

His Hat
By Linda

My birthmother's hospital record
notes a single fact about
the unnamed man who sired me:

Father's hat size: medium.

Were I to transcend the limitations
of that one scant morsel,
I could write a biography.
The title would be obvious:
I Know My Father's Hat Size.

But, tunnel-visioned and absorbed
by the four words on the paper in front of me
I wonder...what kind of hat did he wear?
A bowler? Fedora? Tweed flat cap?
A derby? Trilby? Panama Jack Gambler?

Did he know that the angle
between the brim and the crown
of a hat is called a break?

A break: That's what I needed
beyond hat style and size
to weave a tale of identity,
his and mine, the daughter
he never knew, the father I never had.

Was he tall? Did he smoke?
Did he hunt? Play pool?
Like sports? Watch baseball?
What kind of job did he have?
Did he know of my birth?
Would he mind a tomboy offspring?
Was he a man of faith?

If he knew of my existence
would he invite me into his life,
or would I be left in the silence
of incomplete familial connection?
Would my search yield answers?

To the lawyers, librarians, found siblings,
DNA suppliers, and contributors
to the digital highway who made
discovery possible, I tip my hat in gratitude.

Eugene Phillip Allen
married my birthmother Alyce Bower,
a year after she gave me up for adoption.
He was stationed on Treasure Island
in San Francisco, the city of my birth.

His hatter and his haberdasher
was the United States Marine Corps.

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Gratitude

By Linda

I.

Two daughters remove fixtures, paint walls,
stage the house into magazine-ready salability.
They push downsizing, encourage the parsing of
items into categories: KEEP, SELL, DONATE, DUMP.

One son, ladder-born, climbs high, sanitizes the
attic,
his gloved hands mingle with deposits of skittering
rodents and the webbed netting of spiders.
Wise to his mother's yearning,
He, an ardent eliminator of the unnecessary,
notes the slight nod of my head, heaves
unused items destined for disposal
into his pick-up before I can change my mind.

He Boraxes rug stains into invisibility,
pilots a rug cleaner over yards of carpet,
replaces switch plates, installs a bathroom heater,
He carries sofas, beds, thirty cartons of books,
erects and steadies eight bookcases,
positions furniture, mounts TVs, builds shelves,
slices remaining cardboard boxes into quarters.
Another son, rabbit-quick, hauls, unloads,
organizes,
Returns to his out-of-town home. Repeats.
Posts photographs to social media platforms for
sellers.
Predicts no sales. Correctly.

II.

We settle in, make changes.
Our daughter-in-law shifts
an IKEA desktop onto table legs
which double as file cabinets. Loaded,
they are heavy; they will not open,
but she is solution-oriented, keen of eye,
a workwoman, intent on success.
She slides, just so, a slim triangle
of found wood between the floor and the drawer.
She is a shimmer.

III.

I am a-shimmer too, caught smiling
in a glow of gratitude for children
who've hastened the hour of our
departure from one place, one life
to another place and another life.