

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/4

Harvey Silverman
Rock and Roll

HE WAS ALWAYS GIVEN TO EXCESS, I thought. I had known him for six years the day he took the chair and over that time we had become close friends. Best friends, really, if there is such a category.

Right from the start, from those first days we met as college freshmen, he impressed me with excess, neither ostentatious nor flamboyant, but more an expectation that things were simply supposed to be that way. At first it was an excess of personality, at least compared to my own reserved shyness and insecurity. He was friendly and outgoing in that Midwestern way. And self confident.

He had things. It was not that he was coddled or that his family lavished him with money or material objects. School was difficult and study was time consuming but he sought and held paying jobs. He was the first student I knew who had the unusual back then; a credit card. He had no fear, it seemed, of debt.

He pampered himself that first summer after freshman year ended. It was a hard summer, very hot and uncomfortable. He lived in a small apartment and with his roommate bought an air conditioner. It impressed me as an excessive luxury; one that I was so happy to take advantage of by frequent visits. He was generous to excess as well and never gave a hint of being bothered by those visits to escape the heat; he welcomed me without fail.

There was a wonderful appetite for food and drink. While I watched my pennies and ate frugal foods like tuna fish he bought what seemed to me expensive self indulgences, baby smoked clams, fancy crackers and good cheeses. And he shared, generously and almost urgently. He drank beer in a way I could only watch, pouring it down his gullet as fast as it left the can. He moved on to appreciate wine and bought it by the case.

While I drove an old Plymouth Valiant that had been my mom's he drove a new Mustang. Once driving while quite impaired we sang as loudly as possible with open windows *Chug-a-Lug* and ended up at an all-night diner where he consumed a huge plateful of eggs and various breakfast meats.

Even sports. After one intramural football game in which we had been victimized by the league director and lost a game we should have won, while I was merely ejected for a loss of self control he managed to get himself suspended from intramurals for an entire semester.

I guess he was simply grasping life with enthusiasm, finding that sometimes things worth doing are worth doing to excess. So I suppose I should not have been surprised when he took the chair.

First year of marriage, first apartment on the third floor of a building in a not particularly good part of town. Mitigating the location was a small balcony off the rear. Yes, it overlooked an alley that was filled with trash but it was a place to sit and enjoy the fresh air and the outside, at least so long as we did not look down.

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/4

When we moved in we were surprised to find a rocking chair on the balcony, left behind by the prior tenant. It was a wonderful chair, big and solid and rustic, of oak weathered by exposure. He appreciated that rocker as we did and when he visited and we would cook on our little hibachi on the balcony he would make himself comfortable and rock away.

After a year in the apartment it was time to move on to the next stage of life. He came over to help us load the truck. We were nearly done with just the rocker to move when we realized that it would not fit through the door. At last, the answer to the mystery as to why it had been left behind for us. We briefly considered removing the door from its frame, but that would still not be enough, or perhaps dismantling the chair but it was too sturdy. Had it been assembled initially on the balcony by a prior tenant who did not realize the impossibility of removing it? We could only guess.

We decided, really accepted, that we would leave it there for the next occupants of the apartment just as it had been left for us. But he was not satisfied with that solution. I agreed he could keep the chair for himself if he were able to move it, an improbable task on the final day of occupancy.

I underestimated him, again. He went downstairs to his car, the blue Mustang he still drove, and returned with a long heavy rope. With the rope tied securely he lowered the rocker over the side into the alley, loaded it into the Mustang and rode off, quite happy with himself.

Over the subsequent decades he moved to various places, always taking the rocker along. We lived far apart by then, thousands of miles apart as we still do. But friendship, if valued enough by those involved, is not severed by physical distance. Perhaps, since it involves an investment of time and effort and emotion and money to be maintained, grows even stronger.

On visits I would make it a point to sit on the rocker and claim that it was still mine, that I was merely allowing him to hold it for me. That was, of course, not true but it was part of a long lasting game we were playing. He would become indignant when I would make my claim of ownership. Which would only prompt me to assert it even more insistently.

It was an enjoyable game, just a tiny piece of our close and by then life-long friendship. Until, after thirty years or so, he spoiled it. The game that is, not the friendship.

Once more, his penchant for excess. A few days before Christmas, a holiday we celebrated for many years by a competition as to whose Christmas package was delivered first – he almost always lost, a strange turn of events in one so given to excess – he boldly took permanent possession of first place.

There, sitting on our front porch, complete with red ribbon, sat the rocker. The old oak rocker, still sturdy, worth little in dollars and priceless in memories, had been shipped coast to coast. An extravagant surprise by which he had even outdone himself.

But that tendency to excess is a part of who he was and is. Just one endearing part, though. And I go out onto the porch every now and then, sit in that rocker and rock away and think about friendship and a lifetime of great times together.