were being roasted over an open fire.

We spent a few days at the river, we slept on the dirt under the mesquite trees, the stars were our blankets, and the moon was our light. We were in heaven as my father built a fire and surrounded it with old rocks that he had collected while the children spent the evening collecting wood from old mesquite trees to keep the fire hot. We sat around the fire watching my father cook the fish, clams and crawdads, the sweet aroma filled the air, our mouths watered, and our hearts skipped a beat. My father could make an awesome hot chile with fresh corn tortillas. It was the only time I saw my father and mother smile at each other, and it was the only time we had pleasant memories of our parents for the rest of the memories were better, hard and cold.

The rivers of Mexico have brought us pleasant memories but also bitter ones. I remember when my uncle Jesus tied us up to the truck every time my father wanted to hit my mother, or when he had too much to drink! That old truck that had been broken for years, the rusted red body, the broken windows, and the missing tires, the truck that my father would say over and over again, someday he would have enough money to fix. When my father had been drinking, he would grab my mother's long black hair and drag her to the river then my uncle Jesus tied us up so that we could not help my mother. From a distance we heard the thunder of my mother yelling "Ayudenme, Ayudenme!" We could hear my mother desperately trying to gasp for air as my father pulled her down into the cold dark river water trying to drown her. I would put my head down, cover my ears, tears running down my cheeks as if they were fountains of endless water. I would pray to God that my father would stop. My brother Joe was the brave one, he would manage to untie himself and run to the river and fight with father until he would let my mother go. As children, we did not understand the meaning of loving one another such was the case of my parents. As for forgiveness, what is the meaning of forgiveness? What do we forgive? the hunger, the abusiveness, or lack of love?

As We Forgive “Those” ...
by Jeanne Stewart

Is forgiveness in order for

The dead man who died and left this earth; his family,
Out of his own selfish, risky ways?
Left her with two young men who still needed a father.

How about the young woman who lost use of her left arm

And leg; even lost her voice box.
Should the broken father forgive the one
Who turned the key and flipped the car or
Forgive his defiant teenage daughter.

What does the drug addict son expect from

His worn out grieving mother?
Can she forgive him for his ill decisions of
Needles and promiscuity?
Need she forgive those who taunted him?
Will forgiveness ever be granted to herself?

When the futile starving faces of Kenya stretch across

One's cozy living room wall on their “50” plasma,
Is forgiveness rendered to those who persecute
Or to those who ignore?

Where is God?

How do we forgive the Holy One, The Praised One,
When it is our stained souls that must be forgiven?

Ahh... Could it be Satan Himself, the insipid demon

Of the earth, who must bow down on his knees,
And plea for mercy.

To Forgive or Not To Forgive That is The Question
by Stacia Brianna Weeks

Sometimes forgiveness is a hard thing to do,
especially when someone has done something horrible to you.

There are people that are easy to forgive,
while others have done something way to big.

I was abused since I was ten,
what he did was a sin.

I will never forgive him for what he did,
to me when I was just a kid.

Then there is my grandma, who died two years ago,
I never wanted her to go.

My grandma and me, best friends we were,
I can't believe I said I'd never forgive her.

The truth is I forgive her with all my heart,
and our memories I have with her, I will never part.

The love in my heart for her is sincere and true,
I miss her so much in that beautiful dress colored blue.

As you can see not all people are easy to forgive,
but you must move on in life and live.