

Our Conflicting and Conflicted Memories

(loudly, annoyed) “That’s not the way it was at all!” Georgia found herself becoming filled with disgust at her sister’s failing memory. Nadine, four years younger than Georgia, struggled even as a younger woman to get the facts just right, but her memory was now failing from the beginning stages of Alzheimer’s. Georgia had several discussions with the staff at the facility, she knew not to blame Nadine and that getting angry doesn’t help the situation. But facts are facts, memories are important, even vital- or at least that’s the way Georgia saw the world. “It’s not fair,” Georgia thought, “to be forced to pretend its all just ok.

After lunch, just when many in the facility retired to their rooms for a rest period, Georgia led Nadine to her room. Following facility recommendations, the family had brought her bed, other furniture, and pictures from the old house in an attempt to create as familiar a space as possible. The sisters sat in separate Queen Anne chairs and began to doze. Softly, Nadine began to speak:

“I was thinking about that first Christmas after mother died. Father sat down with us for supper (two other sisters and a brother also present), said the regular family prayer, and we ate quietly as we always had. I remember thinking that maybe a special prayer was in order, it was Christmas after all. But for Father, what was is what was.

“John saw the shadow on the front porch and shot up from the dinner table before the knock on the door. Realizing he had stood up without properly being excused, he paused until Father gave his approving nod. The man at the door was cold, dirty, and hungry. Father got up from the table and met the man outside on the porch- he shut the door, we couldn’t hear what they spoke about. When he

came back in he told me and Marty to fetch the hot water pot and take it to the wash house out back. He had sent the man there to get cleaned up before coming to sit at the table. I guess Father told him that we don't talk at the table because the man said nothing.

"After supper, Father gave the man a couple blankets and led him to the barn. Even the regular travelers throughout the year slept in the barn- this night was no different. Soon after sunrise the man was on his way again. Father never spoke of him, he was just another man with a place to go."

"Here we go again," Georgia thought as Nadine began her memory. This story never happened- surely if it had she would have remembered it too. But this wasn't like forgetting a vacation, or getting a name or date wrong. This memory, if Georgia would allow herself to call it a memory, was different. It was real to Nadine- much more real than a forgotten name or a mistaken detail.

"Is this who my sister is now? Someone who remembers living a life she never lived? How many people in the world wish they could remember a different life? Although I am certain she wouldn't count herself as one of them, Nadine must be experiencing a great blessing. Rest well in your holy memories, my dear sister."