

A RIDE ON THE PORT JEFFERSON FERRY

By
Carol L. Bluestein

Recently widowed and truly alone for the first time, I was struggling for self-sufficiency, individual integrity and emotional independence. I was searching for my purpose and trying to define my passion. My job, which necessitates this ride from Connecticut to Long Island, was at first rewarding, but now is a constant struggle against my supervisor's incessant psychological abuse. I have never felt so empty.

Desolate, abandoned buildings were the main features of the scarred landscape, barely visible in the poor, rainy evening light. I'm in town on business and lost. After circling the city streets near the docks several times and I arrived at the Port Jefferson ferry slip. Earlier than my reservation, I took the initiative and drove right up to the gatekeeper, who waved me on.

Eager to get to the passenger area and explore the boat, I walked up the wrong ramp into the clearly marked non-working elevator, to the amusement of the crew. With as much dignity as I could muster, I retraced my steps and went to the passenger stairs on other side of the ferry, paid my fare, climbed the stairs and walked outside onto the second floor deck. The rain had changed to a fine mist, which looked like snow in the backlight of the imprisoned deck lights.

It was early November and although everything was damp and cool, I was not uncomfortable. The deck was scattered with the trappings of the summer amenities - open air bar, stacked tables and silent vending machines. I walked to the center of the back railing, looking outward, I separated myself from the huge vessel and watched as the ferry pulled away from its moorings.

Alone, in the twilight, on the water, under the big expanse of darkening sky, listening to the chug of the engines, feeling their vibrations and watching the horizon fade, I was overcome with mixed feelings of aloneness, insignificance and awe. Alone on the deck, in my life and on the job, I am at a loss as to where to go from here. My insignificance is magnified by my surroundings and the knowledge that in the face of events of historic importance, my pain, my life, does not even register. My focus shifts and I am aware of the thunderous sounds of the engine and water turbulence against the silence of the night. Awed by everything around me, and how quickly things change, I planted my feet apart on the deck for stability, pushed my hands deep into my raincoat pockets and lived this moment, taking it all in so I could remember it with all of my senses.

Lights from the deck below made the water incandescent. The propellers churned the deep icy emerald-gray ocean into a froth, which gave way to rolling waves in the ferry's wake. Beyond the stern, on either side of the ship, the displaced water looked like the ocean washing over sandy shores. The scene was hypnotizing.

I looked to the horizon and saw a horseshoe filled with buildings, lights and towers. I saw smoke stacks, lit by factory lights, emitting a pinkish smoke against a sky set aglow by the city. Radio towers -- one with a pair of blinking white lights and one with a single red one; and buildings, which by virtue of distance and air quality, took on a distinctly Art Deco appearance. Somehow, my feelings of anger and sorrow were mirrored in the stark, disappearing landscape. I was meant to be here -- now.

As the ferry stayed its course, the city, decreasing in size and detail, slowly sank out of sight -- its last moments giving the impression of the corona around the moon during an eclipse. Without warning, the beauty of the scene gave way to immense sadness. Tears filled my eyes. It seemed as if my life was vanishing with the city lights.

Silently, but with all my heart, I stood before the heavens and prayed for an end to my inner torment. I asked for a vision, an epiphany, a flash of light, something, anything that would ignite a spark of hope in my being.

Disappointed, I turned away before the lights disappeared altogether. I just couldn't face the darkness. Giving up my watch, reluctantly, but in self-preservation, I retreated to the inside passenger lounge to finish the journey. It was warmer, but it was not better.