

CONCLUSION

So. Now what? Is this curtains or just another chapter that will generate little stories to amuse you (I wish) and let you know how things went during my life. We're retired now, living in Rockledge, Florida, but I still have activities which I'll talk about. Such as:

POKER - I love to play cards. As a child my parents played frequently with Dick and Betty Wilhelm. They'd drink, smoke as the cards flew, the poker chips clinked and occasional change or dollar bills flowed back and forth over the table. I wanted to play too but they kept me out of the game until I was a teenager.

The kids on Martense Street played blackjack and poker on the stoops and I knew the game pretty well. Even if my parents wouldn't let me play I could circle the table and see their hands. I probably annoyed them but they were too nice to show it.

One morning when I was about eight years old I awoke before my parents. I crept through the house and found the oddest cardboard box sitting in the middle of the table. Inside was the remains of a pizza. I'd never seen or heard of this food before but, cold and stale, it was one of the best things I'd ever tasted. I polished off a couple of slices before breakfast believing that it

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would be better to not chance asking permission - better to say "Sorry." Do you remember the first time you saw or tasted pizza. I didn't even know the word "pizza" until my mom woke up and began cleaning the debris off the table.

The poker foursome would usually have snacks. Chips or peanuts perhaps. One fine evening, before my ninth birthday I asked permission, to fix them a snack. They said, "Great! What are you going to make?"

"It's a surprise," I said and went off to work things out in the kitchen. "Big boy!" I thought.

I melted a little crisco in a cast iron frying pan. While the grease was heating up I cut some white bread into little rounds, sprinkled a little vanilla flavoring around and pan fried them.

Wow! They loved my snack. Or maybe they just needed me to back off a bit and quit looking over their shoulders.

"Make some more Billy. These are great." Many smiles.

So I went back to the kitchen to make another round but we were now out of vanilla. So, knowing that Uncle Dick loved whiskey, I substituted a few sprinkles of whiskey for the vanilla. They had a real laugh when I told them that.

The question came up again, "Billy. How did you make these snacks?"

I was happy to share my recipe. So I wiped my nose with the back of my dirty hand and told them how I cut the bread circles and then pressed each slice between my palms, pressing them together very tight. They paled a little when they realized how much I'd been handling their food and declined another batch.

I met Joe LaCerva at Kathy's barber shop in December 2010. Just a howdy between a couple of retired codgers. In our conversation we both claimed to be writers. He invited me to a writers club meeting on Wednesday mornings. The following is the first of many written stories I've had the opportunity to read at our Wednesday morning meetings.

POKER NIGHT ~ By: Bill Serle

We moved to Rockledge from New Jersey last April. We had many good reasons to move including loving children and grandchildren, warm weather and bargain home prices.

But I miss my poker buddies. I played poker every Friday night at a senior'-only condo game room with a bunch of old Jews. Well, maybe there was one or two Italian guys, but they were all old. At 72 years old, I was a relative youth. They had a Thursday game too and often invited me when they were short of an eighth player.

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You probably wonder why I mention their religion. It's because the Jews I've known over the years have been fine, moral people but toughened by a brutal history of hatred throughout much of the world.

I had a gruff, snarling commercial landlord once upon a time ago. I would quake in my boots when Mr. Gottman made threatening calls about a late rent payment. Then my good friend Mark Soloman explained that many old Jews had history going back to WWII Europe where their families had been savaged. He said, "Mr. Gottman had to be tough outside to survive and probably passed it on to his children too. Inside he's just like me and you. He'll respond to calm and reasonable explanations. Don't worry too much about his manner." Mark was right. Once when Gottman showed up at the head office to demand payment, I invited him into my office and we had a nice chat. He had an accent like Herr Klink on television. (look it up)

This poker group loved cards and each other but they tended to act tough. They yelled at each other and at me - always willing to complain and chastise when they felt any breach of good poker protocol or personal etiquette. Being from Brooklyn I was used to their guttural New Yorker accents.

"Bill!"

"What Arlene?" I snarled back.

"You're a god damned sandbagger. That's not fair. When you have a good hand you must bet. No fair sneaking up like that."

"Whadda ya mean. I've watched the world series of Poker and that's the way you're supposed to bet. I was using my poker face," I explained as I raked in half the pot.

She grumbled but, since she'd just won the other half of the red, white and blue chips, she sort of let me slide a little.

Milton, on the other hand was not feeling so calm. As my friend Bernie dealt the next hand Anthony, the Italian guy I mentioned, reached out and arranged the cards around the table a little as they weren't flying so straight. "Take your hands off my fucking cards!" Milton snapped at him as he reached out and put a restraining hand on Anthony's arm.

George was a little mad too since he was losing. "Bill. This is all your fault," he said, "Don't mess around. You talk too much. Keep your mind on the game." He correctly sensed that I was confused, as usual, and didn't quite get the game that had been called.

"Rows and columns. Rows and columns, nuttin wild." His fingers were wagging aggressively in my face signaling fore finger for the rows and index finger for columns

and a thumb-forefinger circle for nuttin wild.

For the two years I played poker with this group, we never played stud, Texas hold-em or draw poker. We played strange, ever changing games called bingo, two plus two plus one, tic tack toe, Red and Black, Morris' pea patch and such. Always high and low. Brands of poker that were fun but not exactly kosher in my book.

I'd win once in a while but usually, when I drifted home after midnight and Daisy asked, "How'd you do?" I'd have to say, "I had a lot of fun." Code for losing my shirt. Well not really. We played for nickels and dimes and, on my worst night I'd lose about \$25.00. Now and again I might even win a little.

I loved that this gang cared about the game enough to argue and squabble. Sometimes one of them would disappear for a few weeks due to some imagined or real affront.

Bernie Salanger was a neighbor so we car-pooled to the game. Our conversations during the half hour it took each way were wide-ranging. They ran the gamut from philosophy to finances to family and life experiences. I usually drove since Bernie didn't see so well at night. We took turns as to whose car we drove.

Bernie and his wife Patricia became good friends to both Daisy and myself. Dinners at each others homes or restaurant outings were equal fun. I miss my friends.

Hey! Does anybody here play poker! See me after class.

WRITING ~ On Wednesdays I go to the **Senior Writing Workshop** at the Martin Anderson Senior Center in Rockledge. At seventy-three I am a younger member. There are usually about twenty members present and we each get to read our work. Mostly we hear family and personal history; sometimes fiction or poetry. I enjoy the meetings and there are flashes of humors and brilliant phrasing. I now feel that brevity is a virtue. Too much journaling can be tedious.

I've also joined a Melbourne group called **Scribblers of Brevard** that meets two Saturdays each month. Scribblers has a web site and prepares a bound book each year featuring members' work. I found them through their book. This group is younger and includes musicians, playwrights and even poets.

As I finish this chapter I have writing and art projects which I eagerly anticipate.

- *Hunter II* is a novel I am just now completing. I hope to publish it as an E-book in 2012. Love and crime. A prequel and a sequel will be called *Hunter* and *Hunter III*.
- A compilation of editorials from *Fun Things To Do In The Mountains*.
- An illustrated book of "mini sagas." My great niece Meg Johnson may be teased into contributing a few illustrations.

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George: Jersey boy loves poker and his buds. Talks loud with sign language. Bossy. Fun.

Milton: Cynical Jersey City antique store owner. Bossy. Table's senior citizen. Bossy. Fun.

Bernie: My neighborly friend. Cards three times a week. Philosopher card shark. Bossy. Fun.

Arlene: Poker queen. Makes weekly bus trips to Atlantic city hotels and casinos. Bossy. Fun.



Anthony: Tough talking kid from da Bronx. WWII vet writing a book. Bossy. Fun.

Bill: Behind camera. Sandbagger. Talks too much. Need's supervision.

- Say Hello - a two act black comedy about death.
- Mom's life - based on her letters.
- Anne Abraham's life based on her journal and family tree.

In my years I've devoured fiction. Fun reads. Along the way, especially in the last few years, I've read quite some true family histories and fiction disguised as personal histories. The ones I'm going to list here have been so enlightening and entertaining that I proudly present them to you as another way to have fun!

I have immodestly put some of my work at the head of the list. The other books listed are super fine work!

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A one minute synopsis of *Stealing Ali*. Ali is four when her Lebanese father, Joe Zayyatt, and her Cuban mother, Maggie, divorce in Miami. He takes her to Lebanon to meet his family while Maggie goes on her honeymoon. He tells Ali that her mother doesn't want her and leaves her in Lebanon intending to put her in boarding school until he can convince Maggie to leave her new husband and return to him.

Maggie must journey to Lebanon to retrieve her somewhat damaged daughter. Her beautiful hair is cut short, she's taking Valium and thinks her mother doesn't love her.

Maggie succeeds in retrieving Ali but her father, the despicable Joe Zayyatt, kidnaps her and takes her again. Maggie and her new husband Lee do some detective work and learn that Ali is in the middle eastern emirate of Bahrain - an island that they had never heard of before.

Joe, a Catholic, converts to Islam and wins custody in the Sharia court. Traveling through the middle east by tugboat, without passports, facing police and Arabic immigration officials, risking everything they

Travel to Germany, Isreal, Syria, India, Africa, Egypt, Poland, Afganastan, Iraq, Iran. Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, and beyond. Travel in time as well to sojourn in other Eras. Read these fine books to lose yourself only to return to your sweet corner of earth wiser and refreshed.

Title	Author/Notes
• <i>Stealing Ali</i>	<i>William and Daisy Serle</i>
• <i>Bills Journey</i>	Bill Serle
• <i>The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit</i>	Lucette Lagnado
• <i>My Father's Paradise</i>	Ariel Sabar
• <i>The Girl from Foreign</i>	Sadia Shepard
• <i>Fatuhiva</i>	Thor Hyerdahl
• <i>The Good Daughter</i>	Jasmin Darznik
• <i>The Septembers of Shiraz</i>	Dalia Sofer
• <i>Not Me</i> (A Novel)	Michael Lavigne
• <i>Not Without My Daughter</i>	Betty Mahmoody
• <i>Roots</i>	Alex Haley

strive to get her back.

SOME THINGS THAT OCCUPY ME IN RETIREMENT ARE:

- Art - Painting, drawing. Water colors mostly.
- House and garden projects can be real pleasure as well as exercise.
- The grandchildren - we love doing things with them and their parents
- Boating, Golf, Gym, bicycling - all provide exercise as well as fun.
- Traveling and visiting with friends.
- Movies and plays, walking with my sweetie.
- Writing.

Here are a few mini sagas I've written:

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Dessert ~ A Mini-Saga by William Serle

Minnow swallowed Tadpole.

Stork stalked Minnow. Neck coiled, sharp beak struck and swallowed the little Fish.

Young Weasel was on Stork in a second and she became lunch.

Circling high, Eagle spotted the little brown diner and plunged from the sky.

Lone Wolf aimed and then released his arrow. God...

Bushed ~ A mini-Saga by William Serle

Only I note shadowy figures rustling toward the tent. The campers sleep.

Never mind. Just moon shadows wavering through windy mist curtains.

Wait. On my neck! Oh. A vine. Forget it.

What the Heck! There. By my foot...the bushy striped tail is standing straight out.

Peehew!

No Appointment Necessary ~ A Mini-Saga by William Serle

Running failed. Gasping I fell into the Reaper's arms.

"Don't take me yet. I must save the world."

He paused. He smiled..."Your time's now. You meet your maker at midnight Harvey."

"WAIT!!! My name's not Harvey! I'M WILLIE!!!"

"Same shit." The world went poof."

As you can see a key feature of the mini-saga is that they are fifty words or less.

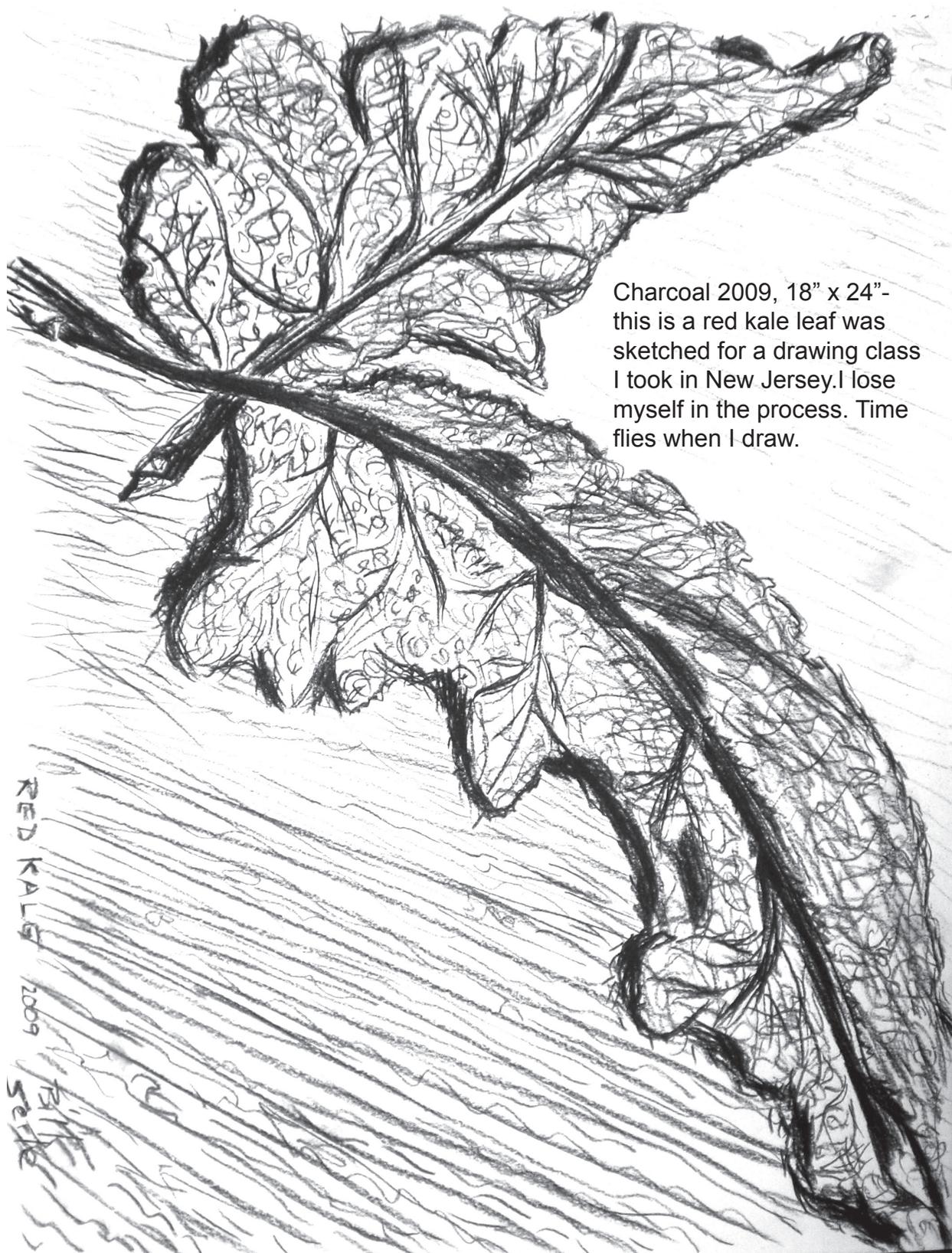
Well okay kids. That's all for now. Write if you get work. Hang by your thumbs. Hate to see you go!

Bill



April 2011. Me and my great-niece Meg Johnson. Setting out for a short voyage aboard Day's Ease in Cocoa, Florida. Photo by niece Chris Johnson.

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Charcoal 2009, 18" x 24"-
this is a red kale leaf was
sketched for a drawing class
I took in New Jersey. I lose
myself in the process. Time
flies when I draw.

RED KALE
2009

Bill
St. Joe

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We have visited our friends Norma and Peter Joyce in San Miguel D'Allende, Mexico. This is the patio of the home they stayed in on our first visit. Later they bought their own home here. Wonderful climate and a beautiful place to abide. Colored pencil. Below is a sunset photo taken in Haiti while on a cruise.



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This study was drawn at Restauranto Del Puerto in Juangriego, Isla Margarita, Venezuela.

I like it because the restaurant was divinely sited. Seeing Daisy covering her face reminds me that she was a little annoyed with me for some reason. At this time of our month-long stay we were alone. We took the bus over the top of Margarita's mountains, through the capital city, La Asuncion. I remember the occasion as a late lunch and we were the only patrons. Check out the photos below.



Juangriego, Venezuela



view from La Asuncion



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Bill on the Statue of Columbus in Barcelona.