

Old Wounds

by Jack Swenson

We got married in a hospital. My bride had her appendix out the day before our wedding, so we decided to tie the knot in her room at Hoover Memorial. It was going to be a small wedding anyway. Nothing fancy. A few friends and members of her family.

A few days later we were off on our honeymoon trip, visiting the rest of her family in Seattle and mine in South Dakota. We stayed in a B and B on the drive north where the owner didn't remember that we were coming. Strange lady. Her house was crammed with Oriental hangings, statuary, furniture, and gewgaws. Her late husband had been a diplomat, she said.

In Montana we stayed at a seedy hotel in Billings and listened to a country western singer with a harelip in a gaudy lounge downstairs. The performer had a nice voice, but he had trouble with the words.

I had a teaching job in Oakland for the first few years of our marriage. We lived in a fourth floor apartment in an old building on Taylor Street in San Francisco. Our apartment had a Murphy bed and view of the Bay Bridge and Treasure Island. I remember one day seeing a nuclear submarine in the bay. I was surprised by how big it was. It was painted a dark gray, almost black; it looked sinister. I also remember not coming home until very late one Christmas Eve because I was drinking with friends who had moved to California from South Dakota.

My wife went back to school and got her teaching credential, and we both got jobs down the peninsula. We bought a house, which became the party capital of the Western World for a few years. Our guests were other teachers mainly. Our dentist and his wife who later committed suicide and an ex-boxer turned school administrator were among the regular party goers, too.

Then I fell in love with my wife's best friend, and my wife began to spend some time with the ex-boxer, although I suspect that their

tête-à-têtes were innocent enough. Mine weren't. K.C. and I went at it hot and heavy. Then K.C. ran off with a biology teacher, dumping both me and her husband in the process, and my wife began to have back problems which required periodic hospitalizations, and because she was unhappy, she began to see a psychiatrist, and that's how one day I made a visit to see him, too. I didn't want to go, but my wife insisted.

I went, but it was no fun. I don't remember much of the conversation, but I do recall my wife saying that she didn't think I loved her anymore, and the psychiatrist, who seemed embarrassed, said, "Oh, of course he does!" He paused and looked at me, his eyes pleading. I shrugged. "I don't know," I said.

I was lying. I knew. I just didn't feel like talking about it. I looked at my shoes and waited for the session to end. That evening after dinner I stayed up half the night drinking bourbon and watching an old war movie.

