

In a bull-session years ago, the participants aimed at first remembrance.  
The winner was audacious enough to claim remembering being born.  
Yes, his screaming, the adoring crowd congratulating the mother and father,  
ignoring him. That telling seemed to be his moment to getting even,  
for here he was the center of the universe,  
where none cared that he had been unhappy when born.  
The ladies in this crowd, assured him, he would never be unhappen again.

The evening was a success, the hero remembering his birth  
was given the Memory Acting Award by the others,  
who then, all went their separate truthful ways, sane.

Others that evening had only vague recall of anything as a baby.  
For these others, early childhood recollections were always pleasing, vague,  
an event with a spark of joy in their early world,  
that moment nailed in memory.

And as each recalled and repeated a memory, it became apparent,  
all there had the same response to this fact of earliest memory;  
it was more than vague as to time.  
And sometimes, the event not a real memory,  
but the tale retold by another of an incident  
where that individual had done something unusual.  
Then, adopting that story as their history, giving it certitude.

And so we arrive at this early moment of joy.

The family lived 30 miles from the nearest relatives, up-river from Pittsburgh.  
Their houses were connected by that steel ribbon, the railroad.  
The family visited those Pittsburgh relatives often,  
as the father was a railroad employee and had unlimited free access to passage.

Railroads were punctual. Every passenger had a seat. The stops were frequent.  
Small towns aligned the east side of Beaver River every few miles.  
The train stopped at each.  
The train's Conductor came through every car  
almost as soon as the train began moving  
announcing the next stop, as if passengers did not already know.

It was so this moment of early memory.

Returning home from visiting an Uncle and Aunt in **Sharpsburg**,  
the train reached the Conway stop, passengers departing and entering.  
As the train started north, the conductor appeared in their Coach car  
to announce the next stop. Before he could get a word out,  
the precocious child standing on the seat  
shouted in a loud, clear, sing-song soprano, mimicking the Conductor,  
“Next stop Freedom, Next stop Freedom.”

This brought laughter from the Passengers.  
The Conductor simply said nothing,  
continued to other Coaches where he would be appreciated.

Much later, when the story was first repeated by a parent in the child’s presence,  
it was news to the child.

Upon hearing several repetitions by parents to other adults,  
the incident was adopted by the child as true memory.

Now, with no one to contradict, in each recounting, there stands the Conductor,  
dark blue suit with brass buttons, Capital lettered PRR,  
the flat top authority-hat, with red band.

He breathes in to announce “Next stop Freedom, Next stop Freedom”,  
is shocked into silence.

That small duty stolen, he does nothing about it  
honoring parents and the child.

