

24

Aurora and After

(0000-0000)

Mom had enjoyed her fame as a kindergarten teacher. She liked being recognized on the streets of Hudson by the parents of her kindergarten children, and later, by those children themselves. But such fame has an expiration date; it will eventually dwindle. Mom preferred to leave while the leaving was good.

Where to retire to? Pop, weary of Ohio hay fever, would have liked the desert; maybe Arizona, but Mom couldn't contemplate any place without trees. And so they stayed in Ohio. The first choice was nearby Aurora, where the new development called Walden, in effect a golf course with houses here and there, advertised "people paths," invitingly free of dangerous traffic, though leading nowhere in particular except to more golf course.



They proceeded to buy one of the prebuilt houses – indeed new and convenient, with enough rooms to put up visitors, but smaller and less work than the Hudson house. They moved in. And one of the rooms, I found to my relief when I arrived after a long drive, was not only perfectly dark when the door closed, it was also perfectly silent. It reminded me of the Mammoth Cave tour, when the guide douses her lamp. I slept for I don't know how long.

That worked for a while. But the time sooner or later comes when living needs assistance. Again there was a choice, and again trees won out over desert. The place was a Methodist retirement home in nearby Salem Ohio. Though her church time after marriage had been spent in Presbyterian and Congregational contexts, Mom was Methodist by heritage. What could possibly go wrong? Unfortunately, it did. There were questions about the home's finances, and as Pop had done in my spelling bee days, they raised those questions. Publicly. This led to tension, not only with the directors but also with the other residents. So they thought it best to move out, and bought a small house nearby.

It was not ideal for the purpose. Retirement, especially of the assisted living variety, needs to be on one level. This house had two; the basement being reached by a rather precipitous stairway. It was in that basement that I pulled off my last performance triumph. Pop had a pair of slide projectors, linked to a cassette tape player, so that the projectors would take turns showing a slide, with the background music lending atmosphere.

I did the coordination of slide and music, the music being mostly pieces by Percy Grainger. Very nice. Trouble was, you had to cue the music a second and a half before it would cut in during the performance. Keeping the two going together, but a second and a half apart, was (to borrow a phrase from Newton) the only thing that ever made my head ache.

But it went well, and it was satisfying to let Pop have some benefit for all my time in Conservatory. Taeko and I visited from time to time, but it was Patricia who moved in with them and helped Pop at the end, when Mom was dying of an excruciatingly painful brain tumor.

That phase being over, Pop moved again. Not even now to Arizona, but to Fort Collins, Colorado, where he and Patricia shared a small two-story house. He had photographic friends, who admired his two projector and sound setup. Since 1972, Kim and her husband Bill had had a summer residence in Vail; Holly had arrived from California for year-round residence in nearby Denver. Pop sometimes drove to visit her; no great distance. In effect, there ensued something like a regathering of the siblings; except for myself, since Colorado wasn't within my one-day range. But it was more nearly a renewal of the family than any other arrangement could have been.

The end came when Pop was driving back from Denver. He had a heart attack, but made it home safely, and fell asleep. From that sleep he never woke.

The question then came, at what point to cut off life support, and just how? The doctor carefully explained the options, and how the patient, in his coma, might perceive those last minutes. The Colorado siblings made their best guess.

We all got together for a week at the Fort Collins house, for the last things. By his will, I was executor. So small was the estate (in the vicinity of \$30,000) that the probate court required no bond. I disposed of the sellable assets, such as the car, which like all Colorado cars was pitted by the occasional hailstones. The tools. The projector setup went to his chief photographic friend. He would not pay anything like its value, but I told him that I would sell it to him at that token figure by way of thanks for the companionship he had shown to Pop. Patricia canceled the magazine subscriptions. And one afternoon we four got together with the items of merely personal value to be divided among ourselves. We went around the room several times, each in turn choosing what they would most prize, as a convenience (his nifty reclining chair), or simply as a memory.

I still have his western-style belt with the fancy buckle, inlaid with what looks like agate. The last time I wore it when shopping at the local Walmart, the lady proctor at the exit told me how good I looked.

For that enhancement, and for much else from both of them, over the years, I am grateful.