

"Life-Lines"
by P. H. Lin

(a short monologue
suitable for either a
"Live" presentation on stage
or via Zoom)

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Cast of Characters

OLDER WOMAN: Female. In her 60s. She is fit, engaged and engaging despite her years.

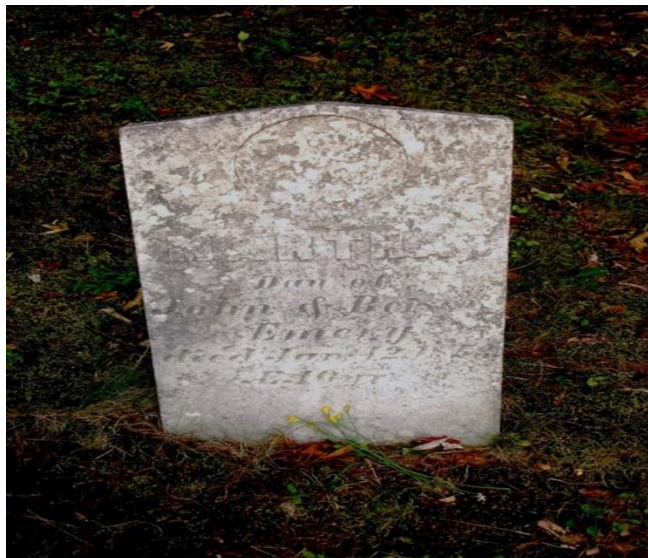
The Time: 2015 (well before Covid 19)

The Place: A pine tree lined country road in what feels like "the middle of nowhere."

Playwright's Note:

This piece was envisioned to employ two images as a part of the presentation (see below.) Both would be done as projections... but in the case of a Zoom presentation, as "virtual backgrounds."

Image #1 "sets the scene"-the edge of a pine tree forest. Image #2 "punches up" the impact of the ending. I can provide both images if so desired. patlinplays@gmail.com



At rise: OLDER WOMAN enters.
Despite her years, she is
fit, engaged and engaging)

OLDER WOMAN

So good to be with you again! You're looking the same, Martha Emery. Well, maybe a little grayer... and rounder around the edges. But aren't we all?

I'll bet you thought you'd seen the last me...and yet, here I am! By the side of your road. On your doorstep, so to speak.

I'm back for a Camp Reunion! My old summer camp. The one at the end of this road that I'd come to each summer? We've talked about Camp many times. You don't remember?

Can't believe that Camp is 100 years young this year! Can't believe it's been... what... fifty years since I walked the bunk line... saw the ball fields, the craft shops... the dock?

Camp Winona. It should be landmarked. Been a fixture here. Functioning since 1915!

Just think about all of those campers who came here before me. All dressed in white "middies" and bloomers... and in my day, white polos and shorts. All those girls would make up a line stretching clear to the lake! From the lake to the flagpole and back again multiple times!

Fresh faced kids sent North to escape from the heat of their cities. Mostly East coast girls. And to hide from whatever plagues might be deadly that summer.

Yeah, that's what I said. "be deadly." In the early days, that would have been Spanish flu. And then later on? Polio. The threat of that lasted for years. And more recently AIDS... SARS... MERS... and who knows what comes next. Anyway...

I came up the hill to see you. See how you were doing. How you've been holding up. Don't expect you to answer. Never did before, so why hope for a miracle now? But that's ok. I get it. You're quiet and you prefer to keep your own counsel. Me, too. One more thing we share in common.

(She references some flowers that she's holding)

There were flowers growing wild beside the road. I picked some to brighten things up, and because they were pretty.

(Beat)

This place of yours is so shady. So many shadows. But what to expect your home is surrounded by pine trees?

(She hands over the flowers)

Here. For you. No thanks necessary or needed.

(Beat)

This, uh, may be the last I visit you face to face. It's not that I don't like to come here, it's just... I live far. In Los Angeles. Since March. Very different living so far away from my roots. My memories.

(Quick beat)

So when Camp sent an e-invite to come back here for Reunion? I jumped at the chance to revisit. To reconnect with you, Miss Martha Emery. My "local" Maine-woods friend who changed my thinking.

(Quick beat)

Yeah, that's heavy, I know. And maybe uncomfortable, too. But it's something I've wanted to say for a very long time. To you, and now I have, and that's all good.

(As she's run out of things to say, she fidgets)

Remember the first time we met? I was ten. You were, too... which surprised me because you looked older.

(Quick beat)

Maybe you weren't surprised, but I was. Especially when I realized bad things had happened... to you, Miss Martha Embry. A kid just my age.

That unnerved me.

(Beat)

You'd never gave out with the details of what had happened... and I never pushed, 'cause, you see, it didn't matter. I accepted how you were sharing what you could, and that was enough. Enough to make a connection. Not sure that I'm saying this right, but you get how I mean.

(Quick beat)

And I did come up with my own versions of what had happened. And some of them were doozies... let me tell you! But I've always been known for my active imagination.

(She laughs at her own joke)

So why was I out and about on that day I showed up here? I guess I was looking for color. Local color. A cow in a field would have done... but to meet up with you? A kid my own age, who actually lived by this road, in the middle of nowhere!?!

(Another beat)

I'm going to sit down for a bit. I'm not ten anymore, and this foot is prone to bunions.

(She sits and massages her foot)

When my Mom first suggested I go off to sleep-away camp? I didn't want to. But once she decided I would? Well, that was

that. And though, at that time, no summertime epidemic was looming... except for a Viet Nam War, but that was different... Mom declared my time had come to become a "Winonan!"

(Quick beat)

See, she'd started at sleep-away camp when she was my age. As had as her own Mother before her. And as both had spent their summers at "Winona?" What had started out as a "one off" with Grams in the Jazz Age? By the time it got to me, this was family tradition.

So, despite my protests, I went... and you know what? I liked it! Same way that my Mom and my Grandma had liked it before me. Why I kept going back to Winona, until I "aged out."

But there was a time...my third summer... when things hit a rough patch. One that left me frustrated, confused, impatient, and bored. See, I'd had it with too much "forced fun" on the Junior camp level. I'd played those games for two summers straight by then.

I wanted to take a canoe trip down "Crooked-Long River." I wanted to climb Mt. Pleasant, not hike to Five Corners. But that would all have to wait until I was "fourth year." And classified "Intermediate" on the Camp's roll call.

Guess that's why I wandered off that day I turned ten. My Birthday present to me!

And even though I still can't believe that I did this, I walked through the iron Camp gates and up the road... to have an Intermediate level kind of adventure.

But instead of finding a farm with a cow in the field? I stumbled on you. Hiding out in the trees, on this "Promised Land" where you lived.

(She stands up to address Martha on eye level)

You never told me this place had an actual name, but it does. I searched it out through the county land records I googled... but anyway...

(Quick beat)

I came here today... not to end but affirm our connection.

No "closures" for us, OK? Way too confining. Always think how the path for a "closure" describes a circle. A line always destined to end back the same place it started. And that's not how I see what we have... what we share.

What we have is more like a gyre. A pathway that loops on itself... but with each loop, loops higher. Onward and upward!

I've realized this since we met. This girl of my very own age, who'd had bad things happen. And once I let that sink in? It colored so much about how I thought... about life and so much more.

(She gets out her cell phone)

Do you mind if I take a picture? For old times sake? Then I do have to get back to camp... down the hill for dinner. They're having a lobster bake on the beach tonight. A farewell, nostalgic, remembrance kind of party.

(She takes her picture)

Yeah. This is how I remember you, Martha Emery. As the daughter of John and Betsey. Aged ten years old. August twelve. The day you died. 1853.

And your death day became my birth day one hundred years later. Coincidence or not? Who knows. Who cares?

All I know, even though your own life-line got cut short? Somehow it got linked up with mine. Your past... my future. One gyre. Onward and upward!

(She shows off the photo she's taken {which is of Martha's tombstone} to Martha.

At the same time, this image is projected for all to see.

Lights fade to black.

End of play)