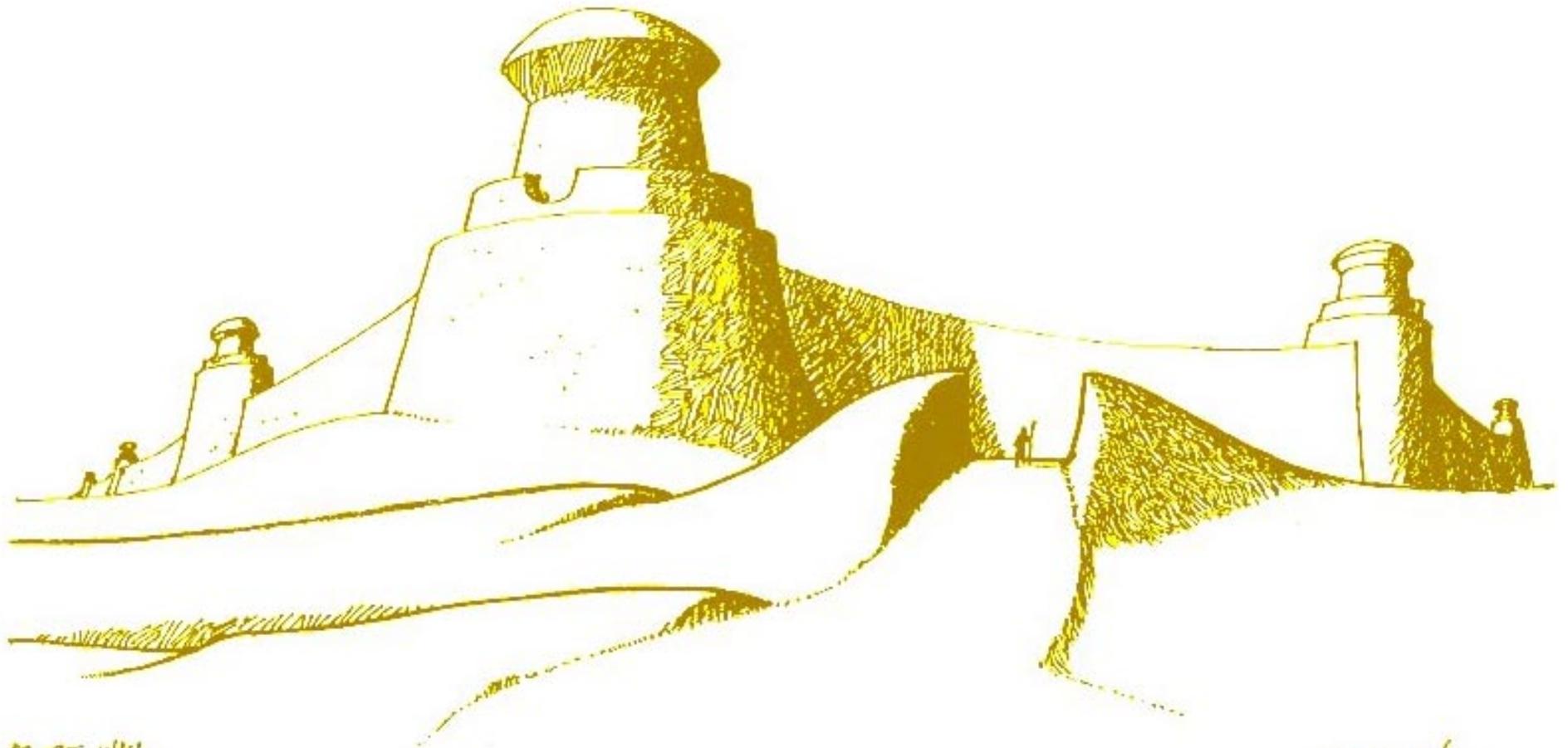


The Drink Tank #83: A Family Issue



AT THE WALL

ROCKEY 02

This is the hardest issue of The Drink Tank ever. It's about family, and about dying members of families. That's pretty much saying that this issue is going to be a little depressing, but there's more to it than that. In my family, comedy and tragedy are only separated by the moment of arrival, and sometimes not even that. That's shared by the Morels. Everything is a source of material, especially when the moist blankets are around.

In this one, Judith and I swapped articles. I wrote the original version of The First In Their Generations and Judith fixed it, made it less sad, made me into more of an asshole character and slashed a few thousand words. Judith and SaBean wrote Those Last Days On The Cape and I played around with it a bit to brighten it up, made SaBean look less like the raving addict she was and Judith less like the two-dollar whore she was...and added a Jive-Talking Robot. We're very happy with the changes and the new versions. Robert Hole gives us a couple of views into his family and

Those Last Days on The Cape
by

Christopher J. Garcia, Judith Morel and
SaBean Morel

June 1st

During twilight on the first of June, 1990, the Morel family went



to the Summer house on Martha's Vineyard and Dad said that he'd not live to see the day when the family would return. SaBean cried for a short moment when he said that, but only because she knew it was true; he'd be dead by the end of the month. He hadn't left the chair much that week, only a few trips to the bathroom or to change the tape in the VCR. His hands were nearing uselessness, but he still tried, still tinkered with the miniature devices, the grandiose designs he'd scribble away on the graph paper that always seemed to be at arm's length. They were set to leave in three days, and she knew he'd make it to that, but

SaBean was the only one who knew what was happening: James Morel would be dead soon.

And that morning she's run out of her brand of cigarette: the cigarettes you'd shoot directly into your veins. She brought her father a microwave meat pie and then walked outside the house and gulped water from the garden hose. She knew she'd be shaking by the time she would go to bed, so finding a score was the highest priority.

There's no fucking way I'm going to watch him go without a heavy fog around me.

That night, out at Lanagan's piece of the beach, she found a lonely guy who held a small bag and kissed him wherever he wanted until he shot her up and let her take the remainder.

June 2nd

Goddammit where are my fucking underwear?

She pushed aside the pile of empty cigarette cartons into the magazines and paperbacks that littered the floor. She had to get back home before Mom went into Boston and if Judith knew her, she'd be leaving in fifteen minutes.

Where the fuck are they?

Judith just knew that Rick had woken up in the middle of the night, gone to the pile of her clothes and snatched her panties, put them in the

bottom of some drawer for use when he wasn't able to bring himself off. Judith didn't care anymore, she only worried about being able to run across the way, through the Wasserman's backyard, into the door to the basement. She would make her way in and turn on the TV just moments before Mom opened the door from the sitting room. She had been this production number so many times.

Judith closed the door, pushing her panties towards the bed when she pulled it open.

The passing was fast. The old servant's quarters of the Michaels home was the perfect place for the sort of affairs that Judith had specialized in. The Michaels were only around one or two weeks a month, if that, and they were in Montreal for the next six days. She made it across the Wasserman's and opened up the cellar door, walking down the six steps and pulling the door closed over her head.

"Late night, Jude?"

James Highwater Kennedy Morel sat in front of the TV, a tray with an English breakfast sitting steaming on top of it.

"What are you doing here?"

Judith said, stepping further into the cellar.

"I thought I'd wait for you in the basement. Might as well see you as often as possible the next few days."

Judith wasn't a fan of the way



Dad had started talking about his mortality.

"Is Mom awake yet?"

Judith's Dad turned back to the PBS news show.

"She's in the kitchen. Don't tell her I'm here. She yells at me when I eat bacon."

Judith walked over to him and gave him a kiss on the cheek. He smiled and went back to staring at the TV while he tried not to think about what it would take to climb back up those stairs.

June 3rd

James Highwater Kennedy Morel couldn't get out of bed. It had happened a few other times in the last few months. This was the second time since they arrived at the Vineyard. It was after noon, and since nearly nine-thirty he had been trying. His legs were locked and his left arm was completely jammed in on itself. At least that's what it felt like. SaBean always knew when Dad was stuck in bed. She'd bring him grilled tomatoes and toast with a piece of crispy bacon.

The moment he was about to call to the girls, SaBean pushed open the door, carrying the plate.

"Can you sit up?"

"This is as far as I've managed."

SaBean walked to him and pushed on his legs. They were ragdoll legs offering no resistance. She walked around to his head and pushed the pillows into a stand for him. He managed to use his right arm to get himself up. He stiffly managed to work his left arm a little, just enough to keep him steady while SaBean set the tray in front of him. She cut his bacon and the tomatoes into piece he could stab onto his fork.

"How's that?"

"Good, Sabe. It's very good."

SaBean hadn't heard him call her Sabe in ages. She always hated the way Gramma Dorothy would call her Sabe, carrying out the word from a long s through a Brahmin a into the

closing plosive that seemed to hardly exist. She put the fork into his right hand and took a seat on the bed next to him.

“Eat up, Dad.”

SaBean had shot up an hour before, when she had first noticed that Dad wasn't anywhere in the house. Every day he got stuck in that bed meant the tumor had managed to push another part of the brain aside for the time being. She had to fight back tears again while she tied off and pushed the lancet in.

June 4th

Mike came into Judith's room. She'd been awake for almost an hour but hadn't left the bed. Rick had kept her up until almost seven. It was nearly four, and now SaBean's boyfriend was in her room.

“Judith?”

She turned and looked at him.

“You looking for SaBean?”

She sounded less than half-awake.

“No, I know where she is.”

Judith did too. Mike had often gotten into raging battles over SaBean's drug use, but she said that this trip, the last trip with her father, he had to let it go. He had been there for nearly a week and they had only slept in the same bed two nights. SaBean kept weird hours, and she loved to wonder when the night was



darkest.

“What do you need?”

“Your Dad can't get out of his chair.”

Judith sat up.

“You tell Mom?”

Mike took a seat next to him.

“He asked me not to. He wanted a cigar.”

Judith didn't notice that she was crying.

“You'll have to go to Bettner's.”

“I know, but I need your keys.”

Judith felt the tear and slid the sleeve of her shirt across her cheeks.

“Wait a minute. I'll come with you.”

Judith got out of bed, pulled on some jeans and pulled her keys out from under her notebook on the desk. They hurried downstairs and

to Judith's Escort. She sped out and pulled into the parking lot. Mike got out and ran in, buying one of the ones that SaBean had bought him for Christmas. He got back into the car, and Judith was already rolling by the time he grabbed the handle of the car.

“You think this is the time, don't you, Mike?”

“I don't know. He's never asked anything like this from me before.”

“Well, he likes you better than any of us.”

“SaBean's not sure.”

Judith didn't say anything until they pulled into the house. Mike got out and ran inside. Judith stayed in the car. She didn't want to go in, not if it meant what she thought it meant. Still, she knew she had to go in, had to see her father. She pulled off the seatbelt and sat for another minute before opening the door and shuffling back into the house.

Once she was in the house, she saw Mike clipping the cigar and Dad sitting in front of the open window facing the Wasserman's front porch. Dennis Wasserman was sitting in the swinging chair and he and James were having a lovely conversation about catching bluefish this time of year. Judith came to Mike's side and for the first time Judith noticed that SaBean was huddled into the corner of the back room. Her make-up was running and she was staring at the back of

Dad's chair.

"Excuse me, Dennis, but I'm gonna smoke this cigar and then see if I can walk out of this chair."

"No problem, Jim. If you manage, you and Janine and the girls should come over for coffee after dinner."

"Sounds good, Dennis."

Mike handed the clipped cigar to James and held the lighter a few inches under the tip. James used his right hand to twist the cigar between his fingers, toasting the end until he drew in and the smoke exploded forth.

"I love a good Davidoff, Mike. Thanks for getting it."

Mike didn't respond, instead walking over to where SaBean was sitting on the floor.

"Jude, come over here."

"You know I hate the smell of cigars."

"Yeah, but you'll put up with it."

Judith grabbed the chair from in front of the computer and slid it next to her father. Dad put his left hand out stiffly, the hand stuck in the ASL 'B' position. She put her hand in it and James smiled.

"Jude, you mind sticking around tonight and coming with us to the Wasserman's?"

"Not at all, Dad."

James took a giant draw and exhaled. He put his right hand on the air of the chair and stood up. Judith stood with him, but he didn't need her



to support him. SaBean looked up and starting standing herself.

"I knew all I needed was a good cigar."

James spent a minute getting his balance and then started walking through the kitchen into the livingroom.

"Mrs. Morel won't be happy with you dragging that cigar through the house." Mike said, giving SaBean a shoulder to hold while they followed Mr. Morel through the dining room.

"I'm sure she'll forgive me."

James kept walking and set himself down on the couch. Mike brought SaBean upstairs so that she could get some rest.

"Why don't you go upstairs too, Jude. I'll be OK."

Judith kissed her father on the cheek and headed upstairs. James

stayed on the couch, wondering if he'd be able to get up next time...and how much hell he'd catch for smoking in the livingroom.

June 5th

SaBean was shaking in the morning, but Mike was wrapped around her. She wanted another fix, but there was no way Mike would give her enough time to shoot-up. She'd just have to suffer through.

"You awake, babe?"

SaBean rolled over towards Mike.

"I am."

Mike scooted back a bit.

"You need to stay clean the next few days, baby. You gotta for your Dad."

SaBean didn't answer, but moved close in on him again.

"I don't know what..."

She had to stop mid-lie.

"I already found your stash, SaBean. I'm not gonna get on you for it, I just got rid of it, OK."

SaBean didn't respond, she just sunk a little.

She could hear her Dad wailing in the bedroom between screaming at Janine.

"I'm not going to a fucking hospital."

James had a powerful voice, even when he was in serious pain. The fight and yelling lasted nearly an hour, but it stopped. SaBean stayed in the

bed with Mike, praying for a moment when she could manage to find where Mike had hidden her shit.

Thursday's flight back to Chicago couldn't come fast enough.

June 6th

Janine had a highball at noon. She only drank when they were with the Wassermans, but this was special. James had made it out of bed, walked downstairs and had even managed to make himself some toast before Mike came down to help him with the bacon. James took a seat in the kitchen and turned on the TV.

He was right, she finally realized that. He was going to die sooner rather than later. He had been there before, so near death that he couldn't talk, but he got better, he progressed through everything and he traveled around, spent time with his girls. This was the last trip. He might not go home with them tomorrow. He might not make it another full day, and James knew it.

All night he had kept her up talking about the little plans, about what to do with various little things. He had no debt and the will was complete for the important things, but there were the watches, the books, the tickets to the opera that wasn't for another month. Janine tried to get him to wait, but he said that there was no way that he could hold off any longer.

She poured herself another glass



of whiskey as she ran over the list in her head.

June 7th

The flight was completely uneventful. Judith had pushed Dad in a wheel chair to the plane. James hated having to ride in wheelchairs, but it allowed him to save his strength for the walk to his seat. Luckily, there were only five or six steps until he reached the front-row first class seat. Janine sat next to him, Judith was across the aisle and Mike and SaBean in the row behind them. James slept and Judith was the one who woke them right before they landed.

The drive back home was murder. Traffic made a trip that should have taken forty minutes into an hour and a half. James slept in the car, as did SaBean. Mike was sitting between

Judith and SaBean, the younger asleep on his shoulder.

"Mike?" Judith whispered.

"Yeah?"

"Are you gonna stay for the next couple of days?"

"I think I should, the way your Dad's been talking."

"SaBean needs you around."

"That's not what she thinks."

"I don't wanna go through this without someone I can talk to."

"And that's not an option with SaBean?"

"Can you think of the last time the two of us exchanged words?"

Mike paused long, as if he were trying to discover something he knew wasn't there.

"You really should try to talk to her, Judith."

Judith didn't say anything for a long interval where the limo had managed only to inch forward only a quarter mile.

"I'd just like it if you stuck around."

Mike lifted his other arm and put it around Judith. She leaned into him. He stayed alert, because if SaBean woke up and saw him with his arm around Judith, she'd kill the both of them.

June 8th

The Morels rested.

Mike woke up around seven-

thirty and walked back to his place, dropped off his dirty clothes and picked up a new batch. He ran into his Mom who was on her way to work.

"I'm gonna stay over with SaBean for another couple of days."

"He's that close?"

"I'm surprised he made the trip back here."

Mike's mom grabbed an orange juice from the fridge, walked over to Mike and kissed him on the forehead.

"Take care of her, OK?"

"I will, Mom."

Mike walked back and found nothing had changed. Mike knew that Dr. Miyazuka would be over around 3, but no one had gotten out of bed yet. It was nearly nine-thirty and the house had a feeling of stillness that felt more like three am. Mike went up to SaBean's room and found here in bed, still and calm.

She'd gotten back on.

She must have been waiting for the second he left and shot herself up. She wasn't sweating, she wasn't shaking, she was just pretending to be asleep like a child on a Christmas Card. Mike wanted to wake her up and put it to her, but this week was going to be hard enough. He climbed into her bed and put his arms around her.

"I'm sorry, Mike." SaBean said a few second after he settled in.

"I know, SaBean. I know."

June 9th.

This was a new feeling. James knew that this one was the last one and he had to get out of the study. He had chosen the room without any windows to be his study because he wanted to left with no distractions, but this was one moment when he wanted a view of the water.

He grabbed the book and forced it into his left hand and started to make his way to the front room. There was the window box he had built and the chair that he had bought for Janine on their tenth anniversary. That would do. He was having trouble, he could barely lift either leg and his right arm was functioning which he left was jammed into a 90 degree bend. He pulled out one of the phone cords as he cross the living room and he ended up having to pause and lean against one of the walls before he made it the rest of the way.

James didn't know how much time he had left, but he'd been putting off reading it for far too long. He managed to make the chair after a few minutes, and put himself down very slowly. He stared out the window for a moment and then pulled his left arm into a position where he could read. He opened the book with his right hand and settled it into left hand, which was perfect for holding the book open.

SaBean came home around four. Dad had been dead for a couple of hours. Janine had seen him and went into the kitchen, poured herself a drink. She screamed, loud, intense and heavy. Judith came downstairs, saw her father. SaBean crumbled to the floor and Judith went over to her father's side. She saw the book, and it seemed to be open to the first page. Judith pulled the book out of his hand and gave it to SaBean before Judith walked out to the kitchen where she guessed her mother was.

SaBean looked down at the book and recognized it from Christmas. She opened it and read the inscription on the first page.

To Mr. Morel,

I know you say you don't have time to read science fiction, but give this one a try

Mike.

SaBean opened the book and tried to figure out what the first line meant.

'To wound the autumnal city'

SaBean guessed that her father had liked Mike after all.



Et tu, Brute?

Art and Article By Robert Hole, Jr.

I've been trying for a couple weeks now to write this thing about family for the Drink Tank and having a dashed difficult time of it.

First, I have one. I have a large one. I am the family-branch genealogist and regularly and irregularly correspond with 9th cousins and 14th removed aunts and whatever. I have cousins popping out of the woodwork, or at least out of the internet.

Second, my family is somewhat complicated. My mother's father was young when his parents died and none of his eight brothers or sisters could take him in. He was "farmed out" to some family friends and they became his family as much as his siblings.

Before then and continuing on until today we have had a tradition of including within our family some of what has become to be called "family of choice."

The term "Dutch Uncle" means a friend of the family that is called uncle by the children of his friends. My family has Dutch uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents and siblings. Essentially we've become an old style clan - an association of people, some of whom are related and some not, but all with an included feeling.

My family chooses members carefully and only after long association. No one can apply for



membership. Membership is not granted by decree or by any specific person. I can no more declare a person a member of the family than any other single person.

Though I've been part of the process many times, I've only noticed it once in my life. It was an interesting experience. There were no trumpets, flags or fireworks. My biological brother said, "can I invite..." to some family event and our mother replied, "Of course, he's my kid too."

I say it was an interesting experience because I didn't know the person in question very well, but

knew the relationship he had with my brother and my mother. My reaction though was that from that moment I had a new brother. And it felt like he'd always been there.

Something that has been amusing to me over the years is to try to explain the relationships within the family to an outsider. Especially one who doesn't have a good grasp or their own family tradition of clan building. We all understand the relationships but we can throw others into fits when trying to explain it all.

For instance, my parents have two children, the above-mentioned brother and myself. My brother has two brothers while I have five. Three of them are married to my sisters. Through them I have 7 nieces and 3 nephews. I have a fourth nephew who is not the son of any of my brothers or sisters, but is the child of one of my sisters' sisters and is my cousin.

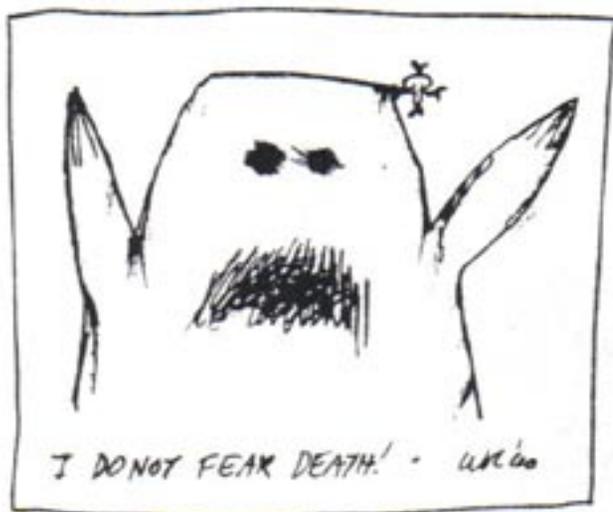
One of my brothers and his wife, my sister, are among my parents. I have nine parents, seven grandparents. There's one divorce in there leading to a step-mom, but she's only my step-mom because I call her that (she's been living with my father for about 20 years so I believe she can probably claim it pretty well by legal means too).

So, through all this, how would I define my family? Genealogically? Biologically? Choice?

In my first German language

class we were given two words meaning “you” in the singular form, “Sie” and “du”. We were taught that “Sie” is formal and should be used with strangers and those with higher status, used as the default and in most circumstances. We were taught that generally “du” was only to be used with people for whom you would jump in front of a bus. Yes, that’s the way it was put to us.

Family is “du.”



The First In Their Generations

By Judith Morel & Christopher

J. Garcia

Art by John Garcia's favourite:

William Rotsler

Johnny Garcia was the oldest son, fifty years old last August, a full

year and a week older than David, the runner-up. John Paul Garcia, as of May 2nd, 2006, was confined to a bed in a coma. His last words, as far as any one knew, were the ones he left on his son’s work answering machine at Noon on May the First.

“Hello Chris Garcia. This is John Garcia. I am calling you. You can call me back.”

And those words, the stilted delivery that should have tipped Chris off, were running through his head as he walked to the ICU phone to call for entry. He had been going there for a week, knew all the nurses by their faces but had never learned any of their names. He picked up the phone and hit 2331.

“ICU?” they all said it as if they weren’t sure.

“Chris Garcia here to see John Garcia.” Chris said, reaching out for the door.

“I’ll let you in?”

The ICU was nothing to be noted. Clean and white and built for the comfort of those in the beds, not those who picked up the phone to get in. Chris didn’t really care what it looked like, all he cared about was Room 126, where Pops was in the TrueCare Sport bed. That was one of many things he learned, the name of the bed. As he got to the small room where the TrueCare Sport bed dominated. He noted the other equipment: most of it

GE Medical or Agilent-built and loaned to Regional Medical for their use. Chris knew the companies, all battling for market share by giving away pieces to hospitals that serve predominantly ethnic communities. Chris was certain that Regional Medical was the single most ethnic hospital in the world. He couldn’t remember running into a single White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant his entire time in the place. The TVs in the lounges were all tuned to Telemundo (or Maury Povich, if the time was right) and Vietnamese and Spanish were what echoed down the halls.

Pops used to call it Mexican Brothers when it used to be called Alexian Brothers Hospital. Chris thought of that every time he parked his car and laughed a little.

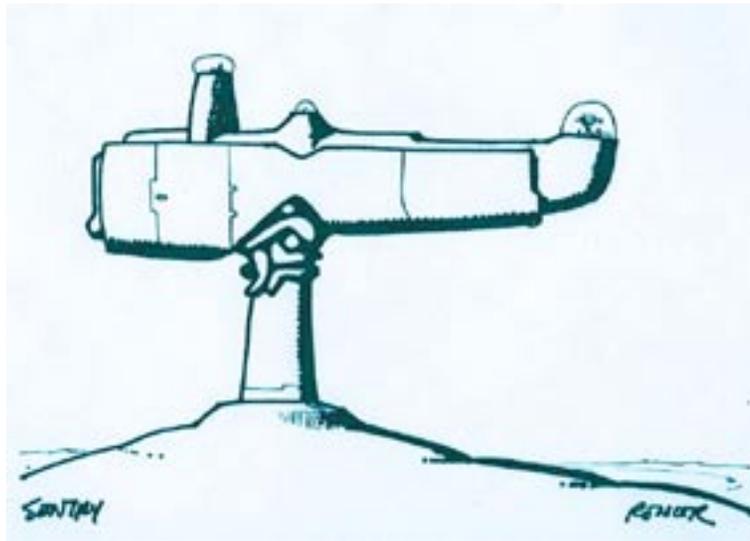
“Hey Pops.” Chris said as if he were expecting Dad to answer. Chris had done that every time he entered the room, regardless of who was in the room with him. Nurses seemed to think he was stupidly hoping that his father would reply, but they knew better. They all knew better and refused to say it. Chris pulled up his chair and just stared at the machines that were regulating his breathing and keeping tabs on his heart. Chris watched the machines and looked at Dad once in a while. While he usually sat in silence, alone save for when Nurses came in, he wondered about

whether or not Dad was thinking, or even if he knew that he was still human. He wondered if Dad really felt anything. He had been mostly unconscious, only opening his eyes for brief periods but never moving anymore than an inch or so at once.

Today, he had come to hear the doctor tell the rest of his family that they were going to kill Johnny, stop his dialysis and take out the tubes knowing that it would kill him sure as a bullet in the brain.

Chris had called the doctor on the golf course and pretty much forced him to tell him what the meeting was about. It really came down to one thing, something called an encephalopathy. The cancer had grown and cut off the ureter between the kidney and the bladder, causing the backup of material and the coma that he entered into on May 2nd. Chris knew what the doctor was going to say and was fully ready to say that no one else's opinion mattered and that what he said went as Pops had wanted.

Pops wanted Chris to be the one to make the right decision. *'You know you're the smart one, Chris.'* Dad had said, reassuring him that no matter what Chris said, it would be right. Dad never gave Chris directions as to what to do, only that when it came time to do something, it would be his choice, right or wrong.



The nurse came in. Chris thought she looked like a Lisa.

“Mr. Garcia, your family is waiting in the conference room.” She said.

Chris didn't know what to do now. He'd not seen any of them in ages, more than a decade in some cases, and this wasn't the situation Chris would have chosen for a family reunion.

When Dr. Fulik said encephalopathy, the entire family looked at Chris. Chris was the first to graduate college; in fact, he was the only one to graduate high school in an actual high school. His cousin Michael had managed to get his diploma while he was in Elmwood. Chris felt some pride when he heard that. It seemed to tell the story of his family: they may not be smart people, but they were

always willing to work, even when the cards they had to lay weren't worth shit. Chris just nodded, even though he knew that everyone expected him to know exactly what was being said. They looked back to the doctor and seemed to struggle with more words until Dad's youngest brother, Gilbert (called Bear) asked what sort of life Johnny-boy could expect if he regained consciousness.

“He'd be in a vegetative state.” Dr. Fulik said.

Grandma cried.

That sold everything. No one had cried in the room, there hadn't been any sort of strong emotional reaction on any side until Grandma, that woman who might best be described as crusty, broke, let it out.

Then the blubbering began. Naomi, Tony-boy, David, Diane, Aunt Tina, Jesse, even Grandpa all started crying, practically throwing tears onto the table of the room that was far too small to hold a family with a last name like Garcia. They weren't loud, but it was obvious.

The only one unaffected was Chris.

“People,” he said with all the emotion of a Nazi tax collector, “there's no reason to cry over science.”

That got a laugh, and then it slowly stopped as Dr. Fulik gave them options that Chris knew didn't matter.

The decision had been made; not by these people who he honestly barely knew, but by himself over the phone the night before. He knew what was going to be done, what the doctor would suggest, what the social worker would say once they were told. He didn't want to hear any of it, so he spoke up, making sure he was fully understood without having to get the tiniest bit emotional.

"I know there's no way he's getting better people. No choice here; we gotta let him die."

There must have been a rush of air that took everything out of the room. It was a vacuum, silent and still. There was no crying, no talking, nothing. For a minute, everyone seemed to pause. Chris knew that the one word you never said in a hospital was 'die'. People passed, they went, they reached their end, they were made comfortable so that they could go with dignity. It was all bullshit. People died. They became dead. Chris always believed in calling things what they were and the face of the social worker seemed to go from happily Jamaican to ashy.

"I'm not sure you understand..." "No, I fully understand." Chris said, interrupting and still managing to sound polite "My dad's going to die because I'm saying that you're going to take him off the machines and stop the dialysis. There it is, his death



sentence, he's going to die."

Somehow everyone needed it, they needed the one who they all knew was the 'smart one' to tell it to them in the plain terms that they could get their head around. The doctor seemed to want to say something, to make Chris understand that what he had done was the wrong way to go about it, that they were giving him his dignity, but the twitching of the goatee also told him that he couldn't say anything. The vacuum slowly faded, finally broken by the doctor.

"Are you all certain that's what you want?" Dr. Fulik asked.

"It's what's going to happen. Dad always wanted me to be the one to make the call if it came to it, and I'm doing it."

The doctor just nodded and the

social worker stood up and they both left.

The Garcia family: Chris' four uncles, his aunt, his two great aunts, his cousins Jesse and Reyna, and a couple of white girls who married Chris' uncles. They were all there and as soon as the door closed and the interlopers who weren't related were gone, the real Mexican reaction began. Loud crying, heavy sobs, tears that couldn't stop. Chris couldn't join them, he just didn't have that in him for the situation. He had known Dad was dying for three years, and though calling it relief would be the wrong idea, he never felt the need to cry. He always skipped denial and anger and bargaining; Chris went straight to acceptance, and that was the hardest pill to swallow. Chris couldn't be in there, he had something to do down the hall.

"Jesse," Chris grabbed the sleeve of his cousin "come with me."

Jesse wiped his face and looked at Chris as if he was having enough trouble with his own grief to deal with the idea of walking anywhere. Chris put his hand on his shoulder and Jesse slowly got up. They walked across the ICU and found themselves in room 126. Dad hadn't moved at all since Chris left almost half-an-hour ago.

"Hey Pops." Chris called.

Jesse was crying again, but he

held much more back.

“Hey Uncle John.” Jesse said.

Chris pulled the chair he had spent many hours in up near Dad’s head and stared for a moment. Jess went to the other side and looked at Chris.

“Dad, I have to let you go. We’re going to pull the plug on Friday, give folks time to visit say goodbye. One last time to see you before you die, Dad.” Chris said. Jesse went whiter than his Anglo cousin was on a regular basis. Chris looked at him, knowing that he wanted to ask what the fuck Chris was doing.

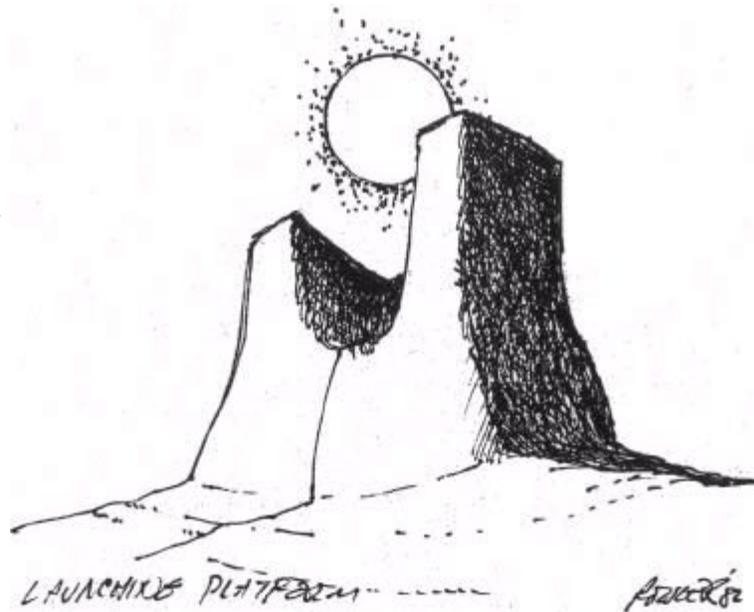
“He’s got the right to know, Jesse.”

Jesse started crying again and hugged his uncle. Chris knew that if Johnny Garcia were able to wake up, he’d do it the moment he found out that they were leaving him for dead. It would have really pissed the big guy off.

There was no chance: if Dad couldn’t come up for that, he was going to die. Chris kissed him on the forehead; a semi-farewell gesture.

“Crittty,” Aunt Naomi, the youngest, Dad’s only sister who he always called *Witchy-poo* and who had done her days in lock-up, “we’re all so proud of you. Your Dad most of all.”

The last time he had seen her



was on one of the few times in the 1990s when she wasn’t in jail. They were both at the Fourth of July in Downtown San Jose. Chris introduced her to his Armenian girlfriend and she reintroduced him to her kids. He hadn’t seen Jesse nor Reyna since. Reyna had come and Chris didn’t recognise her almost ten years older. She was sitting next to her mother, her cheeks wet, and she was nodding.

“How old are you Reyna?” Chris asked.

“Sixteen.”

“And you’ve got a kid?”

“Yeah, she’s a year old. A little brat named Diana.”

“But my little baby is so cute.” Naomi cooed.

Chris smiled.

“Just like Reyna. She was so

adorable.”

“Yeah, and look what happened.” Jesse said.

Reyna threw her snotty Kleenex at Jesse and the family laughed. Entirely inappropriate at a time like this, but that was the Garcia family. Reyna was the cutest baby Chris had ever seen when she was little...or at least when she wasn’t screaming and crying and latching on to any available appendage with her tight little baby fingernails.

“You know, I’m thirty-one, and somehow I haven’t managed to have a kid.”

Reyna gave a sarcastic smile that Chris recognized as one of Naomi’s circa 1980.

“Well, we’re not all infertile.” She responded.

The crowd reacted like any audience should when a solid snap was laid down. Chris smiled and the family laughed.

“Let’s go and get some lunch.” Grandma said. She had yet to wipe her face and the trail of tears still showed.

“You know, I bet they’re wondering what all these brown people are doing in the cafeteria.” Tony-boy said.

“And I bet they think that the guy with the JewFro either paid for

everyone or that y'all kidnapped me." Chris responded. Only the Garcia clan would attempt this kind of humor at the volume they played at.

They'd pushed five tables together and were eating in all there chaotic goodness. Chris looked up and down the table and realized that every stereotype that you could think of for Mexicans dining were true and being played out in the cafeteria where his Dad was dying a floor above. There were kids running around, people leaving early because they had to make a court-date, people leaving to go outside and smoke, calling out to have their kids bring them their Coke. Chris laughed, not only because of all the hysteria going on around, the kind of confusion and noise that would make most people ask to be moved if they were at a restaurant, but he was sitting in Dad's seat.

That would take some getting used to. Dad was always the focus of attention...unless Chris was around. He was the one who entertained and no one could compete with him for funny or smart. But Dad always got that seat. If the Garcia Christmas Party had been the last supper, Johnny would be sitting in the Jesus seat. Chris would be running around like the whirlwind that Leonardo could never have painted.

"Crittty," only Naomi called him that, and this time from the courtyard,



"come out here."

Chris got up, just like Dad would have if one of them had called him to where they were smoking. Chris made it outside and took a seat at the small umbrellaed table where Jesse, Naomi and Reyna were sitting, their own little family reunion.

"I've been a bad aunt, Critty." Naomi said.

"It's OK, I've been a bad Garcia all around." Chris answered.

And it was true. He hadn't seen any of them for years. He missed Christmases and until Dad went under, he didn't have any of their phone numbers. He had forgotten about them almost, though he often used one Uncle or another to fill a punchline role in a joke he told around the museum lunch table. He had missed his cousins growing up, and he knew that it had been hard for them. The last time he saw Reyna, she was maybe six. When Dad had come down with cancer, Chris' sister Bailey and Jesse visited Dad and Chris saw them then.

"It's OK," Reyna said, "You were too busy being better than the rest of us."

Chris could tell she didn't mean it as a joke. Jesse and Naomi were nodding too.

"I'm gonna try harder, Chris." Naomi said.

Chris could feel something odd going on behind him and he looked over and saw Grandma obviously motioning for Naomi to come inside. She had a series of waves and signals far more complex than semaphore and even after so many years Chris could read it loud and clear. She got up and headed inside, leaving the cousins alone.

"So, you got a photo of the kid?" Chris asked Reyna.

She pulled out a phone and

handed it to him. On the screen, behind the menu options, was a pudgy baby who might have passed for the label on a Mexican Gerber jar.

“She is a butter-ball. She looks just like you.” Chris said, handing her phone back.

“Yeah, and look.” Reyna said, turning around.

Lifting her shirt back, she exposed a tattoo that covered the area between the shoulderblades. In the script that his family had always favored read the words Diana, with scroll work all around it.

“You know, the size of that tattoo means you can’t have too many more.” Chris said.

“Yeah, that’s sorta why I did it. I don’t wanna be forty and have a kid at home. I’m getting’ ‘em done young. I’ll have one more, maybe when I turn 18.” She answered.

Chris laughed.

“And what about you, Jesse? You got any little bastards running around?”

Jesse shook his head.

“I’m not that dumb.” He said.

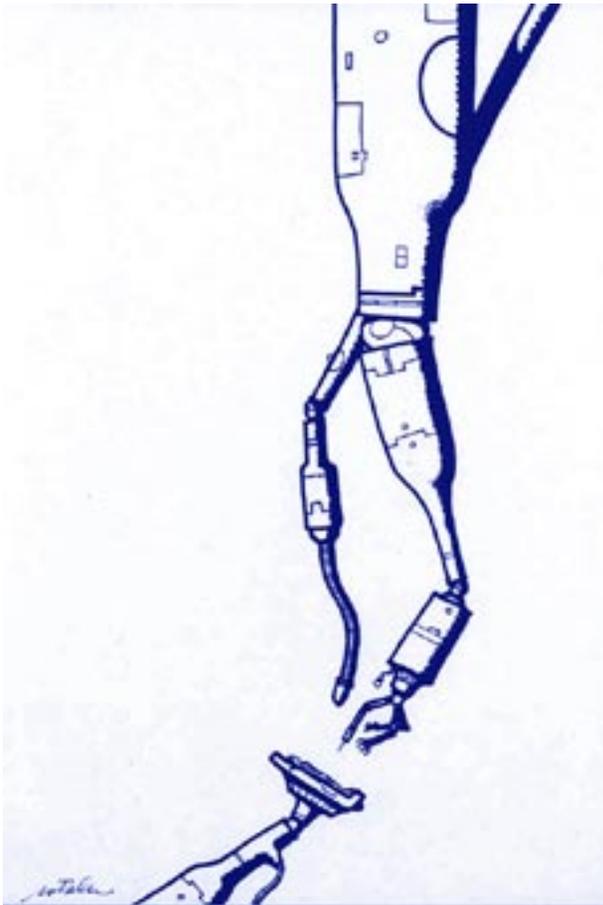
“Yeah, he’s too busy doing stupid shit and getting arrested.” Reyna said.

Chris gave the judgment face to his cousin.

“So, you wanna tell me about it?”

“Me and my homeboys went and bought a couple of forties and...”

Chris turned to Reyna.



“All of the great epic poems of the past open with ‘Me and my homeboys bought forties.’” He said.

“Either that or a dime bag of cheap green.” She answered.

They all laughed. Grandma was now calling everyone in with nothing more than a frantic flailing of the non-paralyzed side of her body.

“Put the cigarettes out, we gotta go in.”

Jesse and Reyna pushed them onto the stone benches and followed Chris in, wondering what was gonna

happen next.

The family had exchanged phone numbers and were working on getting things settled as to the cremation and memorial. They all said they’d pitch in. David had said that he’d put in everything that Chris couldn’t collect from the family. David made big money, an electrician with both high tech and government contracts. He billed 87 bucks an hour for his personal time and had a waiting list of almost a year. He could afford it, and Chris knew that David was biggest success in the family. Though they all held Chris up as the hoped-for example, and Johnny was the one everyone love and respected the most, David was the one with the money, and that had impact.

“We’re gonna come back on Friday, try and call of Polo and Lola’s kids, get them to come and see Johnny.” Grandpa said in his own slow way. Grandpa was Dad’s favorite, and even in those years when John wasn’t talking to Grandma (such as the year following Bailey’s birth when she refused to allow Johnny to bring her to Christmas) he’d still call Grandpa and tell him what was going on.

“I’ll be here. I’ll stop by for a bit tomorrow, but I’ll be here until Pops dies on Friday.”

Everyone did a nod that Chris figured meant that he shouldn’t have

put it like that.

Chris went back into the ICU to see Dad again. He wasn't sure why, but he needed to see Pops one more time. When he got there, his nurse was standing in front of his room. With Dad's condition constant as a dying wind, they seldom were in there with him.

"Hello, Mr. Garcia," she said, "the doctor told me about your plans. I'm so sorry."

"It happens, but I do have a question, and not to be too blunt, but how do we go about scheduling Dad's death? I mean, is there a form or something that'll say when?"

The look he got quickly told him that humor featuring the word death was not appreciated.

"We'll take him off around 9 or so on Friday morning. There's an order that things happen and it usually happens around 9." She said, the curtness in her voice almost ringing.

Chris walked into the room and closed the door.

"Well Pops, you sure chose a hospital with no sense of humor."

It was 9 on Friday and Chris walked into room 126 where a raft of family had already gathered. Chris' oldest cousin, Maria Maldonado, had shown up with Naomi. Jesse was there,



looking tired, and so were a couple of people Chris knew were Dad's cousins. Chris went around and gave hugs.

"Yeah, you look like Johnny's kid." One of the cousins said.

"Well, at least I didn't get the ears." Chris said back, bringing a laugh from the peanut gallery.

This was the end for John P. Garcia and Chris wasn't about to let the man go with a bunch of crying relatives.

"Hey Pops," Chris said, "don't bother getting up. We're not fancy here."

Dad didn't laugh, which was probably the right reaction.

The doctors came in, checked everything and looked for the one who might be John's son. They chose Jesse.

"You've authorized us to take off the life support?" the tech said.

"Yes, I have." Chris answered.

"OK. We'll get to work." And over the next five minutes, every tube was

removed from his mouth, leaving it hanging open, slack.

There was no going back, but it's not a right away thing. For three hours, cousins came and went, most of whom Chris didn't remember. Little Bobby, Uncle Bobby's son who was in his early forties, showed up. Dad had always liked him. Becky showed up, and being the most solid religious one in the entire family, she was the one who most tried to keep the ceremony respectable, but after she kissed his forehead and left a large lipstick smear, Chris said "Excuse me, I don't want my father dying looking like he just got back from Ash Wednesday services."

She laughed, and the room eased.

Elsa showed up, dressed as if she were going out to a club, as she always was. She sat down and watched Johnny's monitor as close as Chris had just every day for the last ten days. She was only a few days older than Johnny and she never let him forget it.

While people came and went, a strange surprise happened: the arrival of Dad's girlfriend, Cyndi. John had spent a fair amount of the 1990s homeless and most of the last ten years of his life opening up his apartments to various other people who he never should have invited in. Cyndi had latched on and he really did love her, but she used him like the heroin that had landed her in various

State facilities.

“I know her.” Naomi whispered to Chris.

“She’s an addict, I know.” Chris responded.

“And a prostitute.” She whispered in Spanish.

Chris wasn’t going to tell her to leave, mostly because he knew she’d get uncomfortable on her own and walk out. Chris knew that she was a junkie, and he had known a few of those in his lifetime, but he also knew that when she wasn’t stealing from him or Bailey, she made Dad happy.

Her goodbyes were brief.

Lunchtime rolled in and everyone left save for Chris and a trio of cousins. Chris may never had met any of them, though they all worked for the City of San Jose, just steps from where his Mom had worked for two full decades. They had paid respects to Dad by talking to him, telling him to remember the good times they’d had as kids, playing football and ransacking the Garcia household. They sat down after a few minutes and started talking about work, about what everyone was doing, and about the other cousins. Chris got caught up and didn’t look at the monitor for more than five minutes. When he finally looked at it, he could tell that there was hardly any action at all.

“You know what? I think it’s happening.” He said.



The cousins and Chris all came close, looking into the open eyes of Johnny as he stared at the same spot on the ceiling he had whenever he opened his eyes. He took a small breath, then another. Long pause and a gulp.

That was all.

Chris looked and saw that all the action had stopped. He walked out into the Nurse’s station and found the kindly Southern nurse.

“I think he’s dead now.”

“He is. I saw it on the monitor. Y’all can have as much time as you like to say goodbye.”

Chris went back in and everyone was talking. Jesse and Naomi and Maria came back. Elsa and Becky returned a minute or so later. Everyone gathered around and talked, told stories about Johnny, about Grandpa, about football games and Uncle Polo and the way Christopher used to sing Grandma Got Run-Over by a Reindeer every Christmas, about Johnny cooking pancakes for everyone when he was eight, about Becky bailing him out pretending to be his wife, about John once pretending to be an undercover cop to avoid getting a DWI and actually getting away with it. For nearly three hours, they sat and talked and talked. Chris took a seat next to Elsa.

“Maybe it’s just me, but we’re sitting here clucking like hens while there’s a dead guy in the room.”

“Yeah, we probably should have covered him up.” She said.

“No let him be. Dad always hated it when I’d put the covers over his head in the morning.”

Everyone had a little laugh, and over the next hour, everyone left. Chris left first. He’d seen his Dad on his best days, and his worst days, and this one happened to be one those that fell exactly in between.



*Another Family Article and Photos from
Robert Hale*

Yesterday was the funeral of my last grandparent. She was the mother of my stepmother.

She died back in January, and I attended her memorial service, but it's taken awhile to do the logistics of her cremation and organize her burial service.

There were a couple hundred people at her memorial service from all over the country.

There were eight of us at the burial. This was intended; only 12 were invited to the burial. One of those died a couple weeks ago; one was the mother of the dead lady (and in bad health, so couldn't have done it anyway). One couldn't make it because of time conflicts.

My grandmother was a 3rd generation Berkeley resident. She went to UCB in the 1930s. Was married and

widowed in the 30s-40s, married again in the early fifties, had a daughter and was widowed again about ten years ago. About three years ago she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and 18 months ago disappeared into herself.

During her college days she would hang out at a local bar "Hinky-Dinks", which later changed its name to Trader Vic's, now a world-wide chain (and home of the original Mai Tai). Though no longer in Berkeley,



last night we went to the nearest TV's for after-service dinner. I'd never been there before, and it was very cool. If you've never been there, it's Polynesian themed and it's kitschy in a mid-20th century way, but excellent food and a pleasant atmosphere.

There were lots of memories shared - not just of my grandmother, but also of our own personal histories. That might seem a bit strange, but it really wasn't. She was extremely interested in other people and a hugely gracious lady (the phrase most attached to her name). Even though it was supposedly all about her, she would have insisted that the spotlight be shared. She might have talked about herself some, and allowed others to share memories of her, but she would make sure that everyone was comfortable and that everyone got a chance to talk, and everyone had questions directed toward them.

My relationship with her was limited, almost exclusively visits at holidays. And during those times she was more a friend than a grandmother. Despite that, I cared a lot about and for her. I learned a lot about her, and from her. I have two special memories of her.

The first took place a few years ago at Christmas. The family was chatting and I dropped some off-hand remark about the nature of the universe. I think I said something about looking far enough to see the back of your head. In her gracious way she pounced on that. She wanted to know all about the universe, relativity and space-time. She was fascinated, asked probing questions and finally grasped the concepts (whether she

chose to believe or not I'll never know, but she got the ideas).

My second memory of her is another Christmas, the last I spent with her. It was the first time we'd had the holiday at her house. Her place was small so we'd held it elsewhere before. She'd become essentially wheelchair bound, so we went to her rather than making her travel. She'd begun having memory problems, and I had been told about them and what to expect. I detected no such problems the whole evening, however. She was present and engaged throughout the evening, following and participating in the lively conversation that usually happens around the table in our family. That was great, but the thing that told me a lot about her that evening was when she made an offhand comment about the dishes all matching. She was very pleased with that.

I've been told she was a stickler for such things and we (I helped with the table-setting) had gone to great pains to make sure her tableware all matched and similar niceties of being a hostess. I was very happy that we made her happy that evening.

Especially since it was the last time I saw her, until yesterday.

