

5/9/88
cont to
Sally & Wendy

The Parrot

"Mom, this place looks like the Salvation Army showroom," Wendy says as she hauls in her 2 little ones for a week's visit.

"Not my fault, really," I explain, "you see, Kip is redecorating his home and didn't know what to do with his old furniture. You can see it's too good to give to just anyone." Then I get a little defensive. "Besides, what's wrong with it? It matches the rug."

"And what else?" counters Wendy. But she is too busy to get into the fine points of interior decorating and taste as she busies herself with the luggage, the stroller and boxes of disposable diapers. Later that night, with the children bedded down and the house so peaceful like the calm after the storm, Wendy and I sit down in the kitchen with a bottle of wine.

Wendy looks up at the ceramic colorful parrot hanging over the corner with the plants and asks, "Mom, is that the parrot Dorothy gave you?"

"Ryan and Daryl thought it's perfect. It makes that corner look like a jungle."

"Mom they're 6 and 8."

"There's something about a Nisei home that just doesn't jell together," Wendy says.

"That's true. We weren't raised in traditional American settings. You've probably picked up a lot from your Richard and his family. Your home is coordinated. Mine sort of accumulated.....a little bit of Grandma's Japanese clutter, a little bit of Dad's lifetime hobbies, a little bit of what I picked up in the Home Ec class in high school. For instance, those 10 pictures in a line against the living room wall, all except one came from all over. I could never take any of them down....."

"I meant to talk to you about the way they're arranged."

"You see that picture of the boat on the end? That came from the lady who sold her drugstore to Dad. I think it has a dreamy quality in the grays and blues that's quite nice. That framed calligraphy means the light of the moon. A friend gave it to us when she was on the verge of blindness. Can you imagine the feeling behind that feeling as she faced total darkness. Ah, the light of the moon." On and on I continue about each picture. I pour from the bottle as I conclude with a flourish, "How could I ever take any of them down, knowing where they came from."

"I understand, Mom," Wendy agrees, "but why couldn't the one picture you chose have been a little bit more compatible in color at least."

I realize she just doesn't understand, "You see, that's the picture of the first Japanese dance I learned."

This is from book

"Mom, it seems to me that you are trying to tell me it's not your design. Everything is the way it is because they just sort of happened."

"That's right. It all started when I was born."

"What do you mean?"

"Just before I was born, my father, Granpa Inouye, was called to Japan because his father was on his deathbed. He couldn't ^{resist} leave for 6 months and I was born during that period. That's how I became interested in all those things like fairy tales, dancing and reading, those things your Grandma Inouye loved."

"What makes me curious," says Wendy, "is that you married Dad and his interests were so different."

"True, I might have been a contented old maid teaching English, living in a neat little apartment, surrounded by books and with everything under control but I met your Dad and he sort'a bulldozed me with his bedroom eyes and all."

"Mom, this is getting too heavy for me. I'm going to heat up some tea and get some rice and kimchee for us." Wendy got up and went to the sink, leaving me to contemplate the hanging parrot. In the happy glow of the wine and the company of a visiting daughter, I thought back on the woman who had given me that funny bird.

George and Slim were fishing pals. He was a customer in George's drugstore and they had struck up a fishing partnership. George was 5 feet 7, dark and Japanese. Slim being 6 feet, looking like Abraham Lincoln, they looked like Mut and Jeff. Contrary to the notion that all Japanese are good fishermen, George learned everything about salmon fishing, the techniques and hot spots, from Slim. They had a standing fishing date every Sunday morning ~~since~~ since George was in his late twenties. By then Slim had won a car and motof among many smaller prizes in the Seattle Times Derby. After I got married to George, I met Slim's wife Dorothy. If I didn't know Dorothy, I would have thought she was a scatterbrained barfly but being invited to her home many times, I got to know her as a meticulous housekeeper and an excellent cook. The best part of

being with Dorothy were her stories. She had a daily routine of making the rounds of the downtown stores and a favorite beer tavern or two. Once she told us of having something stolen from car in a parking lot. She decided to get even and thought up the scheme of leaving a liquor bottle filled with urine. She went to an adjoining building overlooking the lot and watched a man steal the bottle.

Another story that she told rather appalled a reserved woman like me who had been raised in a sheltered Japanese home. She attended a auction of repossessed cars attended by people looking for a good buy, among them a man from a wrecking lot. He was looking for a particular part in this junky car. Dorothy started bidding against him and she could see his face getting redder and redder as the bid escalated. Finally, the auctioneer hit the gavel and awarded Dorothy the final bid. She told the audience, "Who wants that old heap of junk?" She laughed hysterically as she told the story.

When Slim retired from his job as mechanic at the police car pool garage, they sold their home in Seattle and moved to ~~their~~ ^{u modern} ~~summer home~~ ^{Cotino} on Whidbey Island where they felt their expenses would be fixed and smaller. It was an idyllic situation in the woods where Slim could go fishing and Doroty could feed wild animals and birds. Before too long, it was evident that she missed her Seattle life style, getting ~~mad~~ ^{offended} when the mailman passed her home without stopping. Making beer became a hobby but it was too slow to keep up with her needs. She tried joining a garden club but ~~she~~ didn't feel comfortable drinking tea with a group of gentle ladies. The taverns too were not the same without her cronies. Over the years, she lost her old abandon and became a harping nearsighted witch. She forbade Slim from fishing and he too starting sitting around and drinking heavily. Inside their home they were locked into a polarized position, hating when they needed each other more than ever.

One day George and I went to Whidbey and dropped in to see them. It was before noon but they were already drinking, and I felt like someone stepping stone sober into a party already in high gear. Feeling a little awkward, I looked at the ceramic parrot hanging in the doorway and commented that it was very nice.

She grabbed it off the hook and thrust it into my hands. "It's yours," she said. I brought it home and wandered around the house

trying to find an appropriate place for the bright tropical bird, finally ending up in the kitchen.

For a while, I lost track of many people, among them Slim and Dorothy, because I was coping with George's death. It was not too ~~many years later~~ ^{was later} I heard Slim had died of a heart attack. Dorothy ended up in a nursing home, crippled by arthritis.

One sunny day, I decided to go see Dorothy. I drove up to Mukilteo and took the ferry over^{to} the nursing home. The sun was bright but not warm. The drive was the same from years ago but I felt like stranger alone entering ~~the~~^a building instead of the cabin of years ago. Dorothy too looked like a stranger, just skin and bones, tuft of hair hanging down from her scalp, no longer fluffy and bleached, and twisted fingers. *But her mind was lucid and unlike the past when she kept prying me for information about my life in the city, she told me to ask her questions about her life, "How else would I know what you want to know about me?"

"There is a happy hour here," she confided in me. Her eyes brightened, "once a week on Wednesday. Last week I chose a 4 ounce glass of beer and it was so good." She told me to open her closet and there were a few housecoats she had bought from the catalogue. "They're expensive but I don't want to wear the same old thing everyday to the dining room."

"How are things in downtown Seattle lately?" she asked. I described some of the shops and old buildings being refurbished and new towers reaching new heights. The changes are so dramatic, how could I start to explain to her the way it looks now. I mentioned the jail building on Yesler Way and how it ^{has been restored into} is a office building for the city now.

"Of course I remember," she said quietly. During the Great Depression, there was no money anywhere. I walked there when my first baby was due because I had heard there was a hospital on the top floor. They took care of me. You see, I was 19."

And now you are 70, I thought. When I started to put on my

coat, she told me it was only 2 o'clock. I explained to^{her} that after I caught the ferry, I didn't want to hit the rush hour traffic.^{on the ferry} Then she directed me to the exit closest to her room. Outside, I turned around to see her waving from her window.

Half year later, about Thanksgiving time, I decided to go over before the weather turned difficult. I called the nursing home about her condition and the receptionist told me Doroty had died a few months ago.

"Why wasn't I told?" I said, "I left my name and phone number in the event she got worse." The woman was flustered and apologized. "I remember you. Didn't you bring the bottle of wine for her once? I guess your information got mixed up in the records when she died."

"Here Mom," Wendy said, ^{setting down the} bringing me ~~back~~ rice and kimchee. "What is it?" she asked noting my somber mood; following my gaze to the parrot, she said, "Oh, Dorothy." We both stared at the cheerful parrot with its vivid orange, yellow, turquoise and green colors. She started to pour the tea and I explained to her that a couple weeks back, I had gone to the basement to clean out the storage room. ^{with good intentions.}

"I took 3 cartons....1 for throwaways, 1 for keeping, 1 for maybe. I started with some books, then some old dishes from grandma's time but after a few hours, there was a dribble at the bottom of the throwaway and keeping boxes and almost everything else was piled in the maybe box. I didn't make a dent."

"All these years," Wendy said with a sly smile, "you had us believing it was Dad's ^{who collected} junk, It was really you!"

"No, you're wrong," I protested.

"OK. Admit it Mom. How often do you go down to enjoy all that stuff. You wouldn't miss it a bit. One day, we kids will do you a favor. We're coming over with a truck while you go shopping or visiting or whatever."

"Over my dead body!" I shout. We look at each other and burst out laughing till tears roll down our faces.