

Don't Lose It

by Helen Gowan

Some years ago at an Elderhostel I had a roommate, an art teacher in a Catholic school on Long Island. Before she turned off her light at night she wrote briefly in the journal propped up on her knees. After a couple of these late night sessions, she explained that she always wrote down three things that she was thankful for that day. I thought this an admirable habit, but never had the constancy to keep to it. After a few more shared study trips, I could see she continued to record her gratitude. I imagine that she has piled up dozens of journals, and goes back through them occasionally to recapture memories that might otherwise be lost.

I wish I had done the same. I have some of the memories but they are not conveniently arranged in chronological order. Where did I first see a marmot? When did I break my right elbow? What year did Nick and Jini proudly share the pileated woodpecker which nested in their Cleveland backyard?

I have come to realize that there are things that are important not to lose: the house keys, whether or not I took my daily or weekly allotment of pills, the telephone list, and appointments. Generally I have made accommodations for keeping track of these. It's a waste of time and fretting, to say nothing of embarrassment, when I forget an obligation. However, for most things, like all that stuff I forget at Trivia Bowl, I don't beat myself up about it anymore. Seize the moment. Share it if you can. Then let it go.

Years ago, when my children were small and I was happily homebound, I avidly read *Woman's Day*. At the top of the page that recommended thrifty meals for the month there was always a Bible quotation. One is still in my mind. *This is the day the Lord hath made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.* I may not remember what day something happened that caused me to rejoice in the same way my Elderhostel friend does, but the joy and the vision sometimes reappear to brighten my life. Last year about this time, I wrote about walking out of Liberty Savings Bank one morning and noticing a four-storey tall flowering crab in magnificent bloom. Last Monday on my way to Writers' group, and eastern sun was shining on two crab apples which had bloomed overnight, in spite of having been snowed on twice while they were in bud. One was a bright pink, the other one, partly in the shade, was deep rose. I stood still for a moment marveling at the sight, recognizing its impermanence. By the end of the week, maybe even the end of the day, blossoms would litter the ground, victims of rain or snow or wind or hot sun. Next year heavy rain or snow might blast the blossoms. Equally likely was the possibility that I might not be here next year.

A young man was walking briskly toward me. Without thinking, I tapped his shoulder and pointed across the street to the trees. Surprised by being accosted by an old woman, he said, "What? What? Oh, the trees. Awesome," he acknowledged, and hurried on.

Today is the only day I have. Open your eyes, I remind myself. Don't lose it.