

Moonshot Excerpt

Picture the meat tenderizer mallet in my mom's hands. Hear the thud of the mallet on the steaks on the counter. Again. The swinging and pounding of the mallet repeats, tenderizing the meat. The mallet penetrates deeply. It looks dangerous, but its purpose is to tenderize, to penetrate deeply, to make the tough meat palatable. As so it is with memoir. Thoroughly overcooked, my story sits, dried and tough. My past is marbled with drama and trauma; unappetizing yet intricately laced in the meat of the story.

Believe me, I tried to digest it all; I chewed and chewed, yet the blob stayed in my mouth, gag-reflex triggered. The undigested, flavorless meat, grey and unappetizing, bothersome at best.

I spit it into a paper napkin and throw it away; yet there is no away. Not with our life stories. They can clog our arteries and hurt us, or they give us the choice to tenderize our hearts and fertilize the space between.

“Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine,” Mary Oliver reminds us.

It all started as a moonshot.

Summers in Florida are hot. Period.

July of 1969, no exception. The forecast called for humidity, but no thunderstorms, a crucial piece of data for determining the moonshot. JFK's imperative that man gets to the moon by the end of the decade generated internal heat for beings around the world. This heat, for many, had the flavor of mind-blowing, exhilarating optimism, and infinite potentialities. For others, the heat took on a more negative charge; resentment that funds went upward toward visionary aims instead of dealing with domestic issues down on Earth like poverty and crime, down here in America.

Thankfully, my parents, gathered with family and friends on the coast of Florida, celebrated the moonshot. They were in the exhilarated camp. This was indeed extraordinary.

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Dad got the coals ready on the Coleman BBQ while mom pounded the meat tenderizer on the steaks. Steaks meant celebration. The neighbor, Susan, shucked the ears of fresh picked Zellwood corn. Always around, always helpful, Susan prepared the sides and desserts. More butter needed, always more butter needed, Susan and butter were hand in hand. My mom prepared the main dish. Everyone brought the booze.

My parents had, at this time, four children, ages 10 and under, who ran down the beach, lighting fireworks and getting high off the energetic buzz of excitement that historic night of the first lunar landing. The moon, symbolic of the unconscious, loomed high in the sky, no longer a hope and a wish.

We were, collectively, bridging the conscious with the unconscious. This took place at a pivotal time. The moonshot, the Apollo mission, was “the result of thorough research carried out by a successful team, whose strength rises from a common thought made up of simple ideas, growing and coming together in one dream, yours and ours.” I came across this description on an ordinary clothing tag recently, but it sums up most worthwhile endeavors in life.

It takes more than me. Simple ideas, common thought.

The late 60s in American history, full of swirling energies of change and possibilities, the fertile ground for greater consciousness, was the birthplace of the moonshot, both for Neil.

Armstrong and for my conception. Suspended in a moment pregnant with possibilities, my parents consummated this joy. The backdrop of the American culture, so promising and inspiring, had a moment to shine. Those in power advocated overcoming scarcity, fear, and negativity, and finding common ground. This climate of greater consciousness, of human advancement, bathed my parents as they made love.

The backdrop of my conception is creative non-fiction. I don't know if they ate steaks the night man landed on the moon, but it certainly goes with the meat tenderizer concept. And you know what? It doesn't matter. It works. It works because tenderizing my heart makes for a more palatable offering.