

A Memorable Birthday Dinner

By Pete Clark

Sunday, February fourth, I turned seventy-seven, still one of the youngsters at Windsor Gardens. On Friday the second, I went on line to the website of a local seafood restaurant and made a reservation for eight, the next afternoon at five-thirty, as our Birthday Group wanted to go to dinner to celebrate my aging. Whenever one of our group has a birthday, we have a get together, in appreciation of the person's still being among us. Saturday morning, a man from the restaurant called to verify the reservation and I told him we would be there, as sure as there are water moccasins in southern creeks.

The seafood place was not my first choice for a birthday dinner, but I was to receive a discount percentage from them that was equal to the number of years that have passed since I was hatched, and I couldn't turn that down. Becoming an old fart sometimes has its dividends. For dinner, I thought in terms of shellfish, rather than scaly things that swim through the water, or other things that crawl around on the sea bottom and look like oversized bugs.

A little after five that afternoon, I pulled the car into the loading/emergency zone in front of our building, staying a ways out from the curb, so Judie could get into the car more easily. After she was in the passenger seat and the door was closed, I took her walker around to the driver's side and slid it in on the folded-down back seats, and we were soon on our way.

When we arrived at the restaurant, there was no parking to be found. I circled around the parking lot, but no empty spaces were to be found, so I pulled up in front of the place, blocking traffic and listening to horns blow, until Judie was out of the car and on her way to the door. I found a spot far from the building. Near the end of my hike to the restaurant's door, I noticed that a Handicap spot had been vacated just across from the ramp leading to the door. After I entered the restaurant, the Maître D guided us to our table.

When we sat down, we learned one person had not arrived and the other missing person could not come due to having to work late. We waited for a few minutes, until the last person arrived and the waitress came and took our drink orders. Judie and I arrived at a fateful decision. Instead of having glasses of wine, we would each have a glass of Michelob. Each of the other five at the table ordered ice tea or wine.

The waitress soon returned with our drinks. She set a glass of ice tea near the plate of the person on my right. My next sensory experience was a cascade of icy cold from just beneath my right shoulder, down my chest, into my lap and streaking across my knees. Then I heard the glass hit the floor.