

Patchwork Quilt Memory

Just in the past week, I've reconnected with people I haven't laid eyes on in more than 20 years, both encounters courtesy of Facebook.

Since I work in memoir, it's interesting to discover how differently we remember the stories that we carry forward into our future.

I last saw Bill in Dallas - goodness, must of been 1975 - in his small apartment devoid of furniture. We left on bad terms - there was some kind of spat - and all these years I've believed I was to blame. Long ago, before I learned to love myself and let someone love me, I would turn like a rabid raccoon on any overture of kindness. I believed I was unlovable and deserving of abuse and nothing but abuse. So in my mind whatever ugliness occurred was entirely my fault.

Then this spring I began work on a fictionalized short story about meeting Bill, so I decided to Google him. Isn't that we do these days when our curiosity gets the better of us?

Bill was my first true summer love. We met at church camp, and our big dates consisted of holding hot, sweaty hands during the evening service. He's gotta be six years older than me, but as my daddy used to say, I was always just a little too smart for my britches. In Bill I finally found someone who seemed to get me. I could talk to him about anything and everything. And he seemed to genuinely like me without wanting to change me.

That was in 1969, the week in July before the first moon landing, and after camp, we came back to earth along with Neil, Buzz and Michael. In another month Bill went back to college and I started my sophomore year in high school. We wrote a few letters, he came by to see me, and in October, when we heard that Paul was dead, we talked all night on the phone and listened to Strawberry Fields Forever over and over again. On the car radio on my way to school and on the 45 rpm I played on the boxy pink recorder player in my room, I heard the lilting harmonies of the Fifth Dimension, and I sang along with all the reverent fervor that only a 15-year old can have, "I love you, Bill, why don't you marry me, Bill. I got the wedding bell blues."

My parents weren't happy about the six year age difference, so the relationship was pretty much kaput by the end of the year. The following February, Bill sent me a copy of *The Prophet* as a parting gift for my 16th birthday. Of course, I had never read anything like it, deeper than *Lamentations* and more beautiful than *Romeo and Juliet*.

"For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you."

"That's it exactly," I thought. "I'm in so much pain I'll surely die."

"Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning."

"No, I can't survive this," I protested to the universe.

But survive it I did, and as life unfolded over the next few years this small heartache was just the first of many sorrows. By the time I ran into Bill unexpectedly five years later, I had stepped in and out of

personal tragedy - pregnant at 17, sent to a maternity home only to relinquish the child I bore out of wedlock, married at 18, and divorced by 20. I was depressed, suicidal, fighting daily reminders of guilt, lies, betrayal, and abandonment.

And all I remember about that brief re-encounter with Bill more than thirty years ago, was that I was hateful, spiteful, immature.

So when I contacted Bill on Facebook, I placed my message in the form of an AA "amends" letter. I was shocked when he wrote back apologizing to me. "I thought you were the victim and I was the selfish, pretentious, pinhead idiot."

Did we even share the same space and time that day that night? Did I drive to Dallas or take the bus? I remember a sunny city park, a bum on a bench. He wore a straw cowboy hat and black boots rundown in the heel. He drank liquor hidden in a brown paper bag. He told me a story about a broken doll. Bill arrived. We went back to his place. I took a shower. I didn't like the soap. We argued. Never assume, I said, that you know what I'm thinking. I left his apartment, I left Dallas. Did I drive or take the bus? Bill started running - how long and how far?

We shared a moment, but not the same story. I'm sure I was the immature bitch I remember. And Bill may well have been opinionated and insensitive. But even though, at that moment more than 30 years ago, Bill and I were disconnected - wholly unaware of the other - each memory, his and mine, is a part of a large patchwork quilt, its pattern a Crown of Thorns. In putting together the pieces in our new found Facebook connection, we have created a truer memory of the event and the people we were and are. This meeting, this re-connection, this patchwork quilt of memories allays doubts, relieves fears, and grants some breathing room for grace and forgiveness.

I kinda like that.