

OCTOBER

The last five years I have felt somber and a sort of Melancholmy sets in during the last week of October. If I write about my feeling or talk to someone about this sadness, I feel better. The reason, I realize, is because six years ago I made the solitary journey home to my father's funeral on October 31st.

This was not the first death in our family, but it was the first one without my father to say comforting words. "Show respect for the dead, but take care of the living", had been his advice when my mother died. I could not wish him back because he had lived alone twenty-six years and had been incurably ill the last three. His disease was hardening of the arteries and he had spent a few months in a mental institution, the last two years in a nursing home. During these three years he had not been able to recognize his family. So, we had really lost contact with him during all this time.

My sisters had quarreled over the care of my father. There were three of them and the arguments split them, two against one. (I had succeeded in keeping out of this family row---maybe because I was sixteen hundred miles away). The ^{odd} ~~off~~ one, Martha had called me on Tuesday evening to say that Papa was worse and I should call my sister Mary, so that she could start making some funeral arrangements.

Also, I should call my brother whom Martha didn't think would come to the funeral. I did not ask Martha if she would be there. She had told me, during a stopover from Europe, the previous summer, that she would not come to Papa's funeral because of the other sisters, Mary and Fay. I had hoped she would change her mind.

I made the calls. Mary had not heard from the nursing home that day. Ernest was very busy and was not sure he could make the trip from California. I left it up to Mary to notify Fay.

At eleven o'clock that same evening a call came from Mary. "Papa has expired", she said. That word expired was so cold, so inferior to died. I sat in a chair after this phone call and shed some tears, perhaps mostly for Papa, but some for my quarreling family. I had told Mary I would come as soon as possible.

By noon on Wednesday I was on my way by taxi to catch a plane in Albany. That morning I had gone to Bookouts Travel Agency to get reservations for the quickest flight to Oklahoma City. They had finished everything by eleven a.m. I got money from the bank, had a hairdo and bought a dress. Also, I had called Mary to meet me at midnight in Oklahoma City.

From Albany to Oklahoma City there were many stops and much waiting---the trip could take four hours. Now I was making it in eleven. Ordinarily I enjoy a plane trip, but on this one I felt nothing for my physical surroundings. I do recall talking to a woman between Chicago and Kansas

City. My mind was occupied with what might happen in Oklahoma. I felt a great urgency to rush to be with Mary. Little I could do to help such a capable person. She had managed my father's finances and done an excellent job. She had tried to care for him in her home to the neglect of her family. Even though I knew there was nothing I could do, I wanted to be near her. This I felt so strongly that nothing else mattered.

Mary and Stelson, her husband, met me at Will Roger's Airport, then we drove two hundred miles west to Cheyenne. The dusty, old hotel we had to stay in was not a cheerful aid to us in the task we had to do.

First there was the visit to the funeral home to select the necessary articles for the burial. It seemed all that day was taken up by trying to locate friends who could be pallbearers. Even though my father had lived in that county over forty years, he had few healthy friends left. The result of our search was highschool friends of us girls. Easily I recalled his favorite hymns. My oldest sister arrived late in the afternoon and we agreed for her to ask the local Methodist minister to conduct the services. My father was not a member of any organization though he was a student of the Bible.

Friday morning arrived and we started on our last journey home with Papa. Home was thirty miles northwest to a small village---Durham. Here we had all grown up

and Papa had worked so hard as a school board member. Due to a shift in population there is only a brick house (once the school gym) left on the sight of the school. Here, the funeral services were to be held. The population didn't seem small that day. Many friends came whom I had not seen in twenty years. Martha did come and Ernest with her, though she did not greet Fay or Mary. The fall flowers gave a sickening odor to the whole atmosphere. Too bad to see relatives only on such occasions!

A short while later, by an open grave on a windswept hill, I felt, above all my sadness, that Papa would have thought we had shown proper respect for the dead. As for my quarreling sisters---certainly there wasn't any reason for them to disagree anymore, so I would not bother to try to keep the peace. The overcast sky and cold wind made me shiver, perhaps, but I think the loneliness made me tremble from within.