

Fragment from an Unwritten Diary

by David Ackley

It's not history that the quiet lack, but the inclination to put it to words. They don't read stories, or bother telling them. They don't see their own lives as stories. Stories happen in the movies and are for the famous to live. You're no General MacArthur--one of those referred to as "the storied." As if he—or his parents, perhaps—had almost composed it in advance.

Your narrative, if one even existed, was not intended for the record. To be self-effacing means that you efface—you erase—your story as it is being written. You leave behind neither diary, nor letters; your spoken words, are terse, barely remembered. Your life exists now, in my mind, as an intermittent trail through the woods, a print here, and then a ways farther on, another.

Yet what's between is a certain passage through a particular space that allows inference, a charting of course, tendencies, perhaps inclinations. One print was noted by my cousin, Bob Stevens, who remembered how you played with him when he was a kid. He liked so much that you, one of the big kids, seven years older, didn't look down on him.

Playing what? Catch, probably, with a dirty baseball, and those old short-fingered, lumpy gloves. You're fourteen, muscles filled out, throwing with zip and accuracy, showing Bob all the stuff he still has to learn, but taking it easy on him so he'll want to keep at it. You remember what it's like to be younger and just picking up things, a knack not everyone has, the teacher's knack of seeing back through skills to when you didn't have them, remembering yourself just starting out.

You and Bob out on the lawn at the shingled Broad Street house, while your mother, my kind and placid Aunt Ruth, visits on the porch with her mother, and yours, who is Bob's and my grandmother, Lela,

the two of them glancing out at their two sons through the screen. They could be sisters, both with grey hair, glasses, the print dresses and sensible, laced shoes. They feel without remarking it the family continuity in likenesses, and their sons—uncle and nephew--out on the lawn, tossing the ball back and forth.

The women embroidering, knitting, or most likely doing needlepoint—something with flowers, daisies maybe, to lay on a chair arm. Their quiet talk, of who they'd seen or hadn't at church a murmured undertone to the sound of the ball hitting leather. "Good catch, Bobby!" you say, whacking your glove for emphasis. I look back through the relentless subtractions of the years to this cupped tranquility and my eyes sting.

