

Write Your Life

A micro memoir writing project

Recall something you can no longer do as well as you once could.

Loss of Whistle

This morning, when I'm handing her a cup of coffee, Tizi says to me, "I can't remember Frankie Gliebe's mother's name."

"Marie?"

"No."

"Lynn?"

"That's Frankie's wife. Don't help. I'll think of it."

Those Canadian cousins. The first time I met them was at Frankie and Lynn's wedding, up in Sudbury, almost fifty years ago. A curious local custom: At the reception, after dinner the bride and groom both took their shoes off and pulled on wool socks. The band started to play, I don't know what, some Canadian music while the newlyweds stepped into a metal washtub and the revelers, gathered around them, threw money into the tub. It was not a long song. I didn't want it to end. You don't forget stuff like that. At the reception that night I met Frankie's father, Joe, and his mother, whose name we cannot remember.

Later, on our morning walk, I say, "Mary?"

"That's not it. Don't help. I want to think of it."

I whistle while we walk. Today, out of nowhere, a tune has returned to me from memory, some infectious phrases of music from a flute concerto written by a classical composer whose name, of course, I can't remember. While we walk and while I whistle, I become keenly aware that I'm losing it, not just the range of my whistle but the quality of the sound. I can't hit many of the notes. One of our grandsons asked me once, "How do you do that?" How do you whistle? But also, how do you whistle a tune? I couldn't explain it. You just do it. Or you don't. His brother can't whistle at all. His father can whistle, can even whistle a tune, even though he is unable, singing, to carry a tune.

"I'm losing my whistle," I tell Tizi.

"That's not a bad thing," she says.

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It's too much free-floating happiness for her. When I was a kid my parents whistled me and my brother home to dinner. I had friends who plunged their index fingers into the corners of their mouths and whistled. I wanted to do that but could never learn how.

“Lina.”