

children *churches* & daddies

FOR FATHER'S DAY

A CHAPBOOK OF POETRY
BY JANET KUYPERS

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LEARNING MORE

It is amazing how I learn more, how I take it all in
How I think I am just learning little random pieces of information
And that is when I find out that all of the pieces relate
That there is meaning to almost anything I see or do

I remember so much about you, and I know there is
So much you have taught me
How to understand the word of my elders

Mom has taught me to take it all in stride
She has taught me how to manage it all and how to do that
With grace

I know that you were the foundation to everything she maintained
You were stern for a reason, and this was how
You kept everything in line without having to raise your voice to me

Because I just knew

You were making all the details possible by working so hard
Mom knew this, and gave you your space for it, and all the children
Thank you, and I thank you, because mom and you are what made us
us

Life would never be the same without your influence
Without you making it all possible

My brother told me we were all creative in this family
I did not see how, not for all of us, I did not fit the pieces together
And he laid out the details this way for me
Mom painted, Ed was an architect, Bob used construction to build from
scratch,

Lorelei was an art tacher, Sandy got her art out through crafts,

And I was a graphic artist and a photographer and a writer
Before he told me that you took my grandfather's business
Kept it alive, kept it thriving, I then remembered one more thing

Once I was looking in the little kitchen and found a box
Of old black and white photographs, and I didn't know where they came
from

I asked you, you used to be a photographer, that you
Developed these pictures, that you took pictures
When you were in high school,

this was the way you could be creative
It gave me my own snapshot of you, it helped me realize
These are the things we do to keep ourselves alive

and It gave me one memory of you

this was something I learned about you through chance, first hand
This was how I learned more about you, and me
And I thank you for that

There have been so many changes that I have gone through in my life
So many things I could not explain
Learning about you, getting these tiny glimpses
It is as if I have taken these snapshots of your life

Now I can slowly piece this all together to make the picture complete
I know that life is not easy and that it all takes work
Your life has been difficult at times, your life has been rich as well
Your life has also made me rich, rich from you, from being a part of your life

When people compliment me, tell me that I am smart or talented
I know where the pieces came from that have made me whole
That have given this to me
And I thank you for that

GOLFING WITH GEORGE EASTMAN

I played a round of golf with
George Eastman
Now, George was going on,
bragging about his game,
and at the first hole
my shot was pretty straight
and his veered sharp to the right.
And he started swearing
and cussing, me and the
other two guys thought he
was going to pop a vein
or throw a club at us. And
every hole was the same:
George wasn't playing well
and with every shot he'd
get more and more violent,
more and more volatile.
And finally, at the last hole,
he lands his golf ball right
into the water. And he stops.
Perfectly calm. No jumping.
No swearing. No throwing of
of his golf clubs or stomping
on the ground. George just
shrugged his shoulders and
walked toward the water. He
dropped a new ball down. Not a
sound. Maybe this was the
one, we, thought, the one point
when he realized how useless his
anger was. And we watched. And

George Eastman looked at the ball he dropped between his feet, and then just started stomping, and screaming, and waving his golf club above his head, even more violent than before, as if the poor golf ball did something wrong. And back a the golf cart, the three of us, at a safe distance, stood there and laughed.

WATER ON THE STREET

George Eastman
was dumping water
from his outdoor hot tub one day
and the water
was running
down the center
of the street.

Now, from a distance,
it looked like
George Eastman
may have been
watering his lawn;

but people were only allowed
to water their lawns
on certain days of the week.

So when I saw the water
and then I saw
George Eastman,
I said, "Hey, you know -"
pointing to the water

and
George Eastman
interrupted and said,
"I know what you're thinking, but
I'm not watering my lawn. I'm
dumping out the water
from my hot tub,
and I'm dumping it into the street
because I don't want the chemicals
to hurt my lawn."

Well, I didn't even mention the
sewer grate behind his house
he could have dumped the water into.
I just said,
“Well, if it will hurt your grass,
what will it do to the asphalt on my
street?”

And
George Eastman
started hemming and hawing
as I drove away.

FATHER'S TEARS

I knew the smell of his work boots
from the construction site,
I knew the smell of the martinis
waiting for him at home.
I knew the sound of his walk:
his ankles cracking,
his keys rattling.

Emotions had their place for him.
In everything he did and felt
he showed strength and power.

I've seen him cry twice.

Once he cut his hand with a saw.
I saw fabric four inches thick
soaked with blood around his hand.
I saw the drops of blood on the car seat.
He drove himself to the hospital.
He was always in control.
But I heard the tears of pain in his voice.
I stood in the driveway and cried.

Once I heard him arguing with a friend.
I heard his voice from the hallway,
but I didn't recognize his voice at all:
it sounded confused, weak. Distraught.
I walked up to the door,
looking through the square window.
His voice choked and gasped.
The muscles in his face were contorted,
and it was as if the wrinkles
in his eyebrows cried,
"How could you hurt me so?"

How could you do this to me?"

It was as if he screamed at being weak.

I moved away from the door
before he could see me. But I still
heard his voice; I had to run outside.

I've always known he was strong.
I think I didn't want to believe
that he was human.

CATCHING A MUSCOVY

One year, Doc Wiggins
decided he wanted to shoot
one of the Muscovy ducks
and have it for Thanksgiving.

As far as ducks go, the
Muscovies are pretty ugly -
the males look something like
turkeys, and in Southwest

Florida, in this heavily pop-
ulated area, they are so
used to people that they will
walk up to you, expecting food.

Well, one year, bless his heart,
Doc Wiggins decided he wanted
to shoot one for Thanksgiving
dinner, so I taught him how to

use my rifle and we went to a
nearby lake. Then Doc started to
worry. "What if my bullet ricochets
off the water and hits something

else?" So he was in a bit of a
panic, trying to figure out what
to do. So I told him just to sit
tight a minute, and sure enough,

a Muscovy walked right up to him
and looked at him. So Doc looked
at me, then the duck, and just
picked it up and brought it home.

FALSE SUICIDE

“A woman called the station once, said, ‘My daughter has been depressed lately, has been talking about killing herself. And she’s an early riser, and hasn’t returned any of me calls. Could you go over there? I’m afraid something terrible has happened.’ So we said we’d go there, and we got in the squad car and went to the woman’s house. All the doors were locked, and we started looking through the windows, and I saw her on the bed, stark naked, with her tongue sticking out, quite dead-looking. Now, this is kind of strange, because women usually commit suicide dressed well. In all my years I ain’t never seen a woman commit suicide naked. Well, me partner kicked the front door down with one kick, and we went back to the bedroom, and I grabbed her hand to see if rigamortis set in yet, if she was cold, if she was stiff. And when I grabbed her hand she jumped up and screamed, and then she saw another police officer and she started to calm down. And we said, ‘Your mother thought you might have killed yourself. She said you were an early riser.’ And she said, ‘Damn mother,’ under her breath.”

COULDN'T TAKE IT HOME

I went out deer hunting once with some buddies of mine. Now, I'm not a big fan of deer meat, but I went for the sport, I'm a pretty good shot. And I saw when I went over a small wooded hill a small lake amongst the trees, and right at the edge of the water was a deer. So here was my chance. I pulled out my shotgun, aimed, pulled the trigger. Direct hit. It was still moving, so I walked toward the deer. I hit the spinal cord, and the back half of the deer was paralyzed. The thing was dragging itself with its front two legs, trying to crawl away. I knew it was in pain. I looked at the deer. I pulled out my .22 pistol and shot it in the head, and left it there. I couldn't take it home. My buddies asked me why I left it there. Everything felt wrong. I told them I didn't want anything to do with it. Leave it there. Leave it.

KNEW ALL ALONG

So my friend Joe owned this bar, and Joe was a great guy, but he had this thing against guys with motorcycles. He didn't want motorcycles in his parking lot, he didn't want anybody in leather or heavy motorcycle boots in his bar. So I thought one day I'd get him for thinking like that - so I came up with a plan. It's like this: the bar is laid out with an entrance to the left of the main entrance. So I decided I'd ride a motorcycle through his bar, with a full leather outfit on and a helmet so he couldn't see who it was, and I'd go in through the main entrance and exit at the entrance on the left. So everything was in place, I was in the parking lot, then at the front door, ready to go. Then someone opened the door for me, and for some reason when I went through the front door, I couldn't turn my wheel, and I ended up running right into his juke box. And so I tried reversing my way out of it, and I ended up running into Joe's cigarette machine. And his wife was behind the bar screaming for Joe to come out - Joe was in back and missed all of this - while I managed to maneuver my way out the door on the left before Joe ever got out there. And Joe put out rewards for information about who did this to his bar, and he swore up and down about motorcycle riders. And I couldn't tell him that it was just a joke, that I didn't mean to break all of his stuff, right? So finally, after four years, I told him at a party it was me. He said, "I knew all along."

A CHILD IN THE PARK

this was no ordinary park, mind you: there were no swings or children laughing; there were different children there. There was recreation:

tennis, the pool, and a maze of streets for bicycles and long walks; surrounded by rows of prefabricated homes each with one little palm tree by the driveway.

People drove golf carts around in the park, or large tricycles, or older couples would walk together just as it was beginning to turn to dusk and long shadows from

tree-tops cris-crossed over the streets. In the afternoons, the women in the pool would wear hats and sunglasses, lean against the sides, swing legs in the warm water.

I remember the summer afternoons when it rained in Florida, and after the rain I would go out in the puddles in my roller skates, skate through them, feet soaking wet.

There was even a street named after me in the park, and at the end of Jan Drive there was a pond. I spent hours there, playing imaginary games,

pretending I was grown-up, feeding the ducks, watching the fish swim around the rocks at my feet, looking for the turtles, listening to the wind.

Oh, I remember Mr. Whorall, how he would walk onto his driveway every time I was playing tennis across the street. He would watch me, tell me how

I was getting better at the game every time he saw me. And there was also Mrs. Rogers, who lived up the

street from me. She saw me riding my bicycle by one day

just before Halloween. She invited me in to help carve a pumpkin. Every year she bought me a Christmas present. The sweetest woman. The most beautiful woman.

And there was Ira and Betty Wiggins, who lived on the next street, Sand Drive, with a sign in front of their house that said, "The Wiggins' Wigwam."

They had a hammock on their porch, and art so beautiful, so colorful on their walls. They lived in Panama for years, he used to be a doctor. So

many things collected from all their travel. They both knew so much, they both loved life. Once they saw me and asked if I wanted to catch a lion. They then

went to the side of the road, and with a spoon pulled an ant lion from the top of a sand hill. So many secrets. Every night Ira could be found with cue holder,

decorated with Panamanian art, at the pool table, playing my father, or another man who died years ago. I remember that man telling me that when I was younger he would

watch me on Easter Sunday, me in my pastel dress, by myself, spinning, dancing in the streets. He remembered me dancing. This is his memory, how he thought of me.

And I remember the McKinleys, Pete and Lindy, another beautiful pair who talked of Mexico, of all the places they'd gone, all the things they had seen. So many times I

would visit them just to hear them talk. And Pete would try to stump me with an intellectual riddle every time I sat with him; he would ask me about astronomy, what I had learned in my

classes since the last time I visited the park. Sometimes they would take me to their country club, play on tennis courts made of clay, how strange it felt on my feet through my tennis shoes.

It was like another world there. The park was where I spent my Christmases, my Easters. I remember swimming in the pool, a week shy of

thirteen, when my parents told me I was an aunt. Now I talk to my sister on the phone, she asks me if I remember so-and-so from Palos Avenue,

from Blue Skys Drive. The couple that had the ornate rock garden in their front yard, or the snow shovel against their light post with the words “rust in

peace” painted in white on the metal. Yes, I say, I remember them. Well, so-and-so passed away last week, she says. Heart attack. This is what it comes down

to, I think, all these memories are slowly disappearing. So many memories. Where there are palm trees everywhere. It was my other world, my other life, another

lifestyle, another everything. This was not an ordinary park, but the children were so much smarter, and still so full of life. So much to teach. So little time.

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