

from Fall '06

Reflections
by Patricia Bell

The Grandeur of a Grand Picture

It was 3:15 am, on this recent warm July morning that I approached the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, after an eleven-hour drive from Denver, Colorado. It was also my birthday. The Bright Angel Lodge stood rustic and inviting behind me, my place of respite for the following days, and before me the Grand Canyon.

Black. Chasm. Nothing. One cannot "see" the Grand Canyon in the dark. But let me tell you some mystical fact. Standing there, within inches of plunge and space, I felt the magnitude of this Wonder of the World. The soft Arizona air lifted from its depths and welcomed the strands of disheveled hair about my face, and I was caught breathless. Silent. My husband and daughter walked towards the lodge, giving me even more space alone. And because of all this year had placed in my lap, there were a few tears. I have never witnessed the world dark, as I did that moment, when looking into the canyon, and no matter how hard I tried to adjust to it, I could not see into the vastness to find any glimpse of form or feature.

But, there was an immediate peace that came with this expanding quiet. And not a thought could I hold. Not one. As teachers, when do we ever have that moment of no thought? Most of us carry our work even into sleep. By mid-July, we are already planning our new lessons, or worrying about administrative changes, or facing changes. Standing on this precipice of dark, I had no thought save one. How beautiful the dark could be. No answers floated to clarity. No whispers of decision wafted through me. None. How I loved that none.

Sunrise was scheduled for 4:45am. At that time, the first rays of sun would begin to illuminate the canyon. The desk clerk, who by the way found no humor in us showing up at 3:00 a.m., told us. Even when I gushed (imagine me gushing), that it was my birthday and this was my wish to be at the Grand Canyon at sunrise on my birthday, she simply looked at me trying to hide the fact that she felt me certifiable.

I sat upon the stone wall of the South Rim. Grayness milked its way into the black of night. A tiny thin line of light. My eyes searched for some shadow, some hint of rock formation, and then all of a sudden, there it was. The air rose from far below and said, "Look." The canyon, when first wakened by sun, is cast with blue. The juts, the forever well, the plateaus, the valleys, and the cliffs. I was stunned into a paralyzed wonder. There was absolute hush.

Suddenly from behind me came squeals of laughter and voices rose in excitement, and there was a rush of feet and arms and legs, as I became surrounded by two busloads of high school students! My much-needed respite and get away was foiled. My husband looked at me; surely I was going to simply roll off the wall into oblivion.

"Do you believe this?" my head said. "Yes," my teacher's heart replied.

It was not what I had carefully planned. But then, what is these days?

Their voices lingered in the air. And remarkably so. When they gathered around me as I sat, this stranger among them, they all smiled, and became as quiet as I. Voices changed to whispers. And though the faces were strangers, the voices, ah the voices, were those of all the students I have known.

The grandeur of the Grand Canyon, replete with now full sun shadows and rocks of red and pale pink, strata of linear ages, tufts of green and above it all the flight of the

California Condor, opened before me and the peace I sought ran like gentle rain and seeped into my every pore. In the quiet of the sunrise, in the peace of magnificence, I rested, praising the opportunity to see the big picture.