

Veteran Writers Group

Quarterly

*Some of the writings done in meditation at our April 2 gathering.
They are presented without editing.*



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Prompt for Veterans Writers Group

April 2, 2011

Dear friends,

This morning I got an email from my cousin, who lives in Japan. While she and her family are ok, even in Tokyo, they are still uneasy and frightened daily by tremors. I had been working on this prompt over the past few weeks, thinking about how the fabulous Japanese art of origami could provide inspiration for our day together.

Now, with TV news full of scenes of earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, of nuclear power plants in emergency – as well as of people coming together to help, to support and help people heal – it seems right to hold the people of Japan in our hearts, and to honor the ancient culture of a country facing devastating loss and challenge.

I learned to fold from my cousin's daughter, Mai, about 10 years ago. Mai is a young and talented artist, who graduated from high school a few days after the earthquake and tsunami. We sat for hours together as she taught me to fold cranes and other objects. One afternoon, she quietly folded 12 identical pieces, quickly assembling them into a lovely multi-colored ball. I was enchanted by the transformation and still have it hanging in my office. Unity, harmony, creativity – this is what I see in these folded squares joined into one. The beauty and power of fairly ordinary single beings joined together, so much more than the one.

The pieces Mai folded were Sonobe Units, the basis for much contemporary modular origami, in which multiple pieces of a specific fold are joined together to create fantastic shapes. They were first defined by members of a small group of creative origami radicals (awright!), the Sosaku Origami Group 67. This small group, meeting together to practice and refine their art, transformed the practice of origami in Japan, working in a more democratic manner that didn't follow the traditional master-apprentice pattern. Their foldings and practices – including the Sonobe Unit and new modular origami creations – migrated to the US in the 1960s, when origami was beginning to emerge as a legitimate and popular art in this country.

I've folded thousands of squares of paper in the last 10 years. I've folded alone, I've folded in community. I've folded with elders, with teenagers, and with an especially adept 5-year old who not only was the best teacher in the room, but came up with astounding new ways to put the units together. I especially love folding a piece and turning to my neighbor, who has also folded a piece, and seeing how they join, what they become, what they become together.

On Saturday, I'd like to introduce you to the Sonobe unit, the basis of modular origami. In the writing warm up, I'd like to lead you on a short journey that I hope will let us create a visual representation of the power of our sangha, and of how we as human beings can come together to heal – and once healed to create even stronger community. You need only bring your words. I'll bring paper.

We'll then proceed to writing in silence, hopefully taking something of this small endeavor into your writing, a small beauty held in this time of wars and disasters.

As usual, the prompt is there to use in your writing or not, as you need. As for the day, try to arrive early enough to settle in and be ready to come together at 10 am for meditation and check-in.

The day will follow the usual order, with approximate times:

9:30 Arrive and settle in

10:00 Meditation and check in

11:00 Writing prompt

11:30 Meditation, and time to write, in silence...

1:15 Lunch (Potluck, vegetarian, and always incredibly delicious; the first half of lunch is in silence)

2:00 Sharing of the day's writings

3:30 Walking meditation (in the eucalyptus grove or inside)

4:15 Sharing of thoughts, reactions, and feedback to other's writings

5:00 Announcements

5:20 Meditation

5:30 Put things back in order in the space, help clean up, and take the extraordinary energy of the day back out into the world.

I'll look forward to seeing you all at Marg and Bill's, on Saturday, April 2. I've included a couple of pages of origami writings, just for fun.

In peace, Nancy

* * * *

From the acknowledged master and father of modern origami, Akira Yoshizawa (1911-2005.) Yoshizawa was born into a farming family, but became a technical draftsman at a local factory – where he taught the workers geometry using origami. He then studied for two years to be a Buddhist priest, and although he never entered the monastery, he remained a committed Buddhist all his life. When the war broke out, he was drafted as a medic, and was known for decorating the beds of injured soldiers with origami. He became ill after the war, eked out a living, and continued to fold. In 1951, his foldings were featured in a popular Japanese magazine – and over time became recognized worldwide as an innovator and teacher. A short excerpt from his writings:

I've been making efforts to raise the status of Origami as a creative art. And it's been spreading not only in Japan but all over the world.

You can fold a simple quadrilateral paper into any shape as you want. I wished to fold the laws of nature, the dignity of life, and the expression of affection into my work. ...

even the tiniest bug has its own history as a living creature, and I have folded them hundreds of thousands times via trial and error and observations. The evolution of nature life cycle has taken hundred million years, so folding a cicada with one single piece of paper is only a trivial thing after all. But this established the way to fold living creatures, resulting in a method to help in the folding of other animals and plants. ...

Folding life is difficult, because life is a shape or an appearance caught in a moment of a period of life, and we need to feel the whole natural life to fold one moment of life. •* * * *

Origami life

fold, then fold again
 your hands persuading paper
 to accept the creases and expand
 into a bird
 or a flower
 while each passing day
 adds a wrinkle to your skin
yeah

B. Sue Johnson, 2002

Little God Origami

The number of corners in the soul can't
 compare with the universe's dimensions folded
 neatly into swans. In the soul's
 space, one word on a thousand pieces
 of paper the size of cookie fortunes falls
 from the heavens. At last, the oracular
 answer, you cry, pawing at the scraps that twirl
 like seed-pod helicopters. Alas, the window
 to your soul needs a good scrubbing, so
 the letters doodle into indecipherables just
 like every answer that has rained
 down through history, and you realize, in
 your little smog of thought that death
 will simply be the cessation of asking, a thousand
 cranes unfolding themselves and returning to the trees.

Stefi Weisburd

-- Source: Poetry (March 2005).

The [Heart](#) As Origami

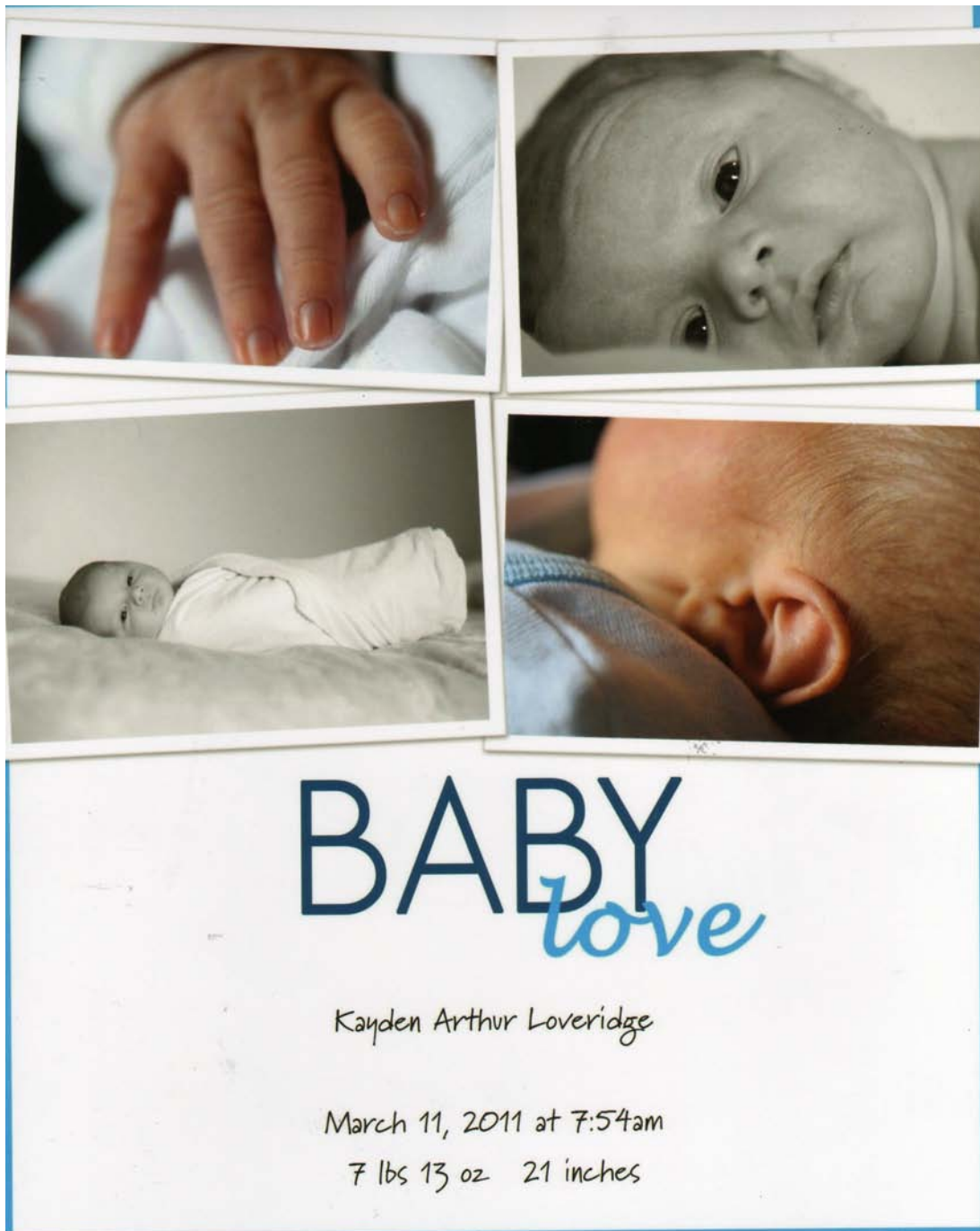
Each one has its shape.
 For love, two sleeping ducks.
 For selfless courage, the war horse.
 For fear of death, the daylily's one-day flower.
 More and more creased each year, worn paper thin, and still it longs for them all.
 Not one of the lives of this world the heart does not choose.

Jane Hirschfield



Congratulations

**Rachael Hairston
and
welcome to the world:**





Rachael with Kayden Arthur Loveridge



Bees in Trees

Scott Morrison

At the last meeting, I had planned to play a song that I had written into the novel. Whenever I intend to play, I always use the writing time to take my guitar to the far end of the eucalyptus grove to tune up and practice without disturbing anyone. I took the upper path by the garden and thought I'd grab a tangerine or two from Marg and Bill's tree, which in the past were the best I'd ever tasted. I went into the garden but this year the tree had dinky little tangerines. As I circled the tree, hoping for at least one good one, I found a huge swarm of honeybees clustered on a branch. Two years ago, my wife took up beekeeping and I've learned a lot by osmosis and knew that when bees swarm like that they're searching for a new home.

So I went back to the house and brought Marg down to check it out. I asked if they would mind if someone would come to collect the swarm and they had no objection. So I called Ettamarie Peterson (my late friend Jack's mother-in-law) who is a beekeeper and very active in the Sonoma Beekeepers



Association and asked if she'd like to catch the swarm and she came right out.

She took the photo of the swarm, which was exceptionally large, put on her gear and shook the swarm off the branch into a collection box. She was pretty sure she'd gotten the queen in the box as with most of the bees as those bees which landed on the ground rather than in the box started walking into the box (they follow the queen's unique scent). Then she hung the box on the tree with bungee cords and came back at dusk after the bees that had been out foraging returned. She said the box was very heavy.

She is giving the bees to two girls in the Liberty Valley 4-H for a project and said the girls were ecstatic when she called to tell them she had a swarm for them. (Note: Liberty Valley runs from Petaluma to 116 outside Cotati and is the gorgeous landscape you see from 101 when you're on the Cotati Grade. For those driving south after the meeting I suggest taking Stony Point Road, which runs through the valley parallel to the freeway, for an even prettier ride.)

Ettamarie has two websites, one for her farm and one for the Liberty4-H beekeepers.
Very informative for anyone interested in honeybees.

Here are the links:

www.petersonsfarm.com

www.liberty4Hbees.com



Toward Sonobe Units

DonEdward Morris

Inanimate object
to be eaten
made from grain
a flowering grass
fertilized by oxen
fed by water
nurtured by the sun
harvested by hands
 of roughened men
separated by hands
 of weathered women.

That not eaten
returned to water
soaked into milk
milled into paper
folded into
an animate object.
Wonders.



Homeless Joe the Window Washer

Gregory Ross

The voice came from behind me, tentative but, determined. "Wash your windows", he said. I turned to see a wiry, somewhat sunken cheeked man, standing out of arms reach, with salt and pepper hair and beard obviously self trimmed. He looked homeless, he acted homeless, but he did not smell homeless. I told him, "No, I'm good. How about if I just give you a dollar" and reached into my pocket. He said, again with determination, "I don't want charity. I would prefer to work for it." I said, "Go for it." and started loading my groceries into the back of my truck while he washed my windshield, moved on to the door windows and the mirrors. He did a great job, even washing the inside of the window on the camper on the truck. I gave him three dollar bills, two quarters a dime, a nickel and seven pennies, all the "small change" I had. He said that was too much; I said he did a good job. He did not argue further. We smiled at each other, then he thanked me and ran off to ask another person if he could wash her windows.

Thus went my first encounter with Joe about six years ago. Since then we have become as much of friends as our respective situations have allowed. We call each other by first names and shake hands each time we see each other. He knows my wife and her car and cleans her windows too. He has met my son and I introduce him to friends when we run into each other. Joe frequents the business area of the Dimond District in Oakland; a few blocks from where we live. I see him in the parking lot that the CVS and Farmer Joe's and the new Japanese Restaurant share. I see him in the shared parking area behind the new Peets Coffee/Subway/La Farine/Wayland's Meats and of course a Nail Shop or at the Shell Station right in that area. We run into each other at Peets on occasion and he lets me buy him a cup of coffee and then says, "That is a washing I owe you." I say, "Forget it Joe, this one is on me." Later when I return to my vehicle [now that the truck is gone he knows what my car looks like] after shopping or going to the library my windshield wipers are sticking up and all my windows are clean. Sometimes I don't see Joe but when I return the wipers are up. When next I see him I tell him I owe him one and if I do he takes the money but he keeps track and if I had bought him coffee and have forgotten about it, he says, "No, I owed you one Gregory." In the winter, when there is little opportunity to wash windows he will take money but, you can see it pains him.

These are things I know about Joe. He has an alcohol problem and is aware that it cost him a lot. He had a wife and home and job. He lost them all. He has a "Crew" that he helps and protects: Vinnie, A.C. and Lori are the regulars and there are occasional "strays" as he calls them. They all live in a camp by the freeway exit/entrance. It is well hidden, well maintained and they have been there for a few years. They have an agreement with Cal Trans. They keep it clean and four times a year Cal Trans brings by a bunch of their orange plastic bags and Joe and his crew fill them up and set them along the ramp. I once watched Joe stand outside of the CVS and an elderly man drove up, handed Joe something and parked in front of the store while Joe ran in and brought out a prescription bag and two cases of water. Joe loaded them in the car, gave the man his medicine and change, then the man gave Joe some of the change back. I have seen him do that a few times. Joe had a bike which gave him mobility to go to other parts of

Oakland to wash windows but, it got stolen after about a year. Joe is in good physical shape: lean and muscled. He lives and works hard; he eats little but as well as he can afford. He is living the Paleolithic Diet/Lifestyle that was the "Diet De Jour" a few years back. He believes in a god and ethics and is often quite happy. He loves a sunny day.

This is what else I know about Joe. When he loses his temper he can lose control yelling that there is no justice in the world as he stomps away, unable to hear or be helped by those who wish him well. On occasion he still uses drugs. Unfortunately for him he was videoed buying drugs by someone in the area and it was posted on a neighborhood site. This led to a rumor among those who don't know him that he sold drugs. I pointed out to a neighbor who insisted that Joe was a dealer; that if that was true he sure was a lousy one because he lived under a tree by the freeway and was homeless; which was the other "sin" this neighbor was complaining about. One business manager is adamant that no homeless person could be anything but a liability and keeps calling the police to run Joe off. Many of us in the Dimond have talked both to this man, who is the head of the Dimond Merchants Association and the Police but for many weeks Joe just had to stay away; at least when the beat officer was around but, do to the budget cuts, we saw more of Joe again.

Joe and I talk often and he knew that I was facing a lay off. Every time we saw each other he would ask me how the job situation was going and as it would turn out I saw him the day I got my official lay off notice. When he asked about my situation I told him and he looked me straight in the eyes and said with all sincerity, "Well, Gregory, you and Peggy can come live in my camp if you need to." I almost started to cry.

Recently, Joe approached me excited and asked if he got a business license did I think he could join the Dimond Merchants Association. I told him he would be a business in the Dimond and I thought, why not? We both got great joy out of the thought of him going to a Dimond Merchants Association meeting. He told me that he washed the windows of a local tax consultant business and that the two women who ran it came up with the idea that if he got a business license he would be legit. They were willing to help him with the paper work and the fees, even take him downtown to sign up. When Peggy and I found out we talked with them and offered to share expenses. Joe never showed up for the date to go downtown and get the license.

A while back, Joe told me that A.C. got a loitering ticket for \$80 and if he did not pay it he was going to jail. A.C. disappeared a few months ago. Vinnie and Lori seemed to not be around and it has been about three weeks since I have seen Joe. None of the other homeless people know where he went.

People were always trying to help Joe but, he knew his limits. He once told me that he just could not live inside anymore. Not because it made him uncomfortable but because the few times he has gotten "walls" he always lost them because he can not say no to any one homeless and the place always got too many in it and it got rowdy, then he lost it.

Maybe he just couldn't handle all that goodness coming his way, even though everyone who wants to help feels he deserves it and more. Maybe he is in jail and he will

surface again. Maybe something more drastic happened. He does after all live the Paleolithic lifestyle and it was dangerous.

Haiku like; 17 syllables [I think]

Gregory Ross

scientists argue particles and waves but all are vibrations

light and dark
particle and wave
balanced vibrations
yin and yang

if all things are vibrations, my favorite is a good laugh

vibrations of quiet attenuate the roar of oceans




Deep Check

Kathleen Taylor

Your steps on the gravel are different now
The sturdy crunch of a working man's boot
announcing your arrival is slurred
The definitive, strong, capable sound
is looser
A rolling, pulling, resisting progression
sounds my internal alarm
I inhibit
a primal impulse to rush out
appear casual, nonchalant
offer you my arms
Needless to say
Understood between us
soon enough
plenty of that

April 2, 2011



A RAINY DAY IN PENSACOLA

Matt Wathen

The sky has opened up, rain is pelting the tin roof; there is no way we are flying today. I am one of 30 Student Naval Aviators hunkered down in the World War II era structure that serves as a ready room located next to the tarmac. It is February in Pensacola, Florida, and this is not an afternoon shower. Clouds are pushing down towards the runway while the wind sock has stretched to full horizontal, showing a strong southeast flow. The temperature has plunged to the high 40's; hardly a beach day on the Florida Panhandle. The rain is constant and unchanging as the steady piddle patter continues its relentless symphony. We are prisoners in this stuffy box, hoping for a small miracle that would allow us to fly. We are all familiar with P'Cola in the summer; warm, sunny with the predictable afternoon shower that blows through in an hour or less. Now we are stuck with a weather system that may disrupt flying indefinitely. The thought of canceled flights for days is too bitter to contemplate.

Time wise, we are about half way through our training to become Navy pilots. However we haven't passed the most formidable obstacle to reaching that goal: carrier landings on the ship. This was to be the day we could earn the right to say we had "hit the boat". In today's Navy many aviators have never landed on the ship, but in 1968 anyone wearing Navy wings had landed on the carrier. Our group had completed basic flight training in Pensacola last summer. Those of us selected for the jet pipeline were sent to Meridian, Mississippi for the basic syllabus. There we completed instrument training and formation flying. Now we were back in Pensacola for air to air gunnery and carrier landings. The gunnery stage was especially challenging: to fly the pattern without stalling the plane on the initial turn in, to hit the banner with our bullets, not the tow plane, and finally not to fixate on the target, flying into the banner. Gunnery has been completed. Now we need to hone our flying skills, focusing entirely on carrier landings.

The ready room is stifling with the wall heater cooking the Student Naval Aviators packed into the 15X20 foot space. The fortunate instructors have their own area, also an out of date shelter, but much less crowded with decent ventilation. Next to one wall is a long table with the ubiquitous Navy coffee pot, a five gallon jug of water, cups and some donuts. Above the table is a white motion picture screen that has been lowered. We are all sitting in metal folding chairs, jammed into three rows facing the table and screen. The camera is rolling with episode one of Victory at Sea, Design for War.

To get to this point, all of us have successfully passed our FCLP's (field carrier landing practice). This consists of day after day of nothing but a take off and continuous touch and goes, one after another. The runway is equipped with the same glide slope indicator that we would encounter on the ship in addition to four arresting wires painted in the landing area.

There is an LSO (landing signal officer) who grades every landing, just as he does on the ship. Approaches and landings are judged on lineup, airspeed and rate of descent, all written as an esoteric acronym unchanged for decades. A typical comment would be LUL, HIC, DNTL. This translates to: started the approach lined up left of the centerline,

then high in close followed by dropped nose to land. The LSO also records the arresting wire you would have caught on the ship. Rarely would we have a perfect pass which would be indicated by “OK, no comment, three wire.” Some days we would fly 40 or more simulated landings, all graded in an attempt to increase our proficiency and familiarity with flying a carrier approach.

To those outside Naval Aviation, this grueling training schedule would seem nerve wracking, boring and impossible all at once. The early stages of training weed out most of those not totally committed to becoming carrier pilots. The vast majority DOR (Drop On Request) before the Navy washes them out. I discovered early in training that I seemed to have a natural aptitude for flying which was aided by my strong commitment to physical fitness. I found the psychological aspect of Naval Aviation brilliantly focused on what was immediately at hand. This one- day-at-a-time program prevented all of us from stressing over expectations a month or year from now. This present-oriented approach was supported and strengthened by the constant refrain from instructors that we were the top 1%, the best of the best. So I battled on thinking I was supremely gifted, and knowing I was the recipient of the Navy’s time-tested unparalleled training for the most challenging flying ever required of the military.

The brief for flying out to the ship for our first carrier landings was scheduled for 0730. It is now 1530. These 8 hours have been spent in a schizophrenic state of hoping for a weather break to complete our shipboard landings, while also wishing for a cancellation of the flights and the temporary relief that would bring. We have had rumors of the ceiling lifting which might allow us to fly, but no real change in the weather has occurred. We have reached episode 12 of Victory at Sea, Conquest of Micronesia. Another day like this and we could almost see all 26 Victory at Sea shows that were made in the 1950’s.

Our flight suits are damp and smelly and many of us are jittery from way too many cups of coffee. The talk has been naturally centered on carrier landings-guys that have not been able to get aboard, the chances of dying if you screw up the approach, and what happens if you wash out of the flight program. We are exhausted, yet still on edge as one of the flight instructors enters our crowded space with an announcement. The flight schedule for today has been cancelled. We will be coming back tomorrow at 0730 for another chance to fly out to the carrier. We breathe a unified sigh of relief, yet knowing our anxiety will only be heightened by another day’s delay.

He's A Lonely One Way Traveler

Alex Rush

He's a long way from happy and further still from home,
Out looking for a little some place that he can call his own.
You see him by the market with a sign up in his hands,
"I'll work for food or money, I served in Viet Nam."

He's a lonely one way traveler, who's running out of time,
But if you give him a dollar he'll give you back a smile, CHORUS
A smile as big as Texas, the place that he came from,
And then he'll say "God bless you" and all you feel is love

He had a wife and family but he hasn't anymore.
They couldn't take the anger that he brought home from the war.
He swore he wouldn't put them through the hell that he endured.
Now all he's got are pictures of a life he never knew.

CHORUS

He lives with friends outside of town, when the weather's not too cold.
In a campground with a little creek, where he washes his old clothes.
And when the cops say he's got to leave, he does as he is told,
He ain't looking for another war, he's just a man who's growing old.

CHORUS.

You think he must be freezing in his worn out tattered clothes,
Yet his eyes are clear and calm as you roll down your window.
And when those eyes meet yours, you see yourself reflected there,
And suddenly without a word your soul has been stripped bare.

He's a lonely one way traveler, who's running out of time,
But if you give him a dollar he'll give you back a smile,
A smile as big as Texas, the place that he came from,
And then he'll say "God bless you" and all you feel is love,
All you feel is love.

How to Give a 95th BD Party for your Mother

Ellen Greenblatt

Find out what kind of cake she wants.
 Agree that whatever she says is a great choice.
 Ask if she means raspberry jam or raspberry mousse with the lemon cake
 Check her Do Not Resuscitate order—is it up to date?
 Invite guests.
 Help her deal with the fact that no other family member but you is coming.
 Figure out how to present yourself as many people—maybe develop multiple personalities?
 Decide that just you is a crowd if you are cheerful enough.
 Discuss, again, whether she should have a transfusion the next time she is hospitalized.
 Call Hospice, again, to ascertain whether extreme old age counts as a life-threatening condition.
 Make sure you know if she wants chocolate frosting or chocolate glaze.
 Ask Hospice, again, *why* extreme old age does not count as a life-threatening condition.
 Help her choose what to wear to the party brunch.
 Remember to tell her that, as usual, her hair looks nice.
 Encourage her to take her walker to the brunch.
 Don't ask why she is upset with her oldest friend during the brunch.
 Remember that just you is a festive crowd as you get her an omelette and a bagel.
 Smile all the time.
 Take photos of the pastry chef with the cake, of your mother with the pastry chef, of your mother with the cake.
 Have someone take a photo of you with the cake and your mother.
 Ask the staff to sing Happy Birthday to her.
 Pretend to be surprised that the staff is singing Happy Birthday to her.
 Help the chef cut the cake.
 Offer the cake to each resident, saying your mother's name, so that they will congratulate her.
 Thank the residents who remember to congratulate her.
 Keep smiling.
 Search for her walker.
 Take her back to her room.
 Tell her how much everyone enjoyed the party.
 Check to make sure the Do Not Resuscitate order is still on the refrigerator.
 Hug her gently—remember she has osteoporosis.
 Kiss her.
 Remind her you'll be back in a few days.
 Love her.
