

January 17, 2007

Our Sixtieth Wedding Anniversary

My wife Helen and I reside at Cadbury Commons in Cambridge. She stays in a unit called "Morningside," where they care for residents with special needs, including Alzheimer's disease. I live in a comfortable apartment on the third floor.

Each December, Cadbury Commons holds a Holiday Buffet Dinner for residents, family, children, friends and staff. This year it was held on December 13. My children live very far away and were not able to come. I was happy to have two good friends with us, Margaretta Thuma and Sue Schauppner. The festivities included wandering carolers and fine food and soft drinks.

As usual, before the main course, our Executive Director Steve said a few words of greeting to the assemblage. By prior arrangement, he called upon Helen and me to come up and gave me the microphone to address the group. Here is what I said.

"Sixty years ago today, Friday the thirteenth of December, 1946, the *New York Times* carried some articles that give the flavor of the time. One reported on the arguments of RCA and CBS before the Federal Communications Committee on the kind of color scheme to be adopted for all television. Another story reported that New York City Mayor William O' Dwyer accepted a grant from John D. Rockefeller Jr. for six blocks along the East River in Manhattan as a site for the United Nations.

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Also on that day, but not reported in the *Times*, Helen and I were married in the living room of her parents' home in the Bronx. The wedding was to have been in the synagogue, but her father was ill, and Rabbi Miller came to Helen's home instead. It was crowded, but all went well.

“By a happy coincidence, the December 11, 2006, issue of the *New Yorker Magazine* carried a poem by Maxine Kumin, a Pulitzer Prize winner, entitled ‘Looking Back in My Eighty-First Year.’ Helen and I had briefly met Maxine and her husband Victor at our daughter Amy's graduation from New England College in 1982. At that ceremony, Ms. Kumin received an honorary doctoral degree. The Kumins were an alternate family for Amy when she was at college. They all lived in Warner, New Hampshire, and had a common interest in horses and trail riding.

“The poem resonates in many ways that suggest a connection with Helen and me. The title refers to ‘in my eighty-first year,’ and Helen is 81 years old. The poem's line ‘Sixty years my lover’ echoes our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary the day of the Holiday Dinner. It includes the line ‘Kilroy was here,’ which I remember so well from my World War II service in Europe.”

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Then I read the poem aloud to Helen and the assembled audience of some 200 people. I was later told that some of the listeners were moved to tears by the poem, and some of the women residents even hugged me.

Here then is the poem:

### LOOKING BACK IN MY EIGHTY-FIRST YEAR

Instead of marrying the day after graduation  
In spite of freezing on my father's arm as  
here comes the bride struck up,  
saying, I'm not sure I want to do this,

I should have taken that fellowship  
to the University of Grenoble to examine  
the original manuscript  
of Stendhal's unfinished "Lucien Leuwen,"

I, who had never been west of the Mississippi,  
should have crossed the ocean  
in third class on the Cunard White Star,  
the *war* just over, the Second World War

when Kilroy was here, that innocent graffito,  
two eyes and a nose draped over  
a fence line. How could I go?  
Passion had locked us together.



Sixty years my lover,  
he says he would have waited.  
He says he would have sat  
where the steamship docked

till the last of the pursers  
decamped, and I rushed back  
littering the runway with carbon paper. . .  
Why didn't I go? It was fated.

Marriage dizzied us. Hand over hand,  
flesh against flesh for the final haul,  
we tugged our lifeline through limestone and sand,  
lover and long-legged girl.

*Maxine Kumin*

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