

He Just Smiled and said,
"I'll See You in a While, this One Has No End."
For Moses

First we exchanged amused and slightly quizzical glances. Then as the scene unfolded before us we doubled over in laughter, proceeding to roll around the slightly sloping fairway of the eighth hole at the Marlboro Country Club, our "tears in the eyes" howling echoing across the course.

Our two companions in what can only be loosely labeled as a foursome at SMOC's Charity Tournament had just proceeded to give new meaning to the term "water hazard" on this bright, clear, early autumn afternoon.

It seems that Henry 77 had decided to "rescue" a golf ball Moses had moments earlier launched into the water filled creek bisecting the fairway, enlisting the fourth member of our group, Jeff Feeley, in his enigmatic quest.

Why?

Who knows? Only Moses, a good athlete, was attempting to play the course. 77's, Jeff's and my activities consisted of busting chops, pointing out to Moses that golf was not his sport and occasionally putting on one of the greens.

77 had convinced Jeff to stand behind him with his hands around his waist as he bent over to retrieve the ball which was nestled in rocks forming the creek bottom.

Pushing 80 and 30 years into our friendship, nothing 77 ever did surprised me. His philosophy, he was an early practitioner and proselytizer of what is now called Freeganism, led him to make unusual life choices on both a macro and micro level (see Thanksgiving Day 1976 essay).

Anyway, Moses and I pick up the scene just as 77 starts to bend over in this odd quasi modern dance movement. Then in what looks like a slow motion scene in an old Chaplin flick Jeff, a

friend of nearly 50 years, hand strength weakened by exposure to Agent Orange four decades ago, loses his grip and 77 proceeds to roll into the creek.

Seeing is not always believing. Moses and I recover in time to assist in the "rescue." Henry undoubtedly sensing the absurdity of the moment joins us in our mirth and gets Jeff to taxi him home for a clothing change. For the rest of the event Moses and I would break out in spontaneous laughter when we looked at each other.

This is the scene that has been playing out in my head like one of those You Tube videos since Tania called to tell me that Moses had died from liver cancer at age 36.

Moses Mohammed, one of my favorite people in the world, now he is gone.

I don't remember the first time we met, but I do know why we became friends and the elements of our friendship that wrapped around our easy-going chop busting routine. Rather than stumble around here let me use several lyrics from an old song to catch the essence.

"If we can't be cool then let us take the tool and change the rule."

Moses started life as an African and became an American, without ever losing the sense that he was blessed by both life experiences.

When immigration issues threatened to derail his dream, Moses changed the rules, succeeded in winning the right to remain here and marry Tania.

Moses used the tools to evolve from the first graduate of our YARCM (Young Adults in Recovery) program to the Engagement Supervisor of SMOC's Common Ground Resource Center, where among

other things before he left, helped my son Eavan get a sense that helping others was a "fit" for him.

"When we've begun
to see the world we're on
Don't you see there's only one."

"Then we all begin
to see the skin we're in
It's just the same, there's only one."

Moses knew this, it resonated in his being. It connected the inner Moses to the outwardly warm, generous and engaging individual who moved through his life experiences.

Moses got it! Maybe it came easy for him, I'm sure where there were times it didn't, just the same it guided his ability to connect with and help others.

"Do we have the grace
to begin the race
in another place
face to face."

Moses had it, in abundance.

About 8 weeks ago, staring at the twin 40' x 15' patches of barren earth in front of the decommissioned, huge power plant adjacent to our new renovated office building on Bishop Street, I felt a sudden, strange urge to plant something in the dirt.

"Let's grow some sunflowers here," I said to David D. who proceeded to enlist Al in this little adventure, much to the wry amusement of my wife who has unsuccessfully attempted to get me to take up gardening for years.

As the sprouts appeared I found myself weaving the "sunflower endeavor" into my conversations with Moses.

"Hey Moses, you know that space out front of the 'Bird House,'" well I planted some sunflowers there." In response to a perceived skeptical snort, "Yeah, well I actually delegated to David. Al's done a good job, we have about 100 plants growing." The inevitable chuckling follows.

"Hey Moses, they're heightenin', the tallest is now hitting about 3 feet. Lookin' good, next time you're here, you gotta check them out. I may need to promote Al to senior gardener."

I know in my heart that some morning in a moment just a heartbeat or two ahead of the present, I'll enter our building, glance at the picture of that golfing foursome affixed to my oak door, enter, walk over to the side office window and gaze down at the Sunflower Garden.

Moses will be there, looking elegantly eclectic in an azure polo, bleached cotton drawstring pants, his dreads tucked neatly in a straw Panama with black ribbon headband. He'll be patiently inspecting each flower stalk, gauging their need for water and additional nourishment. Occasionally he'll stop to offer encouragement, in a soft whisper, to a stunted outlier.

Later, I'll spot him strolling through the flowers with Henry 77, renewing a friendship, talking or perhaps being talked at by an old friend, listening intently to 77's animated lecture on the relationship between the sunflower florets and his beloved Fibonacci spiral.

As the long summer day draws to a close I'll take a final glance out the window. Moses will be there, sitting on the garden bench waiting for Tania to finish her work. She'll join him, their hands will clasp together, the cacophony of noise will dwindle to a stillpoint as the dusk is replaced by a diamond sky.

Jim
8/11/14

Notes

- The title is taken from a lyric from the song "No End" written and performed by Sandy Denny (1975). It is a haunting elegiac tune that I found myself listening to frequently in the recent days.
- The lyrics are all from "There's Only One" written and performed by Graham Nash on his "Songs for Beginners" Album (1971)
- The diamond sky image at the end of the essay is borrowed from a lyric from Bob Dylan's "Mister Tambourine Man." For me it is one of the seminal images ever written by Bob Dylan.

The complete lyric is "to dance beneath the diamond sky with one hand waving free."