

Final Goodbyes

By Christine B.

As the plane took off down the runway Megan knew it would be the last time she would see her home town, and what remained of her family and friends who still lived there. She had not told anyone about her illness. It was important to Megan that her last visit with them be free of anguish. No one could do anything about her eventual demise anyway, so why bring it up? She also wanted to avoid their insistence that she move back to Ohio. She wanted to spend her last days in California. That state had been her home for the past ten years; and after returning from this trip, she never wanted to leave it again.

Once her jet lifted off the tarmac, Megan made a special effort to pay close attention to the ever-miniaturizing landscape of the freeways and housetops surrounding the Cleveland Hopkins Airport. For the first time since she had left her doctor's office, Megan felt depressed. As the air pressure in the plane's cabin tightened around her chest, she thought she could actually feel the cancer coursing through her body, destroying hundreds of her healthy cells every second.

Megan closed her eyes when her plane turned toward a setting sun it would chase across the country. She had not thought one month would be long enough to say goodbye. As it turned out, it was. Once above the clouds, Meg drifted into a light sleep and barely heard the stewardess reviewing the safety rules. Meg had heard them many times before; besides, she thought, what did it matter to her if the plane went down? That eventuality would merely curtail her upcoming ordeal. "That would be a good thing," she whispered.

As Megan fell deeper into sleep she saw slices of her life pass before her. As a toddler, she remembered standing on shaky legs, holding onto her mother's desk and looking out through

the front screen door at a world she could not yet comprehend. There were memories of a family camping trip they took when her bother, Eddie, was a newborn, making Megan only two.

As her jet flew over Indiana, Megan recalled the little house in Middleburgh Heights where her family lived when she was six. There had been only one bathroom in the house; and it was situated in a section of the basement with no door. A commode stood a few feet from a showerhead, which protruded singularly from one wall. When she recalled the huge rats running across the foundation, Meg shuttered in her sleep. The rats also inhabited the small home; and they didn't appreciate being disturbed by anyone having to use the bathroom facilities. Was it any wonder that of all living things, Megan had hated rats most?

Kindergarten was a bizarre experience for young Megan. It was held at the school a few houses away from hers. She remembered lots of kids in a large room with a high ceiling. A sizeable window was positioned above the main floor and anyone sitting behind it could observe the children in class. The children could not see through the window, but were told that their parents could see them. It helped to maintain order in the classroom. Her mind seemed like a home movie as she saw herself taking a walk with her class one day after Halloween. A prankster had put a mailbox on the roof of one of the homes they passed. Even after all these years, Megan still thought that was strange. The most important thing that happened the year she was in Kindergarten had been the birth of her sister, Carol. Meg vividly recalled her mother returning from the hospital with the baby, and how much she loved her sister immediately. Other incidents from her sixth year flashed past Megan's unconscious. The memory that haunted her most was that of her brother's accident. Megan could still see the blood covering her brother's face when the handlebar of his tricycle lodged into the top of his

head. After all these years, she still blamed herself for the accident. He tripped while struggling to bring his tricycle down from the front porch. He had asked her to help, but she refused, and he had gotten badly hurt. Megan wondered how her brother had survived his youth, because he had been a walking accident until he was over forty.

Scenes from her life continued to display themselves to Megan as she slept on. Memories spanning sixty years with three different husbands danced through her unconscious mind. By the time her jet crossed the Nevada border into California, Megan was recalling her most recent memories of her trip home to visit her family one last time. The captain's announcement indicating they were about to land brought her back to her painful present.

Megan waited patiently until everyone else had left the plane before she got up and made her way to the exit. She had always been the last to leave the airplane when flying, never understanding why most people rushed to depart in mass, only to have to wait for their luggage at the baggage claim area. The stewardess smiled and thanked her for flying with their airline. Megan replied, "Thank you for the pleasant trip." She meant it, although the stewardess had little to do with the reminisctic voyage Megan experienced while flying over the country.

That evening, while Megan sat alone in her family room watching a favorite television program, she smiled at the irony of life. How important it had been to her to watch this program faithfully every week; and now that she had no idea how many more episodes she would be able to observe, she could care less about watching it. Not much seemed that important to her any longer. Six months ago, after the doctors told her there was no cure for her type of cancer, Megan had compiled a list of things she had to accomplish before her death. Flying back to Cleveland to say goodbye to her family was the last thing on her list; and Megan decided that she was now ready to leave when her time came.

An hour later Megan was awakened from a nap by her heart pounding violently in her chest. She took in slow ragged breathes in an effort to clam her fluttering heart. Her feet felt numb and from a place outside her body she felt a sharp debilitating pain curse though her left shoulder and down her arm.

When the pain finally subsided, she got up from the couch and moved toward the glass doors to her garden. As she surveyed the beauty of her flowering plants Megan recalled the years of effort that had gone into the development and maintenance of her garden. She wondered if any of her cherished floras would survive her death. There would be no one to care if the plants were watered, and the beds were weeded after she left. What remained of her family was in Ohio, and she knew they would not be flying across the country to tend her garden. Her family would most likely sell her home. That thought left Megan sad. Her husband and she had spent many wonderful years together in their Northern California home, until he passed away a few years before. She said a silent prayer that whoever took over ownership of her home would cherish her garden as much as she had.

As Megan moved through the sliding door and down the pine needle paths of her garden, she silently wept. Of everything she knew she would have to leave behind, leaving her garden would be the most painful. So, although the urge to move on was strong, Megan lingered there in her garden for as long as she could.

Megan remained in her garden long after her body was found, and was flown back to Cleveland for burial. After the autopsy, her family also commented on the irony of life when they were told Megan had terminal cancer, and that she had ended up dying of a heart attack. Although Megan had expressed wishes to be buried in California, she found it didn't really

matter where they buried her body. Her soul remained in her garden. The garden was Megan's Heaven; and she saw no reason to look further for paradise.

Megan's spirit nurtured her flowers even after her home was sold to Nichole, a young woman who viewed the garden as a life-long dream. Nichole cherished the garden as much as Megan had. She sometimes sensed Megan in the garden as she worked there, and carried on lengthy conversations with Megan's essence. Megan contributed to the conversations by instilling her spirit into the thriving plants. The garden flourished, and so did Megan's soul. Megan's essence still existed in her garden even after Nichole grew as old as Megan had been when she had her fatal heart attack, twenty years earlier.

One morning while working in the garden, Nichole felt a debilitating pain in her chest. As she fell to the ground, she hit her head on a rock that bordered one of the planting beds, and fell unconscious. Megan rushed to Nichole's side and helped her up. Holding on to Nichole's hand, Megan guided her to the bright light that appeared in the midst of the garden. Before entering the light, both woman looked back and said a final goodbye to their garden. They would always be a part of the living things growing there. As that thought passed their psyches, both ladies entered the light, and returned Home.