

FLASHBACK

On Saturday, January 17, 2004 – a bitter cold day – my husband Leo and I moved into Drum Hill Senior Living Community in Peekskill, NY to begin the next phase of our lives. Our daughter Marty drove me from our home of thirty-eight years in Yorktown Heights to Peekskill, and when she turned the final corner onto Ringgold Street I exclaimed, “There it is! I’m *home!*” And indeed I was.

Sunday morning we found the ground covered with newly fallen snow which continued to deepen most of the afternoon. It was the kind that sticks to trees, outlining the branches, making such a beautiful picture against the gray skies.

Our first meal in the dining room was Sunday brunch at 1:00. What a variety of foods we had to choose from! And the food tasted as good as it looked. We were told that the midday meal every Sunday was a brunch similar to the one we had just eaten. Already I began to look forward to the next one!

On the way back to our room we passed a table where the menu for the evening meal was displayed. We stopped to see what our choices would be. It all looked good to me! Then from behind I heard the comments of others who were also perusing the menu. Not all of them were as impressed as I was. Some of the negative comments sounded vaguely familiar. Where had I heard them before? All of a sudden.....

**** FLASHBACK! ****

There I was, an eighteen-year-old freshman dorm student at Millersville State Teachers College in Pennsylvania. For much of the next four years I would be having three meals a day in the cafeteria or the dining room at the college. I had not had much experience eating away from home up to that point. The “restaurant” I frequented the most was the counter at Woolworth’s, where I would order a hot dog with mustard and a chocolate ice cream soda. Each time I considered this meal a real treat!

My mother, in my opinion, was an excellent cook; her meals were plain, simple, repetitive and delicious. At college I was introduced to a broad spectrum of new foods and I reveled in the experience. Others felt differently and spoke freely of their food dislikes with those around them. In four years I never ceased to enjoy the meals at Millersville. Will it be the same at Drum Hill? We’ll see! I do know this: not having to prepare the meals or clean up afterwards is such a relief that it overcomes the thought of complaining.

That first Sunday, shortly before dinner, I glanced out our living room window at the western sky and saw an absolutely amazing sunset. The gray skies and snow-covered branches and ground were beautifully contrasted by deep rose colored streaks liberally strewn in the area where the sun had dipped below the horizon. I stood at the window, mouth agape, drinking in all that beauty, while my heart reached out to the Master Painter that we used to sing about in my youth. And then it happened again.....

**** FLASHBACK! ****

There I was, standing on the porch of the Bible Chapel in Tucson, Arizona, mouth open, gazing with awe at the western sky. I was twenty-three years of age, newly arrived in Tucson, soon to begin my

second year of teaching school. While still in the East, I had heard that the sunsets in Arizona were spectacular. Now I was actually there, verifying the truth of what I had heard. A man saw me standing on the porch and asked if I were all right. "Yes," I answered, tears rolling down my cheeks. "I'm just watching my first Arizona sunset."

How happy I was in the first days at Drum Hill to realize that from our apartment I could hear trains whistling as they move along the Hudson River just a few blocks away. I have had a number of long train trips throughout my life as well as many shorter rides. Is this why I continue to enjoy the sound of train whistles? Or are earlier memories being stirred?

**** FLASHBACK! ****

In my mind I was transported to Annville, Pennsylvania, my home town. Annville was so small that wherever we lived in that town we could hear the trains that passed through. Magically, a train would bring our Philadelphia relatives to Annville each summer to spend a week with us! However, I believe the warm feeling still evoked by train whistles is connected with my teenage years. I was longing for adventure, wanting so much to go places, to do things. My mother kept telling me that my adventure would begin as soon as I went away to college. Then a song that expressed my desires so well became popular. In it was the line, "I start getting restless whenever I hear the whistle of a train." From then on the sound of a train and the thought of adventure were intertwined in my mind. I was eighteen when I finally boarded a train to begin my travels beyond Annville. What a pleasure!

Drum Hill, our Senior Living Community, is set on a high hill, just as the name suggests. From our living room window we first see a grassy slope, and then a block or two down the hill are private homes and some business places. From our vantage point above the buildings they seem small, almost small enough to pick up and handle. One day in our first week here, I was at the window looking over the houses when all of a sudden.....

**** FLASHBACK! ****

"Why, it's Tiny Town!" I exclaimed. Again I was back in Annville, this time perhaps eleven years old. I was in the living room sitting on a chair next to our piano bench. Numerous little cardboard houses and public buildings lined the imaginary streets on the bench. I spent many pleasant hours arranging and rearranging the buildings of my own Tiny Town.

The origin of the buildings is partly what makes this memory so special. In those days Nabisco Shredded Wheat Biscuits came in a box with cardboard dividers between the layers. For a long time each divider had a Tiny Town building printed on it. I would eagerly check the dividers whenever we opened another box of Shredded Wheat. Might there be a new building or two this time? Even if there were repeats – another Ivy-Covered Cottage, for example – it didn't matter. I would just color it different from the others, cut it out, fold and paste it into shape and add it to the piano bench town.

One day several years after my marriage I was enjoying a bowl of Shredded Wheat when I was overcome with nostalgia. I wrote to the people at Nabisco thanking them for the Tiny Town cards of long ago. I got a wonderful letter of appreciation in return. "If we had a set of those cards on hand," they said, "we would have sent them to you." It's just as well. When we packed to come to Drum Hill, I had to leave many things behind. But I brought with me all my memories – a rich store of treasures

upon which I can draw any time I want.

All my flashbacks went to happy times in my life: childhood, my college years, teaching school in Arizona. But then I have always enjoyed my life, even when going through hard times. There are changes, though. No longer do I feel restless when I hear the whistle of a train; rather, I bask in the pleasure of the sound. I am glad to be in a place equipped for people who need a walker to get around, as I do. It is a different way of life, a different time of life, one more step in my journey from time to eternity.

In the past month I have met some wonderful people at Drum Hill, both residents and staff members, and my memory bank is being enriched daily. My heart is smiling even now as I write. God is good and I am grateful!

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Post Script:

The above story remains just as I wrote it and as it appeared in the May 2004 edition of our bimonthly newsletter, *The Drum Beat*. Since then I have had only one more flashback of the type described in my story: walking (or riding in a Powerchair) down the corridors at Drum Hill reminds me of walking down the sidewalks of Annville, especially if others are sharing the hallway with me.

I felt socially obligated then to greet everybody I walked past, whether they were on the sidewalk or on their front porches. I remember scanning down the block to see who was outside and how many hello's I would have to say before I arrived at my destination. I do the same in Drum Hill. Friendly greetings go a long way in lifting a person's spirits; why not take advantage of the opportunities that come our way?

"Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones" (Proverbs 16:24).

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