

Remembering Erich Fromm (1900–1980)

The Art of Listening

On mastering the art of unselfish understanding:

The rules to practice concentration of the listener. Nothing of importance must be on his mind, he must be optimally free from anxiety as well as from greed. He must possess a freely working imagination sufficiently concrete to be expressed in words. Endowed with a capacity for empathy with another person and strong enough to feel the experience of the other as if it were his own. The condition for such empathy is a crucial facet of the capacity for love. To understand another means to love another — not in the erotic sense but in the sense of reaching out to him and overcoming the fear of losing oneself. Understanding and loving are inseparable. If they are separate, it is a cerebral process and the door to Essential understanding remains closed.



The Green Man - One of our earliest Gods of Listening

Loved

Loved

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Possibly

An answer to life's riddles comes across subtle as someone touching your arm signals you are not alone. Eyes light up. Heads turn in your direction. Someone is there with you. If you like that or not you belong in that moment. So stand up straight, be taller. Hold your head high, not proudly but out of respect for courage.

Others who have concerns for you need you. Then listen to what is around you, and carefully take in what you hear. Those silent faces whose eyes may show recognition may reveal some confusion, but within there is understanding too.

Sometimes doing nothing is powerful.

Changes do take shape.

And if any face shows you hatred, look away. You do not belong to them. You already have a direction to move forward, let them be. They are the ones who are stuck in their opinions.

You are free.

The Idea

Cowards hate because they are confused. Let them pass. Someone who is loved is fearless. You have something to do in your life. Being loved is one of them. Cowards hate because they are confused. Let them pass. Someone who is loved is fearless.

You have something to do in your life. Being loved is one of them.

/// Listening, really listening, I suggest you take this as a suggestion. ///

Do not let some thought take over your mind. Stay as empty as you can.

Hear the wind, notice where the sound of rustling leaves comes from.

Look around you to watch for movement, where there may be a sound,
where in your body can you feel that listening touch?

What is your face showing? How do your eyes react? How easy is your breath?

What does your body really hunger for? What does that tell you?

As a kid I never got it, being loved. I mean to say I never recognized it when I was loved. Hugs were suspicious. I never knew what love meant. Would I have changed if anyone acted on my confusion, explained to me that which was not spoken aloud? A kid was a kid, I was rarely brought into the conversation and only when I did something wrong I got that I was not who I should be. I did not miss what was going on around me. World War II and the parts that adults played. There were disembodied voices on the radio, at home suspicion of neighbors, judgments of others, daily upsets. I had friends, my cat, our dog, my brother, and cousins. When FDR died our house was filled with neighborhood women mourning. It was strange to see so many tears. I was told to go play outside.

The Church demanded love and obedience, and Sunday School for a Baptist kindergarten didn't explain why I was a sinner. They told each of us, all our hearts were black, not red, not white. Jesus scrubs our hearts clean. Please put the fear of God in us.

My working class family all walked the daily line between hopes, prayers, and silence. Hitler then Japan, one uncle dispatched by the Navy into the war in the South Pacific, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. My Catholic uncles visited the suspicious marriage to my dad and their sister, my mom. This was never spoken of until I was twenty-two. Yes, mom was divorced, dad was the new one. There were many secrets. My brother, five years older, was charged with looking out for me. I bonded with my dad who played baseball. "In center field," he always added. He was kind to me and fun. He found ways to make me laugh. With him, I felt something different with him than anybody else. I believe I may have felt love for him, but I didn't know what to call it back then.

The 1940s set the scene in Grade School, "Duck, get under the desk!" No place for understanding only heightened vigilance. "What kind of bomb?" What was a kid to do but run as fast as I could into the wind to get free from all those fears in grade school, then enter his own house filled with daily rules? In my bedroom, my world was peaceful with my cat and crayons. When dad's bedtime stories began my world filled with wondrous colors and adventures. My imagination came alive in

full color. I was grateful, especially for him and for my aunt, my mother's sister. They were the only adults who could see I was me.

Today, 2020, love is listening, not looking elsewhere, turning my attention to face that which is positive, purposeful. It is holding fast to confusion well past the time one would think you may as well give it up and walk away.

So listen. Keep at it, you will learn something you did not know. You will make "listening" high art, understand why looking into life deeply may be called someone's religion, and compassion for friends is necessary. Listening illuminates life. You had best befriend that.

Once listening begins your life takes shape. It is a way of giving love. Think of it like an echo, more than one person at a time can hear an echo.

One Auntie Anne

She was like the other adults in my family, at least six feet tall, or taller.

In a simple print dress and cardigan, sleeves pushed up on her forearms, she walked fast in brown Oxford heeled shoes. Anne wore her hair twisted into a kind of braided cap that sat on the top of her head. She wore horn-rimmed glasses, no lipstick. She would look into my father's eyes, and he understood her because they always talked together. She was thirteen years older than my dad, and ten years older than my mom. They all got on, and my mother stepped back letting my aunt visit with my dad. Now and then, Dad worked on her house making repairs. She lived on the other side of town with her friend Marge in what we called the Riverside desert.

I don't remember why she smiled when she questioned me as a child, or throughout my school years for that matter. Her eyes told me she was kind. She did laugh a lot and was interested in me.

"Why did you paint that?" She'd ask. She was interesting because she was interested. I could tell her, and she listened like what I said was important.

She looked closely at objects I constructed like the tiny tables and chairs I made out of toothpicks, and the small concrete building blocks I made with my dad for a second grade school project. Auntie Anne asked me why my cat was always so close by? I told her we were friends. I believed her hair was always gray and that thick braid rolled up on her head never changed. I liked her, looked forward to her visits. Her friend Marge, who was much shorter, would come along when we had extended family dinners together for Easter, Christmas, and family birthdays. My whole family talked about Auntie Anne and her friend Marge and what they did. Mom said they were heroes but never explained what that meant.

At our house on summer holidays we had our whole extended family together sitting at long tables under our blossomed arbor. Mom's family, all very tall, my uncle Vince, home from the war, with three kids, uncle Bert and Helen, with seven kids. Uncle Nick, mom's oldest brother, a contractor, was working in Iran. He was hard to like him when he got home. At times, Dad's brother and his wife would not come, he was the manager in an ice distributing plant, his wife didn't like being around all those kids.

Of course, Auntie Anne and Marge brought cookies and cakes. All the children sat at a good-sized table, the adults at the longer ones. The food came in casseroles each family brought along with salads and desserts. They drank beer. The kids drank apple juice. We never left hungry. It was noisy and fun. Like me and my brother Tom and our cousins would all run around in our back yard until called to sit down for dinner. We ran again playing tag until dessert was announced. The women cleaned up after dinner. Coffee would be ready in our dining room and the men brought in extra chairs for everyone to have a seat in our living room.

There were two branches to my family. My mother's from Catholic German immigrants who arrived before the first world war, and my father's Scot Irish from Lutherans that arrived to fight for the British in America's war of Independence. Both families, my mother's from Wisconsin, my dad's from Kentucky and Virginia arrived in California around 1900.

During the great depression, the families moved to Southern California. Riverside's climate suited them, there were jobs, vast orange, lemon, and grapefruit orchards. It never snowed.

All our extended families were lower-middle class, in time we all prospered.

The second world war brought growth to Riverside. The fruit packing plant my dad worked for was converted into manufacturing tanks for the US Army. March Air Force Base was constructed 10 miles from town as a strategic base for long-range bombers. The University of California At Riverside's Experimental Station focused on increasing food and fruit production. Trees were planted throughout the city that were native to desert climates. There were two high schools, a Junior College and a new four-lane highway through the city that headed into the desert and Palm Springs. Water from the Colorado River started flowing into California's southern deserts. New people moved to town, their children enrolled in a burgeoning school system. When we looked east at the San Bernardino Mountain range we could see "smog". We could drive to the mountains east of us in less than an hour. Lake Arrowhead, Big Bear Lake, Running Springs were above the snow line to cool summers and winter's snow.

I liked Auntie Ann before I knew anything about her. She and her friend Marge lived and worked from the time they were young nuns in a convent together in San Francisco. They contacted influenza in 1918 which was deadly in those days and that forced them to leave the convent to get healthy. They moved south just after WW1. They took jobs with the county as social workers.

When I first understood what they did I was in grade school. In 1946, they worked for Riverside County, helping people who were in need. They brought with them the understanding of the Catholic Church's charitable programs to help the county's most vulnerable people. Anne played the Catholic church's organ every Sunday and Marge was the lead soprano in their choir. They drove an old Ford the length and breadth of Riverside County to do their work, but every Sunday they were in church. Later in the day Anne would stop by to visit with my mom while Marge went shopping for groceries. Anne would seek me out to ask what I had been doing.

I didn't know yet what love was. I believed in Auntie Anne because she was sincere and her eyes told me something about her, she never said what that was. I was curious about her. I felt close, safe and OK.

My mother, Genevieve, was a stage-door-mother. She was convinced I would be a great dancer, so I was brought into a class for kindergarteners learning to tap dance. My mother, fascinated with Donald O'Connor, was fixated on movies. Hollywood was fifty miles away. I was put into a Saturday class of fifteen to twenty preschoolers, unruly, unorganized. It must have been like a dog dropping into a roomful of cats. I followed the teacher's orders, and my mom's (demands of minding my p's and q's, or else). My mom hounded the teacher to put me in the front line of children. She was pushy, never one of my most favorite attributes, and demanding, a bully. It was not pleasant to watch her intimidate people. She told me when she was eighty years old that she had fought me every step of the way. When I was in my forties I reminded her, yes she did fight me and she had best consider what that did for our relationship. I looked her in the eyes to see if she got what I meant by that. She did and she backed off. We dropped the subject.

Mom was responsible for the full-on bonkers tyrant of the child I had become in kindergarten. I found a much better way to behave when I entered second grade.

OK! This is the back story:

At five years old, I had been painting regularly, daily. I was enjoying brushes which paint could be pushed around to represent what I imagined. I was happy using them.

I also liked Bosco, the chocolate syrup kids dripped over ice cream. I would play with my food and swirl my chocolate to mix into my vanilla ice cream.

A brainstorm stirred up my mind when I imagined a picture of Little Black Sambo from a book that belonged to my dad as a child. Dad would read to me get me to fall asleep. His description of Sambo hiding behind a boulder how the fright-

ening Tiger must have appeared when he was chasing his tail as his black stripes became melted as he turned and swirled into yellow melted butter (but for milli-second it appeared in my ice cream). That image caught my breath. Suddenly there was wonder, a big and important idea existed for me. The perfect solution to something necessary for me to try in painting. I knew everybody would get what I learned from showing a story. That was the first time I painted my imagination, sticking my finger into black paint and swirling it into a tiger-yellow wet paint. Image-making turned out to be magic. Five years old with an open mind, I loved Bosco, I loved paint. I loved my Dad.

Of course, they appreciated the adventure of that painting. Enough for my teacher to show it to the principal of the Grade school. Used it to show around to other teachers. I was told it was going into an exhibition. I was told I should be happy. When weeks passed I asked for it back, my teacher said they lost it.

Mrs. Tobias was my teacher in kindergarten, at Riverside's Grant School. I raised such a stink I stomped out of that classroom, telling that poor teacher as I left she was "real bad" and I would never return.

"Un-fair, I won't come back, never.

"Good-bye!"

She couldn't catch me I was out of the room so fast.

I left the school and the schoolyard. I walked away fuming, sulked all the way home. (two city blocks). I wanted to be with my cat, sit on my bed. But my mother dragged me back, kicking and screamed the whole way. I sat in a children's chair my lower lip sticking out in anger, arms folded over my chest, feet fidgeting while my mother attempted to make peace with Mrs. Tobias. I told them both I will not paint in that kindergarten ever again and I made it known that I did not like any adult there. "Nope, no more painting here, Uh! Uh! No. Done. NO!"

I learned something had shifted as within a week the Principle of the school came into kindergarten to make amends. I was offered art lessons by a master

painter who was married to the Arts Coordinator at the Riverside County Office of Education. (No doubt to shut me up.) I hesitated but agreed.

The painter was a returning GI from the Second World War a Mr. Head. He spent his tour of duty during Japan's recovery from the war, and in his free time in Tokyo studied Japanese Sumi brush painting.

He used Sumi painting as a means for me to "get it" the work of an artist, painting was his work, a glimpse into making beauty, telling the truth by image making. He was a compassionate guy who understood one does not mess with inspiration.

So in that summer, at six years old he gave me my first sumi brush, then he showed me how to use it.

"Enter the paper with the brush's tip as pointed as you can make it. Let your arm be your master, not your hand, no stop. Use your shoulder and let your eyes take control of your arm. Good – let your brush lead you, don't think. Use your eyes to think, pull the brush slowly, stroke it as you would carefully stroke your cat. Slowly let the brush touch the paper with the point then let it down on the paper as wide as the brush will expand. Keep pulling it. Then lift the brush while pulling it up until you leave the paper with a point the same size as when your brush first entered that paper. The color must be the same at the beginning point as the exit of the brush and as sharp a point as to how you first made it touch the paper.

"That's it? Do it again. Make one brush mark over and over until you know, really know that mark. That is your mark, and you will show up as a painter. Focus on the brush's movement so you won't be bothered by any flaw in the paper or any loud noise in the room.

"You will understand that you have made the correct movement.

“Your goal is a brush mark that looks like it was effortless, one that the viewer cannot tell where you began and where you stopped”.

I got it. He set the course of my life. Thank you Mr. Head.

Sometimes you have to trust what happens and let yourself take that in.



I quit tap-dancing lessons when I was fourteen. It did help some with coordination as my body shot up to six feet in height in junior high. My mother didn't say a word about my decision to quit dancing, for Auntie Anne had arranged a one-man show for my paintings at a Palm Springs gallery. At fifteen and throughout High School, I took lessons from a desert landscape painter, Ralph Love, who opened my eyes to oil paints, oils, varnishes, to contrast, to colors and to relationships, the chemistry of all that. Marge and I now had a conversational vocabulary about paints and brushes as she was a master china painter.

In high school Auntie Anne gave me books for birthdays, Christmas presents and sometimes just because she knew I'd be interested in a topic. The Life of Marco Polo, The Martyred Red (The murder of the Ruling Tzar of Russia and his family) and Marge sent along old Saturday Evening Post magazines because of the illustrations and art magazines that taught painting techniques. Marge put information under my nose. My mother fumed. I did not care. I loved Auntie Anne, we knew what I was good at.

At sixteen when I got my first car I would drive to their house and we would have a visit at their home. I met some of their friends and some of Marge's family. Visiting their house meant freedom. I felt I fit. I knew who I was.

I had good grades in High School but no money for college. My brother Tommy had married at nineteen. By the time I was a senior in High School, he had two girls. I got a job moving plants around for a landscaper. When I turned eighteen I got the idea of how I might fit in the world of adults but I was still confused. Sex was rampant and love was still a mystery.

I joined the Air Force. My mother cried. My dad was proud.

I did hear and took to heart, that time worked wonders and at eighteen I arrived in Germany for a three-year tour of duty.

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Not to be neglected but held close.

From Erich Fromm (1900–1980)

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The rules to practice concentration of the listener. Nothing of importance must be on his mind, he must be optimally free from anxiety as well as from greed. He must possess a freely working imagination sufficiently concrete to be expressed in words. Endowed with a capacity for empathy with another person and strong enough to feel the experience of the other as if it were his own. The condition for such empathy is a crucial facet of the capacity for love. To understand another means to love another — not in the erotic sense but in the sense of reaching out to him and overcoming the fear of losing oneself. Understanding and loving are inseparable. If they are separate, it is a cerebral process and the door to Essential understanding remains closed.

One

USAF

I arrived in the early winter of 1960 to Bremerhaven, Western Germany. I was eighteen. The snow was on the ground and mud was everywhere. This would be my home for three years, the 6913th Radio Squadron Mobile's base campus. Army troupes were marching by the bus's windows as it slowed to a stop. The men's footfalls muffled by all the mud, the sharp voice of the sergeant called out the cadence for their steps. The puddles under my window reflected the empty rain clouds on this cold bus having just arrived from town. It was late, late afternoon.

I had been picked up by this empty bus at the railway station in the center of Bremerhaven having taken the six-hour train from Frankfurt. I had one night there to recover from the twenty-hour flight from New Jersey before taking this train. I had the thickest pancake I ever thought possible with Maple syrup for breakfast at the train station. The coffee was as thick as that syrup.

“So this is Germany, so gray, so cold.”

It was past five-thirty and I was the only airman to check-in that day. Or should I say 1740 hours, I had to hurry and drop my belongings off with the serviceman on duty at the barracks, get to the Mess Hall, have dinner and return to be debriefed, then shown which bunk was to be mine. There were twenty beds in that room, three were not yet claimed.

I used the spotless room full of toilets with no seats, visited the icy shower room with no partitions. I was told I would be assigned a weapon the next morning and introduced to my superiors. Early afternoon, they would have my assignment of duties prepared for me and I would be briefed on what would become my next steps.

The 6913th was a security base. Top Secret Code Word clearance required. They chose me for this duty, I had no say in the decision. I had signed over all my rights to be a member of the US Air Force.

Earlier in Texas, I experienced the skills of Air Force interviewers, I wrote answers to questions when I joining the service. Background checks were made at home in Riverside while I was in Texas going through basic training. More testing when in Texas, like how much I had learned from three days of being taught the usual six weeks Chinese language course, then an interview with three officers who asked me what I thought of that experience.

I told the Captain “I believe you plan to send me to the Monterey Language School to study Chinese, but ... “

I spoke up, “I would prefer an assignment in Syracuse, New York, to study Russian as when I get out of the service Russian would be more useful for me to use in business.”

I had to wait for six more weeks in Lackland AFB in San Antonio to be assigned to a school in San Angelo, Texas. The Goodfellow AFB was In the middle of nowhere just south of Oklahoma. There we were taught pattern recognition, in text, by numbers, by lectures. Our grades were determined by how we made sense of what was given to us, judged how we wrote our reports of our findings. Seven months in West Texas behind chain-linked fences with occasional trips to town, for movies, restaurants, for R&R. At that station, everyone was under constant surveillance. We were there to learn one the finer arts of spying by breaking codes. Getting “Bumped” from not being good enough meant that airmen would be going “elsewhere”.

Can you get it? I was so interested in secrecy, the competition, so willing to go along with this type of education? What would it mean if I passed, succeeded? What would I learn? Who would I become?

I endured monthly interviews with military therapists. “How are you doing, Airman, how are you getting along?”

“Tell me Maxwell, I hear you are into swimming, what you think about that?”

We were graded, the hierarchy of the young men recorded in the class of twelve, the competition between us, who was this airman, who was that one? Who would be the first, the second, third in line, and so on? The ranking of each participant was usually by two teachers (Air Force officers).

After seven months of scrutiny, we were told we were ready to be assigned to a squadron depending upon our standing in the class. We could choose from Germany, Turkey, Italy, Alaska, Hokkaido, Japan, the USA. I came in second. There were four assignments possible in Germany.

It was hands-down. Destiny.

I took German in High School. My security background check was spotless.

I had signed on the dotted line.

I wrote home. Hey cousins! Auntie Anne, Mom, Dad and Tommy, Marge, I’m going to Europe. I got leave coming up. I’ll see you for Thanksgiving. I’m shipping out after Christmas.

The Bremerhaven base was shared with the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force, we ate in the same mess hall, worked out in the same gymnasium. Shared the same recreational areas with the other three branches of service, the USO provided a taste of home and there was a movie theater. Each branch of the services had their own large barracks. It was rare that there was any intermingling except over sharing a table in the mess.

The working offices for the Air Force and Navy were behind a tall chain-linked electrified fence with two armed security guards checking our identity cards and patting us down for any weapons before they opened the door.

I got it fast. This would be serious.

In this building the Air Force had its offices on the second floor, the Navy the ground floor. The basement housed the photo unit and darkrooms. The conference rooms were in the eastern end of the building, with rooms for officers and civilians that worked undercover, for accountants, for secrecy.

A contingent of Marines doubled as our police force. The Army ran the business of the base.

My boss, Sgt. Patrick O'Neill met me at the gate and walked with me to his office. He spoke as we strolled through the lower level then climbed to the second floor.

"We are one of the four teams to make a seamless covering of intercepted data, twenty-four hours a day. We listen, record, report our data to the Security Services in Washington DC and MI5 in London. Our team, you and I with two others, will be working four-day shifts starting from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm then we will have one day off. You come in the next day at 4:30 pm and work until midnight for four days, again we will have a day off. You return that next midnight and work until 7:30 am, four more days, then you have four consecutive days off to do what you want.

"Stay on the base, go to town. I understand you speak a little German. Hook up with some of the guys in your barracks who have a car and tag along with them. They know every bar in town, and they do look out for one another. It is pretty safe in town."

He paused to see how I was taking in this information.

"You will repeat this work cycle for the remainder of your service, or you get reassigned.

"You have an hour for your mid-shift meal. You may take breaks for coffee or breathers. You must clear that with me, then sign out or in with the hour and

minutes you left and returned. That chalkboard is next to the door that exits our office. Do not forget to write down where you are and confirm it with me. I've got a lot on my plate. I don't want to raise my voice with you.

"You will help plot aircraft, estimate departure time and arrivals at bases in Western Russia. You will get printed info from all those men in earphones pounding typewriters deciphering morse code. You passed them on the way up here. Pick up those papers every thirty minutes. We keep track and report data sent by the pilots to Russian military airports. There is a wide aisle between your typists and Blaine's who captures the voice transmissions in Russian. They translate that into English. That's done by all those men you passed in headphones recording their listening on typewriters at the front of the room.

"In our office, Blaine specializes in translated Russian voice data. He picks up all that paperwork every half hour. He is that big guy I pointed out to you coming up the stairs to the office here. Blaine quickly goes through all the paperwork and anything that looks interesting he flags it, puts a note on the location on our big map then sends a data message off to the NSA and GCHQ. What are you thinking?"

He waited for my reaction.

I must have flinched as I looked around this room the size of a two-story barn. I stood before O'Neill at his desk. He was about ten or fifteen years older than me, the ring of his finger said he was married. A photo on his desk displayed a woman and two boys.

"National Security Agency, Washington DC and GCHQ in London – we are buddies you know." He caught my eye.

"You are not going to get everything we do right away, or what you must perform in a week. We're a good team and we help each other out. So, stay with me. We'll help you and we do that just fine. I have a report on you that indicates you learn fast.

"Foggy," he took a breath.

"You'll meet him when he returns, is responsible for all the data that comes from those spinning tape recording computers hooked up on our ground level that monitors what sounds like meaningless chatter but is communications and

coded data broadcast from Moscow and easily picked up by their military throughout Russia and eastern Europe, perhaps spies here in the West. We're close to cracking that code, we get glimpses of it, but they change the pattern every two months. We usually break it after two weeks. We'll get that handled and figured out soon. We always do.

"As the newbie, you will extract the information from your typists, and record the coordinates of all the aircraft in the air over eastern Europe and in Western Russia and place markers on this map on the wall to follow their flight path." He gestured for me to see a particular path on the map marked by colored pins and little flags with connecting strings.

"We can see minute by minute where aircraft are in the air and read in the messages where they may be heading, a complete flight path from lift off to landing. Their airfields, landing sites are marked with red pins and small flags. Both Blaine and Foggy will give you their data on the hour for you to plot information on the map. So for a while, you will be busy learning to get your job done. Don't worry, the last airman who had your job was a bit lame and did ok. You look like all your lights are on.

"This is your desk. That map at the end of the room is your responsibility, learn it. Think of it as your territory, memorize it like your back yard. Walk around in it. It must be updated at all times with all the data that comes into our office. You will write a report when any flight has landed, that data, the time it took to the air, where it came from and where it became silent. Plot it on our map. Then give that report to me and I'll take it from there to get it into the right hands. I'll let you know when and what flights your tracking, can be removed from the map.

"I'll pinch-hit if anything goes awry. Any questions?"

"I tell by your face you need to sit down." He gestured towards the center of the room, "That is your desk."

He handed me a large binder, "Here's your logbook, read it, keep it up to date."

I was in the center of that room facing the wall. That map took over the room. I felt like a pin.

“Remember to call me Sargent O’Neill I have to have some respect around here. After all, I am the boss.” He smiled at me.

The room was about twenty-four feet square, the pitch to the roof was about eighteen feet above the floor. The map stretched from O’Neill’s desk at the right near the corner of the room. Odesa in the Crimea was the city spelled out above his head when he was seated. Moscow was about eye level in the center of the wall. The map covered the room's 24-foot width, it was about 18 feet tall. At the top left, Murmansk in Novae Zemlya was flagged in red nearest to the roof. Murmansk featured large in America’s concerns. That was the staging area for the Russian nuclear testing program in the Arctic marked in red near the peak of the roof.

Blaine arrived and O’Neill sat down at his desk arranging papers to fit into order.

Blaine walked me down to the coffee shop in the basement so we could bond. He attempted to intimidate me while we drank our coffee. He reminded me of my mother with his bravado. He was really insecure behind his opinions and much too fat. He was married, his wife a civilian. I saw through his routine, his fear, or he let me in. I couldn't quite tell. In time we would become trusted friends.

When we returned to the office Foggy was busy, head down in paperwork at his desk. He looked up at me. Twenty-two years old, dark hair, Prussian blue eyes, possibly the most beautiful man I had ever seen.

He asked with a welcoming smile. “Maxwell, is it?”

“Yeh,” I answered. “Why are you called, ‘Foggy?’”

“Not even a clue!” He made a dumb face then he fell into a half-hearted deflated grin.

/// I have to stop here as writing this has brought me back to being eighteen. ///

However, what may be important from a nearly eighty-year-old writer's POV is to speak to the issue of code. Everybody speaks in code. "Foggy" is code for a person's character trait and that is called a "handle". It is given by others in his close-knit military group. Blaine was known as "Fatback". It was one full year before I threw off the handle of "kid" and was re-marked as "Sis". Those absolute fucking bastards and their dastardly ideas, God only knows what they were named or how scared they were in their group dynamic.

That nick-name or "handle" describes that person's attributes in a way for self-examination, to understand how he is seen by his fellows, but in most parts it is cruel. For him or her (military usually) to know and keep their place within the group. But to the rare few who suffer their handle, it provides them with something to become someone stronger, more capable by knowing how their fellows see them. Still, it is a stifling put down. I fought back with humor, with truth, as dignity was not allowed. For others, it rolled off their backs. I left that handle back in Germany, but I still carry its scars.

My first mail from my family arrived from my home in California. A red, white and blue stripe outlined the envelope marked "AIR MAIL". There were two letters, one from my mom and one from dad. I held the one from my dad to my chest in surprise. First time I received letters in Germany. The first letter I got from my father. I saw he signed it, "Love, Dad".

I made a new friend outside of the office in my barracks, William Rooney was seven years older, two years older than my brother. He worked as a Russian translator on a different team. Our paths crossed as we were bunkmates in that long room where no one talked business. But we would see one another at the movies and get together at the USO. He was smitten with one of the women who ran that operation, and I tagged along as I was the new guy and the youngest airman.

Months passed and a two-man room became available at the western end of that huge building, we applied for it, made it through an interview, and got it.

It was cold but radiant heat made it livable. Two windows looked out on the Elbe River. Large transport ships would slowly pass, both departing and arriving upriver at Bremerhaven's port, Germany's port of entry off of the North Sea. The wide river was a city block from our window over a grassy expanse, trees lined the river's edge.

Looking out any north-facing barrack's windows, one could see a flag pole and a concrete slab large enough for the commanding officer and staff to make announcements to those gathered. Surrounding the center of the quadrangle four two-story tall, long brick barracks, one for the Navy, one for the Air Force, one for unmarried officers. The furthest north was for those about to be redeployed, office workers, the USAF security offices, and in the basement the base's laundry for all Air Force personnel and our armory. A street ran toward the Elbe separating the quadrangle of barracks from a chain-linked electrified fence, set back one hundred feet was the Air Force and Navy's security offices, where we would perform our work.

This campus was originally built as Hitler's Naval Academy.

The US and our allies never bombed it, saved for the use at the end of World War II. Over each entryway, the brick buildings had swastikas embedded in the brickwork.

In our barrack's basement it was mostly empty, the fifteen-foot square rooms whitewashed, their floors sealed, their door's allowed air to flow inside to keep them dry. Some of those rooms had overhead lighting. Most of them were almost empty, stored with bed frames and mattresses, light fixtures and electrical extension cords and plugs.

It was Rooney's inspiration, at his suggestion we turned one of those rooms into a living room and art studio. I could paint. He could read and listen to music through earphones. We could have friends visit. We had electricity from the light socket for a hot plate to boil water and an ice chest for beer. He had a large Grundig Radio hooked a wire for the antennae to thread out under the little

window close to the ceiling opposite our door. It was dry, and we still bundled up. Rooney's girlfriend made us a fabric snake filled with sawdust to keep out the cold air from coming in under our door. She could never visit us. In time we got an electric heater. We made it cozy.

I set my sights to learn still-life painting, I painted in oil on canvas during my off-hours. My still life's subject matter was: a table covering, a drape of a dark color that blocked out the background, glassware, usually wine glasses, full of wine (usually emptied before I closed the door). I staged my still-life to learn how to compose, used a direct clamp-on light source to study how shadows worked. How reflections affected color, a large loaf of bread with differing cheeses, red waxed Gouda, a wedge of Swiss that I would eat from behind, and I would paint what I faced. I made it fun. I learned a lot.

Of course, I had a camera and took photos of my still lives. Black and white photos showed and taught me how to look at values, the degrees of dark and light to match with my paints, I learned to love how shadows told of atmosphere. The look of my painting became more natural. I showed my paintings at the USO. I got compliments.

I walked into work one day in May 1960 and we were on alert. A US U-2 aircraft had been shot down by surface to air missiles near Sverdlovsk.

It was already flagged in red on our map. There was a clipboard with the report of its flight path, where the missiles had been fired (also flagged). O'Neill had his radio tuned to Armed Forces News and we were following the story as it unraveled. Wide-eyed we learned a US Spy Plane was down in Southern Russia, Pilot Francis Gary Powers arrested, unharmed. A poison needle was taken from his possession, and there was proof the aircraft's cameras had focused on Russian airbases.

Holy Shit! I was part of something bigger than I ever imagined.

I looked forward to doing my job, liked the men whose heads were bent over listening for hours and hours to their assigned radio frequencies. Some would stand and stretch have a conversation with some man three rows in front or behind him then sit back down again when a new message caught his attention. He would put on his earphones and pound his typewriter with numbers and letters in five-digit blocks for hours at a time. They caught the morse code chatter sent between the Russian aircraft to their ground crews. I picked up his typing, brought it to the office, looked to see anything more suspicious was embedded in the message. I would plot that aircraft on the big map until it landed. At times there were more than twenty aircraft active within an hour. I was busy most of my shift. Real-time was really “real” and my immediate reporting to the brass mucky-mucks up the chain of command was from a soon to be nineteen-year-old.

Gerry was a civilian contractor (no-one knew what they did, but we speculated they were “spooks” - spies). Gerry longed to be seen. He was single, mid-forties, heavy set. In the evening he would hang out at the USO. We knew what not to talk about. So we spoke of easy things, like did you enjoy the Drama club’s last play? Have you lived on the base for long? No, I haven’t gotten a car, yet. Yes, I did like that movie. Have you read ‘Advice and Consent’ it is scary-good.

He complimented me, having seen the stage play where I was cast as a bumbling clergyman who would stumble to the ground every time I would enter the stage. (The director’s idea of a laughing stock, because I was so serious, tall and skinny, and I could not keep my face still.) I wanted to belong, somewhere?

I showed paintings in their lobby. I turned twenty.

Gerry said he had a German friend who did watercolors. A lady, he said of advanced age, a Frau Tilda who lived in the country outside Bremerhaven was “Very popular and appreciated”. He said, they played cards, poker. I thought that was interesting. He brought to the USO a small painting of her's he owned. It was really very good.

Rooney knew Gerry as well, I think the three of us were called fixtures at the USO because we needed to find people-people. Rooney suggested we invite Gerry to visit us in our underground “studio.” We snuck him in after the USO closed one night and the barracks were mostly dark.

Rooney liked whiskey so we had that, he showed Gerry his collection of books, photos of his visits to Copenhagen. I walked Gerry around my current still life set up. He noticed the loaf of bread was half-eaten from the back. We laughed. He took time looking at my finished paintings, and we ferreted him safely out and walked him to his car.

My schedule was such that I could come to the USO in the evenings during my day shift and my four-day respite from work. He said he understood scheduling. He now worked weekdays, had his weekends free. Maybe Gerry wasn't a spy.

One freezing Sunday, through Gerry I met a German couple. The wife, Frau Tilde was Gerry's friend the painter.

We had a formal “Tea” in a room off of her garden where she painted. She was fluent in English, and I knew how to do Tea, she reminded me of my aunt Anne.

“Your paintings show so much promise.” She said, “Will you attend Art School when you return to America?”

“I'd like to,” but I admitted to myself I didn't have a clue if I ever could. “I don't know how to do that,” spilled out of me like a confession.

Gerry informed Frau Tilde, my home was close to Los Angeles, and I had two more years of being in the Air Force.

“Good, you have time.

“You need to build a portfolio for a college to review. Start drawing every day, make so many that your head will swim, many different papers, different pencils soft and hard, use black ink with a stick to draw, with pens, with brushes, red Conte,” and she smiled, “with your fingers.”

I returned to visit her with Gerry bringing drawings and some paintings she asked to see.

“My nephew went to a college in Los Angeles, I told him about you.”

She handed me a used Los Angeles Art Center College of Design’s catalog of classes. Black and white photos of students drawing with teachers standing over their shoulders, the campus with students looking so not-military I was shocked and fascinated. In that eighty-page booklet was all the contact information I would need to communicate with their admission’s office.

Tea? She suggested. She mentioned her nephew. He is into cars, designs them. He makes a good living.

After a year and a half, Rooney and I got busted for commandeering that basement room. The order to vacate was punishment enough. The Air Force Commander of the base came down to examine what we had done and he bought two of my paintings for his wife. I continued to paint in our upstairs room. I believe we were lucky but couldn’t think why we got off so easily.

I made friends with a couple my age, Bruce was in the Army, Marilyn worked in an Army office. We met at the USO, and went ice skating that winter on a lake in Bremerhaven's City Park. Someone had made paths twisting through the two feet of snow all over the good-sized lake. Couples could skate side by side in the sunlight but would have to keep up with those in front of them and move aside when some young hotshot had to speed passed. We had coffee with brandy to keep warm from Marilyn’s thermos; we sat on a park bench while watching a worker sweep the snow flurries off the ice. Later in the day Bruce fell and broke his ankle. We took him to the Army hospital, Marilyn kept telling him, “I told you so.” Bruce finally raised his voice in pain, “Marilyn, shut it.”

In spring we played golf. Not for real just to see how far we could hit the ball then take a walk. We always seemed to get caught in rain squalls.

Summer, a few of us tried to go swimming in the North Sea, to lie on the rocky shore for a suntan. No luck with that and little chance, “Let’s go to the pub.”

I bought a car. A 1953 Mercedes 180 sedan with a sunroof that folded from over the front to over the back seats. Good condition, six hundred dollars from my savings and I could see Germany on my four days off from work. Bought it from a departing GI, who had bought it from another departing GI, etcetera, and so forth, etc.

I drove to Hamburg, the Hartz Mountains, Bremerhaven and all the lakes in the region. I went to Paris, with three guys from my shift who paid for gas and my hotel bill. The Louvre Museum was closed the first time since the second world war. France was warring with Algeria. The four of us got drunk on cheap red wine and I wanted to drown in the hotel room's bathtub. We returned home by way of Brussels, then crossed over to Cologne and the westerly route back up to our base.

Together I traveled to Amsterdam for the tulip festival with two guys from the USO. Met up with others from the base and we walked the town, found the prostitutes in their windows in the Red Light District. Noticed people living in barges, their laundry hanging reflected in the canals. Most everyone on the streets wore a neck scarf. Eight of us ate Rijsttafel delivered to us by two Thai waiters who carried our meals on a long wooden plank, so many little dishes. We celebrated spring at that exotic restaurant and drank rice wine.

I learned hanging-out in close quarters with people from all over the US and Europe who were not so different. I could feel easy in the new company.

One summer that hearty little car took four of us from my shift camping for two weeks. We drove south in one day, south to Basel, south again to Zurich, camped the night by the Zurichsee, south over the alps down into Italy.

We crossed into France and went swimming in the Mediterranean. One more leg and we were in Barcelona for four days. We returned home with our tails between our legs having been fleeced by a barkeep. We did see a bullfight together, the four of us got tickets to watch the murder of a bull for one carton of Pall Mall cigarettes. 1961.

Guy stuff and I was growing into my newly twenty-year-old skin.

I started building up my portfolio of drawings, I did not try to make them look like art, they were more like maps of what I saw and the sequence of what I saw first then second when looking. I took a pad of paper when we went to the park to draw what was around me. To the shore of the North Sea focused on the backs of friends that were sitting in front of me, I used one line to show where the horizon was. At times I'd ask if a friend to sit so I could sketch his face. I liked drawing, my hand felt like that was natural too. I had a small pad that would fit into my hip pocket so I could sketch just because I learned something each time.

In October of 1962, we had a major wake up call. This one from the Navy on the first floor of our building. They came up to brief us. Soviet missiles were heading down the Baltic on ships on their way to Cuba. We, as Air Force, agreed with them, and with NSA and GCHQ, to shut the whole base down, no-one could leave or enter for two weeks. No letters out or into the base, no phone calls out. Lines of communications secured and silent. It seemed that war was going to break-out at any moment.

Any radio chatter was confused. The code for my map had changed, the grid was in disarray. After twenty-four hours the shift after us broke the code and we were back in action, for a time.

We got English speaking radio from BBC-News London. Walking around the base seemed colder, darker, the mess house quiet, not enough laughter at the USO. We heard JFK's address. We waited over a week until we got the all-clear to open the base again.

I was called into the office of the Air Force Commanding Officer. The Salvation Army had finally gotten through our information blockade, and I was told, "Write your mother."

Coming back to work from a four-day break I would pick up what those sixteen airmen had for me and returned to my desk.

When not working on the map, early on, when I first started with the team, O'Neill suggested I read our logbooks daily. Our news went back for years. I could understand what the past had taught us about the history of our actions. Saw how other analysts put down their thoughts. What was it about this grid superimposed on the map? I learned its history. It became more alive for me. It became more manageable. I knew more about what I needed to look out for. My memory was never a problem. New data was interesting. Crucial. I learned something every day.

The code showed coordinates of where flights were at that moment. Russian air space was arranged in square grids divided into nine equal parts, the squares anchored to geographical coordinates. Each part of the five-figure burst had its code for the aircraft's position in the larger square, in several bursts of five-digit codes we could plot the aircraft's location, altitude, speed, the aircraft's type, and the digital name of the aircraft.

Codebreakers had been listening to other country's transmissions since radio began. Each section of the larger grid was identified sent in five-letter and numbered blocks. We had to break these messages immediately, all four teams were on it. This was done by pattern recognition, lucky for us as the sequence of information was presented in a consistent order. The frequency of the transmission became a major clue.

One day I got a surprise, a numbered block jumped out at me. It was significant as it stood out as if it was a mindful warning. Important. I remembered it looked it up in the log-book. It was within the sequence of five-digit numbers and letters that identified the particular aircraft flying, a large cargo plane. I recognized that. I took it immediately to O'Neill. I said the intercept was currently being recorded. He confirmed it was important, it had a history, and together we went through the flight path that revealed it was on a course to Smolensk. He shouted, his fist hitting his desk. "Got ya!".

We had a major wake-up call. That plane had appeared on that same course several times, the same direction, and the assumed destination that we could expect in four days, after being silent for a week in Smolensk, it would head for its destination, Murmansk.

We were on to it. A nuclear test explosion off the coast of Murmansk in Novaya Zemlya well out at sea would be certain.

BUT only if that plane landed in Smolensk.

O'Neill was immediately on the phone. Put it on the map, get Foggy and Blaine up here to help. Fine work. We have time to have our recon-planes notified.

Get to that airman right away. Let him know what we got. Stay with him and keep him calm.

Foggy met me in that room full of typists, asked, "What's up?" Blaine appeared as the airman removed his earphones, that transmission had just ended. He stood there his face blank looking at the three of us. He then rolled the threaded paper in his typewriter to free his last page, he removed it, handed that stack of papers to me. The three of us checked it. The plane had landed in Smolensk. We told that airman he just got the prize of a lifetime. We'll pay for the drinks. O'Neill wants you in the office.

That airman was permitted to inform his crew what he had captured. They got drunk together after work and spoke about that to no-one else.

Teamwork, that's what we did. That's who we were. We had to let it go and get back to work.

Our business was listening.

Reconnaissance aircraft were deployed from Scotland long-range and capable of staying aloft for days on end. With B-52s at the ready, they were in place waiting over Finnish and neutral Air Space to capture data when the Russian test took place. Our squadron was put on alert, but not long enough to arouse suspicion. Four B-52s recorded data from different altitudes safely away from the Russian air space.

O'Neill nominated me for Airman of the month, I had to appear before staff officers in my dress blues and freshly shined dress shoes. Was not allowed to say a word. I stood up straight, didn't get it. I didn't mind, I never wanted that kind of attention.

Peace had momentarily descended. Blaine invited Foggy and me over for Thanksgiving Dinner to meet Becky.

She gave each of us chores to prepare our meal. At one point cleaning the turkey I had to reach into the bird's cavity to pull out the neck. I turned around to see the three of them standing in the doorway to the kitchen. Their eyes wide, innocence, then rolls of laughter directed at me as it looked like I was holding what was like the largest penis any of us could ever imagined. Why I blushed red I will never know. I felt so at ease there and we laughed.

With Becky, Blaine was a completely different person. Foggy showed up with oranges, he was more playful and open than at work. Becky played the piano and sang. Blaine was not the bully asshole at work. I thought because he was not afraid at home. We cooked dinner together, killed several bottles of wine. I laughed so easily there with them. I could see how Blaine doted on Becky, and watching them over dinner I saw Becky's devotion to Blaine. And Foggy liked to talk in length and tell stories and I felt OK being quiet and I laughed at our antics together.

I wrote to the Art Center in Los Angeles telling them who I was, and how much remaining time I had in the Air Force. I asked for the procedure they needed for me to apply.

I got back a warm letter outlining what they needed to proceed with being reviewed. They sent a listing of student housing near the College along with a newer catalog of classes.

I told Gerry, he told Frau Tilde. She wanted to see the portfolio I would send the college.

She approved it, her smile was so broad, she told me over Tea, I had grown some skills.

I wrote home telling my family about Frau Tilde, what I'd done, what I hoped to do. Dad wrote back that he'd be glad to have me home. LA wasn't that far. Mom wrote that they would help out.

I got caught in a rainstorm on a long walk up the Elbe and got sick enough to be put in the hospital for over a week. They took really good care of me. Sinusitis. I was the Army's hospital on antibiotics to avoid pneumonia, knocked out and in bed for a week. Blaine and Rooney were sitting by my bed when I awoke from a deep sleep. Foggy visited, said he'd drive me home. I was back in my room for another week before I returned to work.

Foggy mattered too much for me emotionally and that became counterproductive. My feelings got in the way, and he played me, took advantage of my affections for him. I felt used, not betrayed for I finally got it what "Foggy" meant, his "handle" referred to his character. I do not believe he knew what he was doing having a friend, His "Not a clue" ran pretty deep.

We had gone swimming on one of the warmest days in August with other guys from our shift. To a small lake with a little restaurant and boats for hire, the beach had sand, not pebbles. The sky was clear and the sun would sting you if you didn't "oil-up".

We put our towels down made ourselves comfortable, then one of the guys said, "What the shit!" He jumped up and ran splashing into the lake. The others, five of us were close behind.

The lake wasn't deep but there were places your feet could not reach the bottom. Pond grasses, tangles of dead grass, branches of bushes long dead were anchored or floated in dangerous tangles, still the water was pretty clear and clean. You couldn't swim far, maybe fifty feet. We brought beer, one guy had a full bottle of brandy, we got french fries from that little cafe. Germans in small boats would paddle by, they would avoid us, to some of them Americans were a breed apart.

We sat on shore in animated conversation, then I couldn't find Foggy in our company. I looked around and saw him thrashing in the pond close to and possibly tangled in rushes. I dove and raced to get to him. Typical of him he made fun of being "tied up." I attempted to free him, got him to lean into me so I could pull him free. I called for help. He was stuck. Our buddies on the beach stood,

watched. He couldn't budge. A German couple paddling by wouldn't respond to my plea for help.

In a panic, I pulled to free his body with every ounce . . .
He swam to shore, I was not far behind.

Drying off, my heart pounding, I looked to find his eyes.
"That was a bit of fun, wasn't it?"

I'd go running to be alone. I believe I was grieving.
I told O'Neill I was not planning to reenlist.
He said. "I knew that."

There was this guy at the USO, the squadron's day shift photographer who hung out there. He had shown photographs in the same area where I had paintings the month before. He was not puffed up with importance, but his photos were impressive, large. Robert had no handle. I trusted him. We struck up a conversation.

I learned he had six months before he would "head for home." I had a year plus a few months.

"Whose taking your job?"
You want it. It's yours.

My replacement upstairs arrived within a month.
Needs got filled.

It was a good job but I was looking forward to going home. I moved into a second-floor room in the barracks for the daylight staff nearest our working offices.

Robert taught me how to use a mid-sized Press Camera, one with sliding bellows to focus the lens inches away from a 4" X 5" negative. He used that cam-

era to capture his show even though it belonged to the squadron. He showed me how to develop the film, how to print the image on photo paper, develop that in a bath under red lights. Taught me the chemicals common to the photographic processes.

A 35 mm camera, with a very high-end Leitz lens, was the other camera I would use. He taught me how to load the exposed film into a spring designed container in the pitch black of the darkroom so I could develop it, then wash it to stop developing then add an inhibitor. I'd hang those long strips of film to dry from beams in the ceiling of the basement's darkroom.

Robert was the perfect teacher. And he included how to develop color slide film used for special events. During a planning discussion a Lieutenant Andrews heard I would be transferring to dayshift as the squadron photographer. I was pulled into work for him on briefings for senior staff. I had to learn how to shoot slide film for his Officer briefings. I made illustrations and cartoons to present his information, he would help with making the data more compelling, sometimes humorous. I would then photograph my images for his slide shows. He wanted his briefings, "Up-beat".

Also, I was outside a lot in the public sector doing work to capture public relations as the Squadron's photographer. Lt. Andrews would choose the photographs to submit to the base's monthly newsletter.

Blaine's tour of duty would be over in two months. He decided to get something bothering him his whole life fixed. He told me privately he had not been circumcised and an erection kind of hurt. This was frustrating for him and Becky.

"What kind of hurt?" I asked.

Enough to get surgery. I talked with my doc, he arranged a surgeon. Can you take me to my appointment?

"Not to worry. When?"

This coming Wednesday.

"Like two days from now? Blaine, sure no problem."

It's early.

"Like how early?"

700 hours at the Army Hospital.

“Not to worry. I’ll just wait and bring you home.”

The Dr. said, It would be a simple procedure. He smiled caught my eye, his twinkled. A little in and out? Then he winked.

“For god sake man, don’t be such a Fatback.”

A week later I returned with him to get his stitches removed. Before his doctor's appointment, we stopped to pee in the Hospital’s toilet. He got his stitches caught in his zipper.

That wasn’t pretty.

In ten days he was good to go, but I didn’t say that to him. Becky left for Detroit, Blaine was soon to follow.

A month maybe two later both Rooney and Foggy were hired by NSA the moment they signed out of the Air Force. Blaine got a job as an English teacher in the Detroit school system.



Three months to my departure for home.

Dead of night, dark, I’m warm, someone is holding me in an embrace. His penis forces its way into my anus. I am suddenly fully awake, struggling to get away from him. This is no dream.

He whisperes, “Hold still!”

“No!” I say aloud, and I fight to get away but he has me on my left side and has pinned me to the mattress with his weight, his left arm has grasped both my arms anchoring them to my chest making them powerless, and he started to pump, pumping into me. His right hand roughly explored my privates.

“Stop!” I blurt out. “Stop!” I yell.

His free hand shifts to cover up my mouth, his other holds my arms tight to my chest from reaching for anything to grab to get away from him.

Shush, his whisper quiet.

In extending moments of my discomfort he moans, ejaculates.

I can't move, I . . . flabbergasted.

He slowly pulled out of me. As he left my bed he kissed my ear. He was out the door and gone in an instant.

In that same moment, I was in heart pounding panic and relieved he was gone.

Fear started to take over me. I took deep breaths to gain control and my mind told me, "You can do this."

I'm reminded, one step at a time. Slow down. Keep anger away. Calm, just be calm. Breathing to slow my heartbeat, then to hear my voice I whispered, "You do not need to be a victim."

I got up and rushed to the bathroom, no one was around. Dead of night, I washed hurriedly, compulsively, still frightened, almost unhinged. I decided the only thing to do was to take a shit. Gratefully a big turd exited and I believed it purged him out of me.

Sitting there on that cold porcelain toilet, a logical step by step plan began with realizing it was up to me to lead my life, to move forward and to consider that yes, I had just been raped. I did not need to think of my self as a victim and plot revenge. If I am accused of being in a homosexual relationship, I could simply deny that.

I can endure this. I am strong!

Any accuser would have to provide proof. My spotless security record would not be in jeopardy and I would still get all my perks allowed upon leaving the service. Thank God for the GI bill and my acceptance into college in September. I'd be far away from here, And time is always, IS ALWAYS, on my side. God damn that man!

I knew him. Remembered his name, Robbie. He was one of the men who worked in the laundry in the barrack's basement.

I had contact with him for years handing over my full laundry bag.

Yes, I had to admit there was semen on my sheets that he could have noticed, would have cleaned. (For god's sake I was twenty-one. I loved ME). I had been nice to him. He had been helpful. I thought we had respected one another.

He had a thick southern accent. He was black, did his job well and we were jovial.

I never saw him in town or the USO, maybe once or twice at the movies. He kept company with other black men at a table in the Mess. We never had an extended conversation.

When back at work that morning I covered my feelings, held myself confidently. I recalled my handle. Was that the reason why? But that no longer mattered, nor did I need to worry about that. Max was who I was, and “Max” as my identity was real. Who needed a handle?

That night or that very early dark morning, Robbie returned to my room. There were no locks on any of the barrack’s doors. The room was again dark, I could not read his face. Sitting up in bed, I spoke OUT LOUD for anyone to take notice passing my door to hear that I was in a matter-of-fact conversation with another.

“What . . . do you think you are doing?” I asked Robbie with loud authority. I followed that with a momentary silence, then, “I do not think so!” I followed by “I don’t think so!” With that phrase repeated two or three more times rising in volume and my determination.

The door opposite across the hall, inside the next-door rooms, left and right, they would not hear a peep as the barrack’s walls were over a foot thick made of brick and plaster on all sides. Anyone in that hallway would most likely have heard this. My rapist would’t know this.

Four AM or so, he was gone like a shot. He never returned and the next time I dropped off my laundry in the basement, Robbie quickly disappeared.

Kissed my ear? Jesus! Fuck!

I will sleep in the nude if I God Damn choose.

My last chore before leaving the base and catching the bus to the train station was to return ownership of my rifle to our base and close any files that had to be signed concerning my security clearance.

The Marine who manned the weapon's room had his back to me when I entered. A little door on the armory's wall was open. Small flashing lights, white, red and yellow were blinking. There wasn't any pattern to the sequence. He turned to see me. He quickly shut that door and checked it to see it closed, secured, and locked.

"What's that about?" I pointed at the door.

He didn't answer right away.

"I'm here to check in to clear my weapon, I catch the bus to the train station in an hour, I'm heading home, what do I need to sign?"

He exhaled, "You were not supposed to see that."

"Sorry. I did, and I don't really care." I looked at him expectedly. "Please excuse me?" I put my duffle bag at my feet.

"Well, you are leaving so it doesn't matter, just don't tell anybody on base here."

"What?" Was I too short, impatient to get going?

"That's the fail-safe, it is rigged to blow all of us to kingdom come if there is an attack and all of us, the buildings, all the machines, every bit of paperwork if the entire base is compromised . . . about to fall into the enemy's hands.

"Boom!"



At attention I smiled, seeing my breath on the window as the train drew close to Kassel, my next stop would be Frankfurt.

Germany is so green.

My brother Tom picked me up at the airport in Los Angeles.

So this is so LAX. And this is really smoggy?

I sat in the front seat with him, the back seat was full of his four noisy and wiggling little girls. My mom and dad were waiting for us at his home in Pomona.

Auntie Anne and Marge were planning dinner for us over the weekend.

I mentioned I had forgotten how warm it is in California.



AUTHOR'S NOTE:

I never spoke to anyone of my rape until the years of the *Me Too* movement. Only when women friends were revealing their rapes and I was being asked what I thought of that behavior did I speak of my experience.

I was in my early seventies at the time.

Silence never did help.

Thank you for listening.

The previous having being said, told – so to speak and laid to rest. I could play with art for a time. I took a good look at the shape of letters.

L

It is an upstanding angle at 90 degrees.

O

This is a whole, it suggests an inside surrounded by an outside, it also alludes to the idea of having contents.

V

Could this be a plow, a harvesting tool, a knife's sharp edge or it could suggest a victory when used in warfare or in play.

E or e

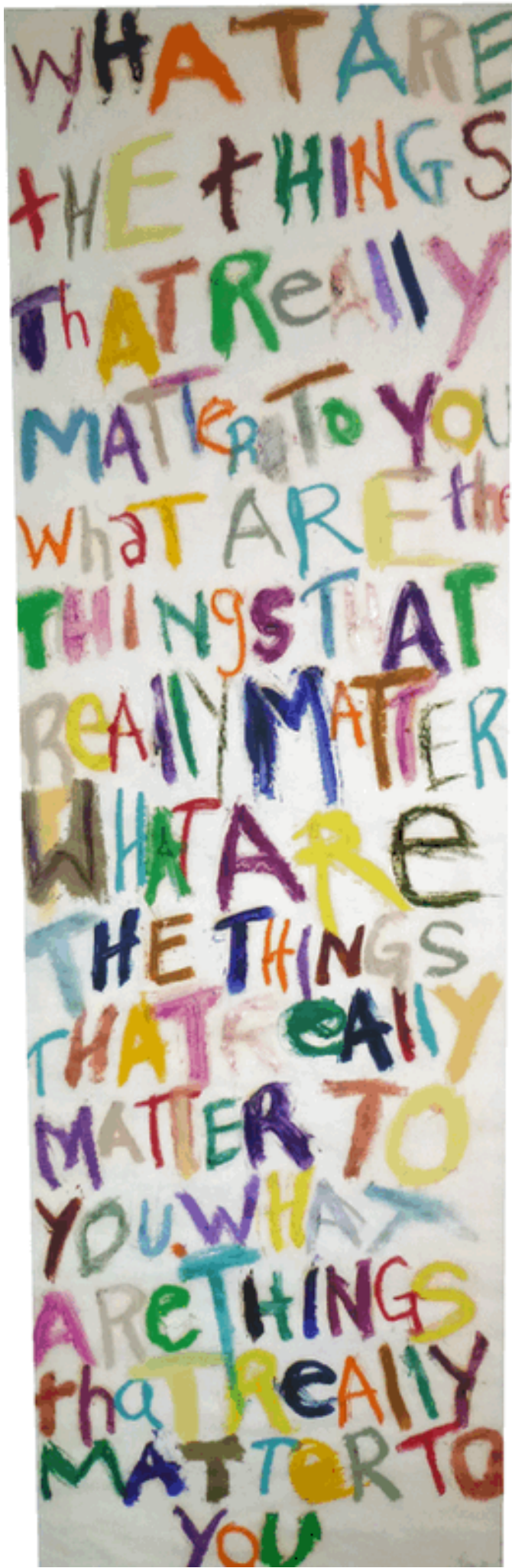
I like this letter, it is silent or it screams as loud as hell to eternity.

D

This figure is final, for it suggests “done deal” or “it is what it is.”

What is it about ambiguity? How does that cause us to be more open?

LOVED the manuscript will to be completed one of these days as this is a work in process.



“What Are The Things That Really Matter To You”
by artist Lisa LaBeau

This is also a test if you will, as I need to estimate my time to create an ebook for a client. So I’m using my own text of my next book to do this. Here it is. It works well for me to learn something new.

It is also how I’m using my time while fine tuning my listening skills, listening to clients and also myself and friends. Have you noticed that when one listens to nature you really calm down?

Having a compassionate mentor like Erich Fromm (1900–1980) is as good as it gets. However friends who listen makes life easier and so free.

The Art of Listening

On mastering the art of unselfish understanding:

Write me if you will,

jasmx@mcn.org

Hey! Give this guy some feedback.
We may be hunkered down at the moment but I am not hiding. I don’t think you are either.

Cheers,
Max



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