

Creative Nonfiction

Memory

Dorothy Long Parma

their damaging origin. I then become frustrated with myself for my inability to best OCD with that knowledge.

I'm only about a year into my healing process. From first telephoning St. Mary's and reaching out to receiving my diagnoses to beginning my treatments, I've made undeniable progress. Yet, I often feel like I've barely made a dent. This class, however, has facilitated my healing in innumerable ways. While I still encounter difficulties writing, I look at the pieces I've presented here and see myself growing. Though I still experience bad and miserable days thanks to OCD, I know I'm now more honest with myself and more open, thanks to journaling. Despite the rigorous editing I still practice (some change takes time!), I'm reclaiming and regaining trust in my voice; learning to write, find comfort in, and draw strength from poetry once more—after so many years—is a joy I emphatically refuse to ever lose again.

I expect battling OCD will be a lifelong war—or, at least, one lasting many years. Last summer, I faced it without truly knowing what it was. I stood as a one-woman army, weaponless, and nearly lost. Now I'm facing it with my mentors, friends, fiancé, and doctors by my side. Now I'm facing it with the weapon I'm sharpening—my voice. And this time, I know my opponent's face and name.

The trials have begun, and I won't always be ready; I won't always succeed in besting them. I'm imperfect, but that's okay, because I can be imperfect and still win. As I attempted to convey in the "Urania" chapter of "9 Muses," there's beauty in chaos, there's beauty in imperfection; there's always, *always* room to grow, for the universe of imperfection is *infinite*. This universe exists outside my glass box, which doesn't offer the convenience of a door. But I can—and *will*—make one.

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Memory is powerful; I invoke its power in setting these words down, for my generation and my son's, and for his children.

Several members of my mother's family were eyewitnesses to, and participants in, World War II as it was waged between the United States and Japan for control of the Philippine Islands, a strategic way-station in the Pacific Theater.

Ten-year-old Florita heard the bombs whistling overhead, the crashing sound of splintering wood and shattered glass. She was hiding under the house with the family pig; they cowered together for comfort. Then there was deafening noise, followed by a silence even more deafening, and a splash of warmth on the girl's back. The pig lay dead, pierced by shrapnel.

How long did my mother carry that awful memory with her? I do not know. She still carries the physical scar, a metal shard embedded in her back. It appears on routine x-rays and has to be explained away:

"No, I don't have tuberculosis. That spot on the film has always been there. See, I received the BCG vaccine." She points to a scar on her arm.

Writing this now, I feel for a similar raised area on the edge of my left shoulder. Growing up, I received the vaccine too.

Great-uncles roamed the mountains with the guerrillas and defended the island of Corregidor alongside American troops until it was overwhelmed. My great-grandfather walked the Bataan Death March, and survived.

My grandmother (Lola) spoke little about what happened, but she carried a bitter enmity toward the Japanese people for the next 50 years. This puzzled me greatly. By the time of my last visit, I had spent several of those years living in the United States, my father's homeland. On university campuses and at national research institutions, I had met and worked alongside people from many different countries. Someone of Japanese (or Spanish or Chinese or Arab or Indian) descent seemed the same to me as any other person; I could no more hold them accountable for the acts of their ancestors than I could fault a falling laboratory flask for being subject to gravity.

Lola fell into eternal sleep seven years ago, in her rocking chair at age 97. I was no stranger to long-distance mourning by then; still I keenly felt the loss. And wondered: in her last lucid moments, had she finally forgiven and forgotten?

Most public records were destroyed in the Battle of Manila, including my mother's birth certificate. And many of that generation have passed on since. Just last year, my church held a memorial service for one of its long-time parishioners. He was the youngest POW in the Pacific War and was at Corregidor when it fell. When the Japanese government invited surviving American POWs to their country to issue them a formal apology for all they had suffered, he was one of the six men on the plane to Tokyo. I thanked his widow, whom I had never met before, for his service on behalf of the Filipino people. She smiled and said he had loved the Philippines.

Some memories beget bitterness neverending, like my grandmother's. So why have I chosen to commit to print these stories, these fragments of recollection passed to me long ago from those who have gone before?

The reason is simple. Bitterness and hatred can remain, long after their root causes have faded from the collective consciousness. Without memory, there can be no true forgiveness.

And a life without forgiveness is only partially lived.