

Oranges, a Note

Joan Rodman

I adore Henry Miller, own everything he had ever written. Late Thursday night in need of some inspiration, I reached down to a shelf below the TV, an ignored region, to pull out "Big Sur and the The Oranges Of Hieronymus Bosch." While flipping through the chapters in search of *je ne sais quoi*, I found a bright pink note. "Joanie dear--Thank you for lending me this book and for being with me." it began. The note, unread until now, was placed there 30 years ago by Don B. I was unsettled, hearing from a ghost. I don't know where Don is today, dead or alive. I had tried unsuccessfully to find him.

Don was 10 years older than I. He was a tall lanky writer, pilot, retired Air Force. It was 1970, the height of the buzz for group encounters. I was living in D.C., newly divorced, when I took myself to a weekend growth experience in a Connecticut Avenue Institute. Don was there with his wife. They lived on a boat in the Caribbean. Nice couple. At dinner, post-encounter, we exchanged personal information; he was a writer; I was a researcher in a think tank.

Three weeks later, Don called, was in town, asked if he could plunk his sleeping bag down in my house. I told him I would be out that evening, but my kids would entertain him. When I returned Don told me he wanted to marry me. He and his wife were in the midst of divorce.

In succeeding years we flew around the country in his plane, touching down on Cape Cod or in the Mexican desert. Always an adventure and an article for *Private Pilot*. His love letters were travelogues in part from a lone eagle. He was not built for merger.

I had moved my family to Los Angeles, was working at UCLA, and had started my doctoral work in psychology. Don asked me to marry him. He was now settled in Austin, Texas, where his plane was housed. He could fly to either coast with ease for his reporting. I flew to meet him in Texas, fully anticipating the works. He showed me the town. We talked. But in the shower at the hotel, I recall saying to myself, "This is not my town, this is not my life, I can't be an emotional refueling center." And so it goes.

