

# I Digress

An  
Emonogatari

爱



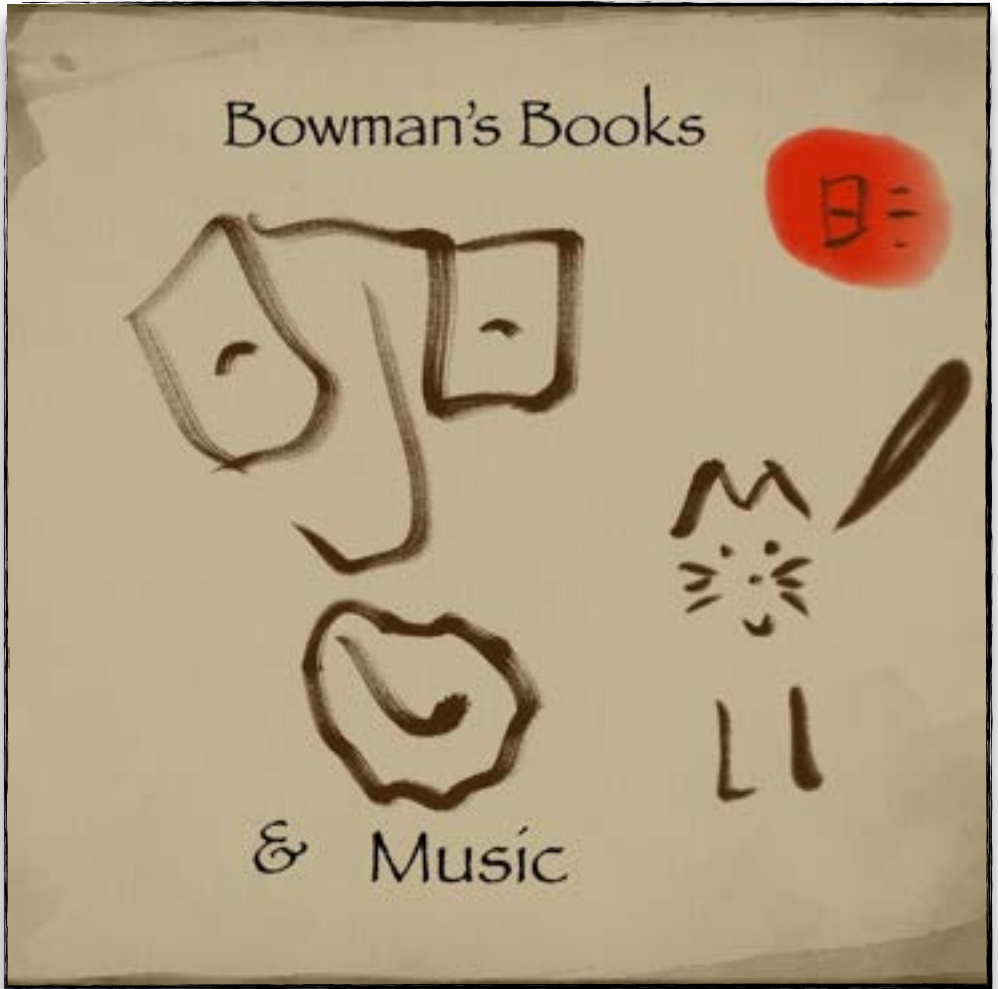
Illustrated Stories

By

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We need to hear each other's stories.

-Unknown

# Starting Point

When I first began sitting in doctor's waiting rooms, imaging centers, or the plethora of other stops I make related to my medical journey I would get anxiety attacks that could kill Frankenstein or his monster or both of them. To pass the time I began doodling and writing observations to calm myself down. That in turn triggered memories that I began to write and draw about. Slowly, it became I Digress.



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Recently I read a book by my favorite artist, Hayao Miyazaki. I was unaware of this book as it had never been translated to English until 2022. Entitled *Shuna's Journey*, it is a lovely story in a style called Emonogatari. The translation is roughly, stories with illustrations. It is a type of writing I have employed for a number of years. I can now attach this magical name to my endeavors. In my Emonogatari I will be casting my eye to events from my day to day life, past and present. Hang with me while I speak to the little things that now give me hope and strength. For my friends and family this will come as no surprise, for when I tell a story, I always digress.





# Trains, Planes, & Bill



On a plane flight, long ago, Bill Walton asked me to switch seats because he needed the leg room. He then asked me to loan him a couple of bucks to get out of airport parking. Just a down to earth hippie that was one of the greatest hoopers who ever played. He was at the end of his playing days because of unfortunate injuries he had accumulated during his playing career. Though he was not at the end of being a quality human being. My flight to San Diego was to visit my mother who was terribly ill. We talked about it a little bit and Bill said in that deep, booming voice, "it may not be everything but health sure is important."  
RIP Bill, you owe me 2 bucks! Love, Bow

# A Mask

Today was my second visit with my neurosurgeon. After a lengthy discussion of options it was decided I would have brain surgery to remove the tumor that had attached itself to my pituitary gland inside my wee brain.

“After the first of the year.” Dr. Yang was looking at me. At that moment the bottom dropped out of my world and I’m reasonably sure I was visibly shaking.

That’s when Dr. Yang took her mask off. At this point I had only seen her wearing a mask.

“Look at me. I’m on your team. I’m with you and I have a wonderful team I work with.” Dr. Yang then got up and came around the table we were sitting at and gave me a hug. “we got this.”

I was profoundly moved by the young lady. She had always worn a mask in our previous meetings. I took it as a sign of caution and respect. On what was a cool, crisp, and sun drenched morning, I considered our world’s shared humanity. All in one gesture, Dr. Yang reminded me that more people care than do not.

I forget to listen to the unspoken all the time, but when I do listen, like this morning, it can be overwhelming. Love, hope, and compassion have populated my medical journey and I’m grateful.

When Dr Yang took her mask off and came around the table where we were seated, looking at the pictures of the inside of my head, and gave me that hug I knew I was with Dr. Yang straight down the line.





# Bud

“You can quit if you want.”

I was 14, playing in a junior golf tournament in Stockton, California. My dad, Bud, managed a golf course outside Fresno. It was only natural that I took up golf. There really wasn't much else to do except play my drums, which had some natural time limitations, as one might imagine. I showed some ability in the sport, so it wasn't too long before my folks began taking me around to junior tournaments in Northern California. It had been a dismal weekend, featuring some of the worst golf I or anyone had ever played. I was usually pretty good at it, competitive golf that is, but not that weekend.

“No.”

“I'll carry your bag the rest of the way, if you want.”

I felt my eyes start to sting. I believe my eyes sting more when I refuse to let them cry.

I looked away, “okay.”

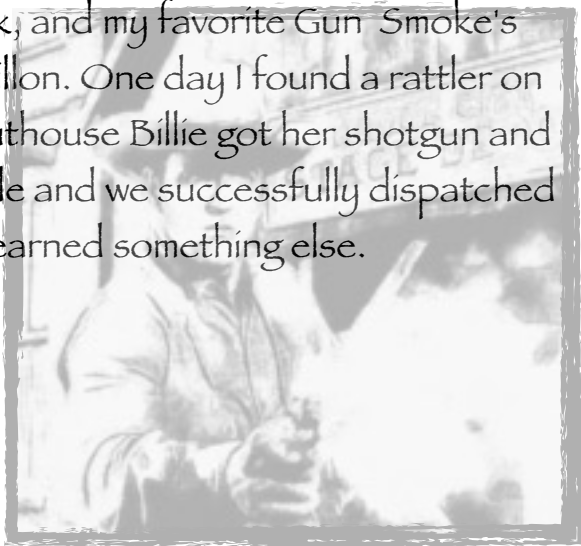
We finished the round, me and the old man. I came in dead last and Bud never said a word about it. The rest of my life I have tried to finish what I start no matter the outcome. When things get tuff I just imagine that Bud's still there over my shoulder, helping me finish what I started.

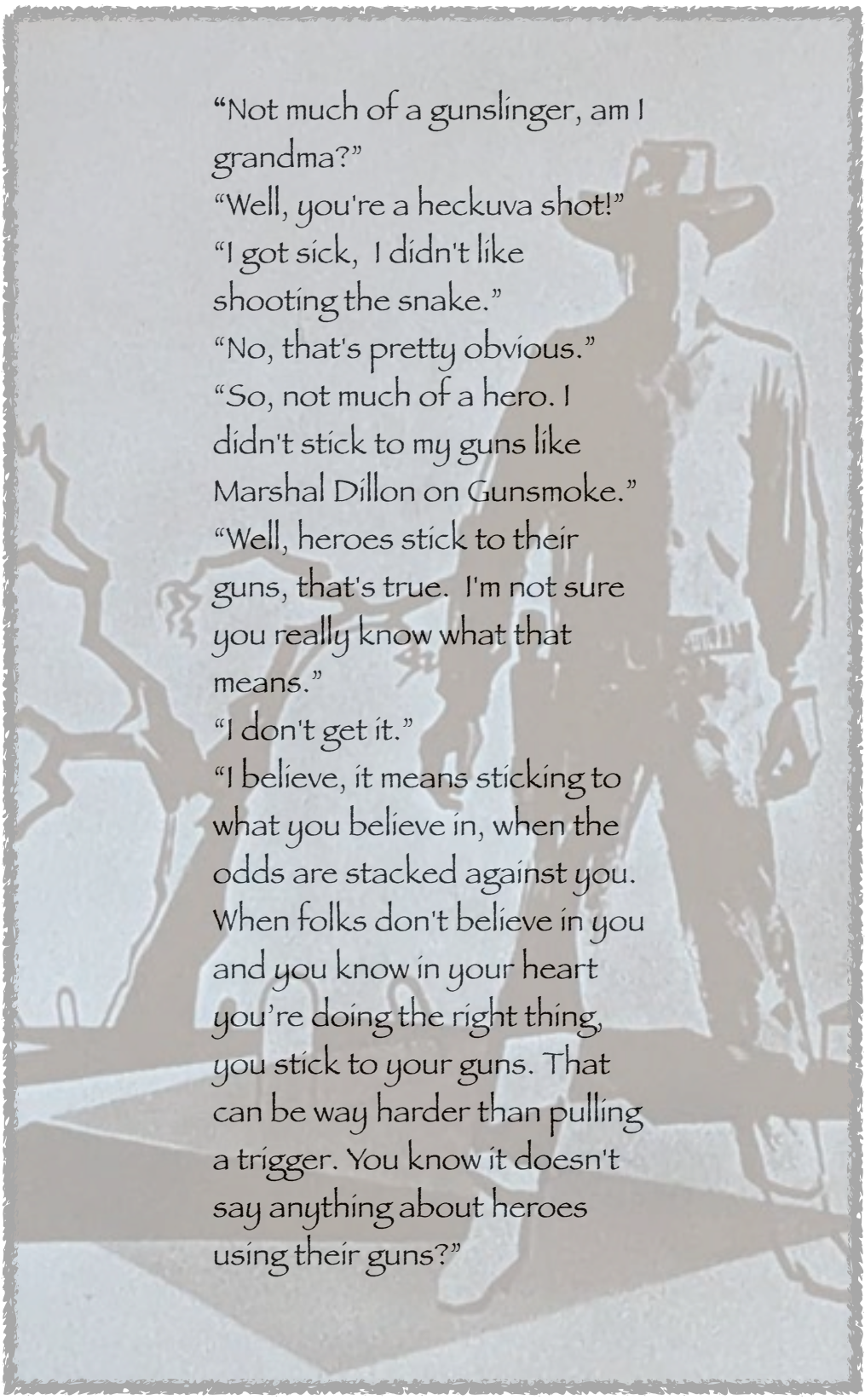
# The Wave

In a small waiting room after getting an IV hook up so some very nice people could do an MRI on my brain. I'm sitting there waiting with a lot going through my mind. I've had a couple of tests lately that have given me pause to think about what a really wonderful life I've had. I'm expecting more life not tests, I'm selfish. There were only two of us in the waiting room, the other gentleman, another old hippie, and I, we didn't speak. The nurse came in and took my history about the tremors I have been experiencing over the years in my hands and fingers. That is when I noticed how violently his hands shook. I'm gonna take a wild guess and figure he was there for some similar work. In a while the nurse came to take me in to do the MRI, we looked at each other and I waved. I've been in a lot of waiting rooms in my life and I can't remember ever waving at someone. Our eyes met, and we both knew how much our wave meant. It may sound strange, but it was a rather spiritual moment, where we both knew we had a friend, a fellow traveler, as it were. I'm optimistic. I always am and so far the optimism has paid off during all these medical shenanigans I've been involved in of late. In that moment that I found so incredibly nurturing with such a slight gesture of love and understanding, he helped me find some strength. I'm hoping for the best for the old hippie sitting next to me, the fellow who was kind enough to wave back.

## Rattler In The Outhouse

My grandmother Billie Murphy, killed, dispatched, or otherwise did away with a number of diamondback rattlesnakes while on the job at the lookout. Right next to the entrance of the lookout she kept a board with the rattles from the unfortunate snakes that had crossed her path over the years, mostly on her trips to the outhouse. As the rattles hung on the board next to the shortwave radio, I saw a tangible testimony to the fierceness of my grandmothers will. This was the stuff of legends in and the Murphy and Bowman families. In the worst way, I wanted to kill a rattlesnake with my daisy pellet gun and bag a Western diamondback just like Grandma. I had gotten the pellet rifle for Christmas. After much heated debate between my my mom and dad. Like my TV heroes: Davy Crockett, the rifleman, Zorro, Wild Bill Hancock, and my favorite Gun Smoke's Marshall Matt Dillon. One day I found a rattler on my way to the outhouse Billie got her shotgun and I got my pellet rifle and we successfully dispatched the snake but I learned something else.





“Not much of a gunslinger, am I grandma?”

“Well, you're a heckuva shot!”

“I got sick, I didn't like shooting the snake.”

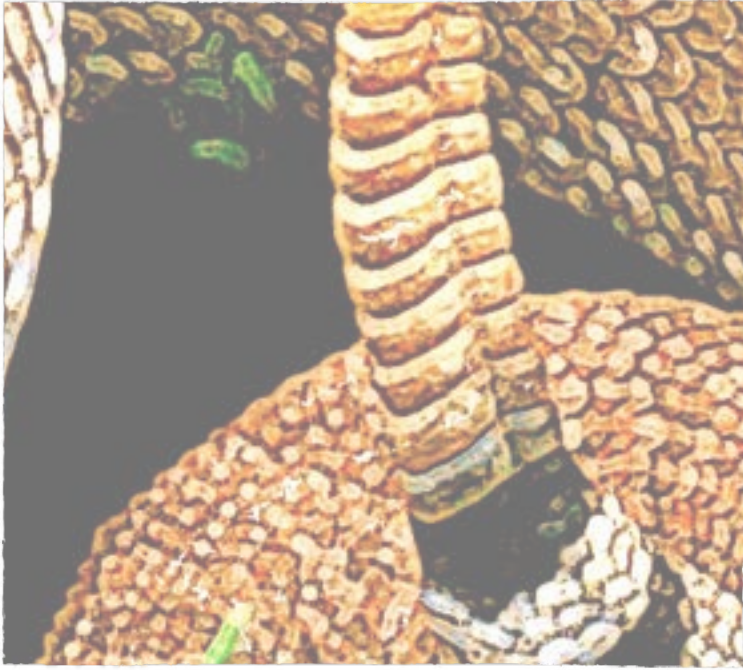
“No, that's pretty obvious.”

“So, not much of a hero. I didn't stick to my guns like Marshal Dillon on Gunsmoke.”

“Well, heroes stick to their guns, that's true. I'm not sure you really know what that means.”

“I don't get it.”

“I believe, it means sticking to what you believe in, when the odds are stacked against you. When folks don't believe in you and you know in your heart you're doing the right thing, you stick to your guns. That can be way harder than pulling a trigger. You know it doesn't say anything about heroes using their guns?”



"You kill rattlers all the time, so you stick to your guns?"

"I use that 4-10 shotgun when I have to, but I don't hunt for the sport of it.

Those rattles I put on the wall are to honor those darn snakes. I had to kill those old boys to keep the area around the lookout safe. They have a spirit, all living things do."

"Sorry I got sick."

"Don't be. You don't have to kill things to be a man grandson but you can always stick to your guns. You are kind and thoughtful, those are mighty fine things to be."

"So, killing stuff isn't for me."

Grandma and I laughed. I thought about what Billie Murphy said.

"You can stick to your guns without using them."



Hashi



Hashi is the Japanese word for chopsticks. I learned that from Mary Shimizu.

# Gene Richards's Funeral

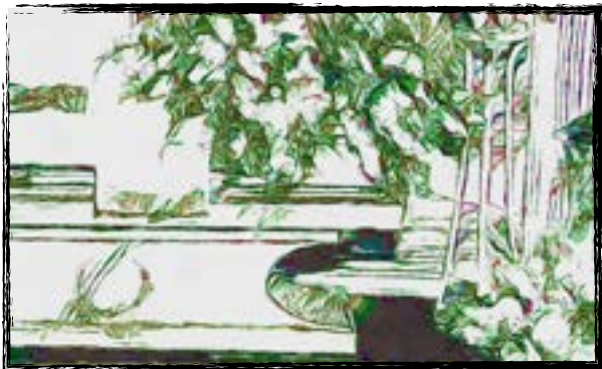
Mom turned her head slightly and whispered, "You okay?"

The funeral service was coming to an end and I was getting nervous. Gene Richards, my dad's best friend, had died unexpectedly and we were now at his funeral.

"Mom?" Was all I could get out.

"It's alright son, we don't have to pass by the coffin."

Gene Richards was my dad's best friend and I always thought one of the coolest guys I had ever met. He was lean and tan and carried himself with what Charles Bukowski called style. That undefinable "thing" that sets some apart. Mom brought me to the funeral. Since Dad was a pallbearer he was sitting up front. Peach and I ended up sitting at the back of the church. The last pew. My mom knew me well. As the service came to an end I saw people one row at a time begin to line up and file past Gene's casket.



I watched in disbelief as the mourners passed Gene's casket. Panic swiftly set in. My throat began to dry and I was sweating more than James Brown live at the Apollo Theater.

"We'll just slip out the back. There are better ways to remember our friend."

So, that's what we did. While the people stood up one pew at a time and began filing past Gene and his coffin, we took a side exit towards the back of the church. As we got in mom's car, she turned to me and said are you OK? I was staring out the window at the church, I didn't say anything. I had a feeling she was protecting me. Peach was the great protector of any children, but when it came to me, she was especially resolute. I could hear it in her voice. The sound of my mother's voice was probably the most reassuring thing I ever heard in my life. I always felt protected, as I grew into my teen years it came to bug the crap out of me. I didn't have many years after that to realize how much I missed the sound of her voice telling me things were going to be OK.

"Jeff, you understand that Gene is okay?"

I kept staring out the window.

"When someone dies that we love we grieve and a lot of times we don't know what to do with our grief. What to do with the sadness and the loss, so the people that are still here living they are the ones who are suffering. But Gene? He's at peace. We all die, we all leave and then we're fine. For those who are left behind, that's a struggle. Does that make any sense?"

I turned to my mom and said, "yes", although I wasn't really sure that I meant it. I just wanted to get the hell out of there.

When my mother passed away, not many years after this conversation, I thought about what she had told me, and even though I was, at the time, in the thrall of my addiction to alcohol when she passed, I took some solace that Peach was okay.



My new rescue cat is named Mochi.  
Mochi's purrs are a revelation. She  
gets on my chest or lap and purrs  
away. Her purrs heal, heart to heart.  
That, my friends, is a heck of a dang  
deal.



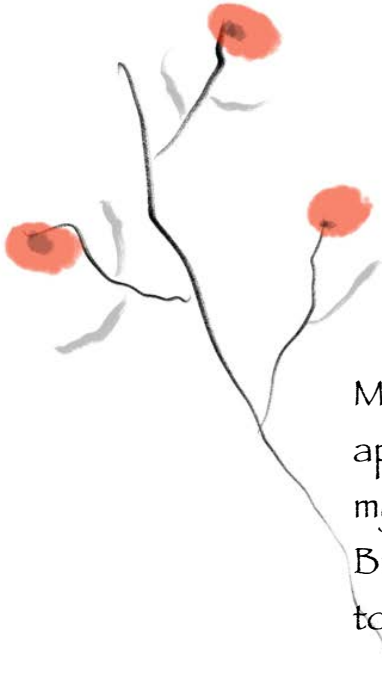
# Iodine



I became moderately sick to my stomach when I was injected with iodine for my MRIs. I was not prepared for how violently ill I became when I was injected at Dr. Char's office in San Francisco when they were looking at my right eye. The doctor had been

Slipping into darkness without a moral compass

## The Forthright Chauffeur



My ride to a lot of my appointments has been my good friend Jennifer Brower. I consider Jenny to be my sister.

**I**f you describe someone as forthright, you admire them because they show clearly and strongly what they think and feel.

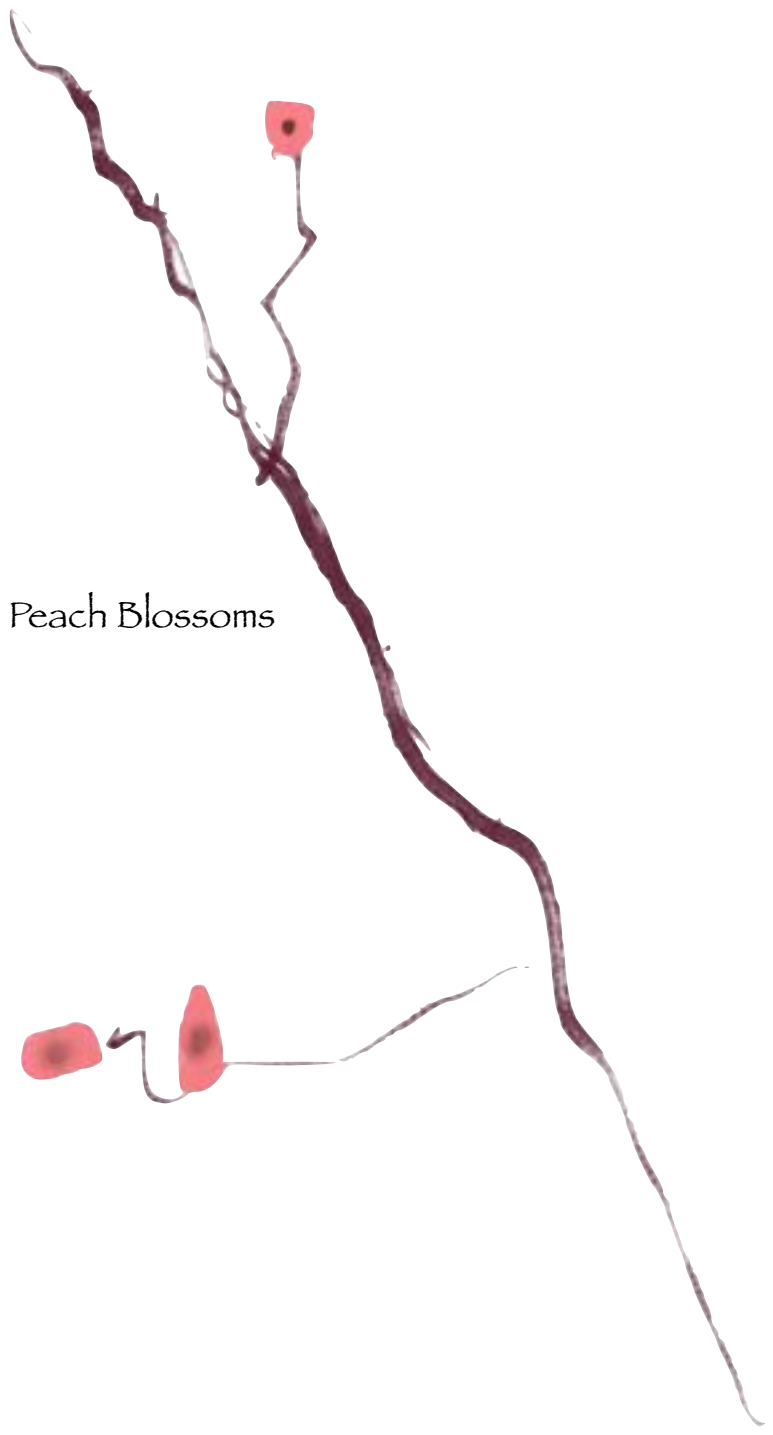
My dear friend Jennifer or Aunt Jenny, has many wonderful attributes. One that I truly hold dear is her forthrightness.

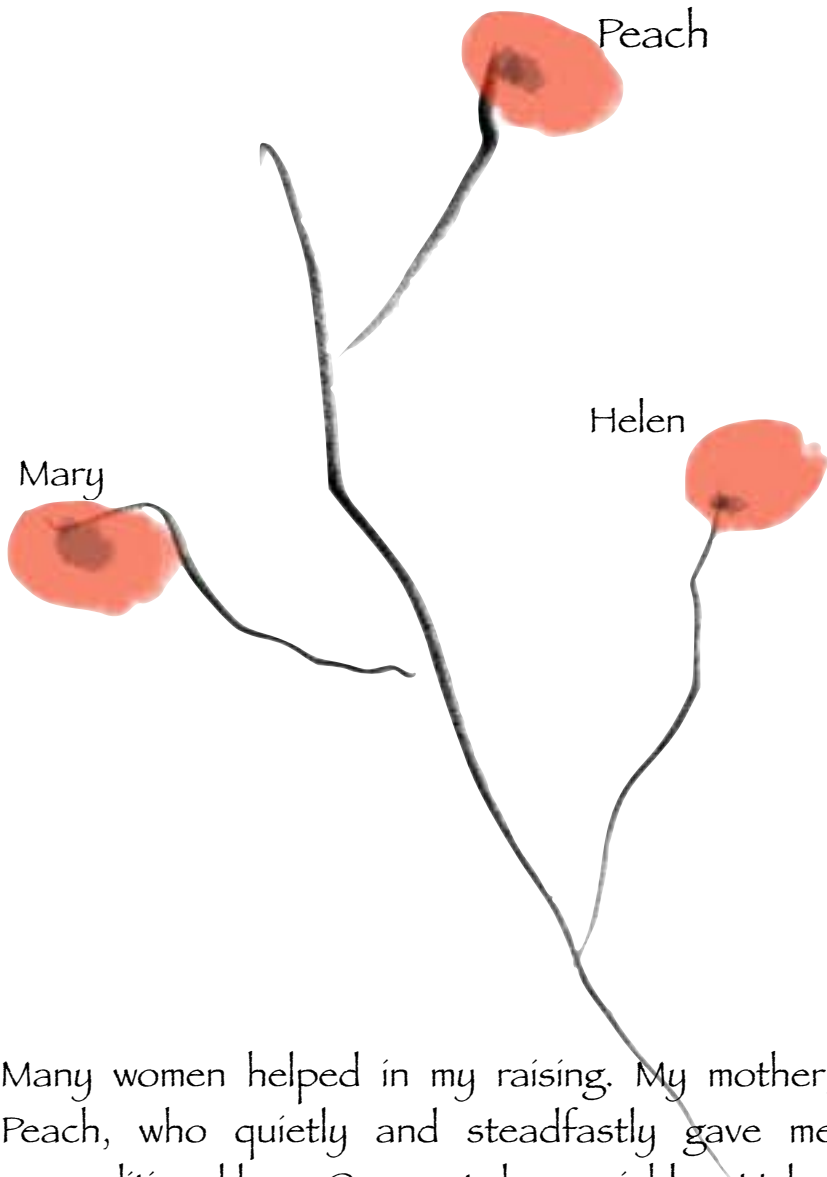
## The Cat's Tail



Before Mochi, I had another rescue cat named Blade. Blade had little use for accordions or humans, except for me. She was a tuxedo cat and my constant companion for 15 years. We developed a way to communicate through her responses with her tail. I can imagine, for some, this might be hard to believe. I don't really care, I am old, I deal with cancer and a brain tumor called a snowman, and besides, it's true.

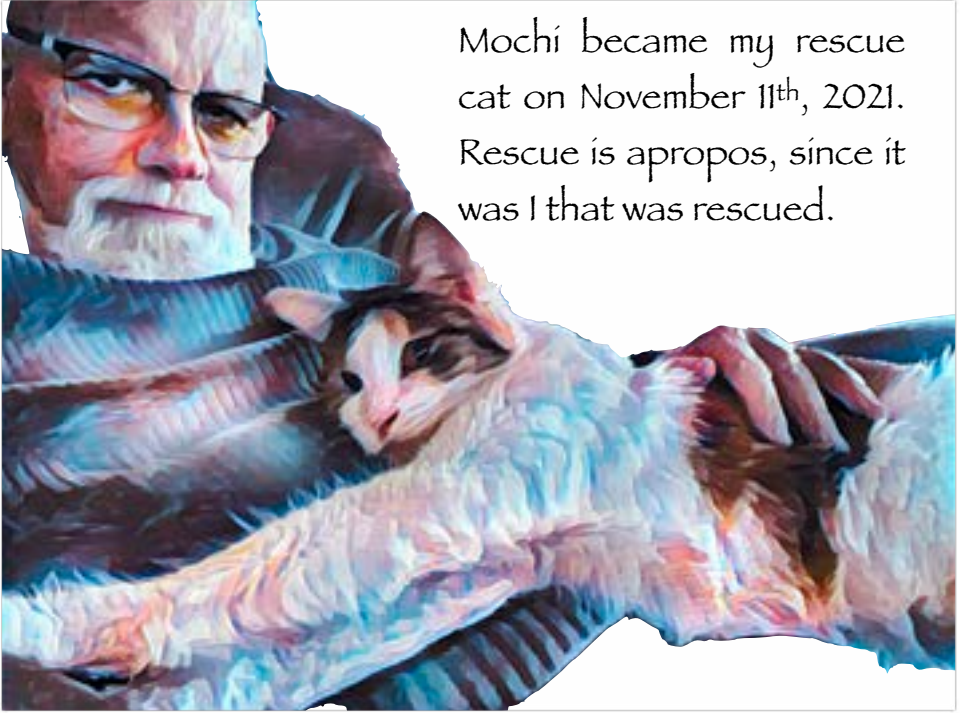
Three Peach Blossoms





Many women helped in my raising. My mother, Peach, who quietly and steadfastly gave me unconditional love. Our next door neighbor Helen Wong, who opened up the world for me. In my teens, Mary Shimizu treated me like family. Three peach blossoms.

# Mochi The Cat



Mochi became my rescue cat on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Rescue is apropos, since it was I that was rescued.

Happiness is a journey, not a destination.

Work like you don't need money,  
Love like you've never been hurt,  
And dance like no one's watching

-Anonymous



Create beautiful worlds untainted by malice.  
- Miyazaki





# Saints

**“You meet saints everywhere.”**

**- Kurt Vonnegut**

**On the day that I learned from my new pal, Dr Yang, that I was going to have a little brain surgery on December 14, I went and had some tacos with my old buddy Dean. Because, as far as I know, when you find out someone’s gonna go up your nose with a rubber hose, you might as well get some tacos.**

**After our taco adventure, which I must say, was excellent, Dean wanted to go by the Betty Rodriguez library to check out Babs Carlson’s photography on display in their gallery. So, we did. After viewing the artwork, Dean perused the book selection at the the Betty. I was wandering around as well, when I noticed a young man looking at one of the art pieces. It was from my first book, How The Light Gets In. I took a peek, and he was reading the words to himself which were printed next to our heroine, Esperanza Wong. It’s a little internal monologue Esperanza has while sitting in a park swing remarking on what a perfect day she is having. I had a copy of the book with me, so I went up to the young fellow and asked him if he’d like a copy of the book that went with the artwork. As I got closer, he looked at me and said yes, I began to hand him the book. He then took a deeper look into my eyes and asked, “are you Oden? Being the quick witted guy that I am, I said, “ I’m Bowman, the author of the book, sounds like Oden. He gazed at me and said, “you are Oden.” I thought to myself ,well OK! hell, why not! brother why not! I gave him the book, we shook hands, and I’ve not seen him again. If you’re curious, I am Oden. At leas, I was once.**

It Is To Laugh. Laughing with dad, watching Laurel and Hardy and laughing with my son makes me feel exactly the same way.

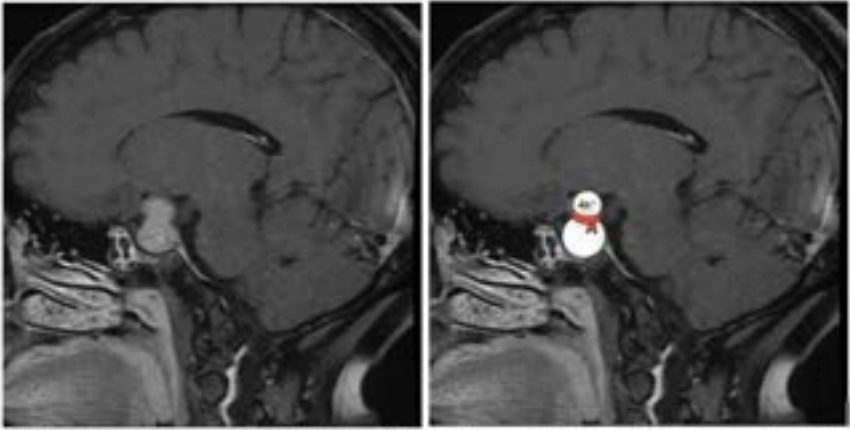


Figure 1: MRI of the pituitary gland on sagittal T1 with gadolinium demonstrating Intra et suprasellar adenoma "snowman sign".

On the left is my tumor which somehow was labeled the snowman because of its shape. This is an artistic interpretation of the little bugger.

## Adios Frosty The Tumor

As my medical journey has unfolded I have been treated and cared for by people who represent the best in humanity. It was not lost on me that I encountered people that I had taught at Roosevelt and others that went to school in Fresno and elsewhere around the world. My neurosurgeon is originally from China and was largely educated in Toronto and New York, I find her to be one of the kindest, empathetic humans I've ever met. The neurological team included a gentleman that was from India, I had treatment from doctors and nurses that represented many cultures and many beliefs. They all did their utmost to extend my life and make me well again. We are a nation of immigrants, and everybody deserves a chance in the pursuit of freedoms that were expressed in our constitution. I have benefited deeply. I Just wanted to say thanks for saving my life. Can we all stand together for the weak and downtrodden? If you give them half a chance, some day, they may just save your life.



Not long after my mother passed away, I remember finding my father in the greeting card aisle of a local grocery store. He was reading a Mother's Day card and quietly weeping.

On another evening, long before that I was watching our black and white, rabbit eared tv and mom began calling dad and I for dinner.

Dad looked over his newspaper and smiled at me. "well, son, if I know one true thing it's your mother is going."

I scratched my regulation flattop, "What?"

"When the time comes."

"Dinner!" Mom called again.

I looked at dad with confusion coursing through my chunky nine year old body, "time?"

"Time comes for all of us. In your mother's case when it's time, she's going."

Once again the head scratching.

"Heaven, son. Let's go eat."







# The Digression

Inside the words  
There is a light  
Inside the light  
Dwells my heart

