

Echoes

By Nancy Lapergola Bertrand

When he was gone, she carried on. The little every-day tasks were accomplished with only a shadow of a difference. Only an echo which made all her actions resound in the lack of him. She had never realized that she needed him in that way...to affirm her existence. "If a tree falls in the forest and nobody hears it..." she thought. Maybe the kids were right. Maybe I should have tried harder to be "a person in my own right."

Her friends congratulated her on her composure; they marveled at her calm. "Who would have thought," they murmured beneath their gloved hands, "that she would take it all so well?" "Brave," said one, "cold," said another. And they're both right, she thought, wondering when the icy calm would leave her. She thought of his hearty laughter when they had spoken of the accomplishments of their grandchildren...any new word, any precocious action had brought gales of wondering delight from him. She remembered the loving chuckles that had punctuated his long conversations ("not important, just about life and stuff") with their daughter. She cast her mind back to the joyous contentment they had shared in the early days of their courtship. Now, she thought of these times hollowly, editorially, still suspended in the emotional limbo that had carried her through. The arrangements had been made perfectly. Perfect was a word that she had never cared for before, but she felt she owed it to him now. She remembered his pride. Egotism, she would have called it once. But now it was only his pride in what he had made of himself, in what he had denied himself. She knew the perfection of the plans would have pleased him.

During his long illness, she had watched him learn to compromise the standards he had always held high. She watched helplessly as the hair he had always kept meticulously groomed fell out by the handfuls. She faithfully stood by him as the nurses performed the various indignities that had become necessary to his life. She had kept her vigil with care, solicitous but cheerful, maintaining a hopeful exterior as long as she could, with a gentle patter of gossip and news. She would shelter him from too much softness... "mush," he might have called it, impatiently. He had never been one to murmur sweet nothings or to recite love poetry. She had always had to make do with his smile. "You know how I feel," he always said, irritably, when pressed, "I married you, didn't I?" Why wasn't that enough? The coolness had come with the passage of years, hectic, hurried years, while he pushed himself hard to satisfy the needs of his job, his family, his community. There had always seemed to be so much for others...so little for her. The jabbing words she spoke were aimed with care to penetrate this coolness, to find a passionate response, but he neatly parried each one. And so again and again the thrusts were repeated, sharpening each time, until her words were dangerous to both of them. But she could not let it go; she had to know. When he could not or would not respond, she nevertheless went on, comforting herself in the wall her voice built around her.

Volume 25, No. 2 Mar/Apr 2011



Now she was remembering the long days in the hospital room, an interminable infinity of days that had slipped all too quickly away from her. The small calendar that one of the nurses had pinned on the cork screen had become her rosary. Daily, sometimes twice or three times daily, she tallied the time they had been there, recounting each leaden hour and minute. Like a prisoner moving toward the end of his sentence, she mounted them up and polished them as if they were awards. "Five months and three days," she would tell visitors with an expressive movement of her hands, "and still we are here." They always marveled at the time she had spent there. "How can you? How can you stand it?" As he remained unconscious (or at least unknowing), their pity was only for her, the ever-constant, ever-vigilant mate, helpless against the disease, yet holding out against the inevitable as best she could.

They had become closer of late, but it was an uneasy peace, shared with the hum of machinery and the bustling intrusions of the hospital staff. A moment of companionship came only at the end, when stripped at last of his protective layers of reserve, he could let her see him. After days lost in a medication-induced fog, suddenly he had looked at her again with his own eyes. He had reached out his hand to hold hers, something he had not done in the more than thirty years since their courtship.



Annual Spring Memorial Program

During this event we will celebrate the lives of those we have loved and lost in the last year by sharing a reading of their names, personal stories, poems, or thoughts.

**Please join us for this touching experience
Tuesday – May 10, 2011
7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Wright Meeting Hall**

Refreshments will be served

Contact Amy Keiper-Shaw at
215-860-4000, ext. 1403,
to RSVP or for more information.

Before the Fall Memorial Service, Chandler Hall offers the opportunity to dedicate lights on the Hospice evergreen tree in memory of loved ones. In Fall 2010, new lights were dedicated in memory of:

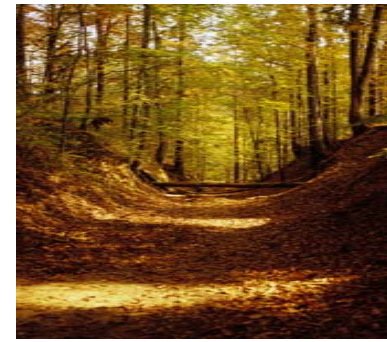
Albert E. Rose
Alma Austin
Amadio Diamante
Andrew Malloy
Arthur M. Abramsohn
Brian Willson
Catherine Steinberg
Charles Overington
Dennis M. McGlone
Edythe Margaret Young
Eileen Runner
Ernestine V. Cahill
Frances A. Enders
Francis McGonigle
Harry G. Wilson

James Gindhart
Jeanne Hiack
Joan Roberts
John Wasko
Joseph Culkin
Kenneth Baines
Martin Miller
Mary Jane Hulings
Richard Ashton
Salvatore Marciano
Soon Lee
Stephen Schmerling
Theresa Larsen
Walter A. Young
William Nutter

We apologize for any omissions from the Fall Memorial Service Program. Please contact Heather Karschner at (215) 860-4000 ext. 1502 with any corrections to this list.

ECHOES

Continued from Page 1



Jolted by the unexpected movement, she took his hand and felt herself tunneling back in time; past the years of holding children's hands, back to the days when they were strangers...when the brushing of his hand on hers had caused her pulse to race and her breathing to quicken. Startled, she felt her heart speed up again. She met his eyes across the maze of tubes and wires that bound him to the hospital bed. "You know," he said. And she, amazed, realized that she did. Now, she steeled herself to her tasks.

"Let them wait," said her friends. "Please, Mom, come home with us for a few weeks," said her daughter, speaking in his reasonable way, using his gestures. How like him she was! What a mystery they both were! But she could not take the reasonable course, could not yet face the boisterous, happy jumble of her daughter's house which he had loved so much. She could not leave, not yet. Boxes had to be packed, rooms needed to be emptied. She went through his closet with ease, methodically folding each item, as if he were going on a trip.

When his things were gone and the closets gaping, she turned to his drawers. How easy, how impersonal. Only clothes with no trace of personality. He was so neat. Nothing was left. The keepsakes had always been her department. How angry he had always been at her exploding closets and drawers. "Why don't you throw out some of this junk?" Now she wished that he had kept some junk – just some small clue that would help her to hold on to the enigma of his personality. Nothing seemed to be left of him. Nothing at all.

She turned last to his wallet. Only in touching it could she somehow believe that he was really gone. In all the years of their marriage, he had never parted from it, never let her see it. She had always thought that it was money he was hiding. How she had resented that thick wallet when their money was tight and she had needed just a bit more to get by. All those years, and he had always cashed his paychecks himself and given the fat bank envelope to her; holding some back, she had always suspected. Doing what with it?, she had wondered irritably more than once. "Never even lets me see his pay statement. Probably keeping another woman uptown," she grumbled to her daughter. He had even slept with it under his pillow, his hand groping for it in his sleep. During the last hospital stay, he had called for the wallet, surprising her by asking to be left alone with it. Holding back from me even now, she had thought bitterly as she left the room.

Her hands, so steady and sure during his illness, trembled a bit now as she opened it. There was a bit of cash, twenty-six dollars. Typical of him to have held on to some money, even throughout the long, long weeks of his illness. The clear plastic enclosures held only a driver's license and credit cards and some snapshots chronicling their daughter and grandchildren at various ages. The "secret compartment" that their daughter had always joked about was all that remained. She opened it briskly...this was the last task left. Inside, she found two laminated pictures. The first was their daughter in the first grade, her golden hair shining in tight ringlets, her mouth tightly closed to conceal missing front teeth. On the back of the photo was a red construction paper heart, bearing the words, "Daddy, I love you!" A funny bulge in the corner, upon closer inspection, was one of the missing teeth. She smiled as she remembered his confusion when the little girl's sharp eyes had discovered that her daddy, and not the tooth fairy, had taken possession of that first tooth.

She took up the second picture, and with a little shock of recognition, looked into her own young eyes in the photograph she had taken for him before he left for the Navy. It had been a special surprise for him, presented on the day of his departure. She had worn his favorite dress for the shot, a deep forest green, although the color didn't show in the black and white print. Her legs were crossed, her nested fingers flashing the new diamond ring ("I'll never take it off!") Her face was tilted toward the camera, the long, silky hair falling softly around her shoulders in the way he had loved. He had not spoken when she presented it to him at the station, but as he hugged her close in thanks, she had sensed his tremble, had felt the moisture on his face. And she had seen him gazing at the photograph as the train drew out of sight. But that was back in the days when she was sure of things, safe in her place in his heart – a hundred years ago. On the back of the photograph was a lock of her auburn hair, laminated in place.

A terrible emptiness fell over her as she finished these last tasks. Sighing, she began to put the photographs back just as he had left them, when a piece of paper caught her eye. Just one of his business cards, she thought, and then she noticed something written on the other side. "My dearest wife," his shaky handwriting read, "I love you still." The ugly word "widow" vanished as she remembered the wonder she had felt at the magic word "wife." The years fell away as she discovered herself again as the golden girl of his youth.

An echo of that old confidence steeled her, she smiled at the laughing girl in the photo. "That's me," she thought. "That's me". This cherished woman, cherished wife, it was me all along." The tears that had been so long denied now streamed down her smiling face as she bent over the legacy he had left her. The numbness was gone, but the emptiness had gone with it.

She would go on.

Summer Bereavement Camp—August 8th—12th

Summer Bereavement Camp will be offered during the week of August 8th—12th. The camp meets from 9:30 am to 1 pm Monday through Friday. Children ages 6-12 who are grieving the loss of a loved one come together to explore their feelings of grief and learn coping strategies via discussions and therapeutic play activities. Pre-registration is required as group size is limited, but there is no charge for this camp. Please call Amy Keiper-Shaw at (215) 860-4000 X1403 for further information or to register.

BEREAVEMENT CALENDAR

The death of a beloved family member or friend results in many changes and feelings for those of you left behind. The time of bereavement can be sad, confusing and scary. Some people feel very much alone. Others find support in a variety of places. Chandler Hall offers several opportunities for bereavement support.



Wednesday Morning Bereavement Group**

9:30 a.m.—11:00 a.m.

March 2, 2011

April 6, 2011

**Meets the first Wednesday of each month

Evening Bereavement Group*

7:00 p.m.—8:30 p.m.

March 8, 2011

April 12, 2011

*Meets the second Tuesday of each month.

Light refreshments are served