

**RAVEN
UNDERSTANDS:
A HAPPY MEMOIR**

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McCaa Books • Santa Rosa, CA



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1604 Deer Run
Santa Rosa, CA 95405-7535

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First published in 2021 by McCaa Books,
an imprint of McCaa Publications.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021908703
ISBN 978-1-7363451-5-3

Printed in the United States of America
Set in Minion Pro
Book design by Waights Taylor Jr.
Cover image by Marvin R. Hiemstra

www.mccaabooks.com

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PREFACE

Welcome to my lifetime. Courtesy of an ingenious Celestial Cruise Director my years on this planet range from a time when people identified as “that way” were mentioned only in a whisper to a time when anyone “gay” was considered highly suspect to the present when “gay” is becoming accepted as a ubiquitous category of being.

Gay is now seen by many as just the “G” in a sea of capital letters standing for a generous variety of intriguing and interesting hanky-panky. Please enjoy my book and most of all live every minute of your life, whatever capital letter represents you! If none of the 26 seem to fit, just invent another one and use it with pride.

Delight in who you are!

Marvin R. Hiemstra, May 10, 2021

1

FOND MEMORIES OF THE NEST

Know the spark of your beginning.

For many this post-apocalyptic world is a stunner but not a happy one. For me I find the hint of a sunrise in every minute. I am delighted to share moments of my life as a kind template for everyone: gay, bi, lesbian, trans, straight or crooked.

Here is one of my first and happiest memories. At three I wandered the house yard of an Iowa farm: poplars lined the lawn. A quarter size chartreuse frog fell on my wrist giving me a knowing look and a sotto voce “Ummmp!” Suddenly I knew. I was a keen part of Everything and Everything could be totally amazing.

That tiny creature had evolved to live at the top of ten foot tall prairie grass (hungry settlers ploughed it under) so frog and family moved into the trees. I’m pleased to report that today at the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge twenty miles from the spot where I hatched those tiny survivors have returned to their brave and fine life in the prairie grass crowns.

First four years I attended Liberty Corner, one student in each grade in a one room country school. Our perceptive teacher, Miss Rouenhorst, assured me that

I was special, because I used the word, coincidence:
“Your words will save you, Marvin.” They have.

On a typical Iowa day 95 degrees / 95% humidity
(walking in water, not on it), I, age seven, saw the light
when I watched a golden tan driver unload a truck of
loose hay into our barn and then remove his shirt to shake
off the hay dust. That was it. I caught my first glimpse
of Paradise.

When we moved on a farm by a small town, I
began with the first of five blessed piano teachers:
Hattie Cox Van Cleave. This poem appears in *FRENCH
KISS DESTINY*, Zippy Digital, 2007.

EARLY ON THE BEAT

*Red-head woodpeckers tapping
all over town turned Summer on.*

My ancient piano teacher – her stalwart
father, 11, drummer boy in his father’s Civil
War band: captured, survived playing music
for scraps in a Confederate prison – my piano
teacher loved 50 students a week for 64
seasons. Think of the life sustaining delight.

*V formations overhead and pheasants
against the grain meant Autumn.*

Think the pain of every key change!
When piano teacher got to Marvin age 10,
she knew this peculiar, articulate twig would
not become Governor of Hawkeyed Iowa.
This little guy adored all birds totally,
cooked great meals, and ran the household:

*14 foot globe lilac bush dipped in snow
held a pair of cardinals every Winter.*

mother stuck in an echo of her childhood.
This little guy flatly refused to learn how
to cheat others. He would be a poet. Each
lesson my teacher, sibylline, whispered,
“Your music will save you, Lad!” non
sequitur as we ironed out the trills.

*Spring was such an uproar in the trees.
I made a list of every bird making love.*

I attended one of the best funded schools in Educational History. For a High School class of 70, we enjoyed a brilliant choral teacher I accompanied on the piano, an art teacher, on and on, and two superb counselors: Number 1) a kind and brilliant understanding woman with degrees from Columbia University. She returned to NYC one long weekend each winter to catch the gorgeous Copacabana girls wearing only a smile and a few sky blue, chartreuse, and bright coral feathers. No one missed American History the next Monday when she shared every lascivious detail of her trip: boys licked their chops, girls giggled, and we three gay boys in the class understood. Number 2) just out of college gave us free counseling after school where I could talk about my same sex bent for the first time. Just sign up on the bulletin board. Most of us did.

My piano teacher's brother (without asking, bless him) enrolled me at the famous Writer's Workshop in Iowa City, then in its early years. Donald Justice was my poetry advisor.

Between Junior and Senior College Year I worked in NYC for the summer and met an intelligent, understanding, and adorable oil executive from Chile. So began the first and perhaps the best relationship of my life because it was mostly long distance: that dear fellow taught me this important consideration, “The only person you should marry is Each Day: the minute you hop out of bed.”

Our weekly hometown Chronicle front paged my Creative Writing Degree in Honors from State University of Iowa. Numb with jealousy my family spoke not a word. My hometown rejoiced. The world is our true family.

2

RAVEN SEES THE WORLD

Every day of your life is planetary exploration.

Because of friends in the Music Department I attended Indiana University Graduate School: a Celestial Gift. In that Liberal Arts Boot Camp for Gays I evolved tremendously within one fine relationship with a black operatic baritone, extremely wide range, that involved affectionate and heavy-duty love making every night for one year. Little did I know the gift of that experience: the gift of everything I learned to live a splendid amorous lifetime.

Here's a poem about the start of another relationship in Bloomington originally published in *RFD*, No. 145, Spring 2011.

THE SPHINX IS GOOD IN BED

.... eyes hungry, not for knowledge, for a connection...
University Library in spring ...he, another grad student, was checkout man for the Reading Room every Monday...I had to get his attention...I came with my brief case: empty except for one red apple... when leaving, I opened it for his okay nod...he had a magnificent smile, far more than I bargained for...

fast passion forward...
we drove into the countryside...

spring has always been hot stuff...certain things happen only then: below the belt or between the ears...we took a blanket, bread, orange chicken, and a gallon of hard cider:...we stopped at a boarded-up farmhouse guarded by loyal iris, ancient in saffron and indigo... house was lonely, abandoned except for the wind and two young barn owls in the hollow of a black oak dreaming of the Sphinx doing a philosopher on rollerblades...almost sunset looking down from our attic hideout on apple blossoms just beginning, we shared that simple basket of supper...

I asked you for a second, you tipped it, our rough molded glass jug...miniature tempest struck...dying sun through sparkling amber violence is more beauty than I can get at alone...the calm foams into my anxious glass...I am not alone...you are both the wind wild unruly ferment and the delicious wake after...

Indiana University Bloomington Music School was a haven for retired grand opera divas. Dorothea Manski, known as Madam Manski or just The Madam, had howled her way to fame many years before as the witch in Hansel & Gretel. When near the opera's end the witch was pushed in the oven, Madame Manski, tripped, screamed indignantly, and brought down the house.

The following anecdote she happily shared with us at a party.

Just after World War II the US was desperate for culture: so Madam Manski was asked to train down to a southern city and be one of four operatic voices sitting on stage in front of the orchestra.

When she arrived at the hotel, her long heavy gown was wrinkled. A helpful maid suggested the gown be hung above the tub filled with hot water to shed wrinkles. Manski awoke from a nap to find her gown floating on the water. No second gown and no time so Manski wrung the fabric out as best she could and was off to the concert hall.

Concert began and a puddle soon appeared just below Manski's chair. The puddle got larger and larger and larger as the evening progressed. At the silence between each musical selection muffled, hysterical laughter could be heard rolling through the audience. Final applause was deafening.

I enjoyed teaching at IU, but decided University politics were probably not for me (I'll sell you the recipe for Professor X's favorite Buddha Punch). So I put my Masters Degree in Victorian Literature: Walter Pater Thesis under my arm and buzzed off to Europe. (Post Note: twenty years later I returned to Bloomington to do a poetry performance in the Lilly Library and the blessed Herman Wells, creator and President Emeritus of Indiana University, cared enough to attend, enjoy my presentation, and send me a kind note.)

Fresh in Europe I soon met two ripe and well-seasoned amorous gentlemen: a Dutch science librarian and a German diplomat. The Dutchman liked to go on excursions with me, because he was a totally logical person and together we always discovered situations

beyond logic. On this trip to Antwerp we both witnessed a jolly band of pansexual ghosts and the lady with the banana who you will soon meet in my poem from the *AMSTERDAM QUARTERLY, 2012 Yearbook*.

BANANA PEEL

Gerard and I trained out of Amsterdam early while canal ducks, snuggled in the fallen leaves, dreamed of a day bobbing for golden apples.

We were off on a keenly anticipated jaunt to see the luster of Antwerp in sunlight: that dazzling day painted Peter Paul Rubens's

palace, garden pavilion, studio: every color of delicious with moments of range veined marble. Although the day was bright, jovial

ghosts of roly-poly pansexual nudes played hide and seek and tickle in the corridors. After that we knew only a lavish lunch would do.

It was Café Panache: a violinist doing a pizzicato Boccherini, orchids nudging chins at every table, a solemn dowager in a peacock feather turban

just finishing up. Her dessert arrived, a banana all alone on a platter, yet deceptively modest in the peel. We gazed in disbelief as she gently

manipulated knife and fork to render that banana flawlessly nude before a quick, delectable devour.

On a sunny day in Delft my Dutch friend and I discovered a 250 year old bakery on a back street. In the bakery's early years there was no glass front window: just folding doors at night and a 5 foot high black iron grill with thin vertical rods and two horizontal bands to hold it all together. The top of just one vertical rod terminated into an adorable, smiling, tiny black dragon.

As Gerard and I stood in awe, three children came up on their own to chat one by one with the dragon who was evidently a very dear friend to each.

The German was a perfect cross between Cary Grant and God. We met in Amsterdam and trained to Zandvoort, a beach on the North Sea. The only people in our train car, we dissolved into amorous embrace, and aided by the rhythm of wheels nudging the track remained in ecstasy for the 30km jaunt.

My new German friend lived in Cologne: soon I was on my way for a weekend. I must have been totally aglow as I stood at the door about to detrain. An amused group of 14 year old uniformed school boys got the story just a bit wrong, smiled at me, and sang a four-part harmony of "Ain't She Sweet!"

Next day found us on an Excursion Boat cruising down the Rhine. Boat stopped at a water side village so we strolled on the shore. I spied a W.C. and said, "Be right back." Oblivious to the attendant smoking around the corner, I went right in and shut the door. Attendant fearing that she might miss her fee attacked the door and screamed at the top of her lungs. My German friend, first and last time in our long acquaintance,

became hysterical with laughter. He calmed down and paid the attendant.

Back on board the day wrapped with a singing fraternity banquet: harmonious Gemutlichkeit at sundown until a few singers had enjoyed too much beer and began to toss the dining chairs about. We crawled under a table with our delicious blue cheese plate and chuckled. So much for the Romantic Rhine.

My valiant lover couldn't quite see himself settling down with an American for many reasons. Who can blame him? Yet, thirty years later he took me to see the colossal statue of Arminius, the Hercules who stopped Rome in a German forest, A.D. 9. Sitting in an outdoor café my friend, still a perfect cross between Cary Grant and God, whispered that he always regretted his decision not to marry me years before. Although we were by then happily mated with others, we sat with tears streaming down our mugs until the uptight proprietor with a Bavarian rubber band around his pecker marched up and told us to buzz along.

I remained close to both stalwart men throughout their entire lifetimes. They taught me being gay was no better or worse than any other life style, but it did embrace many magnificent moments. We visited back and forth for the rest of our lives: Lloyd, who you are about to meet, insisted when they came to visit, "You be sure to make love with them if the situation is appropriate." I am forever amazed and brought to tears by that generosity of spirit.