

The First Time by Dennis Knight

All eyes at the table were on me, anxious for my reaction. It was tasty looking, just a dollop at the end of my chopstick, but my sinuses were assaulted, my eyes bulged and welled, my skull felt the pressure but held, my necktie curled to meet my tears, and it was a perfectly joyful moment, the first time I tasted wasabi.

In thinking about other things that would befit an essay on the subject of “The First Time”, I recall my first bike ride as a little boy. It was a short-lived, foolhardy attempt without adult supervision or even training wheels. It landed me square on my keister and earned me a broken tail bone. The crusty family doctor reached his diagnosis, I might add, by employing, in yet another of my life’s first time events, a procedure that needs no elucidation, but did involve a rubber glove.

Some first times require organization. I remember the nuns teaching us that, at age seven we had reached the age of reason, and were ready in the eyes of the church to make our First Communion. It was a planned and practiced ceremony involving a procession and pageantry that left me feeling mature, invincible, and, oh so reasonable.

The next Sunday, I announced to Mom that I was going to Mass by myself for the very first time. It was a clear, crunchy winter morning in Laramie, well below zero, Fahrenheit, and I was a sorry little icicle when I finally made it to the church. One of the ladies held her hands over my ears, rubbed my frozen fingers, dabbed my runny nose and held me close in her warmth. It took until the Offertory, but she restored me to life and I realized, for the first time, that perhaps the age of reason is over rated.

The younger you are the quicker come the firsts. After all, the simple sequence of life dictates that more first time events come at the beginning than at the end. But we can thank God that life continues to come to us in brand new ways as we reach our golden years, and the world is replete with wonderful things to be chased, tasted and tripped over. The baskets we have carried from our childhoods are filled again with all variety of adventure for us to sample for the first time according to our own fancy.

And so I stand here today, with all eyes at the table on me, a bashful new member, sweat on my brow, cotton in my mouth, this sinister object called a microphone in my hand, reading my story to the Windsor Gardens Writing Group, for the very first time.