

## A MID-NOVEMBER NIGHT'S DREAM

It was a cold and dreary mid-November night at a time when everything and everyone is hunkered down, especially in a storm like this one. The rain consistently fell from the ominous clouds and the sound of thunder boomed as lightning lit up Astoria like the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Fireworks over the Pacific ocean. There I was, standing in what seemed to be an extension of the Columbia River, barefoot and openmouthed as I stared up at the barely lit sky. Amongst the riveting rain was an astonishing amount of wooden toy airplanes, circling above me like a predator getting ready to pounce on unsuspecting prey. I found myself to be muttering, practically chanting Newton's Law: what goes up, must come down. But as I stood barefoot and bewildered in the torrential downpour, it became apparent that these planes were defying gravity. Even more so they seemed determined to terrorize me.

During my contemplation of what could be causing this phenomenon, I was struck alongside the head by a plane that initiated a dive bomb attack. Alarmed, I began swatting at the planes like Godzilla atop the Empire State Building. That proving unsuccessful, I dove to the ground, curled up into a fetal position and tried my hardest to breath through the shallow river that was once my front yard. The smell of mud and grass filled my nostrils and the cold wet ground made me feel six feet under.

The severity of the sting of the toy planes striking my unbundled body was consistent and constant for an indeterminate amount of time. Then, suddenly, the pain became unusually tolerable. It may be that hypothermia was setting in from being out in the cold November rain and lying on uninviting ground for who knows how long. Or it could be that the attack transformed into a reconnaissance mission to gain knowledge of how I would interact. Then the pulverizing pain turned into a consistent patting, like a familiar paternal type gesture, as if someone was consoling me. Rolling to my side, I mustered up enough courage to unveil my eyes.

As my vision refocused after being tightly obstructed by the palms of my hands, a figure was revealed to me. Blurry at first, but becoming more defined by the seconds that slowly passed. It was a young man dressed in World War II army greens, kneeling beside me, with one hand on my shoulder and the other holding a balsa wood toy plane. His smile lit up the rain like fire on water. He was familiar to me and yet totally different than anyone I could name. I sat up, bringing my knees towards my chest and holding them tightly as I stared. He never stopped smiling and his face was like looking into the sun, where your eyes cannot adjust and you get rings and spots in your vision. But it was his smile that warmed me, that made me want to move towards it, that urged me to trust him.

He gestured with the hand that held the airplane. Since we were outside my Victorian era home that had proven to be an equity draining restoration project near the Clatsop Community College, I could see clearly that he was motioning toward the Column. I was drawn to fall in line behind him as we began tramping through the woods towards the column. The woods at night, usually filled with menacing wildlife and treacherous obstacles, seemed curiously inviting and an easy trek. The climb to the top of the hill just before the Column would normally suffocate me by

depleting my lungs of all oxygen and flaring up my asthma to the verge of passing out. Although, I had already experienced overwhelming anxiety and despair when I was bombarded earlier, I was now free of all ailments and ascending effortlessly up the hill. It was as if we were walking on the beach instead of bushwhacking through a muddy mess of ceaseless misery like many of the winter voyages of Lewis & Clark.

The column stood out like a beacon of hope and light. It felt like a promise of understanding and knowledge of what was to come. As I stopped at the base of this masterpiece, I found myself staring up once again with my mouth wide open in awe. The planes that had been attacking me were circling around the column. This time though, they seemed like doves let loose after a wedding, finally escaping their cage and searching for a final resting place.

The man was waiting at the entrance of the column, staring back at me with the eerily beautiful smile and gestured for me to follow, still carrying his toy plane. I followed him into the darkness of the unlit column and we slowly marched up the 162 steps in unison to an unheard beating rhythm. The door to the platform made a slow creaking that set my nerves and hair on end, but I pushed forward through the blinding light of the door and found myself standing near him and peering over the railing. I looked down only to discover that we were miles above the ground, but could see everything with clarity.

He gave me one last dashing smile, cocked his hand back and launched his plane out into the abyss. As I watched his plane soar from his ghostly hand I caught a glimpse of the name written on it: Handsome Harry. With shock and recognition of who this smile belonged to, I felt the tears pour out of me like rain from the now forgotten storm clouds. As his plane glided into the sea of planes that surrounded me, it was as if I had been cured from an illness that plagued me. I stared into the vastness and all I could see were planes with every name imaginable. They were circling the column and the houses on the hill, around the bridge, and the barges. Tongue Point was filled with the planes like a flock of seagulls circling where a fisherman cleaned his daily catch. I began picking out names on planes near me and realized with deep sentiment that each of them had meaning to me, that they were people I loved and had lost and people I feel I knew but had never met.

As the sun rose, it glinted gold against the green of eastside of the Astoria-Megler bridge. I turned to face him and it felt as though I was basking in the light breaking through a violent storm. The light grew brighter and his image burned away in a fiery white light until I found myself staring directly at the sun. It felt as though I entered another realm where the invisible was revealed to me, that no one we love is ever really gone, that you have to let go of sorrow to be free to soar, and that those we have loved and lost are circling us like an airplane cast from the column.