

Write Your Life

A micro memoir writing project

Think of something you collect or keep that other people might overlook—a pebble, a ticket stub, old tools, recipe cards, shells, buttons, rocks. What do those ordinary objects reveal about you without your ever saying so?

Dritta

“Shoulders back,” Tizi says. We’re standing next to a flowerbed by the side of the house. She points at a rock collection she’s pleased with, next to a profusion of cannas and hostas. When I take a step back and look, she reminds me, echoing her old aunt back in Italy, a tall statuesque woman who always commented on posture. *Attenzione le spalle.*

She calls it the old man hunch, notices it in men my age leaning forward, walking themselves downhill.

I stand up straight, tell her she has a way with rocks.

We have many rocks, inside and out, ornamental piles of them around the outside of the house. I don’t know how we accumulated so many over the years, heavy rocks, rocks I would not want to lift. When we came to this house 40 years ago she wanted to bring boulders from her parents’ home eight miles down the road. Moving them would have required heavy equipment. They were beautiful, I thought, right where they were.

She’s rocks, I’m pebbles. Inside the house, in various locations, I have collections of my own. For a few decades now, whenever I’m near the water I stand where waves meet the shore and search for flat sand-colored pebbles, smoothed by eons of waves. In fresh water and sea water I find them. On a sunny day they give back light. Back home, I rinse them in the sink, dry them, and put them in ceramic bowls, one on the kitchen counter, one on the night table on my side of the bed. In a dresser drawer I have more. I forget them, then remember.

One year we visited Zia Alice in Pesaro, climbed the three flights of stairs in the old palazzo, to find her standing straight and tall at 85. She wore black, her hair tied back, a light scarf tied loosely around her neck. She rose from the table to make tea, walking to the kitchen and back. *Dritta*, they say in Italian. She made you feel elegant by association.

The next day, at the edge of the Adriatic, I collected a handful of pebbles, straightened my shoulders, and looked out at the sea.