

Pecan Pie and The Universe

Dear Friends,

It has been so long since I've written. I will NOT tell you how busy I've been, because that does seem to be a problem with us all these days. It's like a status symbol that we wave sometimes, and I've been very guilty. Instead, let me tell you that the tomatoes are beginning to ripen in the garden. Pumpkins have invaded, uninvited, and we've decided to let them stay. The ground outside my office is covered with apples, waiting to be made into applesauce. And it is a measure of the success of my days that I have time to sit and enjoy this lovely garden. And I will NOT tell you about the weeds. Not today.

I've just returned from a family reunion in Sanger, Texas. It's the first ever in that branch of the family. My mom and daughter and son went along, and it was a most amazing gathering. Texas in July was HOT! And I experienced the warmth of Southern Hospitality, as the cousins and aunts and in-laws made us feel so welcome, tho' I'd not been there for nearly twenty years. What struck me was the strength of the women in my family. A cousin told me that Grandma said, "You come from a line of strong women. You do what needs to be done." What an important message to come down through the years! Somehow, I'd missed this story. I was also struck by how we are made strong not by the secrets we keep, but by the stories we are willing to tell.

Here's a little poem I wrote the day of the Reunion.

Family Reunion July, '03

We have come to find our place
in the Order of Things.
We have circled back -
Following our heads
Like well-trained cutting horses,
Back to the place where it all began.
And have I not, all these years,
Felt like that lone, bawlin' calf,
Cut off from the herd,
Three legs tied and still
Trying to get up,
Cryin' for the safety of a warm tit.

I never considered myself a Texan,
'Tho a Walker died at the Alamo,

'Tho Great Grandpa Dave Farrar
was a Texas Ranger
And rode the Chisolm Trail to the
Fort Worth Stockyards,
Then across the Trinity River,
With the court house rising
Like some Lord's castle.
Must've been a sight to see,
Comin' off that long, dusty trail.

And so we gather,
With two God-bless 'em Matriarchs
Swappin' stories,
And we're seeing what cousin looks like
What uncle.
And I find that part of myself
I left beside the trail for awhile.

I'm back.
Damn right.

The food, oh my, the food! My cousin fixed my grandmother's recipe for banana pudding, and I hadn't tasted that since she died. I remember trying to get recipes from Grandma. It would always be a pinch of this and a handful of that. My mom remembers that she made her biscuits by putting the ingredients in the big flour bin, and mixing it there until it felt just right, and then pulling it out to roll.

Here's the family's recipe for Pecan Pie, one of my personal favorites.

1 cup white corn syrup
1 cup dark brown sugar
1/3 cup melted butter
1 1/2 to two cups shelled pecans (half broken)
3 whole eggs (broken)
1 dash vanilla
1 pinch salt

Mix above ingredients well, pour into an unbaked nine inch pastry pie shell, and bake in 350 degree oven for 45 to 50 minutes. Cool and top it with whipped cream or ice cream.

Even served plain, nothing tops this!

Speaking of families - today I had lunch with Linda Hunt, who has just released a book called "Bold Spirit: Helga Estby's Forgotten Walk Across Victorian America." What a beautiful book, and what a story! Years ago, when I first

heard about Helga, I wrote a song about her. Here are the words. I'm hoping it might encourage you to read the book. It is about a courageous woman, and about the silencing of family stories. You can learn more about this book at the web site:

<http://www.boldspiritacrossamerica.com>.

Here's a quote which Linda Hunt included (by Elizabeth Sone, author of "Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins: How Our Family Stories Shape Us.")

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"All of us, long after we've left our original families, keep at least some of these stories with us, and they continue to matter, but sometimes in new ways. At moments of major life transitions, we may claim certain of our stories, take them over, shape them, reshape them, put our own stamp on them, make them part of us instead of making ourselves part of them. We are always in conversation with them, one way or another."

Helga Estby c.1988 Linda Allen
(with thanks to Linda Hunt for the story)

I'll never forget the first time I saw her
She and her daughter just outside Spokane
In her high button shoes, a gun on her shoulder
Settin' off on a wager to walk across the land

Helga and her husband were hard workin' farmers
But the year of 1896 had brought them to their knees
For Ole had been crippled, Helga's health was fading
If they didn't pay their taxes soon the farm would be seized

Then Helga had an offer from secret New York sponsors
To earn ten thousand dollars to walk across the land
So one clear May morning, with winter frost still forming
They set off on the railroad track East of Spokane

We are all on a journey, and who can know the end?
It's hidden in the promises, scattered by the wind
But she walked across this country,
It was all that she could do
Helga Estby of Spokane, we will remember you

They followed the railroad through snows of the Blue Mountains
Pouring rains was constant the first month on their way
They stopped in Boise to earn a little money

Then set off once again at nearly 30 miles a day

Now many were the dangers, a Wyoming mountain lion
A rain-swollen river nearly took their lives
The thieves and the hobos learned to keep their distance
For a red pepper gun helped these women to survive

Once in Snake River they cut across the sagebrush
They were lost three days before they found their way back
Rocks tore at their shoes, rattlers gave no rest
Hunger burned like the summer sun 'til they stumbled on the track CHORUS

Near the end of the journey, Clara sprained her ankle
But they made it to New York on a cold December day
The sponsors were sorry, but they never paid a penny
They'd walked four thousand miles, but they got there three days late

In May they returned to a heart-broken family
Two children they'd buried, the farm would be lost
In their grief and anger, they hid the walk in silence
Too bitter the memory, too high was the cost

Many years later in nineteen and twenty
In a small Spokane attic, Helga sorted her notes
She'd locked the door tightly, but her mind still could journey
She picked up her pen and she secretly wrote

And the years fell away. She wrote of the people.
The beauty of the desert with Clara by her side
But when she died, her daughter burned every paper
But her memory was stronger, her story survived. CHORUS

CURRENT OFFERINGS:

So here's what I'm up to. The schedule is fairly light between now and the end of November - my first draft of my doctoral thesis is due then. But I'm looking for other work, particularly starting in January, so if you'd like to have me come to your area for a concert and/or workshop, let me know! Since I'll be in North Carolina in March, might be a good time to tie into some East Coast work.

Watch my WEB SITE, <http://www.lindasongs.com>, for updates, tho' I've been shamefully remiss in postings lately. But I have plans for a New and Improved web site, with copies of the newsletter, photos, and a section called "Rough Cuts" for the songs I'd like you all to have, but that haven't been professionally

recorded. It's all in progress.

Saturday, August 2 PORT ORCHARD, WA

Kitsap Folk Festival

3:00 Ya Gotta Find Your Own Song: A Natural Voice Workshop

5:30 PM Songs of justice, hope, spirit and love

More information: Call 360-895-1551 or

<http://www.kitsapfolkfest.com/>

Saturday, August 30th RICHLAND, WA

Tumbleweed Music Festival

2:45-3:25 - West Stage

5:00 - 5:40 - Songwriting contest finalists North stage

Howard Amon Park

More Information: 509-783-9937

<http://www.3rfs.org/tmf.htm>

BELLINGHAM

Walking in This World: The New Artist's Way

Thursday nights. 7:30 PM to 9:45 PM.

September 18th through December 18th.

\$195.00.

Call 360-734-7979 for more information.

2004:

ELON, NORTH CAROLINA

Elon University

Wednesday, March 17th

Evening performance

Thursday, March 18th

Afternoon workshop

CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA

June 17 and 18 Scripps College

Conference 2004: Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus

Where Wisdom Calls: Crossroads and Open Gates

For more information:

<http://www.eewc.com>

Here's a link to a most extraordinary web site that looks at our larger family, and our place in it. Well worth the few minutes it takes to view.

<http://micro.magnet.fsu.edu/primer/java/scienceopticsu/powersof10/>

I ask for your thoughts as I complete my last class at UCS and focus on the writing up of my project on helping disempowered women find their voices. The field work is done. I am so grateful for the support I've had in doing it. Now to pull it all together, and put it to use.

May you all enjoy some not-so-busy days this summer. May you be rested and strengthened for the coming work.

Blessings -