



A giant chain supermarket sits at the town center's core, where stores have been replaced throughout the years.

Photos by Patrick Webb

Webb: Mothers should live forever, but they don't

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inspire his exhausted players in 1966 as they prepared to play overtime in the World Cup final.

Sporty

Sports have been huge in our family, both watching and playing. Because I have downsized Mum into assisted living and now a residential care home, I have had to sort through family artifacts. Memories have gained meaning. I discovered a photograph of an early teenager in a box-pleat skirt grinning at the windswept sea coast.

Picture Olga Korbut and I realize that's Mum as a child. The elfin gymnast stood 4 feet and 11 inches tall, was barely 82 pounds and even had the same hair. When we watched the 1972 Olympics together, I wondered why Mum teared up when the Sparrow from Minsk waved to the fans. She cried every time the Russian did the flip.

For Mum at 94, her own tennis, badminton and lawn bowls prowess is a disappearing memory.

She was born amid what clichéd writers would label the hardscrabble streets of London. It was the mid-1920s. Her mother operated a sell-everything corner shop, didn't actually marry her second husband and was later revealed as a money lender. That may explain my many uncles and aunts who weren't blood relatives.

I cannot imagine that era. Motor cars and lorries



The irony of the center's wallpaper being dedicated to much-admired actors from a previous era is not lost on a visitor.

were replacing horse-drawn buggies. Rockets had been depicted by Jules Verne in "Autour de la Lune," but no one was suiting up for moon missions. The terrible bomb was still 20 years away. Calvin Coolidge was president. Mel Tormé and B.B. King were born that year, too. In Europe, Benito Mussolini was flexing his muscles and Adolph Hitler was busy writ-

ing his book.

Haunting

The mood set by the staff at Mum's facility is one of routine and endearing jollity. As far as I am concerned, they are saints. They come from Ireland, Nigeria and Pakistan, as well as some regions of England. They unite in a common philosophy of making each day com-

fortable and carefree. Safety and harmony are priorities.

Mum's meal companions are the brightest in her unit. One lady is the widow of a career Air Force airman. She delights in creating drawings of flowers, all in her favorite orange. One bloke owned a liquor store at the racecourse where they run the English Derby. Bragging about how Moët & Chandon "flew out

the door" with high-spend-ing toffs on busy race days, he cherishes the retelling as much as the memories.

Down the hall, the facility's designers have named the dementia wing "Squirrels." English humor may offend Americans but that's how we cope. Tommy Atkins laughs in his foxhole as German bullets whistle overhead.

At its entrance, the wall-

paper features a Hollywood collage of Rock Hudson, Audrey Hepburn and a young Elizabeth Taylor. Those pictures of a past generation's heartthrobs smile out onto a corridor that reverberates throughout the night, plaintive voices emanating from broken minds, muttering, crying, producing odd rambling words and guttural barks that haunt.

During the day, a looped recording overhead plays "That's Amore" and "Que Sera Sera."

Goodbye

As I leave, Mum is simply too fragile to hug, so I gently squeeze her cold, gnarled hand with my fingertips before giving Fred a huge squeeze. My family is not demonstrative but I have been loving teddy bears for 62 years. His plush fur against my face is comforting, familiar and slightly warm.

In the best-case scenario, Fred bear's first owner will stroke him until he is threadbare.

Mothers should live forever but they don't. Mine's wizened body is worn out. "I'm ready to pop off," she says so delightfully.

I don't wish it.

But when she does, Fred will climb into my hand luggage and come home with me.

British-born Patrick Webb, who lives in Long Beach, Washington, is the retired managing editor of The Astorian.

Widow wants more from man who loves her platonically

Dear Annie: I'm a widow. It's been nine years since I lost my husband. I have been in a friendship with a man who hasn't had a relationship for approximately 20 years. He was in a terrible marriage that ended really badly. It broke him in every way — financially, spiritually, emotionally. From what I have gathered, he became a Peter Pan after the divorce. In the two decades since they split, he has just been goofing off and not dating seriously.

I have fallen deeply in love with him. I told him I loved him, and he repeated, "I love you, too, but just as a friend."

I don't think I can continue to spend time with him as a friend, because I'm in love with him. I'm not a teenager looking for fun. I would like to have a loving, adult relationship. I'm not talking about sex, necessarily (although that would be nice), but real romance. Should I just forget about him and let him go? — *Pining for Peter*

Dear Pining: I'll give you Peter Pan this much: He was mature enough to tell you how he really feels. And kudos to you for starting that difficult conversation in the first place. That takes real courage. Now that the truth is out, you can begin to move on — but it will

be impossible to do so in his company. Give your heart the time and space it needs to heal.

Dear Annie: I like to think of myself as someone with multiple hobbies, but some friends have been telling me it really isn't that. My friend hinted at this. We'll call him "Luke." "Luke" was at my house recently, and I was showing off my collections of what I think of as hobbies, which are on display in my man cave. I enjoy collecting various types of model cars, stamps and collectible toys. When I showed my collections to Luke, he told me I really just like accumulating things with no real direction. Another friend, "Dan," gave me a similar response when he saw my collection. Honestly, I do

enjoy my hobbies, but my friends put it in another light. What I want to know, Annie, is: Are my friends right? Am I truly just accumulating random objects? Are they wrong? Should I ignore them? — *Curious Collector*

Dear Curious: Your friends might be implying that you're hoarding. If you feel an overwhelming attachment to the things that you collect — as though something really bad would happen should you get rid of even one item — it could be a sign that your habit of collecting is becoming unhealthy. Another cause for concern would be if your collections are overtaking your house and making it unlivable. The International OCD Foundation distinguishes between

collecting and hoarding this way: "Collectors typically keep their possessions well-organized, and each item differs from other items to form interesting and often valuable groupings. ... (Hoarding disorder) is different from collecting in that collecting is organized and systematic, even though some collectors may have a similar amount of possessions as someone with HD. Collecting does not produce the clutter, distress, or impairment that HD does."

From your letter, it sounds as though you're indeed a collector, and this is a satisfying, enriching pastime for you. If these friends look at your treasures and only see trash, that's their loss. Keep doing your thing.



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