



Our Lives

Trick and Treat Ellen Manes-Meunier

Halloween is not my favorite holiday. I don't like putting on costumes or makeup, creating alternate worlds, or contemplating the presence of spirits. I can't deny, though, that there is something intriguing, perhaps frightening about acknowledging the possibility of another world.

Lately, I find myself surrounded by teen-aged ghosts. The most recent one arrived unexpectedly and most unwelcomed a few weeks ago. I was checking my Facebook pages and saw a post referencing the death of Eric, the Pied Piper of my adolescence. Other spirits from childhood are hovering in my atmosphere. Next year will be the 50th anniversary of my graduation from High School. There's a lot of on-line chatter about a summer reunion event being planned by people I hardly remember, but to whom I am grateful for embracing this thankless task.

Forgotten classmates are showing up all over Facebook, the web page for my High School, and in emails from the self-appointed reunion planners. People I haven't thought about for 40 or more years are populating my dreams and my daytime musings. I remember them, as they were 50 years ago, clear-eyed and hopeful; I look at their pictures now and see old people, more resembling my parents and teachers than my peers.

As a hanger-on in a group of disaffected teenagers, I met Eric in my sophomore year. We were the kids who didn't really fit in – the artists, musicians, wannabe intellectuals and drama club members who just missed the mark in getting a toehold into the social world of High School. Eric was a senior and aside from his physical panther-like beauty, had the cachet of being older than most of us. He was our natural leader.

We eschewed the suburban fashions and currency of the early 1960s. We wore flea-market clothes, listened to jazz, not rock 'n roll, read Nat Hentoff, Nikki Giovanni and anything published by the Grove Press. Our idea of a good time was to go to junk stores, browsing for oddball artifacts from the 1940s and 50s, or to pile into a car and like Shakespearean sprites, carouse through the woods at Bear Mountain.

Eric, with his anti-establishment, artistic sensibility imagined adventures and we'd follow his lead. We'd travel old country roads to abandoned farmhouses along the Hudson, disregarding "No Trespass" signs, exploring the empty houses left to fall into disrepair as if we were visiting important museums. We called ourselves social anthropologists. On a whim, we'd drive down to Atlantic City late at night, have breakfast at a greasy spoon and drive back to Westchester early in the morning before rush hour. We

explored the shoreline eccentricities of Long Island Sound and collected unique bits of flotsam or jetsam to bring home as prizes.

Other ghosts -- Keith who died months after we graduated in a freak swimming event, and Frank who had a heart attack shortly after our 35th reunion -- float around the edges of memory. Keith never got to grow up, and Frank was robbed of the chance to grow old, but they are in my mind, as they were once, like Eric, beautiful young men with endless opportunities to be brilliant.

And there is a phalanx of quasi-ghosts – people still out there whom I haven't seen for many years. Most importantly and heart-breakingly saddening, is the spectre of my brother, Stephen, who disappeared from my life 25 years ago. He was my other magician, like Eric, creating wondrous experiences that formed me. His choice to disconnect from family and friends was one that I don't exactly understand but accept as necessary to his emotional survival.

Next summer, I will go to that reunion, with more than a little trepidation. Perhaps I'll see Mona, my then best pal with whom I had a falling out after college, or Anne, the first neighborhood girl I met when we moved into our new house. Maybe I'll see Naomi, who cast me off as a friend when we reached High School, only because I was not running with the popular crowd, or Leslie, my first friend of color, whom I got to know in Girl Scout camp. I do hope I'll see Peter, who was my biggest booster and has become my most successful and worldly Facebook friend, and one or two of the other three Ellens in my class.

I won't see Stein, my almost boyfriend who lives in Seattle and who I hope still sees himself as apart from the mainstream, or my other pals from classes above and below mine. I won't see the ones who've died and the ones who've never stayed connected. I won't see Leon, now Lee, alive and well in New Zealand, who was the poster of the news of Eric's demise, or Amy, the strawberry-haired Communist who came to school one day announcing she had a pet squirrel in her green book bag. She disappeared long ago.

Today is Halloween and it feels right to allow my ghosts a few minutes out of the closet. I enjoy having them in my life, even though I keep them locked up most of the time.. They remind me of who I once was and carry me back to a period when life was simpler, but much more magical.

There – my personal trick and treat.

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