Regarding Time

MEMOIR I: PEGGY

Although our journey through life can often be complicated and sometimes difficult, taking too many twists and turns to keep track of, Peggy's story is proof that with resilience and optimism, we can adapt to quite a bit.

Peggy grew up in Switzerland in the 1940s, where she remembers hiking, sledding, seeing horse-drawn carriages, and beautiful, snowy winters. In particular, her love of hiking stuck with her for her entire life, only slowed by chronic pain caused by a leg injury she sustained by falling off the porch of a relative's house when she was growing up. Her father passed away of cancer when she was only six, but her mother would remain supportive of her until her own death in the 1990s. Her mostly peaceful childhood was interrupted by World War II, fought almost at her doorstep–she lived just a few miles from the German border. In fact, her town was accidentally bombed near the end of the war, despite being in Switzerland. When asked

about this, she vividly recalls the sheer traumatic volume of the attack, but not much else.

Peggy moved to the United States in the 1950s, crossing the Atlantic alone. She moved in with her uncle, who owned a bakery in the Philadelphia area. Peggy recalls the wonderful smells the bakery created every day, but also the area, which she didn't love enough to settle in permanently. She moved in with a well-off family who lived outside of the city, working as a nanny for their children. She still remembers their kindness and support of her learning English and attending night school.

After graduating from night school, Peggy began work as a draftswoman. She was married twice. She had a daughter with her first husband, but later found out he was gay. Peggy met her second husband, an engineer, at work. Their first few dates were picnics in a forest near their office. Peggy fondly remembers a particular clearing they would frequently visit.

Peggy's second husband became a loving and supporting father to her daughter. They loved to travel together–although he never came back to Switzerland with her (she would visit alone many times– until he passed away from cancer about a decade ago. In addition to traveling, Peggy loves gardening.

Peggy moved to Chandler Hall recently. While she is happy with the care given, the excursions, and the friends she has found there, Peggy still misses the house she lived in with her husband. As she puts it, it simply does not yet "feel like home". Her daughter frequently visits, during which "we like to gossip".

When asked if she has any advice for young people today, Peggy thinks for a moment, before giving a simple, yet timeless, piece of advice: "you have to stay positive". Through war, immigration, divorce, and struggle, Peggy feels that her attitude has helped her to be resilient and to adapt. While she may still be adjusting to life at Chandler Hall, Peggy's optimism will help her to tackle that challenge

with the same zeal and adaptability that have served her throughout her entire life.

MEMOIR II: RUTH

Her name was supposed to be Mary Louis.

That was the name her mother chose, but her grandmother refused. Because there were already two Mary Louises in the family. So, from then she lived between the two names: Ruth, the one written on the papers, and Louis, the one called by close family at home.

She was born on December 26th. That's what she believed for almost her entire life. Until her wedding day, the truth emerged as a careless mistake, her birth was actually the 27th recorded on the document. Still, her children, now in their seventies, call every December 26th to celebrate for her. The long tradition within the family is stronger and harder to correct than a date on a certificate.

Time has a strange way of folding in on itself. She is ninety-four now. The girl has grown into a woman with all the experiences and relationships in her life. She used to take care of everyone, her mother, her brothers, her own children. Now, someone knocks on her door

each morning to help her rise and move.

"I came as a baby. I leave as a baby," she tells me, half joking and half accepting the inevitable truth of age. But every morning, when she opens her eyes, she tries her best to make it one of those meaningful days.

She grew up in a coal town outside of Pittsburgh. "We never thought we were poor," she says. "We were happy." Memory and family always have a way of making things feel warm. On the weekends, the whole family would walk down to the lake, her mother spreading out a blanket on the grass. Her father would hand the children pieces of rope, and they would pretend the fish were biting, and they were fishing. She remembers the laughter and shared family moments. It lived in small things, family dinner, fishing, and simply voices. Those were the memories that filled her childhood.

However, unexpectancy always exists in the corner of life. Later, her mother became sick. At first, no one from the family knows what happened and what they should do. So they tried to manage on their own. They didn't have much money, so she spent almost a whole year helping at home, taking care of her mother and also looking after her two younger brothers. But the illness wasn't something that could be handled with home remedies or patience.

Eventually, her mother was sent to a hospital in Pittsburgh. There, they discovered it was a brain tumor. In the 1950s, that diagnosis was almost like a sentence, where there was very little doctors could do, and the surgery was very risky.

Before the surgery, her mother asked her father for a drink. It was such a small request, but it carried a fear no one spoke out loud. Her father didn't know how the surgery would be. He told her she could have it after the surgery, though they both knew there was no guarantee of "after".

But she did wake up. Not only awake, after one year of disability, she could move her hands, her feet, and even talk. It felt like hope had

returned.

Louis was then sent home to take care of her brothers. After a week of the surgery, her mother was sent to a large medical gathering with people from all over the country. They wanted to see the miracle. They asked her to move her arms and legs, to demonstrate what her body could do. She felt like she was being displayed. Not long after, without warning, a blood clot formed. There was no technology to detect it back then. She passed away suddenly, a week after the surgery. She never had the chance to return home, and her daughter never got to say goodbye.

After her mother passed away, everything changed very quickly. Her father remarried, a woman completely unlike her mother, who is quiet and tender. This woman spoke boldly. She wanted things, and she asked for it directly.

She also had three children of her own. But she didn't have enough space for them, so her father decided to live with the woman. One day, her father asked her, "what are you going to do". She remembers thinking: what choice did I really have? But life still needed to go on, so she went to her grandmother and asked if they could live with her. The grandmother agreed. She learned and lived to take care of everyone.

She didn't complain. She kept going. That's when she met the man who would become her husband. He went home after their very first date and told his mother, "This is the woman I'll marry." But she didn't feel the same right away. Love wasn't the first thing on her mind. Her brothers and family still needed her.

So when he proposed. She said no.

She explained she still needed to take care of her brothers. Then he said something that changed the entire direction of her future: they could all live together. He agreed to move into their grandmother's house. They built a new family together. Despite the early memory of her father's abandonment. She never gave up on trusting the power of

love and family. They have three children and a happy life together.

Then a car accident happened. Her husband and her brothers were all in the car. One brother's jaw was injured badly. The other was unconscious for five days before waking. Even so, when she looks back and she still says her life was a good one.

Now, at ninety-four, life looks completely different. The person who once took care of everyone is now surrounded by people who take care of her. She isn't used to that. The staff at the nursing home wake her up in the morning, help her dress, make sure she eats. She greatly appreciates their help, but it doesn't feel like something she used to.

"It's expensive here," she admits. They had to sell a house to make this move possible.

Still, every morning she says she wakes up and tells herself the same thing: it is another day. And her goal, simple as it sounds, is to try to make that day meaningful.

She doesn't pretend everything is easy. But she hasn't given up.

Not now.

Not on the last stretch of the road.

MEMOIR III: MARCIA

Marcia told me that she is known for her stories.

That if you name something, she probably has a story attached to it.

At first, I thought she was joking. But as the conversation went on, I realized she wasn't exaggerating at all. Her life seems to exist in small fragments of stories, not in a chronically way, but all connected and carried a unique value of her.

She has been in education for almost her entire life. She started teaching when she was sixteen. At that age, most people are still struggling on figuring out who they are, but she was already standing in front of students, learning to understand and listen to others.

Over the years, she taught almost everyone, from elementary school children to high school teenagers and even adults. She moved through different ages the way people move through rooms, adjusting herself each time. Education to her was the way to recognize that

everyone is good at something, even if it doesn't look impressive on paper.

She told me about a second-grade boy who showed her his secret talent. One day, she was measuring wallpaper to cover a refrigerator for a classroom display. The boy watched her measure and cut. Then, he confidently told her it wasn't going to fit. He was right. He understood space in a way she never could.

Marcia grew up surrounded by people. Her grandparents lived next door. An aunt and uncle lived on the other side. Another relative lived in the same building. Sundays were spent together. Stories were shared and reshared, passed down into each other's memory.

She remembers the chaos fondly. The time an uncle snuck out, tried to sneak back in, and ended up with the police at the door because someone thought there was a prowler. The time her father accidentally set part of the porch on fire and the fire department showed up. Those stories aren't polished. They aren't dramatic in the way fantasy movies are. But they're alive.

That's probably why she describes herself as a "hoarder of people". Not of things but of people. Once someone is in her life, they stay there. She still keeps in touch with friends from elementary school, college roommates, people who live far away, people she hasn't seen in years. Distance doesn't seem to matter much to her.

At some point, she said that aging is funny. When you're young, "old" is always ten years older than you are. When she turned fifty, something shifted. She realized she could say frankly what she wanted. She retired early, at fifty-three, after over thirty years of teaching. She accepted it and moved on. She has lived in Buffalo, Florida, and now Newtown, where she moved to be closer to her children and grandchildren. Again, her family brought her back.

Art has always been part of her life, even though she insists she can't draw a straight line. She loves words. She writes poems for friends on birthdays or special occasions. When she talks about

writing, it's just her way of noticing the stories around her.

She told me about growing up without a television, about being dismissed from school at lunchtime to walk alone to a theater downtown to hear a performance for fifty cents. About how now, kids can't even walk a block alone. About how the world feels louder, more overwhelming, filled with information that never stops coming.

And yet, as she spoke, nothing about her felt overwhelmed.

Talking to Marcia felt less like an interview and more like stepping into a current that had been moving long before I arrived and would continue long after I left. I can only connect with the current for the brief moment I shared with her, but I am confident that she is going to carry the memory of me with the current itself. Her life doesn't revolve into a single lesson or story. It doesn't need to. It exists in fragments, in laughter, in memory, in the quiet confidence that everyone has a place in her memories.

And somewhere between her stories, without her ever saying it directly, that belief becomes contagious.

MEMOIR IV: ANONYMOUS

Some lives are not defined by a single moment, but by what is built slowly over time. Her life unfolded through work, family, pursuits, dreams, and responsibility, shaped less by recognition than by endurance.

The window factory defined her world for 38 years. She started in 1967, a young woman amid the roar and dust and constant motion, and she climbed. She became a lead person, then a supervisor, each step taken steadily. Later, she held the title of safety director. “The role was perfect, I can care for people,” she recalled. She enforced the rules with a firmness that led to a lot of disagreements, but she didn’t mind. If something was wrong, she said so.

The next season that followed, the business itself collapsed. The owner, a man she had followed to a new company, had borrowed too heavily on debts. When the loans were called in, the factory shut down almost overnight. In the quiet of the empty plant, she and another

worker were left with a final order to complete. The machines had no power, so they used a hand saw, scraps of glass, and calculations they knew by memory to build a window by hand. The work was slow and exacting, but they finished it. That experience stayed with her as proof of what skill and persistence could accomplish without modern tools. Works by her own hands.

Her family had its own complex construction. Her father taught her how to love. He was the one who took her out in his truck, just the two of them, which she remembered as some of her happiest and most joyful moments. Her mother showed kindness differently, often extending it outward rather than inward. She learned that help was a transaction between two people, not a performance for an audience. If she did something for you, it remained between you and her. She would not speak of it.

She had children, and love did not shield her from difficulty. One son struggled with addiction and bad decisions. During those years, she began to write. Her pen found its voice in those years. She wrote poems for him, about the fears, the hopes, the waitings and their moments. Poetry became her secret language. Writing became how she processed what she could not fix. She wrote for her parents, her friends, and her children. Over time, she filled a closet and her box with poems, each one tied to a moment in her life. Even now, when she picks them up, she recalls that she remembered every single one of them. The writing came more easily during hard periods; when life was calm, she wrote less.

Faith was something she pieced together from experience. Raised Jewish, she sent her son to a Christian academy. When questioned, she said simply that she believed in a God who did not turn people away and they welcomed him. She believed that everyone needed something to believe in, like a compass, something that helped them navigate hardship. Looking back, she felt that each difficult period had prepared her for the next.

In her later years, when she moved to Chandler Hall, she carried this philosophy with her. She liked it there. “The help was phenomenal,” she said, and she would talk to anybody. Many of the faces she had met when she first arrived were gone now, and that was the only sad part. People leave and people go. She chooses to meet loss with humor . “You had to laugh.”

Now, she watches the world change, the young people with their phones, and remembers her father getting his first television. She had thirteen grandchildren, and thirteen great-grandchildren. They grew up and grew away, building their own frames for their own lives.

She hoped her own frame had been built strong and true. It was shaped by work, responsibility, belief, faith, and persistence. What mattered most to her was that it had been solid enough to last and open enough to let light through.

MEMOIR V: DAN

The dream was a specific thing. For Dan, it's being in the sky. Growing up in South Philadelphia, it was not a vague notion of flying but the exact image of a cockpit. "The world from up there, it's different," he recalled. In books, everything was flat, two-dimensional. But from that glass canopy, the world would unfold before one's eyes. You could see the contours of the mountains, the shimmering surface of the sea, the geometry of fields becoming real, all in front of his eyes. That was the view he wanted.

He frequented the Philadelphia Airport as a teenager. He would reach out to pilots and National Guard personnel, just to be near the machines. His entire being aimed toward one point: becoming a pilot.

Then, the door slammed shut. An eye problem. A diagnosis that meant the possibility of being a pilot in the military closes. The world turned two-dimensional again, flat and gray. Dan thought about quitting college. He thought about ending it. For him, he said it was

the darkest time.

But his parents suggested another way. "One door closes, another one opens," he recalled. They suggested a different door. Dan moved on to attending Drexel University for mechanical engineering, before switching into a new program for aerospace engineering, a co-op program at the institution. He left college with an offer from NASA and stayed at Princeton for graduate school continuing aerospace engineering. The dream was still going, but through a different route.

After graduating Princeton, Dan arrived at NASA. In some ways, the job felt like a return to what he had lost. With his badge, he could enter hangars and, occasionally, sit in the cockpits of grounded planes. He did not linger for long. He noticed the seat, the instruments, the way everything was arranged for flight. His real work, however, was in monitoring. He ensured others could fly safely. He helped planes fly, even if he did not fly them himself.

And he did fly, sometimes. Communally, in small aircraft, or in the thrilling rush of air shows in Wisconsin or California. Once, he secured a flight in a fighter jet. The acceleration pressed him into the seat, and for a few moments, he found that feeling of seeing the world unfold before his eyes. The excitement was never diminished.

His life moved forward. He moved from South Philadelphia to Virginia, following his work. Through it all, he noted the importance of good friends along the way, people to talk to and share their same passions. They were his co-pilots in a way.

Now, when he watches planes land or take off, the feeling is quieter. He enjoys the plane, as a passenger, like everyone else. But he still expresses that same excitement when the plane takes off into the air. He thinks about how quickly life moves when things are going well, and how a single moment can change its direction.

"If I were to live it again," he says, "I wouldn't have done it another way."

For Dan, he described the early devastation as real, but when

one door closes, another one opens. And he took the chance. He learned that the best view is not always from the cockpit. Sometimes, it is from the ground. The world still unfolds in three dimensions before him, not only just in the physical forms of mountains and sea, but a life fully lived, where a closed door eventually leads to a wider sky.