

Recollection

Charles Aufderheide

I was only seven at the time, and the event was inauspicious. Yet memory is fickle and I remember everything that happened or was seen. The huge old house where we visited was dust grey outside, nearly black inside, cool on that hot summer day. This was my great-grandmother's house. Strangely enough, I can't remember her, but I recall the somber meal she served in the vast dining-room with high ceilings and transomed doors. There was an outside door (all wood, that kept the sunlight out) opening into a small, dry yard. Here was a well; and, as I peered into the rippling blackness, I saw a huge cake of ice floating silver-like in the dark. Putting ice into the cold well-water seemed very strange.

The front door of the house opened directly onto the sidewalk. (This door was all wood, too). I remember that from the steps a brown court house could be seen, and on the opposite side of the square a small store, dark on the inside (like my great-grandmother's house) where I got some little red pieces of candy, stale but tasty. I can still see the two bony fingers of the storekeeper as they reached deep into the jar trying to get the candy. I shivered as he thrust them at me and grabbed my pennies.

Vividly, I recall our trip (sister's, cousin's, brother's, and mine) to the graveyard. We walked half-way across the square and raced the other half to the court house. There we sat down on the wooden steps to rest from the race. How funny I thought everything was! The blue sky, the trees, leaves limp, thirsty, as was the brown dust that got into our shoes. "How different from home!" I thought. "Funny", I said to myself as sister took off her shoe

and poured the sand from it into a little pile on the steps, letting it trickle through her fingers as it cascaded down. Then we went on, past the caretaker's deserted house into the graveyard. There we jumped over fallen monuments, careful lest we tread on some long-forgotten grave. How we stared when we came upon the carved figure of an angel! It lay on its side, one wing broken and its white tunic covered with a creeping vine.

And what a start I got when I saw the cliff, a wrinkled, four-hundred foot drop into what seemed a patchwork quilt of plowed and unplowed fields, fields of green clover, fields grey with weeds common to the district. Awe-inspiring was the Ohio, twisting in the distance. I remember we were all silent as we looked. Sister was bold.

She walked right to the edge, holding on to a tree branch. How I admired her! She wasn't even afraid when cousin told the awful story about the grave robbers who had been caught at their ghastly business and had fled over this very cliff to their deaths. She just laughed at cousin and pulled at his hair. She was laughing all the way back to great-grandmother's house. She laughed when she beat cousin in a race down the hill, and she smiled and ran on down the road when he started to carve her initials in the soft, grey rock that banked the sides.

When we got back to the house the sun was nearly gone. Inside, everything was black and still. There was a single coal-oil lamp flickering and smoking on the dining room table. Suddenly, I wanted to go home, and I began to cry. Sister laughed at me and made me sit up on a hard, straight-backed chair to wait for the older people to return.

The lamp's flickering moved the shadows on the high ceiling. Wearily, I watched and waited. Strangely different serpents, long and white, slid across the ceiling, and I found myself contrasting them to the cream flowers in the ceiling wall-paper at home. Flowers were much nicer, much more entertaining. Somehow, as my thoughts turned to home, there in the strange half-gloom, I didn't mind waiting.

Filling In The Distant Background

Betty Richart

My background, I think, is a strange one for a would-be poet. There is hardly a trace in it of the blithe irresponsibility of artists. Instead it is stern with engineers and judges and lawyers, all of whom probably turn wearily in their graves at each new evidence of my lack of discretion. My forefathers, so their loyal descendants tell me, were honorable men.

My maternal grandparents were an oddly matched pair, both native Hoosiers. My grandmother was locally famous for her cream pies, her fearlessness, and her ability to run her husband's business. My grandfather needed her. He was indolent, generous, and easily prevailed upon. His once thriving business ceased to be a "paying proposition" when his wife died, and he and it withered together till now they are all a rather vague memory.

Grandmother's mother and father were sturdy farmers, as close to their land as to their family. They were able to look out over their good

green Indiana acres with calm minds securely rooted in the community and respected by their brethren. Surely they must have sung hymns loudly and tunelessly among their neighbors every Sunday in church!

Grandfather's parents were of a different sort. His father was a school teacher and his mother a member of a distinguished family of lawyers. Both had an inflexible code of morals. Their pictures show profiles as harsh as the Great Stone Face. They were vigorously opposed to card playing, dancing and anything beautiful or gay.

Remotely, my maternal ancestors were Scotch and English. Perhaps it was they who endowed my sister with her incredible Titian blondeness, and me with my love of wind-swept bare places.

My paternal grandfather was a Pennsylvanian. He died so young that I never knew him, but I have loved his pictures from my childhood—his leonine head and benign expression and strong jaw. My grandmother is now my only living grandparent. She "stands as a tree the birds have left, unutterably bereft." Her husband is dead, and her favorite son, who was my father. She is dead herself to the joy of living.

All my paternal ancestors were from Pennsylvania, save those in the dim background. My great-great grandparents were Hollanders, and many of our attitudes and aspects the family has retained something of their earnestness and stolidity. In many of our attitudes and aspects we are Dutch.

In recalling my complex ancestry, I am reminded of a contemporary poem.

"With him for a sire,
and her for a dam,
What should I be
but just what I am?"

What, indeed should I be but a weird mixture of good, bad, and indifferent? What but a saint and a sinner?