

memories

Posted on Feb 26, Posted by [Lois Lowry](#) Category [Uncategorized](#)

I am writing this on a Tuesday. On Saturday night I had dinner with Martin and my three children...grown-ups now, not at all children anymore...and one daughter-in-law (the other daughter-in-law, alas, too far away, in Germany) to celebrate (three weeks early, because of everyone's schedules) my 70th birthday. I had asked them for PLEASE NO GIFTS and they graciously consented, but they brought poems and memories. And of course memories are the greatest gifts of all.

Here is a memory, from my older daughter:

When I was four, I asked to go outside in the night, in the dark, with no expectation of being allowed. But Mom said Yes, to my shock. I went out into the side yard, outside of the kitchen porch, into the night, alone, for the first time in my life. There was a light, but it was dark in the sky and a mild summer night, and I stayed out there by myself in my summer shorts and top, and crouched in the driveway, ecstatic, overwhelmed with joy and surprise that my mom had said "OK" when I asked to go outside, AT NIGHT.

I don't remember that moment, really. The summer that she was four, I had two younger children already and was pregnant with my fourth. So there was much on my mind and many distractions. But I am quite sure I would have watched her from the window and marveled at her courage and independence...as in fact I have done all her life.

The next day, after the birthday party, the kids all went off their separate ways: two to Maine, one to New Hampshire; and my older daughter to the airport to fly home to San Francisco. But she called in the evening to say that her plane had been cancelled, she was in an airport hotel and they would fly her first class the next day...today.

I don't know if I have ever mentioned on this blog that I frequently start the day by reading poetry. This morning I picked up the book of poems called THIRST by Mary Oliver. By chance

(is anything ever really *chance*?) I turned to a page at random and began to read a poem called, ironically, "Logan International"...the same airport at which my daughter had been stranded by iffy weather. It begins:

*In the city called Wait,
also known as the airport,
you might think about your life—
there is not much else to do.
For one thing,
there is too much luggage,
and you're truly lugging it—
you, and, it seems, everyone.*

The poem goes on, and like all of Mary Oliver's work it is evocative and splendid. But it would likely violate copyright law to publish it here in its entirety. And in any case, it is enough to ponder the wonderful metaphor of luggage...what we carry around, drag around, what we pack and overpack and unpack and label and lose and find again and need and loathe.

And to ponder also the luggage of our childhood memories: weightless as scented sachets, they sweeten the heavy load of day-to-day obligations.

from my younger daughter:

*The dark dirt of our rock garden
You handing me little shovels
And velvety plants ("gently, gently")
To place for you, encouraging me,
Under the maple tree,
In the shadows,
To help a life continue
Away from its nursery package...*

I am now in possession of a folder of their offerings...many more words than the few I have quoted...and it is a treasure. Not bad, approaching 70!



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