

We were riding in a limo from the funeral home on the 90 minute trip to Jacksonville, and Howard said "What's that word for the dog's love?"

"Unconditional?"

"That's it, thanks."

A moment later I turned to him and said, "it's not the dog's love that's unconditional, you dyslexic, it's *God's* love that's unconditional!

It was that kind of a day.

Howard's mother, Gert Rosenblatt, died the day after Rosh Hashana, September 29, 2003. Gert was elderly, so when people asked me if it was unexpected I always had the inclination to respond, "Can we truly call it unexpected when a 93 year old dies?"

And yet except for short term memory loss, Gert had been in good shape until mid-summer. It was the short term memory problem that finally took her out of assisted living and into the nursing home--she couldn't remember to take her meds--but she made a good adjustment to life in the nursing home.

Which wasn't a surprise. Gert had been a volunteer at the River Garden Hebrew Home for the Aged since her mother was a resident there, over 50 years ago. The facility had changed (they now have a lovely campus in south Jacksonville), but the caring crew of professionals and volunteers was the same. Gert was helping at River Garden when she was in her late 80's, older than most of the clients she was assisting.

So we always felt good that if Gert wasn't with us, she was living in a warm and friendly environment. And when we'd talk about moving her to Gainesville, it always came down to a realization that her life was in Jacksonville, and to take her away from that would not be a prudent move.

But then this summer her physical health began to worsen, and her doctor said she needed a pacemaker. A stroke followed on the heels of this procedure, and then a second incident that put her back in the hospital on a respirator. I hadn't been sure up until the last minute if I'd be able to attend Torcon, but Gert was hanging in there, and managed to hold on through Rosh Hashanna. She'd been taken off the respirator and returned to her room at River Garden, her "home", and Howard and the boys and I had all been by to see her and talk with her. She was in and out of consciousness at the end, and when the end came, she went peacefully in her sleep.

We tried to prepare the boys as best we could, but it was still hard. I gave Raphi a choice, and

he opted to fly in for the funeral, and in retrospect it was the right decision for him

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and for us. We were glad to have him here, and I believe it was easier on him being here than being in Massachusetts.

The arrangements were handled by a Gainesville funeral home, the one that normally does the Jewish funerals, but the actual service and burial were in Jacksonville. None of Gert's contemporaries were at the funeral—she'd outlived them all—but friends from Howard's youth in Jacksonville were there, and that was a comfort.

As is often the case, there were moments of near hysteria interspersed with times of great sadness. The boys and I were in an anteroom off the main synagogue, waiting for the funeral to begin. A lady we knew from a few years back popped in and said to me "You are so tiny! Look at how small you've gotten! Well, I understand that, you don't eat anything! But we know who *does*!", a comment on Howard's weight.

I believe I just stared at her, numbed, and very carefully not looking at the boys, especially when I heard a suspicious snort from behind me. She must have finally realized what she said because she fumbled out a "so sorry for your loss!" and exited the room, just a moment before Raphi and Micah collapsed, rolling on the floor laughing, and I fell into a chair laughing, and crying too.

Later, after the funeral, some friends of Raphi and Micah's came by the River Garden to pay their respects. We were staying there through the evening for Jacksonville people to make a *shiva* (mourning) visit if they wished, and because we could do evening prayers in the River Garden chapel. Anyway, the boys all went out that afternoon to get coffee and a bite to eat. When the waitress saw Micah and Raphi in their suits and ties she said, "My, don't you boys look nice! Is it a special occasion?"

Raphi said he didn't have the heart to tell her they'd just buried their grandmother.

So now we're back to normal, except that Howard has a year of mourning. It's been difficult for all of us, and Gert will be missed. Our relationship ~~was~~ sometimes strained, not helped by the 45 year age difference between us. To say she didn't understand me is a great understatement, but I have to admit that after the grandchildren came along our relationship improved dramatically. And as she aged, and became more dependent, I learned to be more patient and I hope, more understanding. Towards the end we were if not friends, loving towards one another, and appreciative of what we did have in common, our love for Howard, Micah and Raphi.

The Curmudgeon's Corner--Time for a seasonal rant: I was reading the Florida Times Union today and saw a quote where a woman said she was going to spend over \$2,000 on gifts for her 3 year old and her nieces and nephews because "they see the stuff on TV and they just gotta have it."

What do you want to bet most of these purchases will be charged on a credit card where the balance isn't paid each month?

Remember "layaway"? My first job was stock clerk in a discount store in Fort Myers. Seasonal work, at Xmastime. Part of my responsibilities was going up into the loft to retrieve layaway items when people paid off their balances. See, with layaway, you put down a deposit, paid off a bit each week, and when you could pay in full you got your item. You didn't run up massive debt this way, because if for some reason you couldn't get the item, the store would refund your money and put it back in stock.

Nowadays it's just too damn easy. And I'm as guilty as anyone else, especially with one click online shopping. But I'm convinced there's an entire generation growing up with a difficult time grasping the concept of delayed gratification, and it shows in the debts people carry:

That's it. End of rant. I don't have any solutions, I just wanted to vent a bit.

Pirates and Smugglers, Oh My!

I am pleased to say I have finally finished *SMUGGLER'S BRIDE* and I'm working on revisions, while continuing to shop *CAPTAIN SINISTER'S LADY* to prospective publishers.

This time I'm doing my first round of edits using a technique that works well, reading the manuscript aloud. The only drawback is sometimes I'm doing the editing in coffeeshops or bookstores while waiting for Micah to finish various classes or errands. It's not bad unless I begin waving my hands because I'm excited while reading dialogue. And then there was the time at Books-A-Million when I set the manuscript aside because I was feeling drowsy, and picked up the novel I'd been reading.

Two chapters went by before I realized I was reading it aloud. I stopped, started again, and sure enough, a few minutes later I realized I was still moving my lips while reading.

But it is an effective editing technique. The other good method, which I haven't tried yet, is to read your manuscript backwards, from "The End" to Chapter 1. Supposedly you catch a lot more typos this way because your mind isn't filling in what your eye expects to see.

SMUGGLER'S BRIDE finished at 102,000 words which also pleased me. *PIRATE'S PRICE* was so short as to be practically a novella, and I was concerned *CAPTAIN SINISTER'S LADY* was a fluke and I wouldn't be able to maintain the storyline for a full length novel again, but now that I've done it twice I feel more comfortable with my ability to pace and tell the story without it sagging in the middle. Of course, I say that having sold neither book at this point, but I did finish the manuscript.

I contacted a smallish Florida publisher, Pineapple Press, regarding *CAPTAIN SINISTER'S LADY*. P. Press is known for publishing Florida interest books, mostly non-fiction but they are branching out. I figured, what do I have to lose, right? Sure, *CAPTAIN SINISTER* has tons of sex in it, but hey, they could use a little shaking up. Enough tropical recipe books and photo collections of Florida lighthouses, let's give the people what they want!

At the very least, I might get an interesting rejection letter.

Speaking of interesting rejection letters, one of the agents I contacted on *SMUGGLER'S BRIDE* wrote back that he was too overbooked right now to take on more clients, but he said I "made an excellent pitch for your work. Well organized and professional." That was nice to hear. I think I write a decent query letter and synopsis, but it's good to get feedback. Generally in a standard rejection they're not going to go to the trouble to critique your query letter, so I believe it was a genuine sentiment.

Every little bit helps.

MAILING COMMENTS

weber-- Hope this mailing finds you gainfully employed.//Thanks for the info on *THE PRESIDENT'S ANALYST*. I had no idea about the different versions, and that's good to know if I want to purchase a DVD. I wonder which is the "true" version? I've only seen it on broadcast TV, in edited versions, so I'm guessing the theatrical release is the real one.// re: skim milk: Lately I've been using unsweetened Silk soymilk on my morning cereal. That's the only time I use "milk", since I drink my coffee and tea black. I have to admit, the taste has grown on me and I'm satisfied that I'm getting my soy isoflavones and calcium. It's amazing what food tastes like when you cut excess sugar from your diet. And then the opposite is also true. I had a *creme brulee* at one of my favorite restaurants last week and couldn't eat more than a third, because it was so sweet. It tasted wonderful, but a little bit goes a long way.// Many thanks for the review of the Kasey Michaels book. I've read some of hers, with mixed feelings, but now I'll check this one out.

If you like Regencies in the Heyer tradition, I recommend to you Loretta Chase, who just had two early novels re-released as one volume: ISABELLA and THE ENGLISH WITCH. The "villain" of the first novel, an out-and-out fortune hunter, is the hero of the second, and I adore authors who can pull that off. One out of print Chase novel that's worth tracking down is LORD OF SCOUNDRELS, a big Regency era historical that's hilarious and has incredible characterization.////###

Lillian--Great DSC pix! Thanks for sharing.////###

Hlavaty--If you get tired of the rats, ship them down here. Frisky the cornsnake would love to meet them.//Howard's father was Hungarian. Howard's line on that is "'Hungarian horse thief' is redundant." I remember reading CHARMED LIVES with a great deal of enjoyment.////###

Feller--Ct. Me: Micah is sorry he put off getting his learner's permit, but to be honest, I think part of his regret is that I have to spend so much of my time driving him to and fro. I keep telling him it's in the job description, and I enjoy the hour I spend at Books-A-Million waiting for him to finish at the gym, but he still keeps apologizing for it. He's scheduled to take his test the day before Thanksgiving, so I'll have more news next disty.////###

Lillian--You're welcome to reprint any of the reviews I run through these pages.// I know it hurts not to win the Hugo, but you were a *nominee*! Could you have imagined that a few years ago?//I'm reading a book right now that you might enjoy, though I imagine a Louisiana version would be even more fascinating: "A ROGUE'S PARADISE"--CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN ANTEBELLUM FLORIDA. Fun stuff from the days when people settled their disagreements with Bowie knives and judges got 'round their circuit by boat./// ###

Schlosser--I read the "ham bush" joke aloud to Micah. We agreed it was dumb, but worth a chuckle. Thanks for sharing.////###

Me--That's *infectious mononucleosis*. *Sigh* I hate Spellcheck. But does help, sometimes, so I don't turn it off even though I end up with "infections" instead of "infectious".////###

Weisskopf Reinhardt--I love "Judgment day for the editor"! Thank you so much for sharing!////###

Copeland, L--I hope by now this disty finds your health much improved.

Copeland, J--Before some say they're shocked, shocked by the Hamilton quote, let me just throw out that this is why we have two houses of Congress. And this is generally a good thing. Heck, I still have mixed feelings about popular election of senators, elitist snob that I am. And I'd like to see a *real*, meaningful literacy test to vote, especially after what happened in California.

Of course, the liberal, Democratic side of my makeup argues against this, because we disenfranchise those people who wouldn't qualify to vote, giving rise to taxation without representation., But there are days when it's tempting.

That's all for now folks, Eve