

Brain Camp

by Brenda Bishop Blakey

On the way back from Brain Camp, an experimental Alzheimer's facility, we commandeered the bus and went looking for—something, Shangri-la or Utopia. Ms. Sebring, the stocky looking coordinator, was inside the service station paying for gasoline while the bus driver headed to the can. It was the perfect coup; we simply drove off and left them.

Canyon, the oldest, at a ripe eighty-three years said there was a full working commune about sixty miles down the road. We could score some smoke and probably even stay on there if we wanted. He once organized a commune in the Rocky Mountains back in the early 70's. After three years he set off on a road trip to help others start communes. His common law wife, pregnant at the time, stayed behind. But, he never went back to her. The road is what he loved and he kept a website up to date on just how viable communal living can be in modern times.

Sara, sixty one, was the youngest in our crew of ten. The two weeks we spent at Brain Camp enhanced each of us. But after all the physical exercise and health food, Sara experienced the sharpest rise in mental acuity.

"We're stardust." She stated. And like ants, we looked at one another with complete understanding.

Afterwards, she tossed her walker off the bus and swore off using padded underwear. Then she began braiding everyone's hair, even Canyon's beard.

Canyon, his wispy chin hair winding into a short tuft, smiled and put his hand on Sara's shoulder, "You have the spirit of a sparrow and a heart large as a whale."

Someone put on some Crosby, Stills and Nash. The music vibrated through us and through everything we touched. We cheered and whooped it up; we had put one over on the establishment. Our rebellion wasn't exactly war protest but we each had our own

reason. It was our mini revolution and we were on the lam—against society, perhaps not for the first time, but probably for the last.

The bus bumped along and Canyon passed around his legally-obtained cataract medication. As the familiar aroma permeated the breathable space, we oohed and aahed as memories sparked an eerie sense of wildness. And for a time it seemed our spirits swelled and split through our mundane bodies, birds on wing, sharks on feed, and wildcats on prowl. We remembered how it felt to believe we would live forever, possibly in a bus like this one, on an open road somewhere.

Just for that whiff of time, we were back in the era that no one who hasn't lived it can grasp or imagine. Nobody took notes or filmed a video. Nobody made a post to facebook. The phoenix doesn't stop mid flight to make a documentary. Instinctively, we knew this.

The police caught up to us before the turnoff to the commune. Ms. Sebring didn't press charges and was pleased we hadn't killed ourselves. She stared at us as if we were children who didn't know better than to touch a hot stove. There would be no pain or punishment, just a bus load of aging juvenile delinquents staring out windows on the drive home.

We said goodbye and even Canyon, who wore a perpetual smile, was nearly crying. Perhaps he was reminded of what he lost while travelling the road. We each had losses. Though we probably would not contact each other, we exchanged numbers. Sara made sure she hugged each one of us.

"Let's do this again next summer?" Sara said.

We avoided eye contact. Not one of us would voice the truth we all knew. Our previous euphoria evaporated like the scent of smoke and was replaced by a dull numbness, a foreshadowing of our inevitable slide back into forgetfulness.

We would be returned to people to whom we were a bother, to do that which is of little consequence, for a brief and unknown time. Locked in our brains were the secrets to growing food, loving each other, ending war, and maybe even saving the planet.

