

TONY BOUZA

Living and dying with Alzheimer's

BY TONY BOUZA

"It's funny, but I have no recollection of it whatsoever."

The year is 2022; the speaker is Erica Bouza; and the subject is a film she'd seen the day before with her husband, Tony.

The film was "The Power of the Dog," another brilliant contribution by Jane Campion.

I was thoroughly intrigued and wondered as to the title's provenance.

It turns out it came from the King James Bible via the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The subject is Jesus' lament on the cross as, midway through the peroration that starts with "Why hast thou forsaken me?" Jesus asks God, his father, to spare him from the sword and his darling from the power of the dog.

Huh and double huh?

It appears to be a homosexual allusion, and this is confirmed by the film itself, whose central theme is homosexuality. The subtlety of the message did not fully conceal its blasphemous nature. This was a fairly stark episode among a growing list of troubling signs.

Items were lost in a small apartment where such actions seemed unlikely. A small clock vanished. I looked and looked and never found it. It suddenly surfaced later that year when our movers casually placed it in a prominent place. God knows where it had been.

Erica's jewelry box—where she kept the remains of her stock—disappeared. After weeks of concern—I was determined not to be shaken by any of this—I found it secreted deep within our dry sink. It became an effort to keep her from giving presents to any visitor—usually jewelry she'd made which was destined for her two granddaughters.

As time wore on her unhappiness deepened. She "hated this place," an assisted living facility we'd moved into in 2016. Then I was 87 and she was 85, and I'd just been through colon cancer, and our lives were shrinking.

Our new apartment—bedroom, living room, kitchen and bath—also offered activities and nursing services.

Things went fairly normally. We gave up our car and attended TV movies and TV concerts. I had breakfast in the dining room, alone. Dinner we had together in our kitchen, from groceries I got every Monday from the van service. Life assumed a rough outline.

Evidence of deterioration mostly appeared in the mornings, increasingly featuring questions: Who are you? Are we married? Do we have any children? The family photos surrounding us were useful orientations.

Over the course of the day, boredom would take her over. Yoga helped. So did other activities. Anything to distract and pass the time.

As the day progressed, her mood darkened. Clear signs of paranoia emerged. I was a bully, a controlling monster trying to poison her. She began to use food as a way to express her unhappiness with me—savagely attacking anything cuttable, spitting it out and casting it in the garbage.

Later—after dinner—there'd be constant trips to the refrigerator for yogurt, chocolate, cashews, cake and cookies.

The process was incremental and slow to the point of imperception. No crisis emerged.



Our days were brightened by daily visits to Lowry Hill Park—a gem of greenery containing an arbor, seven charming miniature ponds and inviting paths. Being in an affluent neighborhood, where everyone owned their own park, it got little traffic.

The days gradually assumed a pattern. Mornings were full of questions, then clarity as she oriented herself through a host of family photos on our bedroom walls. There were windows revealing the sky as well. The questions were there—always and growing—but so was clarity, affection and gratitude for being together.

Encounters with other tenants were perfunctory to the point of harmlessness. There were televised lectures on music—delivered (32 of them) by a brilliant, erudite, funny, deeply intellectual professor called Dr. Greenberg. Erica enjoyed them inordinately.

I spent my time thinking, reading (mostly The New York Times) and doing a bit of writing. I did a monthly column—on any subject—for Southside Pride, a small local monthly published by a very tolerant Maoist, Ph.D., Smith College professor, Minneapolis City Council member and fervently practicing capitalist. My last essay came at the end of 2022. After many, many years, I'd said all I had to say—on both life and policing.

Emerson was right—in the end every hero becomes a bore.

Ed Felien, the extremely tolerant publisher, never changed anything and, when we disagreed and I wouldn't give in, he'd publish what I wrote. This was an echo of a genuine contretemps I'd had with my editor on "How to Stop Crime" where in I wrote that Roe v. Wade would produce a revolutionary ebb in street crime

as those criminals would simply not be born. The dividend would appear in 1990 as the unborn cohort would have reached the crime-producing age of 17.

"Makes you sound like a racist," the editor said—a woman I'd done several books with and to whom I usually deferred. This time I stood fast, and my prophecy came true and became memorialized in "Freakonomics," a popular book that came much later.

Street crime was the province of teenage Black and Hispanic males—impoverished, just as Aristotle had foretold. I hadn't been able to inspire young, uneducated, welfare-loving Black and Hispanic females to undertake the simple expedient of crossing their legs.

The exercise led me to prove a very unpopular truth, that the police were irrelevant to street crime levels, no matter how many tough law-and-order policies were pursued.

The theme, curiously, was simply ignored—by everyone.

Talk is anything but cheap, and my career was dotted with punishments for speaking my mind, whatever the truth might be.

It is worth recounting what my fundamental differences with Ed Felien were. They centered on his hostility and suspicion of any police—a true Maoist in that sense. My approach centered on my experiences watching cops work in three agencies. They made difficult challenges function; adopted legal, if unpopular, practices; bitched, moaned and groaned, and got the thing done. I came to love them—but critically. They needed to be controlled and guided.

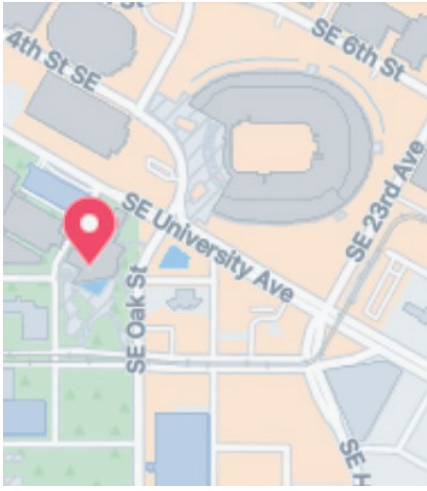
So, by the end of 2022, I decided to stop the essays and devote myself to reflection, an increasingly favored approach.

MEMORIAL

*Dominick Bouza
Invites you to*

**McNamara Alumni Center
Saturday, November 18, 2023
3 pm to 6 pm**

Tony Bouza will be recalled by police executives, family and friends with a slideshow, memorabilia and speeches in a comfortable setting.



Our daily routine continued—seemingly unvaried—but subtle differences began to emerge. Erica became insistently needy.

The paranoia centered on my trying to kill her. She would denounce me to Jennifer Volkenant, the executive director of our senior housing community. An obsession became to "go downstairs" and alert the front desk to my perfidy. These initiatives were fairly easily deferred through persuasion and gentle nudges.

I'd give Erica a mild tranquilizer in the afternoon, hoping it would mitigate her hostility. I couldn't really assess their effect but persuaded myself they probably helped.

Items continued to vanish. Our son was given the silver (ironically etched "D. B." for Erica's mother, Dolly Blume). Dominick Bouza would succeed to the sobriquet. He also got the leftover stock of jewelry Erica had made over the course of a 30-year career as a jeweler, and her mother's two diamond rings.

The problems deepened as Erica began to wait until I dropped off to wander the halls in her nightclothes. A staff member or neighbor would return her.

I tried tying our front door shut, but that didn't work. The outings increased and Erica took to wandering farther afield and knocking on neighbor's doors late at night. One time she wandered off carrying a large kitchen knife. This triggered our eviction. Another involved insisting on wandering into the frozen street in her bare feet and flimsy nightgown. Erica was not a violent person and wouldn't harm anyone, but the knife episode inspired genuine alarm. It was November of 2022 and our genius executive director—a hugely competent, sympathetic and understanding person—came to the conclusion she had to act. Erica clearly needed services The Kenwood, our resi-

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dence, could not provide.

Eviction was the answer. We'd have to leave.

Dominick, who'd matured virtually overnight into a thoroughly competent, wise, experienced adult, took on the project of researching a new residence offering the services of monitoring and controlling Erica's behaviors—a lock-up.

Dominick's situation is worth commenting on for its unlikely and unexpected evolution.

He was born in 1964 in White Plains, New York, and developed happily and normally. Never a scholar (unlike his older brother—a driven striver) Dominick worked as a volunteer in the nature center.

"I like to work with animals," he once reported.

"You're on the right track," I sarcastically responded.

His school life at Macalester College (which he got into as a favor to me from its president, a friend) was characterized by continuous and serious partying. He barely graduated, with minimal grades.

A gregarious, loving, caring person, Dominick was clearly a devoted social worker at heart. His working life consisted of service with America's foremost criminologist, Dr. Lawrence W. Sherman, and, later, as director of the Salvation Army shelter in Minneapolis, and, when he was forced to resign, as director of a nonprofit housing agency, where he was made so unhappy that my niece reported he was experiencing panic attacks.

I became seriously concerned for his health and immediately urged him to quit at his next unpleasant moment, which came three days later. I described all this to his older brother, Tony, who was a hugely successful lawyer and real estate investor in L.A.

Tony bought a five-flat apartment building in Minneapolis and hired Dom to run it. For the first time ever, Dom was in control of his own life—the central development of his existence and the source of his maturation.

Now, in late 2022, Dom had to find a suitable (meaning a prison-like lock-up to control Erica's wanderings) destination for us both. I gulped at the thought of the cost.

His first effort resulted in a \$13,000 monthly fee. I gasped at the prospect. By this time I was 94 and, since Valentine's Day of 1955, had developed into a fanatical saver and investor.

On that fateful day I'd been thoughtlessly stood up by a Bryn Mawr graduate I'd been ardently pursuing.

I pillaged the Village (Greenwich), had some beers, and skidded on ice, wrecking my just-bought '52 Oldsmobile, and emerged—bleeding profusely—into a deserted Brooklyn street.

I commandeered a passing bus and ordered the driver to take me to the Methodist Hospital. Fifty-six head stitches and five days later I emerged to assess the wreck of my life—still owing 13 payments of \$100 per month, a very aggrieved bus

driver, a police report and other job-threatening realities—and being a cop had been my salvation.

Gradually, I determined to climb out of the hole I'd dug and eventually emerged into a debt-free solvency 13 months later. In 1956 I met Erica, and we married a year later.

Over the years I had five real estate transactions, a very few windfalls (such as Erica's inheri-



tances of just over \$50,000 from her mother and about \$30,000 from her father) and my own investments in stock, which started with Pfizer in 1966.

By 2022 I had some real capital, invested at 6% or more, a police pension and Social Security, so I could just manage the \$11,000 monthly rent Dominick finally found.

During Erica's 2022 decline, the word Alzheimer's was never uttered. Her confusion led her to ask—every day—if she was going "crazy" or "senile." I'd respond that she was 91 with tensions and anxiety, as well as memory loss. The only time the dread label ever surfaced was when a young nurse blurted it out after a brief cognitive test which Erica had failed.

And so, on Dec. 20, 2022, Erica and I were moved from The Kenwood to Amira Choice by a group of wizards who, over a seven-hour period, removed everything in one place and carefully set it all up in the new. We sauntered in to a fully-appointed, spacious apartment that evening. The cost was \$4,343, and I was reminded of Oscar Wilde, who'd said, "A cynic is a person who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing."

After the masterful administration of The Kenwood, where Jennifer Volkenant was really a brilliant director, Amira struck me as an indifferently operated bureaucracy, and a stumbling and unresponsive prison. And the vaunted meals were uninspired but fortunately spare repasts—Oliver Twist came to mind every time porridge was served.

Erica's neediness deepened and widened. Her disorientation grew until finding the bathroom became a challenge. She needed help in dressing and in every quotidian enterprise.

I was very grateful we were

together. In between episodes of befuddlement she was loving, apologetic and caring.

Erica would express fears of death ("Am I dying?"), indifference to food, yet snack incessantly in the evening. At one point, in the fall of 2022, she'd fainted at a friend's outdoor barbecue. We spent 13 horrific hours at the hospital, being tested and awaiting the results.

Finally, the diagnosis came—

Mostly lucid, she remained a loving, caring companion.

It was slippage, not crashes—and no menaces. Her objections to me seemed to center on bullying, controlling and plotting to kill her.

Items continued to vanish, and they were anything but easy to locate. Occasionally, I'd stumble onto a comb, nail file or panties buried deep within bedding. Questions were incessant, repeated, and reflected a loosening grip on reality. Being surrounded by family photos everywhere was a help she invariably seized.

Although harboring a decidedly Hebrew neurosis over bowel movements, her physical health was remarkably robust. She had more energy and stamina than anyone I knew. She slept very soundly but periodically awoke to wander the halls and corridors while I slept. Invariably, she'd be returned by staff or neighbors.

And so the days and months passed, occasionally dotted with such episodes as the passing out at Joe Selvaggio's barbecue. The resulting 13-hour hospitalization proved sufficiently chastening that any reference to it would quickly result in complying with nourishment requirements.

Mood changes could occur suddenly and without preamble—

"You don't like me anymore."

"Why are you so nasty?"

"You're a controlling bully."

For me, the principal effect of Erica's disintegration was exhaustion. I needed to be responsive, patient, caring and loving, none of which virtues would've been employed, about me, by anyone who knew me well.

Medical answers—despite frequent deep and differential medical involvements, were spare, unhelpful and consisted mostly of mild tranquilizers.

The thing that stood out was the desperate need for loving, supportive companionship. But, perversely, these were among the very qualities the illness made difficult. Such ironies abounded.

And so, by December 2022 The Kenwood officials decided we'd have to go, launching Dominick in a paroxysm of research for a destination.

Dominick came up with Amira Choice—a lock-up with a lot of custodial features, costing \$11,000 a month. This contrasted painfully with The Kenwood's rent of \$3,500 monthly.

December 20, 2022, would be moving day.

Death became an increasingly dominant theme every day. It surfaced in three phases—"Am I dying?" "I want to die." And "I'm afraid of death."

Clearly an obsessive concern but it was difficult to assess her real feelings. One day in the autumn of 2022, I concluded her real, sincere wish was to die, but I couldn't figure out how it might be done.

Finally, I thought a plastic bag over her head might do the trick. It was abundantly clear to me that she was better off dead although it would break my heart.

I set up the bag and a bottle

of Laphroaig to sip from to ease the process.

Erica slipped the bag over her head, affixed a large rubber band as a necklace to secure the neck and sat and gripped the back of the chair. As she approached asphyxiation, she predictably panicked and tore everything off.

I concluded I'd been wrong and that the life force within her was stronger than either of us realized. The issue never arose again, either in word or deed. A dead letter.

On December 20, 2022, we moved to Amira Choice, a lock-up facility Erica could not leave unchaperoned—day or night. Medical services were provided and three smallish meals a day.

People kept asking how I liked the place. The question was difficult for me to answer. As New York's Mayor Ed Koch would've put it, "What's to like?"

I felt I needed to resign myself to it, accept it and adjust. My principal priority was to stay together no matter what. We loved each other totally, and I was not going to abandon her if I could possibly avoid it. I had seen other warehoused spouses, and the results were to deepen and exacerbate the patient's misery greatly.

Coping was exhausting and challenging but a real test of character. Patience was a must. Exasperation—a perennial temptation—had to be eschewed. I had never had my character so deeply tested, and I feared I'd be unequal to it.

I was anxious to avoid burdening Tony in Santa Monica, where he had his own concerns.

Tony was busy with his family, business and life—as well as being 2,000 miles away. Dominick suffered the handicap of propinquity.

Dominick was managing a five-flat apartment building his brother had bought and was free to shape his own schedule. He found our new residence—Amira Choice—and arranged our move.

On December 20, 2022, Dom brought us to his house, where we spent about seven hours chatting and such with the three of them—Dom, his wife, Amy, and their 16-year-old Melissa—a dynamite student and gifted artist.

While we whiled away the time, the movers set to simply erase one residence and replicate it marvelously—and all for \$4,343. Amazing, really, but they forgot a rug and a bunch of stuff in storage.

Our new digs lacked a stove and a bath—and Erica loved baths. We could not even brew a cup of coffee. I swallowed hard and said nothing.

Now we had services—the nature of which were vague to imperceptible to me—and paid \$11,000 per month to be imprisoned. Fortunately, it was winter, and we were together.

We settled into a new routine of no activities, except for three relatively light meals a day. Opportunities for exercise were, at best, inconvenient to functionally inaccessible, so I took to walking the corridor one mile each day, postprandial.

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Unbeknownst to me, my psychic energy seemed to be silently recovering and I thought I might begin an amateur's observations of Alzheimer's nature and progress, from a regular person's perspective.

Erica was mostly lucid, kind, apologetic and loving. She hated being a burden and having to rely on me and everyone around her. Paranoia—in the form of suspicion that I planned to kill her—came and went. Concentration was fading, so reading was out. Movies, by late January 2023, were of little interest—and the new residence offered nothing comparable to The Kenwood.

So, except for the loving nature and lucid moments, it was all bad. My resources were taxed, and I strove for equanimity.

Erica could converse and even get on the phone for brief exchanges, but her decline was merciless and progressive.

By late January of 2023 she needed help getting dressed, had to be kept from pouring cranberry juice over her dinner and needed me there all the time. Even writing this took a lot of scheming, usually in the form of rest and naps.

She'd insist on accompanying me on my daily one-mile walks, muttering a running dialog of complaints and whines, until finally defeating the project. Yet it was clear that she had way more energy than I did and simply found the whole experience boring. Erica did not—ever—find boredom anything but awful. I embraced it—seeing it as a situation free of harm. Tolerating boredom came easily to me.

Medication, in the form of gentle tranquilizers, seemed to help. She slept well, ate sensibly and otherwise functioned acceptably—notwithstanding a Hebraic concern with bowel movements. Woody Allen would've understood.

I was very grateful to have her companionship—whatever its form—and felt no discernible self-pity over my situation. It was what it was, and I'd do what I could.

Erica skipped breakfast but we had lunch and dinner together. We spent a lot of time in bed, cuddling affectionately. My hearing difficulty and her soft voice did make our conversations increasingly tortured, but I'd tried hearing aids for some months and definitively gave up on them as hopelessly inadequate.

The parallel populations of both facilities bear commenting on for the dramatic contrasts.

Whereas The Kenwood's activities buzzed with animated discussions, Amira's population sat or stood in stony, unbroken silence. Both were geezers but of very contrasting species.

The activities directors were very different too. At Amira, the lady was a minimalist, autocratic bureaucrat, affecting good fellowship and delivering nonstop bingo and the very occasional troubadour (or troubadora).

At The Kenwood, the director

had offered a wide and engaging variety of movies, televised concerts and lectures, as well as speakers and crafts. She was also a fat lady who didn't like me. I'd met the type before—folks who, like the little old lady at one of my speeches, remarked to her companion, "That Tony Bouza sure is full of himself, isn't he?" That said it succinctly. That also explained the reaction my buddy got on RANT (the NYPD chat room) when he typed a flattering reference to me. My waiting critics flooded him with denunciations of my fecklessness in the most vivid tones.

I sat at meals (three a day, light repasts) across from a lady who meticulously realigned the box containing sugar, butter, jelly and substitute patties. She also wiped down lunchroom counters and reflected what must have been a previous life of fussybudgetry.

I'd inwardly scoff at such reports as, "You know, you've got Alzheimer's if you can't find the bathroom in your apartment."

How could that be?

Well, it turns out, quite easily.

Erica would stagger about in the night and finally ask where it was. She took to wearing my clothes, which, being grotesquely huge on her much smaller frame, made for exhausting confusions and corrections.

Periods of lucidity were characterized by contrition, apologies and protestations of love and devotion. Periods of hostility were charged with suspicions ("You don't love me." "Have you found someone else?" "I'm going downstairs to tell them you're trying to kill me." "You're a controlling bully and a monster and I don't even like you.")

Through all this I focused on what I knew to be her true feelings of total devotion and love. The whole business was a test. The closest analogy I could fashion was that it was precisely similar to parenting. Patience and understanding were so obviously required that they were employed effortlessly and automatically.

Sleep was interrupted frequently by anxiety, trips to the bathroom, attempted wanderings in the corridor, searches of the refrigerator for goodies and similar confused ventures.

I remained grateful for her company and cherished the moments of lucidity. The darker episodes sometime tempted me into exasperated outbursts, but I always caught myself and promptly conciliated, apologized and professed my affection.

The bitterness, anger and resentment were really shocking and forced me to wonder as to their source. Where did they come from? What inspired them? How did I contribute? I finally concluded it was the nature of the illness to inspire animus and paranoia.

Being 94, I knew of several acquaintances and friends "similarly situated" and the unaffected spouse—in every case—finally gave up and institutionalized the partner into isolated lock-up misery. I fervently hoped I could find the strength

to avoid such an outcome. I frankly did not know if I could.

It was clear to me, though, that I had to try. Erica desperately needed companionship and if I had to abandon her, it would be just that—and I wouldn't find it easy to forgive myself. There are some failures that are just unacceptable.

The neediness was nonstop and thoroughly exhausting. I had to repeatedly check myself from expressing my exasperation. Her behavior was driven entirely by fear. Awful to ex-



perience and the love and the pity (a very harsh construction but "sympathy" would've been a cop-out—to use a bad pun). Erica needed my physical presence and responsive involvement every second of the day and night.

My number-one priority was that we remain together, and the clarity of that objective kept me from being tempted into other options. Although there was nothing we could do about it, there was little doubt in my mind that we'd both be far better off dead. My memory kept harking back to Admiral Chester Nimitz, the son of the great World War II naval tactician, also called Chester.

This one, my contemporary, owned substantial acreage in Wellfleet, Cape Cod. As he and his wife grew elderly, infirm and, finally, ill, he put his affairs in meticulous order for his heirs and killed himself and his wife. I assumed he'd used sleeping pills, as a friend of mine, Carol Perry, did years later.

I felt stupid and inept over my utter failure to find a similar solution.

Medical people came by and examined and questioned Erica at some length. Elaborate tests were scheduled and executed, often at significant logistical cost: yet I "evermore came out of the same door wherein I went," which is to say we were never privileged with relevant or significant disclosures, and the word Alzheimer's never surfaced.

Erica needed help to get dressed; found difficulty in locating the simplest objects or locations and seemed further adrift each passing day. She was "muddled" (her word) and frequently expressed a great, unlabeled fear. She remained consistently loving. Her emotions were very close to the surface, and she wept frequently.

Sometimes her mood darkened, and she accused me of "not even liking" her. "Who are you going to replace me with?" she would ask. Had I found "someone else?"

Even at meals she engaged in inappropriate behaviors such as

trying to pour cranberry juice over her meat at dinner. Modesty suffered as well and her customary reserve over bowel movements was cheerfully forgotten. Now, for the first time in our 66 years together, it became clear to me that my seemingly forgotten cop experiences of dealing with a dazzling array of human unpleasantness was coming in very handy. I found it at least possible to cope with this underside of human actions and expressions.

As my psychic energy returned, following an awful experience in October, I decided to record my fumbling and amateurish observations, if only to lend purpose to my existence and to give expression to my irrepressible urge to write. I loved the English language and was glad to live in a nation that permitted free expression.

Financially, I thought we could cope with the \$11,000 per month rental, but it seemed an awful lot to pay for one's imprisonment.

On Sunday, January 29, 2023, disaster struck.

The day began with a spare breakfast in the dining room. Lunch and dinner to be served in our apartment. A moving van appeared outside our window.

I thought and concluded there was a Covid-19 scare afloat.

In the evening, a nurse came by to administer tests. I thought little of it all, until ...

A couple of hours later the nurse appeared and said I was negative, but ...

Erica had tested positive for Covid-19. Now our shrunken imprisonment had shrunk further. We'd be confined to our apartment for what I understood to be five days. Our meals would be delivered, and a warning sign posted on our door. Another in an endless series of adjustments.

Erica's antics took a malicious turn. Where a clock had disappeared—one of many items—and surfaced when the movers found it somewhere—now it vanished again. I found it and the next thing was that its battery went missing.

My life was now heavily weighted with such actions, coupled with inappropriate, dysfunctional or bizarre attempts to, for example, change a meal to her liking, wear my clothes, forget the location of anything and no longer be able to take a message or follow a TV movie or program's story line.

By the end of January, Erica was in despair and anxious for death. Only my companionship offered any respite.

Between occasional bouts of anger and suspicion, Erica was a loving, caring person. She was terribly frightened yet managed to sleep reasonably well, with a number of late-night risings and wanderings until coaxed back to bed. She imagined all kinds of errands or trips, which produced anxieties even as they were dispelled.

The disorientation deepened and widened as her grasp of reality loosened. The medications' effects were hard to measure,

but I had to believe they helped.

Dominick's visits—made occasional by his busy-ness with renting the fifth apartment, repairs, snow shoveling and the needs of his family—were pure tonics for us both. He was always great company, engaging and a great laughter.

Tony dutifully called about twice a week.

I saw Tony's success as arising from a simple formula—hunt for a real estate deal, research it carefully and raise the funds to buy it. The key component seemed to be the courage to pull the trigger on the deal.

Shakespeare, as always, had put it best: "The native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought; and enterprises of great pitch and moment, with this regard, their currents turn awry and lose the name of action." (Hamlet) He echoes this in Julius Caesar: "There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

Much, much easier said than done.

And so, our shrunken lives shrunk further still. I fought hard and silently to adjust. I saw no option but to plow forward as stoically as possible and neither wince nor cry aloud.

Writing was a surprising solace. It fed into the internal life of contemplation that so appealed to me. I needed a refuge from the realities closing in and bitching and moaning didn't seem to offer relief.

Staffing

I never intended to comment on or comparing staffs at The Kenwood, where we lived six and a half years, or Amira, where we moved in December of 2022. It just seemed an invidious and unfair analysis, so I never really considered it. But the contrasts appeared so vividly that the subject suggested itself, and insistently.

After seven weeks it became clear that Amira's workers, mostly Black immigrants who had likely won a lottery and were equally likely members of an educated and striving middle class in African countries like Somalia, Togo, Nigeria and Kenya (just like Barack Obama's father), were very different from the Latin Americans, Native American and African Americans at The Kenwood.

Still, occasional and masked flashes of anger revealed resentments mostly kept under control. I saw one when I asked a waiter a minor question, stupidly calling him Thomas, the name of another waiter ...

He answered, removed his mask, and blurted, "And my name is James." His eyes flashed angrily.

The Kenwood workers, under the firm, friendly, confident control of Executive Director Jennifer Volkenant, were friendly, helpful, solicitous and caring. The Amira workers—whose principal mission was to keep us locked in and preventing escapes, adopted the mien of prison screws to our prisoners. The

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thought of one of us escaping and wandering into traffic was the unthinkable and scandalous possibility that must be avoided at all costs.

In my first seven weeks at Amira I never once saw a person identifiable as part of management—senior or otherwise. The place was a prison—period.

My task was to be the caregiver (horrendous new word) to Erica, who now needed my nearby presence 24/7. Even taking time to write this became a bit of a wrench.

The Covid-19 diagnosis did not seem to impact either of us in any discernible way. We ate, slept, pooped and functioned normally. I struggled to get Erica to eat, every day, to nourish her and prevent a repetition of the fainting spell at Joe Selvaggio's barbecue and subsequent hospitalization at Methodist for 13 hours—of truly horrible tests and waiting for their results, only to learn she needed to eat more sensibly.

We were now, at the end of January 2023, even more confined than ever, unable to leave our apartment. The building seemed to be in shut-down mode, very likely a sensible precaution, but a truly painful development for already limited and confined prisoners.

There must have been maybe 60 or so residents on our floor, which was a quadrant surrounding a center court that contained trees, chairs, tables and scattered foliage.

The food was nondescript/institutional and, very fortunately and wisely, served in small amounts. It seemed clear that the nutritional needs of the inmates had been knowingly and sensibly calculated. You were not likely to become morbidly obese at Amira. I was—to my real shock—down to 187 pounds from a high of 212 or so, over a 6'5" frame. I hadn't been that light in over 70 years, and I'd have been quite content to lose a bit more.

The psychic energy to write was a lifesaver for me. I was sustained by an internal life of reflection and speculation, as well as the wonderful pleasure of such writing as this:

When I was a beggarly boy
And lived in a cellar damp,
I had not a friend nor a toy
But I had Aladdin's lamp;
When I could not sleep for the cold
I had fire enough in my brain,
And fitted with roofs of gold
My beautiful castles in Spain.
Now, at 94 and contemplating oblivion, I was motivated by that ancient poem's words, the rest of which I didn't bother to remember.

Erica was a very sad specimen, and I had to struggle to control my exasperation.

She'd wear my clothes, hide my underwear and make objects disappear. I'd occasionally stumble across one lost artifact or another among the bedding, deeply buried in a drawer, in luggage and other unlikely places. It was a pack-rat mentality

that I had to control myself to tolerate. I needed patience and understanding and sometimes managed to practice them.

Her loving, caring, needful nature deserved no less than my total devotion, and reconciling with my fate required large doses of Zen. Erica was more than worth it.

Even as my life shrank, my inner world continued to expand. This exercise was one key. Another was the horrendous cases of police brutality toward Blacks on television, as well as the Hitler-like drift of American politics, abetted by Trumpism.

America was beginning to resemble 1931 Weimar.

The residue of my past lives seemed to persist, stubbornly, the passage of time and the growth and expansion of worldly indifference.

In San Francisco, a Black documentarian was working on Malcolm X's murder on February 25, 1965, and had filmed countless hours with me over the more than 20 years he'd devoted to the project.

In Brooklyn, another team of documentary makers spent five



hours filming interviews with me on police issues in contemporary America. I loaned the female partner a copy of my memoir which was, predictably, never returned.

I never heard from the Brooklyn crew either.

There were messages in bottles afloat in the sea, but it was anybody's guess if they would ever make it to any shore.

Further evidence that life after my professional involvement had ended came with the call from the just-appointed police chief's secretary. O'Hara wanted to have lunch.

How flattering, until ...

I later learned he was scheduling similar prandial exploits with all former chiefs—a task I would not have undertaken for very big bucks.

Nevertheless, I prepared a two-page briefing document—listing all the issues I thought relevant and also thought I'd give him a copy of my memoir—which contained a lot of Minneapolis police history. The date scheduled for this petty summit was February 17, 2023. I'd been sworn in almost precisely 43 years before on February 11, 1980.

And the beat played on—even after any rational assessment would have predicted its demise.

Erica was frequently queried, tested and otherwise assessed, but we never received an appraisal of her condition and prognosis.

Surely, they knew, but America's medical tradition seemed to

rest on not alarming the patient or his/her family. After all, if the case was hopeless ...

Certainly, a tough call, but I believed deeply in the value of truth and the citizen's right to it. The likely unanimity behind soft-soap must have had its roots in practicality.

Nevertheless, I clung stubbornly to the truth in all circumstances—and that's the principle that guided my working life.

Erica was, to use her word, muddled.

It was hard to measure the progress of the disease, but little things served as signposts. She now needed help getting dressed. She needed my company all day and balked at my trying to write. She occasionally lapsed into acerbic humor.

"You really don't like me very much, do you?" was a frequent comment. She was disoriented and spoke of going "downstairs" when there was no downstairs, or "outside" when temperatures were dauntingly frigid. Altogether, a loosening of the grip on the anchors of reality we employ without thought.

I feared that the world would, if it could, tear us apart and that was the one thing I could not allow.

Meanwhile, the Covid-19 diagnosis did not seem to impinge seriously. We coughed and sneezed, had diminished appetites and not much energy, but the vaccinations clearly prevented us from becoming really sick.

I watched a lot of TV—mostly news, sports, the ticker and occasional movies. Novels I once would've sniffed haughtily at now seemed acceptable diversions. But it was writing that really infused me with animation and ambition.

Our bout with Covid-19 went on interminably, although—because of vaccination—the symptoms were relatively mild. Nevertheless, we were in weakened and rather exhausted states. And in the middle of this a minor disaster struck.

Things kept disappearing and rarely reappearing. There was no rhyme or reason behind the actions that I could see. Hairbrushes, clocks, nail files—any object, including a small dresser drawer, could vanish.

On February 3, 2023, things took an ominous turn when I went for my trousers.

Gone.

What?

I searched frantically and soon realized I was not going to find them easily. Futilely, but irresistibly, I asked.

"I've never touched them," Erica answered with the true conviction of the fervent believer.

Hopeless.

I continued my frantic search. My cash and wallet, with all my identifiers and charge cards were in my pockets. I quickly saw this as a test I could not fail—I could not and would not surrender to my frenzy.

So, I rummaged madly—and unsuccessfully.

Thus, did insult impinge on outrage.

On February 5, I wrote our

granddaughter Melissa a four-page letter—no check enclosed (I labeled a gift a distraction in the circumstances). It congratulated her on her straight A's (as usual) and advised her to part with her parents' affection for plebianism and embrace elitism by trying for the Ivy League and becoming an art professor.

It was a risk, so I phrased it patiently and lovingly and sent it with no clue as to its impact, if any.

In a phone talk with Dom he off-handedly muttered, "... and don't go dying on me." I was certain this was sincerely meant.

Staff came in, did tests of all sorts (blood pressure, nose swabs, Covid-19 tests, etc.) and never reported a result, negative or positive.

Amenities were nonexistent.

As my life shrank I increasingly withdrew into thinking, reading and writing, only now the second became increasingly unavailable. I heard a brief reference to a library on the second floor but had, so far, no access. In a pitiful (truly) attempt at thrift I'd canceled The New York Times, saving about \$1,000 a year.

My life was reduced to such futile exertions.

I spoke with Joe Selvaggio two or three times a week, Tony fitfully, and Dominick when the mood—or a sense of obligation—seized him. My inner life—and such writings as these—were my refuge and salvation. I had the distinct feeling that my life was at cross-purposes with the world.

Dominick was right, my demise would certainly be an inconvenience—mostly to him but not sparing Tony either. I'd mope along.

"I'm dying," and "I'll be dead soon," were the twin leitmotifs that launched the day. Death was a real specter in Erica's life and, for whatever reason, much feared. In her normal life she had never obsessed over it.

She'd stroke my face, hair and chest until I felt myself the reincarnation of the Heartbreak Kid.

Up and down and out of bed, a bit of wandering (always hoping it wouldn't include saunters into the dreary corridor) and back to bed. Over and over.

A litany of aches and pains (back, shoulders, legs, etc.) followed. References to needing a drink were now very rare, but they did occasionally surface. Tingling in arms and legs was now totally absent.

Boredom ate at Erica pretty constantly. I did some reading and some TV news watching, and that didn't help her. For me, my piddling writing efforts absorbed my ambitions, notwithstanding the pitiful results.

By early February 2023, the traces of Covid-19 virtually vanished. But the building's lockdown remained. We ate breakfast and dinner and skipped lunch.

My life was now reduced to occasional calls from Tony and Joe Selvaggio and Dominick and the unwelcome importuning of Minnesota's extensive medical establishment—whose efforts,

in insisting on a CT scan for Erica—had launched the Covid-19 outbreak at our residence.

When asked, I replied I was accepting, adjusting and conforming, but inwardly I really hated the facility—its impact and mindless approach. To pay \$11,000 a month for imprisonment struck me as the very zenith of irony, if not absurdity. It was the price exacted for our remaining together, so I'd pay it.

For whatever unfathomable reason Erica seemed to really, really love me and now rarely expressed the hostility and rancor that had surfaced back in the fall of 2022. It had to be attributed to whatever medication staff was administering to her every day.

Alzheimer's was death by a thousand cuts—gradual and very imperceptible but inexorable. It had begun to surface with occasional forgetting, confusions (phone messages, etc.) in 2022 and intensified seriously by that fall, leading to the incidents that led to our expulsion from The Kenwood in December 2022. Its signature was a combination of inexorableness and subtlety.

The result was sad beyond imagining—to watch a fully developed human descend into a self-absorbed and helpless state.

My view of life, as I secretly held it and practiced it, was profoundly subversive. Family was number one and I did all I could to strengthen and preserve it. It was a decidedly European (actually tiny Spanish fishing village) approach. This kind of secret life was one of the big obstacles to my memoir ("Confessions of a Police Misfit," 2021). My account of my life proved, to me, about 95% accurate—and that would have to do.

Even as I scribbled this account I had no clear idea of what I would or could do with it when it was done. But plowing forward felt right.

"Boy, I really screwed up, didn't I?" In her frequent moments of clarity Erica remembered walking the halls of The Kenwood and even once brandishing a large kitchen knife. Another time she had insisted on going out on the street barefoot, in her nightgown, in freezing temperatures at night.

I reassured her that she meant, and did, no harm, and there was no "fault" (her word) attached. This did not totally relieve the burden of guilt.

By February 9, the Covid-19 lockdown was lifted, with never a word—things just reverted to normal. The doctor reported Erica's CT scan (brain test, anyway) went well, but his comments were couched in cautions that alarmed more than reassured.

Any sensation, however brief, brought strains of panic to Erica's voice and eyes. She could not bear separation and even finding the time and space to prepare this account was a challenge. She'd hover over and around me as I scribbled away, mostly undeterred.

I hoped spring would help. There was a terrace courtyard

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that looked inviting.

The longer I stayed, the greater the contrast in space.

Silences were ominous and I learned to be wary of them.

On February 9, 2023, I was lost in a Michael Crichton page-turner in the living room. Erica was in the kitchen—after our first dinner in the dining room in many days.

A loud crash of splintering glass caught me up. Erica had been fiddling with a reproduction Tiffany lamp and dropped it, shattering its glass shade.

As always, she was sorry and apologetic.

As always, I had to fight to control my reaction.

She really was not responsible. No one was. I had to learn and relearn that lesson.

Earlier we'd dined in the common room, with the usual studied indifference of the servers. Served a stew, I had asked for some bread. Obviously unreasonable, my request was ignored. Later I asked another for some juice (they served cranberry with meals) and didn't get that either.

Staff was desensitized to residents' needs, probably because addled geezers were often confused. Still, the staff's challenge was to stay engaged and try to be helpful. Instead, what I saw was a studied and camouflaged indifference.

I managed to resume walking one mile by circling the corridor.

The key to looking after Erica was companionship. She was very high energy and needy, and I was very glad we were together. I just needed to be more patient and less exasperated.

Surrounded by photos and cherished artifacts collected over 66 years of marriage, she at least had a context within which to frame her life.

The winter was characteristically harsh and interminable, and boredom was a problem exacerbated by the prison-like atmosphere.

Obsessing over her mental state, I tended to ignore or downplay the physical aspect, but that mattered too.

I watched her closely. If I went for a corridor walk of one mile, she'd urgently ask to come along. We'd set off and she would whine and fuss, "How much further?" "Can we stop for a while?"

All this time I watched her carefully. Her protestations contrasted vividly with her body language—which was brisk, purposeful and energetic. I concluded she was way stronger than I was, with a lot more stamina. She would always polish off a three-mile walk around Lake Calhoun without a trace of the slightest exertion.

Erica had to be coaxed to eat, having lost interest in food. She'd had an awful bout of anorexia shortly after our marriage in 1957, going from 110 pounds to 99 and scaring us all half to death.

Then she'd finally come around, forcing herself at first, then gradually adjusting to normal consumption.

Now it was different. She would eat, but without interest or conviction.

She slept well and we rested a lot throughout the day. Only marketers interrupted us with urgent admonitions in pathetic English.

Erica had, mostly, moments of clarity interspersed with doubts, fears and concerns. "Do you still love me?" "When are we going home?"

She would study photographs assiduously and reasonably accurately, but events tended to fade into the fog of forgetfulness.

That the worst was during winter didn't help. Fall 2022 had been leavened by daily jaunts to Lowry Hill Park, which broke up the day nicely. Amira offered no distractions beyond meals, and those tended to be stony affairs where not a single word was ever exchanged. The inmate population probably did not exceed 40, from what I could observe. Even visitors were few and far between, and most residents were alone. As at The Kenwood, walkers abounded, and wheelchairs were ubiquitous also.

A lively internal life sometimes proved highly profitable to my mental state. The process, typically, was triggered unexpectedly by Super Bowl 57, the Philadelphia Eagles versus the Kansas City Chiefs.

I was certain the Eagles would bully, batter and bury the softer Chiefs. Had I been a betting man I'd have wagered the farm on the mortal lack.

As it happened, of course, the Chiefs won. I was chastened. My big ego had led me astray once again.

It seemed an episode worth exploring, and it led me to contrast Amira with The Kenwood.

In the latter, I was a celebrity and sought after for all sorts of opinions and advice. At Amira I was met with stony indifference and ignorance. Nothing could have been more salubrious for my mental health. My big ego fed on adulation and celebrity which could not be good for sound mental health and grounding.

So I was grateful, and careful to avoid any reference to my dead past. It was now 43 years since I'd been sworn in as chief of police. Let the dead bury the dead.

Ego was an issue for me. Feeding it led to hubris—arrogance and conceit and impaired judgment and actions. Seeking recognition in the eyes of others was corrupting to character. My ego was always telling me how wonderful and clever I was. Believing that led to the pomposity, self-importance and aberrational egotism that I'd found in so many contemporaries and associates. It was the kind of flaw that led Mayor Giuliani of NYC to appoint his chauffeur police commissioner.

Unsurprisingly, Giuliani's choice would end up in prison for fraudulently housing his mistress in an apartment donated to World Trade Center rescue workers.



This pair—mayor and police commissioner—went on to even loftier heights working for Donald Trump, only to come a cropper once again.

Oedipal arrogance came with a high price.

Erica's illness progressed stealthily and inexorably—almost imperceptibly. I had to be careful that the items that disappeared were not essential to our functioning. Things vanished irrespective of their importance to our lives.

I really missed The New York Times and chided myself over my cheapness about it, but the fact was I'd never get the chance to read it.

Erica's need for my full attention was unrelenting. She'd been a true and faithful partner for over 60 years and now she needed me. I dared not fail.

The contrasts between Amira and The Kenwood were stark. And unexpected.

The Kenwood's tenants paid about \$3,500 a month for rent, breakfast and such services as a van, movies, entertainment, minimal medical attention, lectures, and occasional treats and parties. The residents were a gregarious lot of former lawyers, ministers, professors, doctors and such.

Amira's inmates were nondescript. I found them hard to figure as I thought of their past lives. I'd expected evidence of the trappings of wealth (after all, the monthly nut was a gargantuan \$11,000 which required a gross annual income of just under \$200,000).

Instead, I found poorly-dressed geezers sitting in stony silence, wandering aimlessly through the halls. None of the artifacts of wealth, power and assurance were in evidence. Indeed, just the opposite. Some of the residents looked downright seedy—and one (who wore a cap with the NYPD logo, to my astonishment) even had a dog as a companion. That could not have been an easy lift.

Erica's neediness was so extreme that I needed to search for an appropriate analogy. Finally, I settled on parenting—the one time in our lives when another human is totally dependent on us for their very existence. Any absence, however brief, was cause for fear and dismay, despite whatever precautions were taken to anticipate and assuage the consternation.

I continued to hear, to my surprise, from tenants of The

Kenwood. It was the season of falls, and the halls abounded with tales of mishaps and heroism. One dog, Lassie-like, secured rescue for her mistress by bounding back to the residence, yapping loudly, and leading rescuers to her fallen and helpless owner with a fractured hip, who was unable to rise.

The gregariousness of The Kenwood contrasted dramatically with the stoniness of Amira—and there was no one to ameliorate the distinction or seemed to be aware it even existed.

And so Erica and I cuddled in bed, rested, walked the corridors and ate—lightly but often. I took to reading popular novelists like Clancy, Crichton, Grisham and such to see what the fuss was about. These were writing best-selling page-turners, and I wasn't. Formulaic, I thought, but what did that even mean? And what distinguished them from Hemingway? I found his "Islands in the Stream" tedious and obsessed with cats, winds, tides and boat maneuvers. Great literature should inspire deep and complex thoughts about life, its meaning and its sensible management.

A very—to me—big event loomed in my life—the new police chief's secretary called to set up a lunch date. My ego leaped at the bait. About time.

Later I was told he'd set up similar assignments with the other has-beens. Deflation. Another useful lesson. And then it was postponed because of a scheduling conflict.

I prepared a two-page briefing memo and thought I'd give him a copy of my memoir which contained a lot of background and Minneapolis history. I was not discomfited by the postponement, believing mine to be the easiest commitment to move.

Erica was taking medication and I wondered about its effect. For one thing, the bouts of hostility and paranoia seemed less frequent and intense. She slept and ate well and rarely complained of constipation—a more or less persistent litany.

The epistolary life

No one called, so I was reduced to a medium I found altogether suited to my troglodyte existence—letters. My willingness to engage and respond resulted in such morale boosting and energizing messages as this one, from an editor at Southside Pride, where my columns had

been published:

January 29, 2023

Dear Tony,

I've heard that your January column is the last one you plan to write. I hope I heard it wrong.

I especially liked your latest (and perhaps last?) column in which you described so vividly the way in which society breaks down (the image of one person cutting in line and then two and then many) and then followed that description with a well-told (and horrifying) supporting story. It made a very clear point and a clear warning. I wish more people were reading Southside Pride.

In your columns I don't always understand everything, but even then your writing is intriguing and aesthetically pleasing in its playful, elegant and provocative style. Southside Pride has been very lucky to have you in its pages. In my opinion, the Spaniard in you is always present. We need that ancient voice in the New World.

I read "The Feast of the Goat." Mario Vargas Llosa gave us every possible insight into the reasons why and how a father could sacrifice his daughter and yet, it still boggles the mind. The book displays amazing writing and a horrible story. Technically speaking, the story worked perfectly despite not being told in chronological order. That was super impressive.

How is your Jesus Galindo story coming? Or is it finished? I would love to read it, I think. I hope it's not too scary. Maybe I can get a copy through Eddie, or I can call you about it.

Best to you always,
Elaine Klaassen

In mid-February 2023 Erica was a bedraggled, confused, frightened little old lady, with wild hair—yet I loved her and cherished her companionship. My challenge was to avoid exasperation and practice patience.

For my part, now in my 95th year, I had to husband my energy and continue to simply keep on putting one foot in front of another. I tried to walk a mile in the corridors every day, and Erica always insisted on coming, all the while whining and resisting. At the end I was usually pretty pooped while she bristled with energy.

We spent a lot of time in bed; she'd fall asleep in my arms easily. She'd join me for lunch and dinner, and skipped breakfast.

My assessment of staff was not enhanced when what looked like a teenybopper from "the business office," casually presented me with a bill for just over twenty thousand dollars.

Jesus Christ!

It was rent for January and February and actually less than the \$22,000 due them, but it stung. I wrote out a check which she accepted without ceremony and left—thereby reinforcing my assessment of an unfeeling and uncaring staff.

Classically, I was leading a life of quiet desperation—a phrase I'd encountered as a young person but had to live to grasp its

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meaning. I decided my next read would be John Grisham, who, I was surprised to discover, was America's number-one bestselling author.

Mirabile Dictu!

Erica's behavior was unpredictable, often strange, but not harmful. She'd normally skip breakfast, but, on February 21 she showed up barefoot in her nightgown—vacantly seeking me out. I simply responded routinely, fetched jacket and shoes and shifted to a table that had room for her.

The nights were never free of interruptions—in the form of a rough wakeup by shaking: "I'm dying," "My mouth is so dry," "I have phlegm in my throat," "My shoulder (or back) aches." Fear was a constant and seemed to relate to death.

Often, she was uncharacteristically docile, and I had to be careful not to show impatience or exasperation.

"Moderate Dementia," so read a medical summary, following tests in mid-February. I'd hate to see what "severe" looked like.

The report described Erica's nocturnal hall wanderings and having expressed "suicidal ideation"—the catchphrases of contemporary currency.

Erica's loving nature certainly eased the burden of caring for her. She expressed her appreciation frequently and surprised me by expressing regret over her wanderings and upsetting of staff and residents at The Kenwood.

The briefest separation precipitated importuning of staff—which they were inured to enduring with routine aplomb.

I'd awake to find the bed empty and no sound. She'd be abroad again and would soon be found and returned. Sleep, nevertheless, was often interrupted—adding to the perennial exhaustion of caregivers.

We'd walk a mile in the corridor after lunch every day, Erica whining consistently all the while. At their end she'd clearly reflected heaps more energy than me.

Following her scare at Selvaggio's, she now made a real effort to eat sensibly.

Thursday, February 24, was not a bad day. That label simply was not earned, but it certainly wasn't a good one.

The omen surfaced with, "Why are you trying to kill me?" and evolved into hall wanderings and importuning of staff. These practiced functionaries would escort her back and discreetly look about for signs of physical abuse, etc. Satisfied that mayhem was not in the cards, they'd drop her off till the next approach. At dinner she played with her food and did not eat. Later she'd forage for a banana Dominick had thoughtfully brought.

I put these contretemps into what I felt was a comfortable perspective. After all, except for the expulsion from The Kenwood, what harm was there in these misadventures?

The illness progressed inexorably but with a gradualness that made it virtually impercep-

tible, except, once in a while, her actions captured unwelcome attention. Saturday, February 25, was one of those days—besides being Dominick's 59th birthday and the 58th anniversary of Malcolm X's assassination, which, coming during Black History Month, was nevertheless mostly ignored by a Black community embarrassed that he'd been killed by Blacks.

So on that date Erica was returned to our apartment after having been stopped and intercepted by Miguel, a Salvadoran staffer, who demonstrated how Erica had been flashing her tits in the halls. She was wearing only my tee shirt and her panties. Pretty scandalous, but I was past getting overly exercised about it.

The event was made possible by one of my medical setbacks.

I'd had dental surgical extractions in the fall and, because I was on blood thinners and now a virtual hemophiliac, had lost so much blood that I was rushed to the hospital and received a transfusion. Now, on February 25, the gum bleeding had returned and wouldn't stop. So when Erica sauntered off I was dozing.

The new police chief, who'd flattered me with a lunch invite, announced to the media he'd move to create several new high-ranking police positions. I fumed. Bloat on bloat. Worthy of a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta.

While walking a mile in the corridor, I, like Saul on the road to Damascus, had an epiphany—I'd cancel our lunch in protest and probably write an essay on the fiasco. I thought the title might be "My non-dinner with Brian."

My ego, of course, bridled over the lost opportunity for inflation the event promised. It was something I could throw in to enhance the importance and should have been a welcome course correction, only it wasn't. I'd been looking forward to the event with the eager anticipation of a child for Christmas.

My nights now (in February 2023) were punctuated by awakening to a staffer returning Erica from another nocturnal sojourn. All done without fuss. Except for the dementia—which was severe in its disorientation—Erica was strong and energetic. Also loving, apologetic and caring.

My own health seemed okay, but I was taking six medications daily: for pissing; blood pressure; heart defibrillation; blood thinner; iron supplement; and God knows what else.

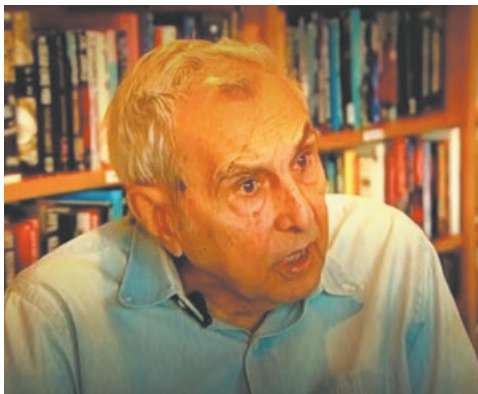
By the end of February 2023 I had a gum infection that caused blood to flow, on and off, for days at a time. My blood thinner was prescribed to prevent strokes (and I'm sure that it did, given the episodes of loss of limb control years earlier, which never returned after giving up beer).

I was reading the popular novelists, who, in common with all popular culture (sitcoms, com-

ic books, horror movies, music, etc.) wrote trash. But when I got to Tom Clancy I was struck by a truly curious fact—the book was written in 2018 and Clancy had died in 2013. Talk about miracles! Actually, this was the best proof—if any were needed—that these enterprises were entirely formulaic. The reader, as in all popular culture, was an innocent dupe.

Vignettes, of an illustrative nature, abounded. One resident left dinner early. When I looked his way he flashed a sickly smile and pointed to his crotch, emblazoned with a little round wet spot. Another of geriatric's little jokes.

On Wednesday, March 2, 2023, I was accosted by someone I didn't know in the lobby. To my genuine astonishment



he announced, "Brian O'Hara," the new police chief. There had been a mix-up on our lunch date.

We sat and I pontificated for an hour, and he seemed interested. I came away glowing with enthusiasm. He seemed a genuine winner.

I disagreed with his plan to create some new high ranks, adding bloat to a bloated agency. He took my demur graciously enough without commitment.

O'Hara seemed seriously interested in my fulminations and I was excessively flattered.

We'd met as I was returning the latest Tom Clancy novel—dated 2018 although he'd been dead 10 years by then.

I concluded these guys—Grisham, Crichton, Clancy, et al. were spinners who described violence very graphically and erotica very genteelly. Just like sitcoms and their anodyne sexuality.

Plutarch wrote that, if you wanted to assess someone, watch what they do with little things, not big ones (where practically all are careful). I'd always watch how my companions treated waiters, for example, a tell-tale transaction.

Whenever a staffer entered our bedroom, often—in a place that trampled privacy—the first thing they did was to draw the blinds closed—cutting off all visual contact with the outside world. Abandon all hope. Submarine effect.

In the meantime, I mulled the significance and complexity of my previous day's meeting with Chief Brian O'Hara. I usually needed to dwell deeply in the event if I were to experience an epiphany—but maybe not.

Erica would complain bitterly over the awful tension she felt, often describing "tingling" in her arms and legs. This was usually succeeded with a wist-

ful sigh and how great a sip of Laphroaig would be. Astonishing, the grip those innocent sips had over her still. Yet she did not succumb and was good about abstaining.

Now, in early March 2023, she had to be helped to dress; be coaxed to eat; prodded to exercise; and not be left alone. She expressed a nameless fear and had to have every aspect of her life—including our relationship and my identity—reaffirmed several times a day.

I kept the light on in the bathroom at night, so she'd find it. Any form of concentration was out—such as a book, article, movie, etc.

She often spoke of killing or being killed, and her obsession with death was a constant. Her love and caring shone through it all. I felt even more needed than I had with my babies. I needed to be much more aware of my effect on her and conscious of my reactions. For example, I'd go off for breakfast and she'd stay in bed.

Fifteen minutes along she'd often show up and I scrambled to accommodate. Another in a perennial chain of adjustments.

I found fun and profit in just thinking about things.

Often I'd find a solution to questions bedeviling me for years.

For instance, as I contemplated my past, I'd go back to how I and Erica met.

I worked in the Garment Center from 1946 to 1950 (when I was drafted) and joined the NYPD in 1953.

Around 1954, an old friend from my Garment Center days, Bernie Kastenbaum—a demon salesman—called to ask me to look in on his assistant who'd had a tonsillectomy.

I brought ice cream and Scotch (she drank), and Elizabeth Ryan and I started to date. She was statuesque and attractive but notably promiscuous and not marriage material.

We'd go to dinner and drinks and return to her place for a relatively chaste session of necking. I could never go further. Puzzling.

"I have a friend in England who is coming over and I want you to meet her. She'd be perfect for you and she's Claire Bloom's first cousin."

"Does she look like Claire?"

"No, but she's nice looking."

And on that rock rested my celibacy.

In March 1956 Elizabeth arranged a party in Greenwich Village where I'd meet Erica. A problem arose when I decided to go to Philadelphia to spend another chaste weekend with a great-looking girl who turned out to be a lesbian.

Elizabeth postponed the party for a week, and I attended.

Erica entered, saw me across the room and said to a friend, pointing to me: "See that fellow? That's the man I'm going to marry."

We did—one year later.

Over the years I wondered what lay behind Elizabeth's single-minded determination to make this match.

A friend of hers had, incredulously, asked Erica, "You're dating a cop?" Which said it all. I was a loser.

So I pondered the question.

Over the years Elizabeth married multiple times and became a serious alcoholic. When we saw her she'd be quite snappy and testy with Erica—who blithely ignored the slights, and they remained friends and even shared an apartment.

But why had Elizabeth been so adamant in an area where she so freely dispensed her favors to others?

It gradually, over many years, became clear. This was about the very British bugaboo of class.

Erica was a middle-class Jew and Elizabeth Ryan a working-class Catholic.

That was it.

Marrying me would bring Erica down a peg—into sweaty commoner status—and temper those snooty airs.

It was altogether a British thing and comeuppance to Erica's haughty airs.

And her plot worked to perfection.

The proof of Elizabeth's animus and envy centered on her behavior toward Erica when tipsy—guardedly and subtly negative.

I said nothing about it for many years.

Elizabeth married a recovering alcoholic, and they opened a home for former drinkers. And then they died.

"Where's Tuch?" (my nickname).

I explained, and that we were married 65 years, this was our apartment and that we'd be here until we died.

The midnight hall haunting continued and I'd be regularly awakened as she was returned.

Fear of dying, dark musings on death and killing dominated her anxiety. I'd occasionally get her to talk briefly with Tony when he called, which was about twice a week.

She'd carry a chair to join me for breakfast and be barefoot. I'd try to be patient but when a staffer said, "Be nice to your wife," I realized I was failing. The woman was totally right to intervene if she thought I was behaving badly.

My presence and efforts were the spirit and essence of my commitment to my number one priority—family.

Dom had a full plate looking after a five-unit apartment building and Amy and Melissa. Tony was 2,000 miles away and also with a full plate of three kids, a wife, a dog and a cat.

Erica needed nourishment, as illustrated by her malnutrition collapse and hospitalization in 2022, so I cajoled her to eat during her two meals a day. She was anxious to be cooperative, so this was helpful.

Her disorientation and anxiety seemed to slowly grow, yet her love and caring also glowed strongly.

Erica's peccadillos were mostly just that—minor sins. Occasionally, troubling possibilities surfaced.

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In mid-March 2023 she took to wandering the halls in panties and tee shirt. Even at 91 this was provocative, suggestive and dangerous. The peril was exacerbated by the fact that she could be easily exploited without her even remembering. I needed now to watch her ever more closely. The behavior could easily be interpreted as perverse—aimed at me—but I had to resist such interpretations.

Erica would insist on accompanying me on my daily walks of one mile in the corridor, yet bitch, moan and complain every step of the way. She didn't do well with boredom, which I embraced with gusto. But her need of and love for me transcended all bumps in the road.

I silently fought despair. I hated our residence and didn't like the staff. Meals were OK and mercifully light. I read a lot and watched the news and the stock ticker. The internal life of thought was my salvation. Keeping this journal was also very helpful.

I had no one to talk to—which made my encounter with the new police chief so memorable. Mine was an internal dialog, which, nevertheless, I found satisfying.

Erica was sad but her need made me feel the satisfaction of being needed. The model appeared to be one of resignation, adaptation, acceptance and silence.

My last role was to be a companion, and Erica earned my best efforts. I was also anxious to avoid disruptions in Dom and Tony's lives. They had their own lives to live—a thunderously persuasive cliché.

Quotidian activities became challenges and obstacles. She'd insist, once every three or four days, on having breakfast, which meant sitting but not eating. I'd coax her to nourishment, and she'd be good about it. At other meals she would play with her food, eat ice cream with a fork and then spread it on toast and try to pour juice over her entrée.

Dressing was unpredictable and bizarre. She would wear my shirts—sometimes two or three at once—and my socks. Organizing her dress for the day was a task.

Always a meticulous housekeeper, Erica would be rubbing down surfaces with a cloth and polishing silver till it shone brightly.

Sleep kept getting interrupted with late-night wanderings and returns by staff, thus justifying both our expulsion from The Kenwood and our incarceration at Amira Choice. Some choice! Their irony was unintended.

Erica's muddlement and confusion grew and disabusing her of fears and the terrors of nightmares became a key task for me. I had to fight to suppress exasperation and impatience. She deserved and earned the best efforts I could muster. And it had to be said, she remained a good and loving companion.

Erica needed me 24/7, and not just my presence but my full attention. It was a struggle to write, walk, sleep, watch the news or otherwise do anything

other than respond to endless questions and demands for reassurance.

I recognized the pressure on me, and that awareness helped me to cope with it. Erica's energy, stamina and physical strength were robust. Her problems were entirely mental.

It was of paramount importance that I always had to remember to restrain myself from a normal reply. Erica's simplistic and repetitive questions had to be handled as a child's would. Kindness and patience were central to any and every reaction. The slipping grip on reality was frightening, but it allowed for only one reaction—patience.

Erica was now (mid-March 2023) not eating very well but trying. Malnutrition's effects—when she passed out at Selvaggio's barbecue and wound up in a hospital ordeal—loomed over me like a menacing cloud.

I managed to keep functioning. Heroic gestures were never my strong suit, so I moped along. If my role was to keep things a bit together, I'd do it.

It became imperative that items—any clothing, socks, towels, bedding and even small pieces of furniture—be returned to their proper places if chaos was to be averted. Erica developed a genius for secreting things so they wouldn't be found. Some items, of course, were more critical than others. I lived in terror of having the TV remote or my checkbook disappear.

On March 21, 2023, spring's inaugural, the resident doctor appeared with his assistant, who discreetly took notes throughout. I finished my walk in the corridor to afford them privacy. I expected there'd be a medical report somewhere ahead.

Erica's health seemed okay except for such little signs as an occasional nose bleed, constipation and such. She was eating okay, sleeping well—naps and at night—and continuing to serve as a loving companion.

My world was shrinking fast. But I managed to preserve some connections through my letters. I did not miss, or regret, giving up the Southside Pride monthly essays, even as ideas for columns kept arising.

Changes were subtle and barely discernable. The mornings featured “dry mouth,” fright, certainty that death was near, tingling arms and legs, or tension. Middays were okay—lunch, contention walk in the corridor, writing and rest. Next came the late afternoon. This featured truculence, negativity, anger and paranoia. I didn't love her anymore; I was trying to kill her. She'd denounce me to staff “downstairs” (confusing Amira with The Kenwood); diners would be okay, followed by early bedtime.

Anything that claimed my attention had to be interrupted with endless questions. Any separation—however brief—was occasion for a homecoming celebration. Insecurities abounded. Erica needed help getting dressed, cajoling to nourish her body, and constant reassurance that she wasn't going crazy or

dying.

Withal I valued her companionship and treasured her love. Clearly, it was an awful burden, yet the sense of being so desperately needed was a small compensation.

Two themes recurred—bowel movements and sex. The former featured ups and downs. And more ups and downs. The latter mainly surfaced in conversation, but her nightly roaming of the corridors and inevitable encounters with male staffers while she was scantily clad were troubling concerns. Her disorientation, memory loss and general deterioration of the normal inhibitions and controls made the possibility of a real problem real. I tried to be wary and careful without stirring any pots.

The essence of elegance all her life, Erica now metamorphosed into a kind of bag woman. She'd wear one of my tee shirts for days on end, appear barefoot at the breakfast table after assuring me she'd stay in bed. She'd leave her hair wild and ignore rules of modesty she'd observed all her life. That we now lived in an environment where bizarre behaviors were routine and normal, mitigated circumstances considerably.

Nights were often nightmarish interruptions, which caused me to drop off during the day.

All of it had the perverse odor of extreme and deliberate willfulness, but her pathetic wanderings and confusions never failed to convince me as to the source of her behaviors and excited my affection and sympathy.

The administrative atmosphere was curious—no evidence of leadership, guidance or much interest. Staff turnover was brisk and the contrast with The Kenwood, our former residence, could not have been starker.

Activities, distractions or even TV programs or lectures were nonexistent. In a way it was fine with me to be left to my own devices. I could think, read, write and mope to my heart's content. No one bothered me with questions and there were no demands on my conversational skills—ever. Amira was a repository for the living dead.

Things were indisputably becoming more difficult. Erica's truculence, defiance and unwillingness to rest exacerbated tensions as they abraded my patience. She would put on, then take off, garment after garment. I left the bathroom light on all night so she could find her way there. She skipped breakfast often, so I had to sit through lunches I'd normally eschew and coax her to eat, which she, pretty good-naturedly, accommodated.

There was a definite sense of losing control. Tension, anxiety, disorientation, forgetfulness grew gradually.

Erica made a very sad figure in her helpless wanderings, and she had flashes of cognitive awareness that heightened the sadness. Through it all, her need of me was so palpable as to infuse me with a determination to carry on, no matter what.

On March 30, 2023, Erica was escorted back, after wandering the halls, by a staffer who reported she'd been screaming in the dining room. It was 4 p.m.—a time of daily travail and angst. For whatever reason I didn't believe it—it just didn't seem at all like Erica, well or ill.

April 2023, in keeping with its traditional launch of a Fool's Day, began ominously. Staff reported she was wandering the halls telling anyone that I was trying to kill her. This, of course, imposed an obligation to establish the truth or falseness of the claim, albeit superficially and subtly.

She wouldn't let me read and consistently prodded, poked, and even punched and kicked me to make me stop. She was not responsible and I, in the immortal words of Akim Tamiroff in “For Whom The Bell Tolls,” would not be provoked.

It was a trial—and that is the apt word for it. But she was simply not responsible for her words and actions, and I had to keep remembering that fact. But each day deepened the gloom and darkness.

It was beyond sad to watch a formerly independent, strong woman gradually descend to a pathetically dependent, disoriented state.

There were moments, however. One such occurred in early April 2023 when our daughter-in-law Amy and the daughter of Erica's closest friend, Karen Hanson, arranged for these two buddies to meet. It was a brave and wise thing to attempt. The result was a sort of *gemütlichkeit* encounter which they clearly enjoyed, despite the paucity of meaningful exchanges. Both were pretty removed from reality, with Erica clearly getting the worst of it. Nevertheless, Karen often spoke of her husband George's imminent return despite him being dead for four years.

The decline was slow but inexorable. Repetitions, reassurances and repeated answers were the order of the day. Erica slept a lot, ate reasonably, but wandered aimlessly like a lost soul.

I made every effort to answer every question truthfully, including “Why am I so confused?” “Am I dying?” “How did we get here?” and the very sad, “Can we go home?”

Visitors were few and far between but sometimes memorable. Two I could think of were with Chief Brian O'Hara and my running mate (when I ran for office, stupidly and futilely in 1994), Kimberly Stokes. I was a truly garrulous geezer in both.

I gave Kimberly a copy of my memoir, “Confessions of a Police Misfit,” and she asked me to sign it. I did (“To the most remarkable woman I ever met”) and explained that the appropriate protocol was for the author to proffer an unsigned copy and for the recipient to ask for a signature (inscription implied).

The days got slowly darker (psychologically) while being brightened by the calendar. Erica wore my clothing; had diffi-

culty finding any room; searched constantly for a key (nonexistent in our prison; and seeking a handbag she never carried.

Meals were trials of cajoling, but Erica was good about my jostling. Sleep was often interrupted with wanderings. It often seemed as if she was impelled by inner demons to literally bedevil me.

In a way, I felt my entire life was a dress rehearsal for this moment, without the slightest assurance I was up to it.

By mid-April events seemed to intensify, rather than change. Fear and dry mouth permeated the mornings. Middays proved quotidian oases. As the afternoon progressed the mood darkened, and the paranoia deepened. Erica grew bitterly resentful of my intent to kill her.

In the evening she complained of shoulder pain and a tummy ache—to the point where I asked that the nurse be notified. Thankfully, she (or maybe he) ignored me, and Erica went to bed and slept peacefully—aches forgotten.

The days took on a cyclical and repeating character—the mornings full of fears and needy affection; the afternoon and evening darkening truculence and paranoia—trying for me and sometimes falling into the trap of anger.

The phone rings. I rush to answer. The receiver is off the cradle. Maddening. It feels like deliberate and malicious sabotage. I fight the temptation and remind myself it's the disease. I search and finally find the device resting on a shelf in the bookcase.

As I stumbled across concealed items I carefully returned them to their proper place. Shoes were a central concern.

Erica's wanderings quickly alerted all—staff and residents—to her problem of disorientation and confusion. She'd show up for breakfast barefoot with two or three of my tee shirts on. Clothing was a particular area of obsessive interest.

Erica was changing—and not for the better—from day to day. But I was not without fault. On Hitler's birthday in 2023, I went through a series of murderous imprecations because she had secreted this journal. I searched and searched and finally decided she had utterly defeated me.

After many hours I decided to remove the heavy drawer wherein I'd stashed it and there it was. It had slipped into the space beneath the drawer. Such was my fate. I felt awful but it had ended both unexpectedly and happily.

Meanwhile, I was being repeatedly awakened by staff returning her from her somnambulist wanderings. She was not easy to help. Meals would be resisted as would doses of medicine. Boredom and cold were perennial issues.

Erica had never—as I had—suffered nose bleeds. Now she prodded and probed until her nose—dried in the sealed rooms in which we lived—would bleed. And she wasn't good about applying pressure to her nostril—prolonging the drama. She

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especially excelled at hiding shoes—amongst bedding, laundry to be washed, into the deepest recesses of closets. Amazingly inventive.

Erica's behavior did not change; her idiosyncrasies intensified. In and out of bed, not knowing what she wanted or where to go; various people (including me) intending to kill her; fussing over clothes and putting them on and taking them off; difficulties over eating. She was loving, caring and needy. The overall effect was great sadness and fierce determination to be there for her.

"Don't you like me anymore?"

That gut-wrenching question never failed to inspire me to resolve to be less irascible and more loving and, especially, patient.

I tried searching my memory for models that might help me develop a perspective.



Posey plunked Russell in a home despite his tearful pleas to remain at home. He died soon after.

In a very surprising move, Karen unburdened herself of George after 60 years of cohabitation. To me she'd been the homecoming queen and he the super jock and Big Man on Campus. Ella deposited her banker husband in a facility—where he quickly died despite decades of togetherness.

And then there was Irving.

I'd studied him carefully—a very smart, successful doctor, utterly devoted to Janet and accepting of her peccadillos. In Spanish, we had a great phrase for such tolerations: "Hacer la vista gorda," literally, "Make your vision fat." Irving had me searching for the word and I finally found it—uxorious. English is a great language.

Anyhow, Irving saw Janet through her decline and demise and died—as I knew he would—shortly thereafter.

So the models varied. The temptation to some form of flight was unavoidable, but I'd follow Irving's example.

It is easier, in retrospect, to discern the gradual, merciless progression of Alzheimer's than to notice it on a day-to-day basis. The progress is almost imperceptibly incremental. Thus, we can look back on the forgetfulness and minor lapses of 2021; the wanderings, dawning paranoia, intractability and anger of 2022; and the terrible fears and paralyzing inhibitions of 2023. The progression was inexora-

ble and irreversible, albeit that the daily dosage of medication might have a mitigating impact.

By the spring of 2023 Erica's need for monitoring was constant and I was very glad I could devote all my time—including sleeping time—to her monitoring. Just putting things back where they belonged was a constant chore. Dressing was a confused issue; meals were cajoling bouts; any chore was a trigger to interruptions and senseless, endless questions. Every night's sleep threatened to develop into her return, in custody, from nightly wanderings.

The evolution of the process was imperceptibly incremental—like the frog in boiling water—with similarly baleful consequences at its core.

My responsibilities were few—paying bills, monitoring our finances, dealing with issues overflowing from the past (such as writers doing work on such issues as the Bronx River Clean-up which I started in 1975, etc.)—vestigial traces of my bureaucratic peregrinations.

By May 2023, the problems did not change but intensified. In the mornings it was dying, dry mouth, stiff

joints and vague and unspecified fears. These faded with the day, to be replaced by insistent and repeated questions. Objects continued to disappear; meals were endless cajoling; sleep was interrupted by staff returning a disheveled and disoriented inmate.

Reading, television or any similar diversion were out, requiring more concentration than she could bring. Any form of exasperation had to be resisted, and I gave myself good points whenever I resisted the temptation to express them.

The aging process exacts a toll, Alzheimer's or not. Our lives were now soiled figuratively and literally. I'd wake up to bed sheets stained with poop and clean it up pretty frantically. Another test. Control over bowels was now a sometime thing.

I was haunted by the vision of the pomaded troubadour on the Puerto Vallarta beach with his guitar and pseudo-romantic and more than slightly ridiculous ballads. But that was far from the worst of it.

He wore immaculate cream trousers and a flowered shirt, but, as he passed, I noticed a perfect oval of brown in the very center of his ass. I thought of the horror he was certain to experience when he undressed, unless, of course, it was called to his attention first—which was worse. The humiliation literally haunted me. Haunted to such a degree that I was fairly confident I'd described this before but kept it in to emphasize its

impact on me.

In addition to uncertain bowels there was sex. I continued to feel both the urge and desire but, since my late eighties, lacked capability. And that is the toughest sentence I ever had to write. Viagra—for reasons I could not articulate—was, for me, out.

In the end we were isolated animals. I was determined to simply do the best I could—whatever that might be. My role was to be an asset to my family—no matter what.

Erica needed my full and undivided attention 24/7. If I walked a mile in the patio she'd go in (too cold) but came out repeatedly. Watching the news was out. Paying bills inspired pathetic efforts to be useful. Washing up meant hovering over me with a towel. Always anxious to help. Very sad.

It is a bromide to extol the virtue and value of the interior life, but I found it to be true. It was my realm and I used it extensively. My musings led me into all sorts of analyses and every relationship without exception. Even my relationships with my sons and wife were within the limits of my candid analyses. The more I was excluded, the wider my inner horizons became.

Humor was vital for me, and I sometimes paid a price for indulging its use—including being fired for undiplomatic comments on Bryant Gumbel's "Today Show" about George H.W. Bush and Colin Powell. Talk, for me, was anything but cheap.

I even invented a joke—an arcane tribute to James Joyce's "Ulysses." It was about metempsychosis:

Two Buddhists in saffron robes are in a bar. One says to the other, "I've had a great life, but this wasn't it."

Socko—boffo.

I put down my suede jacket—in preparation for a one-mile circular walk in the patio. Erica particularly resented this exercise—too cold; too much sun; not enough; how many more laps, etc. So, when I went for the walk, the jacket disappeared. It was a small apartment—bathroom, kitchen, living room and bedroom—two closets. Yet I could not find it. Hard to conclude it wasn't malicious. I fought to contain my anger as I searched—and never found it.

A basket full of cosmetics, toothpaste and related sundries vanished from the bathroom.

Erica would spend chunks of time changing outfits, rarely getting socks to match and removing and changing outfits (often mine) nonstop.

I needed to conserve my strength and strove not to waste it on fulminations.

Our section had what must have had about 24 residents, but, despite propinquity and communal dining, the interactions were minimal, with hardly even a word exchanged. Meals were punctuated with sounds, not conversation. Coughs, grunts, shouts, squeaking walkers and noisily floor-rubbing chairs abounded. Activities were bak-

ing, bingo, sing-alongs and zombie TV watching. Opportunities for reading were minimal. I had not encountered The New York Times since December 2022, taking my news from TV.

Involved in the daily chore of helping Erica dress, I was rummaging through her dresser drawer and there, buried deep within her blouses and skirts lay a package of cookies missing from the kitchen for days. They'd been brought by Amy in one of those complicated family maneuvers meant to convey the message that her marital relations with Dominick were going more smoothly.

My energy was easily exhausted at age 94, rendering me vulnerable to anger and impatience. I fought them back and Erica's loving nature and obvious need proved helpful reminders. Meantime, the vanished jacket and disappeared bag of laundry never did turn up.

Erica was a cunning saboteur, engaged in secret plotting that proved infuriatingly effective. How could relatively bulky items like jackets and laundry bags be secreted in a small apartment?

The disease was marked as much by omissions as by commissions. For example, by May 2023 Erica was no longer complaining of tingling arms and legs and no longer saying how nice a sip of Scotch would taste. Laphroaig's grip on her was vanishing after years of abstinence—entirely due to her fortitude and discipline.

Missing items were a recurring frustration, but discovered objects were always a surprising treat, however unlikely their provenance.

Mornings were a struggle to get dressed, following a litany of fear of dying, dry mouth, stiff and aching joints, itchy back and related complaints. Restlessness was constant—up and down, in and out, dressing and undressing. Exhausting. I fought to create a coasting speed that enabled me to keep going.

Predictably, our circle was shrinking dramatically.

Uxorious Irving would not—and did not—survive his beloved Janet for long. Passive, calm, supportive George passed quietly to oblivion, and his wife, Karen, with fatal certainty, fell apart. Feisty Polly survived Walter by 30 years, moved to California at 102 and reluctantly departed a year later. Most seem to die just as they'd lived. Not much of a surprise there.

The two most influential figures in my life, George Yabroudy and George Kateb were still around in 2023 in their nineties. I'd known them since we were teenagers. Both were Syrian Christians whose families were driven from the Middle East by Muslim pogroms of the early 20th century. Indeed, of the hundreds of Syrians I knew, not one was a Muslim.

Both Georges shaped my life by teaching me the value of education, the centrality of culture and the importance of values. Curiously, my motives were mixed—I envied Yabroudy secretly and admired Kateb open-

ly.

Yabroudy became a successful electrical engineer and married a divorced woman he adored for 60 years, until she died. Kateb became a hugely distinguished political scientist at Amherst and Princeton but, living in the materialist and anti-intellectual culture of Syrian life, encountered only contempt and rejection from his community. How strange that all three of us were still here, and in infrequent but real contact in 2023.

Yabroudy and I attended the Salmaggi Opera Company's productions at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on Saturday nights. We also shared ill-fated relationships with at least two girlfriends. Kateb introduced me to Beethoven, Mozart, foreign movies and a world I hadn't even suspected the existence of—the Ivy League.

Both were not only subjects of my admiration and emulation but conduits to worlds whose existence I didn't even dream of. They taught me that I was not driven by ambition or the promise of greatness, but by the awful feeling of humiliation and defeat that accompanied my stares into mirrors.

Erica was not getting better.

Nameless fears haunted her. Paranoia was rife. Interruptions were constant and insistent memory was nonexistent. Compulsive and endlessly repetitive doffing and adopting items of wear were constant. Neediness was central. Fear and dependency constant. Items continued to disappear, yet her sad neediness and affection inspired—unfortunately—pity as well as love.

I could discern neither progress nor regress, or even the impact of medication on Erica's condition. She needed me there 24/7 and bombarded me with inane questions while resenting any such distraction as writing, walking exercise, reading, TV viewing or anything else that claimed my attention. I made sure to include her in any activity, even putting her on with her sons when they called.

Death, of course, was a reality and one she really, if vaguely, feared. If I went first it would be a major nuisance on several fronts—financial, emotional, practical demands on time and energy. The burden on my survivors would be serious. If she died first I tried to nourish memories of the negatives so I would not miss her too much or be too lachrymose over her absence. A strange perversity.

There were no radical changes, only frequency and intensity of compulsive, repetitive actions. Erica's disorientation was profound. She perennially spoke of going downstairs—an activity possible only in our former residence, The Kenwood.

Shoes were a big compulsive feature. She repeatedly changed, mixed or went without altogether. Under coaxing she continued to nourish her body in good humor. We lived truly isolated existences, even as we were surrounded by other geezers.