

CHOICES

Jackie Mott Brown, April 2014

Why is this so difficult, such a simple little assignment? "Write a short memoir for next Tuesday. It may be published on the Internet so edit closely," our professor said calmly.

I looked around the room full of bright, articulate seniors, pen and paper ready. Each one of us having enough to fill an encyclopedia set. Adding up all of those long, interesting lives, we could write forever and keep you on the edge of your seats.

I thought of five stories right off, but not for the Internet, thank you. I could write about the time a fox rounded the corner of our summer cottage as I was watching our brook rushing over the rocks after the nights' rainstorm. I sensed something and turned to see him a foot away. He raised his head and stared into my eyes for a moment. I stared back surprised but not afraid, for some reason. He was smaller than I expected and quite well mannered. He nodded, or it seemed like a nod to me, and continued his journey up the deer trail. Wild animals have no fear of me. Maybe they think I too am a wild animal only taller.

Or, I could write about my daughter, Randy, ordering a cemetery stone for her father many years after he was cremated. It was a small granite stone with "RICHARD L" etched into it. When we stopped to pick it up, I was introduced to the cemetery supervisor.

"I am so sorry for your loss," she said to me emotionally. I was startled. I'd been divorced forty four years ago. No one had ever said that to me.

"Thank you, that is very kind," I answered, Surprised to be so touched.

Richard L was to be laid by his mother in the Cortland Cemetery, Randy thinking they should be together, until Richard L's best friend, Butch, old but still sharp, yelled, "For God's sake NO! His mother was a mess. He wouldn't want to be there. Take him out to the lake; put him up in the woods up by the outhouse. The view is nice. He loved it out there. DO THAT!" So that afternoon Richard L was placed on the stern seat of the boat and rowed a half mile down the lake. Randy lugged Richard L up the stone steps, all the way past the outhouse and placed where he now watches the brook flow peacefully over the rocks.

Oh I can't write that. People would think my daughter a bit strange and sac religious!

I do have a memory about a morning at the lake when I took my coffee out to the picnic table to sit in the first patch of morning sun. An insect found the sun too and rested only six inches from my cup. He is not a bold-faced hornet--too skinny, not a paper-nest wasp or a mud dauber--too scrawny; looks like an alien with a string attached from upper body to tail. He is just a nice fat bee who quickly started to groom. I know cat's groom, but bees?

He somehow lifted his right side leg to scratch the black part of his body, repeating then with his left. Now, the rascal put his nose down on the table and back side way up. Using his hind legs he smoothed down the ruffled black part. With dance moves he next lifted his front legs way up and over to iron down the yellow area. Fascinated, I wondered if he was vain or just getting ready for work? Do all bees groom each morning? Anyway, he groomed for a good ten minutes while I watched; me just being and he just being a bee. It was a silent closeness.

I wouldn't dare explain this in writing. People would stare and say, "She likes to watch bees groom. Oh my!" they'd whisper and roll their eyes.

Maybe I should write about my stuffed animal friends I talked to when eight and mad at my brother? People love little girls.

But then my pesky mantra sang out: the biggest risk in life is not to risk at all. That does it! I must relay that special time when the bee and I shared a warm patch of morning sun. It is worth the risk.