



## LOWCOUNTRY MUSINGS

April 2018

### A JOURNAL THROUGH TIME

By Florence Bothwell Cosby

*April*



*Let the rain kiss you.  
Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops.  
Let the rain sing you a lullaby.  
  
The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk.  
The rain makes pools running in the gutter.  
The rain plays a little sleep song on our roof at night —  
  
And I love the rain.*

Langston Hughes – *April Rain Song*



Easter week was early this year, well before much of the country had dug out from the relentless onslaught of nor'easter storms. Easter is what is called a Moveable Feast on the Christian calendar—a religious feast day that does not occur on the same calendar date each year. Easter Sunday is calculated

as the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox, thus creating a range of about 28 possible days for designating the feast day.

This year Easter Sunday falls on April 1, with most of the celebratory religious and secular activities having already occurred in the previous month. Last week, David and I dyed some eggs, continuing an annual Easter tradition we had enjoyed with our daughter Cati and our grandson Cameron, but on a smaller scale, for just the two of us. We will not be hiding them for Cati or Cam, as they are grown and flown, but we will enjoy their colorful presence on the chopping-block table in our kitchen.



Cati called on Easter morning to wish me a Happy Easter. She then went on at great length about all of her childhood memories of Easter festivities: about the sound of the church bells calling the congregants to prayer and the vision of Easter lilies banking the altar; about realizing that the Easter bunny at the mall was not real, but a person in costume; about her first genuine understanding of what it meant to be disappointed when she realized she had already eaten her chocolate bunny; about me explaining to her the important difference between selecting a *solid* chocolate bunny over a *hollow* one; and about how wonderful Upper Montclair smelled when the Louvis candy store was making its signature confections for Easter. She gushed out all of these memories, as vividly as if they had happened yesterday. I was of course delighted that she could look back on her Easters as a child with fondness and sensory delight.



When I was growing up, one of the main highlights of Easter preparation was our Eastery finery. This involved much shopping, choosing, and coordinating the various parts into a harmonious ensemble. It was a grand affair when everyone in the neighborhood came outside after church, to parade around the block in our shiny shoes, stylish outfit, with an artificial flower corsage pinned to our new spring coat.

Choosing an Easter outfit was a mother and daughter experience I carried on with my own child. Many years I sewed the dress myself, from fancy fabrics with puffed sleeves, ruffles, and lots of petticoats for twirling around. Cati said that her favorite Easter dresses were the ones which were twirling-friendly. One year I made her a buttercup-yellow dress with a white ruffled collar, worn with little white gloves to match. We dined at The Manor, a fancy restaurant in West Orange, New Jersey, with my mother and aunt for our annual Easter feast and to take photos afterwards. The elaborately landscaped grounds included small scenic grottos with flowers, greenery, and white wrought-iron benches that were intended as backdrops for family portraits. There was a large Italian family ahead of us, with about a dozen members of all ages getting themselves lined up and settled for their portrait. They were all dark-eyed, dark-haired, and even dark-dressed. For some reason, four-year-old Cati wandered away from our family group and decided to sit in with this unknown family, placing herself in the middle of the white wrought-iron bench, with her golden hair, ivory skin, and light yellow outfit. When I noticed her

quiet invasion into the group photo, I kept gesturing to her to come back to me, hissing a “Psssttt” in her direction, but she ignored me and remained perched in her place, posing for the family portrait with a dozen strangers as if she belonged. To this day I cannot imagine what that family thought when they got the proofs for their photos—all these dark and swarthy Italians, and one very pale little stranger smack in the center.



This is what greeted me when I opened the kitchen blinds this morning—two of our neighborhood bunnies enjoying breakfast in our bird-feeding area. They stayed for about 20 minutes, long enough to have their picture taken. We are always pleased when we see the bunnies in our yard.



We have several bunnies that live in the woods nearby and which regularly come into our yard. We usually see them at night in the side yard when David takes out the trash. They seem to prefer one particular patch of grass by the far fence. There must be some especially succulent shoots that draw them back again and again. We are surprised that they ignore the clover closer to the veranda. At other times we see them during the day in the bird-feeding area in the back yard, munching on cast-off seeds under the feeders.

There are anywhere from one to five bunnies that we have seen at one time, from small to medium to large. Some of them scurry away when we come out the door, while others just carry on with their evening meal. One bunny was distinctly unafraid of David and would come quite close to him and not hop away and through the fence. Another bunny, which we called Peter Bunny, likes to scrunch under the back gate, like Peter Rabbit did in the Beatrix Potter book about his adventures.



My first pet rabbit was Jelly Bean. David gave him to me one year for Easter. He brought him home inside his shirt pocket and presented him to me with his little ears sticking out the top. He lived on our balcony, which was a roomy space that extended the full width of our apartment on Cliff Drive in Santa Barbara. He was enormously friendly and well behaved. We even trained him to use a litter box. We did eventually have to get rid of him, because he began eating the edges of anything that was made of wood—like the siding on the apartment building. But we found him another happy home at the Museum of Natural History where David worked, and where he lived out the rest of his life in an enormous outdoor enclosure.

When Cati was young, probably 4<sup>th</sup> grade, she was walking home from school through the woods behind our house in Short Hills. She saw a cardboard box off in the bushes, wiggling as if something was trying to escape. What she discovered was a small bunny that had obviously been thrown there, by someone who wanted to just get rid of it. Of course, she rescued him and brought him home. We agreed to keep him for a day or so, then take him to the Humane Society. Well, I could not bear to part with him, and he stayed with us for good. Cati named him Thumper, after that memorable rabbit from the Disney movie *Bambi*. We constructed a vast bunny residence for him, first in the basement during the winter, then transferred outside in the yard when the weather warmed up. He stayed with us for a long time before succumbing to an attack by an unknown predator.



I had another pet rabbit when we lived here on James Island, which we named Butterscotch. Once again, we used cast-off building materials stored in an outbuilding to fashion him an enclosed protected space with a fenced-in pen. He stayed in his pen while we were all at work, then I would bring him out when I came home. I would sit in a chair out on the patio, with Butterscotch happily in my lap while I petted and fussed over him. He was so sweet and loved the attention, never trying to escape or leave my lap. What did surprise us, though, was Cati's cat Seamus. Seamus was an outdoor cat, claiming the woods, brush, and field around our rural house as his domain. He would come into the garage for his meals and to get out of the rain, but he rarely sought us out for attention or affection—until Butterscotch came along. It then became Seamus's habit to jump up into my lap next to Butterscotch, seeking the company of my much smaller pet bunny, as well as having me stroke *his* back and scratch *his* ears. This was no easy task, as Seamus was huge, weighing so much that he soon put my leg to sleep with his bulky weight. But not before he purred his contentment cuddled next to my sweet Butterscotch.



It was fiercely windy yesterday evening when a large swath of thunderstorms passed over the state, moving from southwest to northeast as is often the pattern. There were gusts of up to 80 mph in Charleston, but not quite as bad here in Summerville, although the pine trees bordering the back of our property were swaying wildly in the wind.



When we lived in New Jersey, in the New York Metropolitan area, the local radio weather reports often included what they called a Wig Alert, to let especially women know that their coifs were in danger on blustery days. It was a time when wig wearing was popular, as well as essential for those undergoing

chemotherapy. Nowadays, with cancer awareness more openly reported and shared, women seem less self-conscious about exposing their hair loss. My mother was a wig wearer, having undergone chemo numerous times in her life. She had nice wigs, similar to her real-hair bouffant hairdo which was easy to match in a wig, so she often looked natural rather than be-wigged.

One day, however, the unimaginable happened and her wig was blown clear off her head. She and David were walking together in downtown Montclair, rounding the corner across from Hahne's department store. A sudden gust of wind caught them by surprise and there went my mother's wig, skittering down the sidewalk along Bloomfield Avenue, a major thoroughfare with lots of drivers and pedestrians to witness her baldness. David jumped into action and chased the wig, stomping with his right foot as he hopped on his left foot, in an attempt to catch it, with several misses before squarely landing his boot on the wayward wig. Meanwhile, my mother was leaning over with her hands on her bare head, squealing in horror at her sudden nakedness. It lasted only a minute or so, then David promptly returned her wig to her, which she quickly settled into place. She told me later that David was such a gentleman, averting his glance and trying his best not to chuckle out loud at her unexpected mishap. The story remains in our family folklore—an entertaining tale once it was over and done.



Okay, I am in food heaven—it is National Grilled Cheese Sandwich Day. I was not surprised to read that it is considered one of the top comfort foods in the country. Food historians claim that the combination of cooked bread and cheese dates back to ancient times and is enjoyed throughout the world. The two basic ingredients, bread and cheese, are often supplemented with bacon, tomato, onion, and even greens or vegetables. The list is endless and there are as many variations as there are cooks who make it, although I prefer the simple approach to a grilled cheese sandwich.



When I was a kid, my mother would often fix me a grilled cheese sandwich for Sunday night supper. We had our main meal mid-day on Sundays, then just simple sandwiches instead of an evening dinner. I cannot remember a time when grilled cheese was not a regular menu item.

David and I have grilled cheese sandwiches perhaps as often as once a week, either for lunch with some chips and a pickle, or for dinner with a cup of tomato soup. I even like to order a grilled cheese sandwich for breakfast with hash browns on the side, when Cati and I go to Waffle House or IHOP. David spreads mayonnaise on the bread rather than butter, and we have found that it makes the sandwich crisper and less fatty. We usually opt for the traditional American cheese, but often substitute cheddar or jalapeño Jack—Cameron's favorite. Another tasty variation is the way David's mother prepared it—with homemade pimiento-cheese spread. We use a griddle appliance, rather than in a frying pan or stove-top griddle, where the temperature is easier to control for achieving that distinctive golden, crusty outside and a warm, gooey inside. Oh, my!



April is National Poetry Month. When I was teaching, I celebrated this form of writing with students by reading poems and guiding them in writing their own. It was a rewarding experience for all of us and one which I hope many of them have continued to enjoy into their own adulthood. I am a poet myself and have written many poems as a young person in school and as an active adult writer. When my brother died, I wrote a tribute to him for the Trumpet online site, to share with my classmates who knew him. I wanted to include a short poem as well, one that would aptly suit the feelings about death and loss I was trying to capture—one which to this day remains close to my heart.



**They called me to the phone  
That day.  
I felt a chill pervade  
Into the very depths of me.  
I knew,  
Before the words were spoken,  
He is gone.**

My love and appreciation of serious poetry took root in Mr. McCann's English 1 class in high school. I have a vivid memory of being totally enchanted by a poem he read aloud to our class in a carefully modulated voice and intonation that evoked the spirit of the author's words. It was *Sea Fever* from the book *Salt-Water Poems and Ballads*, written by the English poet John Masefield and published in 1912.

*Sea Fever*  
BY JOHN MASEFIELD

*I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,  
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by;  
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,  
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking.*

*I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide  
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;  
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,  
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.*

*I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,  
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the wind's like a whetted knife;  
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,  
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.*



To me as a young student, it expressed such palpable passion and sensory awareness that it stirred me to my soul. I could smell the salt air, feel the ocean spray on my face, and the wind in my hair. I loved the cadence and rhythm to his verses, and I felt, as a physical presence, the urgency in his words to satisfy a burning need, and to realize his life's pleasures.



National Raisin Day does not seem like a big deal, as raisins are usually add-ins to recipes and mixed treats. But I like raisins and have always enjoyed their place in the foods that I eat. For years we used regular raisins—those small, dark, shriveled up grapes that came in a signature red box with the Sun-Maid Raisins girl in its logo. I also packed the snack-size boxes in my lunches, or in the kid-bag I carried when Cati was small. But in later years, perhaps close to 20 years now, we switched to the golden raisins, as they are larger, plumper, sweeter, and easier to chew. We add golden raisins to any number of dishes and recipes—oatmeal raisin cookies or breakfast bread, a bowl of oatmeal, and my favorite, yogurt and fruit.



My earliest recollection of eating raisins was when I was about three-years-old, and we lived in the Big House on St. John's Avenue in Rosebank. My mother had sent me outside to play on the back porch, with a handful of raisins as a snack. She had shoed our dog Smoky outside as well and given him a dog biscuit for his treat. Well, I was envious of Smoky, of what I thought was a cookie, so I traded treats with him, giving him the raisins and myself the biscuit. I was not at all pleased when I bit into the hard, bland biscuit that had absolutely no trace of sweetness or cookie-ness. But by then it was too late—Smoky had already gobbled up all the raisins and I was left with a chunk of bark. Smoky definitely got the better deal on that trade.



April showers very often lead to rainbows, so it is not surprising that rainbows are celebrated in this month. But if you look closely at the banner below to designate National Find a Rainbow Day, the first thing you will notice is that the colors on its rainbow are not in the correct order but are reversed. Although the rainbow colors blend from one into another, they are divided into seven distinctly ordered colors—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. A rainbow is caused by the reflection, refraction, and dispersion of light in water droplets, such as rain, mist, spray, or dew, which results in a spectrum of light appearing in the sky opposite the sun. Rainbows are observed as an arc from the vantage point of the ground but when seen from the sky they are in reality a full circle.



A primary rainbow shows the colors with red on the outside, or upper edge, but a double rainbow shows a second arc with the order of the colors reversed, thus red is on the inside, or lower edge, of the arc. I have seen a double rainbow only once and it was here in South Carolina. David and I were in Charleston at a River Dogs baseball game. It was a warm sunny day, but the game was interrupted by a brief spring shower, which was unusual in that the sun was still shining. We were in the stands overlooking the field and suddenly there appeared a spectacular rainbow in the distance, then a second rainbow beyond it. It was a magical moment, and did in fact last only a moment, but unforgettable just the same.

A record-breaking rainbow was recently seen in the skies over Chinese Culture University near Taipei. Lasting eight hours and 58 minutes, it broke the record as the longest-lasting rainbow in the Guinness Book of Records. Chou Kun-Hsuan, a science professor at the university who clocked the duration of the rainbow, exclaimed to reporters— *It was amazing ... it felt like a gift from the sky ... it's so rare!*



Long-time *Meet the Press* moderator Tim Russert died suddenly of a heart attack in 2008. To console mourners, his family chose some of his favorite songs they found on his iPod to play at the funeral in Washington, D.C. At the end of the service, attendees exited to a poignant ukulele version of “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” sung by the late Israel “Iz” Kamakawiwo’ole. Once outside the funeral, people were astonished to witness a huge rainbow arcing across the sky before them, a far rarer sight in our country’s capital than it is in Iz’s native Hawaii. It was captured by a local photographer from his balcony on the other side of the city and quickly became known as Tim Russert’s rainbow.



With an incredibly gentle voice and haunting melody, Iz’s rendition of “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” elevates a rainbow from humble scientific phenomenon to a heart-felt celebration of life.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1bFr2SWP1I>

The phrase *April Showers* refers to the position of the jet stream in early spring over Ireland and the United Kingdom. It can create sudden strong winds and heavy rains moving in from the Atlantic Ocean.



This short poem as we know it today was originally written in 1157 by the English poet and farmer Thomas Tusser in the April section of a collection of his writings called *A Hundred Good Points of Husbandry*.

*Sweet April showers  
Do spring May flowers*



*FMC 04/2018*

**🔗 Please check back next month for the *May* entry to this *Journal through Time*.**