

Writing Workshop Entries

By Janet Bratter

1/6/08

1. A Favorite Food

Whenever my mother baked pies I'd stand in the kitchen and wait for her to make the pie dough.

She'd sprinkle flour on the waked paper and roll out the dough till it was very thin and flat. First she'd line the pie plate with one layer of crust. Next she'd pour in the filling, usually spiced apples that she had peeled and cut into wedges. She mixed in sugar and cinnamon then poured it in.

When the pie plate was full she carefully picked up the second rolled out dough ball and placed it gently on top of the apple filling.

Next came the part I liked best. With a butter knife she cut off the uneven edges of the dough from around the pie plate and gave it to me to play with. While she was pressing the edges down on the pie plate with a fork and poking a few holes into the top, I was rolling out my little pieces of left-over crust. She showed me how to make crispy rolled up cookies by adding jelly and powdered sugar to the dough then placing everything on a cookie sheet to bake along with the pies.

Everything in the kitchen smelled so delicious and warm while the pie bubbled over in the oven and my little cookies got brown and crispy.

2. Gram:

We called my mother's mother Gram. My earliest memory of Gram was when she came down to Florida from New Jersey to take care of my two brothers and me because our mother was going to New Jersey to have her teeth removed. Mother was always concerned with her looks and being glamorous, so having to get false teeth was no doubt very upsetting to her.

Gram was a large woman with long gray hair that turned white as she got older. She always pinned up her hair and dressed in her Sunday best to go to church.

One night after dinner she was standing at the kitchen sink washing up all of the dinner dishes. My older brother, Barry and I had plastic dart guns and we were mischievous. We sneaked out of our bedrooms with our weapons and came up behind Gram. Then we shot the plastic suction cup darts at the back of her legs.

It surprised us that she got angry and turned and chased us. But we ran into our room and hid under the covers where everyone knows nothing can harm you.

1/13/09

Who I'd like to meet in history or eras I'd like to have seen.

1. So many choices in history to choose and it reminds me that one life is so short. Narrowing it down is just too difficult so I'll pick a couple.

I'd like to have been around to see the planet when dinosaurs were the dominant species. I wouldn't want to have bee lunch for some tyrannosaurus, so to have floated in a hot air balloon during a battle between a pair of those huge beasts would be fascinating.

I'd also like to have met Greta Garbo on the set of one of her films though seeing her in color and not the silver screen might not have been as romantic as just seeing the films of that era.

2. Whenever I've heard that the Dalai Lama was coming to my hometown of Washington, DC I'd feel a chill run down my spine. Here is a person who is the embodiment of peaceful conflict resolution who practices his Buddhist principles and always seems able to smile in the face of adversity.

I was fortunate to meet him several years ago when he came to NC as a guest of Jesse Helms. A friend and I drove to the campus of Helm's alma mater where the Dalai Lama was to speak. We couldn't get into the auditorium because we had no tickets. But we decided that failure was not an option.

I said that he had to have lunch somewhere on campus after his talk so we asked around and found out where.

When we got there the police told us to stay far away from the front door to the dining hall. They were shocked and surprised when he stepped out of the lim and looked around before going inside for lunch.

He saw us and walked through the police line. You could see the look of confusion on the cops' faces. When he walked up to me and took my hands in his, looked deep into my green eyes with his brown and said "pray for us".

I'll always remember that moment.

3. Name

I am one of three siblings. I never asked how our parents decided on our names. As far as I know I wasn't named after anyone in the family, nor were my

two brothers, Roger and Barry. I do think they chose names that are somewhat uncommon. I wish I had asked.

My last name, Bratter, caused me trouble in the first grade when one of the other kids made fun of me calling me Brat. Since then I've never really liked it. As women, most of us have the option of changing our last names, sometimes more than once.

4. Scared

I don't remember how old I was when I saw "Psycho". There were several places in that movie that were very scary. The scene when the audience first sees the dead, dried out corpse of the mother hidden in the basement and when the investigator climbs the stairs only to be attacked by the crazy son wielding a big kitchen knife are two moments that come to mind, both accompanied by very effective, scary music.

But for me and millions of others the scariest scene in Psycho is when Norman Bates attacks the woman in the shower. It was a black and white film so wasn't as gory as if it were in color. I learned years later that the blood running down the drain was actually news print. Hitchcock used rolled up newspapers to achieve the effect.

For years after seeing Psycho I wouldn't take a shower unless one eye was always open.

2/3/09

1. Since I'd been in hurricanes before I knew that this was just a lull in the storm, the eye of temporary calm. I wanted to get out of my flimsy shelter and cross the yard to my neighbors' house where I'd be safer. But by the time I was about half way there the winds were starting up again and very soon I was forced to lean into the strong wind that was pushing me back. Since it was dark I had no way of knowing what might be flying around me. But by that time I had no choice but to keep moving forward. I got to the door to my neighbors' house just in time to hear the roar of the wind as it ripped off layers of my roof. I had gotten out just in time Hurricane Fran was busy that night.

2. As far back as I can remember I've been involved with music. Knowing that my mother was a singer in the big band era probably contributed to my love of music. I always wanted musical instruments at the holidays. Our family couldn't afford to get piano lessons for me but I did get a guitar for high-school graduation. I spent that summer teaching myself to play it. I've had many guitars since, electric, acoustic and classical. Right now I play mostly on a dobro which is the precursor of the electric guitar.

In writing the 200 or so songs I've composed I've used guitars. I can play a lot of other instruments including banjo, drums, flutes and harmonicas. But guitars will probably always be my favorite.

2/17/09

1. My childhood fear is connected to a repetitive dream I used to have. I'd be walking down a city street with my parents but when we'd get to the intersection they crossed the street and get ahead of me. I tried to catch up but couldn't. They got further and further ahead and my legs felt heavier and heavier as if I was walking thru molasses. This was clearly a fear of abandonment. It's the only dream I've ever had that repeated.

2. When I was about 13 I played on the high-school basketball team. We had to wear high-top tennis shoes and I thought my feet looked like big boats or Bozo the clown feet. I'm sorry little feet. You have carried me all my life and I have probably not appreciated all the work you've done and all the miles you have carried me. Later in life I have lived with two massage therapists. I became interested in foot massage and have made feet my special focus. When I lived in Miami I was friends with a Unitarian minister who arranged to help the homeless by getting new shoes for everyone who came to the event. We washed everyone's feet and I think that made these people feel appreciated. I know I appreciated the opportunity to do a kind thing for them.

2/24/09 Mardi gras

1. Laissez Bon Temps Roulez

It's Mardi Gras. The trash is piling up on St. Charles Avenue and all over town. One of the big questions in NO every Mardi Gras is to see how many tons of trash will be produced by the crowds. As I watched the festivities via the live web cams I've been feeling a nostalgia for really being there. It's been about 10 years since I last set foot in New Orleans. And it's true what the song says, "do you know what it means to miss New Orleans?"

As I texted my Texas girlfriend who I met in NO many years ago, I'm not in the Big Easy now but maybe next year. Laissez Bon Temps Roulez, Let the good times roll.

3/17/09

Superstition

1 Mostly I have always been a rational person. I look at superstition and a lot of religious beliefs as being irrational and superstitious. As a result I don't buy lottery tickets or operate on the basis of "luck".

These beliefs are the remnants of more primitive times and the failure of education to enlighten people to scientific realities. At times excessive belief in superstition leads to or is manifested as mental illness. I see this with several of the women who are staying at the womens' shelter. Desperate times and desperate people will grasp onto whatever helps them gain some security. That's what superstition and religion fulfills, especially for the poor and the poorly educated.

2. Color Green

That green would be the color associated with Ireland is understandable. If you've ever been there and seen the vast expanses of green fields and green mountainsides all surrounded by the blue-green ocean you'd understand.

Green being associated with springtime is easily understandable too since the leaves and grasses all return as the chlorophyll is reborn from the process of photosynthesis.

If I forget to wear green on St. Patrick's day I can always tell you I'm covered because I have green eyes.