

Study Group #681

SHORT STORIES

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DRIVERLESS AUTOMOBILES

By Paula Altman

Gee Grandma, let me think for a moment about a story to tell you.

I know, let us imagine what it would be like in the future. For now, let us start with the near future. You know that the automobile companies are experimenting with driverless cars. I find this fascinating, don't you?

Then, perhaps in the future, future, the industry will come up with a driverless automobile that might not even need a driver at all behind the wheel. Something, indeed, grandma, wouldn't you say? That certainly would be a great step. All that would be needed would be a code or a cell phone app to start the car and punch in where it should go. I guess an adult would have to be in the car. It wouldn't be a good idea for a bunch of us kids to take off on our own. What a thought, though. Just think, parents wouldn't have to drive us kids to all our game practices, events, and so forth. Of course, unless they wanted to attend.

All of this seems so far-fetched, but it's sure to happen very soon. And, grandma, who knows what's ahead of this!

It's like science fiction. Things are progressing so fast that we will be seeing and using technology that is pure science fiction. I CAN'T WAIT.

Grandma, should I do another story?

Not for now grandson. Thank you.

Being an Adult
(Partially based on actual events)

By Marilyn Barth

A short while ago I was taking care of my grandchildren while their parents were out of town.

My six-year-old granddaughter and I were having a tea party and had recently graduated from using pretend food to real food in the tea set. Over our sugar-laden afternoon snack we had an interesting conversation:

“Grandma, do you know what I want to be when I grow up?”

“No, what?”

“An astronaut!”

“Great!”

“Grandma, can girls be astronauts?”

“Of course they can. There have been lots of female astronauts.”

After we looked online to see photos, bios and names of many female astronauts, she was satisfied that she could become one and moved on to her next activity, building with Legos.

Later that day I told my ten-year-old grandson that his sister wanted to be an astronaut and asked him what he wanted to be. He scrunched up his face, thought long and hard, and finally said, *“I want to be an adult!”* I thought that was a brilliant goal and said *“Great!”* (while thinking to myself that I hoped he would be an *adult* adult and not follow the lead of many people currently in the news).

And then, while thinking about becoming an adult, my grandson said,
“Grandma, remember that time when you didn’t act like an adult?”

“When was that?” I asked.

“When you and Grandpa took me to New York City and you made me keep a piece of paper with emergency information in my shorts pocket at all times? And you told me to make sure I stayed where you could see me at all times? And you wouldn’t let me run ahead of you? And I was good and followed all your rules?”

“I remember. And we had a wonderful time, right?”

“Well, it wasn’t so wonderful when I was climbing on the rocks in Central Park and you were sitting on a bench watching me and when I was tired of climbing I looked around and couldn’t find you.

“I was scared and didn’t know what to do and then remembered the emergency paper in my pocket and found a nice man with a cell phone and asked him to call you and he asked you where you were and when I found you felt so bad because you hadn’t been watching me at all.

“You had moved to a different bench to be out of the sun and you forgot about watching me because you were so engrossed reading your Classic Short Stories book.

*“Grandma, reading your book and not watching me was **not** a very adult thing to do! I will never do anything like that when I grow up.”*

Just then my granddaughter came into the room and said, *“Neither would I, even when I’m living in space!”*

And I never did anything like that again.

Molly's Quandary

By Elly Perl

Everything about this new place seemed strange to Molly. They had made it across the ocean; a difficult passage that had caused her to be seasick several times. And now, here they were: her mother and her three siblings and Molly. In America, but not completely. There were questions and examinations to deal with. She carried within her the fear that they still might not pass, might not be permitted to enter.

The enormous hall was crowded with family groups, wearing strange looking clothes; speaking in a confusing mixture of languages, many of which sounded nothing like Polish, Yiddish, German; languages Molly spoke and understood. And there were signs everywhere in English, a language that was a mystery. Molly, at thirteen, was not yet an adult but she was perceptive and mature. Before leaving the old country, she had helped her mother to sell their house and obtain tickets for the boat. Her father was already in America, but he wasn't able to enter the processing area at Ellis Island, where his wife and children were being held.

Molly stayed with the younger children while her mother was taken for a medical exam. When she wasn't comforting her younger sister and brothers or making up games to occupy them, she busied herself thinking about what they would see in New York.

“Will we live in a house like the one we left?” “Will we live in a tall apartment building?” “Will I go to school or must I get a job?” “Who will our neighbors be?” “Will I have friends like the ones I had at home?”

So many thoughts filled her head. When Mama rejoined the group, though, Molly realized that she had a much more troubling concern to deal with. Mama now had a white chalk mark, an “X”, on her coat, something that only a few other people in the immense hall had. Molly had heard that people with health problems could be sent back to their home countries. If that was the case, then all of Molly’s questions might be of no importance. Her mother had a deformed foot, and Molly thought this might have been the reason her coat was marked.

She considered the situation and wanted desperately to resolve the problem, to make sure they stayed. Molly somehow felt the burden of this situation fell on her. She decided that if she could make the “X” disappear, the authorities would usher her family into America. She rubbed the mark until it appeared much fainter. This action comforted Molly but also filled her with terror.

“What if they see that I erased their mark?” “What if they punish me or send us all back because I did this?”

She became increasingly worried, but she felt she had no other choice. . . After a while, her family met with one more official, who asked if they had a place to live in New York and if someone was sponsoring them. He didn’t seem to notice that Mama’s coat bore the symbol of imperfection.

By the end of the afternoon, they had passed out of Ellis Island and were met by Papa. Not only was the family reunited, but it was the beginning of a new life for

Molly. In the remaining ninety years of her life, she retold this tale many times. As she did, her children and grandchildren learned of the courage and determination that she showed that day, long ago: a quality that characterized the rest of her life.

The Walk from School

By Jeannette Rivera

Once upon a time a little boy was walking home from school. He was looking forward to going to the park and playing with his friends. He was skipping along the sidewalk when suddenly he saw a flash of light cross right in front of him. He was startled and didn't know what to make of it. And so, he decided to investigate.

As he pursued it, the flash of light turned into a fast-moving dark speck which in turn morphed into a large shadow. The little boy ran as fast as he could to keep up with that eerie object.

In no time at all the little boy reached the park he usually played in with his friends. The park looked the same yet at the same time looked very different. The trees were so very tall they seemed to reach the sky; the grass so very thick it scratched his knees; there was moss hanging from the branches that looked like his grandfather's grey beard; and, in the spot where the playground normally sat there was a huge cave.

The little boy noticed that the shadow entered the cave. He followed.

It was very dark so at first the little boy couldn't see anything. But after a while he started to distinguish patterns in brilliant shades of green, blue, red, yellow and purple. Later still he noticed these patterns turning into shapes. These shapes looked like dragons! Could they really be dragons?

The little boy was completely mesmerized. Some dragons were breathing fire, others only exhaled little puffs of smoke; some had small wings while others had humongous ones; some had beards, others looked like young dragonets. Towards the front of the cave there was a huge pile of glittering, colorful stones. The noise inside the cave was absolutely deafening.

Then suddenly there was complete silence. A huge, black, sinister-looking dragon climbed on top of the pile of stones and looked all around. It got even more still in the cave. "Of course", thought the little boy, "the black dragon is the King of the Dragons"!

The black dragon kept looking all around as if searching for something or someone. And then, he sniffed the air!!! The black dragon made a harsh, loud sound that made the little boy's hair stand up in fright. Immediately all the dragons turned and stare at the little boy. The little boy knew the dragons not only had discovered him but were extremely angry to realize there was an intruder among them.

Without delay the little boy ran out of the cave as fast as his little feet could carry him. But the dragons were much, much faster. As one flying dragon was ready to grab him with his talons and a galloping one about to pounce on him, the little boy woke up with a start. He was so glad to discover he had fallen asleep in the middle of his English class.

THE FABLED FAMILY: A VIGNETTE

By Phillip Schwartz

Once upon a time, a little boy named Besop was playing in the playground near his home and his grandmother, Olympia, was watching him. When he got tired, he came over to his grandmother, who had just decided that he was ready for the test she had given to his father when he was Besop's age. She said to him, "Why not sit quietly on our blanket and tell me a story? About anything you have thought or something you have experienced. Keep in mind that the story should be about something you know about and must have a moral. Maybe it starts: 'Once upon a time . . .'" And Besop thought about that and because he always did exactly what his grandmother told him to do and because everyone in his home told stories, he began to tell this story:

"Once upon a time, a baby rabbit was playing in the playground with his grandmother. When he got tired, he came over to his grandmother and she said to him, 'Please tell me a story. Maybe it starts: Once upon a time. . .'" And because the rabbit had been scolded in the past for dillydallying and knew that he shouldn't waste any time, he immediately began to tell his story. It was about a very busy rabbit who always got his work done on time and his family was so proud of him."

Besop continued his story about the baby rabbit and how much he loved everyone in his family, especially his grandmother. Finally, he concluded his story: “And the moral of the story is: never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.”

Olympia knew that her son and grandson were bright and articulate and could probably achieve greater fame by pursuing careers in playwriting but relating short stories seemed to make her boys and their listeners happy and paying more attention to life’s valuable lessons seemed like a worthwhile service. And she was content.

“Wonderful,” Olympia beamed. She couldn’t have been prouder of her grandson. Storytelling had been a tradition in her family for many generations. She had been equally thrilled when, many years earlier, her son, Aesop, had started telling stories and now, it seemed that her grandson, Besop, would be carrying on the family tradition. She couldn’t keep from smiling as she thought to herself: “I guess the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

And, of course, they all lived happily ever after.

THE RED BALL

By William Sittig, Nov. 2016

Grandma, I want to tell you a story of something that really happened.

Remember the summer right after my sixth birthday when I came and stayed with you and grandpa at the beach? That was the summer I really learned a lot.

Grandpa bought me that bright red ball that I always played with. He took me to the field down the street where he tried to teach me how to play baseball. He showed me how to keep my eye on the ball when I was at bat and then he threw the ball high in the air so I learned how to catch pop flies. On weekends when my friend Joey came down from New York to visit his grandmother we would go to the field and throw the ball high in the air to practice our catching. It was my favorite thing to do that summer.

On rainy days when I couldn't go to the beach or play outside Grandpa taught me to play gin rummy. It wasn't long before I started to win most games. I don't think I was really that good. I think Grandpa let me win.

One nice, sunny day Grandpa took me in the backyard and showed me how to plant flowers. We planted a bunch of pretty petunias of all colors. I can still feel his wrinkled, strong hands around mine as we guided the plants into each hole in the earth. We then watered the petunias with the hose. Mrs. Henderson leaned over the back fence to admire our work

Of course I will never forget the afternoon I came back from the beach because big black clouds were beginning to cover the sun. It looked like a storm was coming. When I walked in the door you were sitting slumped over in the big chair with your eyes

closed and Mrs. Henderson and the Doggetts from across the street were sitting on the sofa near you. I was scared because everyone and everything was so quiet. Mrs. Henderson came over to me and gently put her arms around my shoulders and took me into the back room and sat me down on a chair by the card table. She told me that you had gone into the backyard and found Grandpa lying face down near the petunia bed. She told me that Grandpa had died and was now in a good place—up in heaven.

I don't remember much that happened after that except the next day when I came down for breakfast I heard my mother and father talking with you in the living room. My mother said, "Ma, wouldn't it be best if we took Billy back to the city with us so that you can have some peace and quiet for the rest of the summer?" I remember that you answered, "No, June, let Billy stay with me---he brings me so much joy." I thought to myself, "What joy? I almost broke Grandma's favorite vase while I was tossing my ball around the living room and I am always bringing sand from the beach into the house."

A few days later I took my red ball to the field where Grandpa had taught me to catch pop flies. Although it was a sunny day clouds were beginning to come across the sky. In the middle of the field I threw my ball high in the air.

When I got back to the house, you said," Billy, I hope you had a good time in the field, but where is your ball?" I told you that I had lost it, but this is what really happened: At first I threw the ball high up in the air but it came down near where I was standing. The second time I threw it even higher but it came down in the big grassy area. But, the third time, with all my strength, I threw it even higher—soooo high that it disappeared in the clouds and never came back down. I know that Grandpa caught the ball and is now playing with it in heaven. That's what really happened to the red ball.