

Feel Me

But don't fence me in

"Write with words just one beat long," dared my scribe coach.

I was to use none but short words, which meant I could not write the first words that came to mind.

I took the dare to tell you this tale.

Last week when I rode my bike to work, I saw a gal who seemed trapped on the wrong side of a chain link fence. ('Gal' is not my first choice for one of my sex, but it's short, and it could be worse, so deal with it.)

The gal used her palms to feel one side of the fence. A white cane hung from a strap on her wrist.

Did I know her? Her face was turned, so I was not sure and could not call her by name. I could have rung my bike bell, but what would that mean to one who hears yet has no sight? It might scare her or not make sense. So I called out, "Hi there. Do you want to get past that fence?"

"Yes," she said. "Is the Red Barn that way?" She held her cane out and aimed it north.

"It is," I said, "but the fence dead ends to your left." I was glad just then to have learned from blind friends to say where things are and not just point. "Come this way to get to where the fence is not closed off."

When she neared I saw that I did know her, a friend whose name is one beat too long for this task. I'll call her G. We shared a long, slow hug. (My blind friends like to feel me, which I love.)

G said, "I hear you cut off your long hair." She reached up to feel it.

That cut was last year. Did G hear of it, I thought, from our friend in, I'll say, *Rose Town*, who felt my short hair for the first time last month? She's blind, too. Not that ALL blind folks are friends, mind you, no more than all us gay gals are, but where we live, at least, you tend to know who's on your side of the fence, so to speak.

I warned G that my hair was damp with sweat from my bike ride, in case she'd be grossed out.

G said, "No prob," and felt my short mop. (Yes, bike nuts, my bike hard-hat was on my head, but the back of my hair could still be felt.)

G and I walked side by side and talked. She took the back of the crook of my arm. Soon we came to where I work, so we hugged one more time and said "Bye."

The point is that it's good to know all kinds of folks so you know how to help when they need it. It's good, too, to wrack your brain to do things in a way you don't do them all the time. Plus it's good to have friends – with sight or not – who like to feel you.

Award-winning writer Sally Sheklow has been using her syllables freely in Eugene Weekly since 1999.



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