

Katie

by Larry Strattner

Katie died on Tuesday. He got the call around two in the afternoon. It wasn't raining. The sun had been out for about an hour. Steady rain always fell in winter and most of spring.

The rain let up briefly when Katie died, rather than continued. A gloomy day might seem more appropriate for dying but Katie was never a gloomy person. Perhaps the gloom-crew shut off the rain and popped out the sun in acknowledgement of Katie's invariably happy countenance. He wouldn't call himself a religious person or someone who believed there was something beyond this world. Nonetheless he hoped the pause in the rain might be for Katie.

The following day people arrived across the street at Katie's house to pack up stuff. Katie had lived alone in the small house. She moved into the neighborhood without much stuff, from a larger home in Chico.

A practical person goes through life leaving a trail of stuff sloughed off for others to worry about. Sometimes stuff kept is significant. Mostly stuff turns out to be only significant to its keeper and winds up in some second hand store or landfill. A few pictures remain, yellowed, fading over time, hidden in a drawer to be seen by a future generation who ask, "who's that?" and receive an answer like, "I think grandma's brother," without conviction or certainty. We all seem to lose our significance in the end.

He walked across the street and talked to the people working at Katie's house, a couple of sons, a daughter and a grandchild. He had never met them. Katie had been along in years so some sadness was expressed, but mostly fond remembrance. They talked about who Katie had been, from where she had come. When they

exhausted Katie's history they stood quietly for a moment, then returned to work.

He crossed the street back to his little house, wishing he had known Katie better, or maybe longer. She seemed to have had many experiences. They might have shared a few smiles instead of sitting home alone between cocktail hours.

He sat down in his reading chair and picked up a book. Rather than beginning to read he laid it in his lap and gazed out the French doors into his tiny back yard. Beside the fence grew the Weeping Cherry tree he planted some years ago. The rain had forced splendid white blooms early this year. The flowers made him anticipate the bees arriving after the rain stopped, which led him to speculate when the hummingbirds might show up. He enjoyed hummingbirds. His backyard was planted with a variety of hummingbird-friendly flowers. Still, he also kept a hummingbird feeder filled and an eye out for visitors. He even spoke with them on occasion, but now supposed he would have better liked talking with Katie. As with many things he missed in his life, he had waited a bit too long.

He thought about the Cherry tree, its thin, drooping winter branches so suddenly covered with flowers in the rain. From where he sat he saw the pointed buds of leaves to come, the cycle of death, regeneration and rebirth. He didn't think of much beyond this world, but as the cycle of the Cherry tree crept into his thoughts he found himself beginning to hope he would make a better job of getting to know Katie when next they met.

