



True Tales

Terrific and True

By Anne

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THE STONE CHURCH WITH A CLOCK

Our marriage was terrible. But with some compensating situations: We were married in 1966, then went to live in Rome, where my new husband, Bernie, began his study of medicine at the University of Rome.

A few days after starting school, Bernie came rushing home, flying through the door,

"Don't buy cheese anymore. No more cheese. I have the gout."

"What!?"

"I have the gout. I can't eat cheese."

"What!?"

"You can't eat cheese when you have the gout. Tomorrow morning I'm going to the University clinic."

"What!?"

Turned out Bernie did not have the gout.

Later on, there was Paris. We were vacationing in Paris, another school time adventure. We had made plans to stay in a hotel in Paris next to a stone church with a big clock on the front of it. So there we were, traveling second class in the train with our book, "Europe on \$5 a Day."

We got to Paris in the afternoon and went looking for a stone church with a clock. And I, of course, was the one carrying most of the luggage because Bernie had to ask

people directions. After all the trudging along, we finally saw the stone church with the clock. The clock said 2 and next to the church was the small building in which was our room. Of course, the room was up two flights of stairs--more trudging. And wow! We finally made it! It was a plain, small, clean room with a bathroom off the room.

Then the unpacking. Not bad. We didn't have much stuff. I unpacked while Bernie rested. Then, after unpacking, I rested. But while we were resting we started getting hungry. Then my stomach starting growling. Then Bernie's stomach started growling. Then Bernie started growling.

"Let's go eat," he growled. "I'm hungry."

So we went downstairs and into the sunshine. The clock on the stone church said 4. We started walking and looking through the windows of all the restaurants. And we looked at the people eating inside. We found a restaurant where the clientele were laughing and having a good time. That's the restaurant we chose. We went inside and ordered from a special list where the prices were cheaper, ordering plain roast chicken, French fries and fruit for dessert. The food was super-delicious and not too expensive. And we were happy.

We spent the rest of the day walking up and down streets, sightseeing and visiting churches. We managed to get in another scrumptious meal, choosing the restaurant the same way, where the people were laughing and having a good time. After a long day, we were tired. It was late at night and we were ready to come back to our room. We found our way back after asking directions. The clock on the stone

church said 2. We finally got to our room. Bernie went into the bathroom. After a few minutes I heard:

"Annie, come here!" So, I came in. Bernie was looking in the mirror with his mouth wide open--panicking.

"Look at my gum over this tooth. It looks like it's receding!"

"What!?" I said.

"Look! Look! It's receding!"

"What are you talking about?" I said peering into his mouth. "Your gum is fine."

"No! No! It's receding over this tooth! You know a few days ago, I was in the supermarket. And I was looking at the fish at the fish counter. Well, you know all the problems there are with fish, fish being in contaminated waters. Well, there was a guy near the fish counter and he was holding some kind of a machine that went beep-beep-beep-beep. It must have been a Geiger counter. The fish must have been in contaminated waters. They must have been radioactive. That's why the Geiger counter went beep-beep-beep-beep. And I was near the fish. So now I have radiation poisoning. That's why my gum is receding!"

"What!?" I said, looking in his mouth. "Your gum looks fine!"

"No! No! I have radiation poisoning. Look! My gum is receding over this tooth!"

"What!?"

"I have to go to the doctor! I'm calling the front desk for a medical clinic here in Paris!"

"What!? It's the middle of the night!"

"There's gotta be a clinic open here in Paris! Even if it's the middle of the night!"

Well, what do you know. Bernie called the front desk. And after several tries, they found a clinic nearby open in the middle of the night. So off we went with the radiation poisoning to look for the clinic. And there was that stone church with the clock that said 3. After a long straight walk and a turn to the left, we found the clinic with no problem. "Thank goodness for small favors."

We walked in and waited in a room for the doctor. Then the doctor came in and I tried to explain to him this whole story in my broken French. Well, it turned out that the doctor's English was better than my broken French so we spoke in English. I explained to him how my husband had radiation poisoning from the fish counter in the supermarket and the proof of it all, was that his gum was receding. Well, the doctor listened to the whole episode and all he would say was: "That's a very interesting idea... That's a very interesting idea"

And Bernie kept showing the doctor his gum. "Look! Look! My gum is receding! My gum is receding over this tooth! What kind of doctor are you? I need a specialist!"

"Well," said the doctor. "We do have specialists, but I've been a doctor here for a long time and I know about radiation and I know about gums. Your gum is fine. And you don't have radiation poisoning."

Well, finally, after a long talk, the doctor convinced Bernie that he did not have radiation poisoning. So we thanked the doctor but I don't remember if there was a charge for his services. Then we started walking back. And we walked and we walked

and we walked. I didn't realize it was such a long walk. We finally came to the stone church. And I didn't even look at the clock.

Later on, after vacationing in Paris, it was back home to Rome. We lived in Rome for two years before our daughter was born, before we had a child. That was the late 1960's. Then Bernie transferred to the University of Bologna, for the following three years, the late 1960's and the early 1970's. In total he studied medicine for five years in Italy.

As for our life in Rome, we lived in an apartment next to a piazza--a traffic circle. And almost every day there was Boom! Another accident. One day Bernie was telling me he heard--Boom! He ran to the window. One of the cars was still rolling over. The two men got out of each of their cars, screaming. They stood nose to nose screaming and waving their arms. They never touched each other. They just stood nose to nose, waved their arms and screamed. Don't know whatever happened after that, probably laryngitis. Then there were the buses. There was a bus station right near our apartment. You could take any bus; it would take you around town on their route; then you would end up back at the bus station. You got a tour of Rome for the price of a bus ticket. One place near us was the Coliseum. It was a 10-minute bus ride from the bus station near our apartment. What an interesting place to visit.

The Coliseum looks just like the photos. But being there you can feel the ambiance. You can see the gladiators fight to their death. You can smell the blood and the sweat. You can hear the audience cheer. And we were there many times.

Another interesting sight in Rome was the statue of Moses with horns. There was a reason for the horns. The Hebrew Bible says there were "rays of light" coming from the face of Moses. This can also be translated as "halo." However, the Hebrew for "rays of light" sounds almost like the Hebrew for "horns." So it was by mistake that the words were translated to horns, therefore the statue of Moses with horns.

Then there was the student dining hall at the university of Rome. The food was cheap and very good. You could even buy wine with your meal. Try that at a college campus in New York. At one point riots broke out at the University of Rome. We lived near the University so Bernie decided to go there and check out the riots. Well, he was telling me, when he got there the place was deserted. There was stuff littered all over the ground. You could tell there were riots but no people--no students--no cops. But there was one lone guy roaming around, so Bernie went up to him and said: "I thought there were riots here."

The guy said, "Yes, there were riots here."

"Well," said Bernie, "Where is everybody?"

"Oh," said the guy. "They all went home for lunch."

I guess you would call that civilization. You had your lunch at 1 pm, the main meal of the day, and then you had your nap. Afterward, you went back to work or school. So instead of having two rush hours a day, you had four rush hours a day. But the Italians must feel it's worth it. Then, on a lighter note, there was gelato, Italian ice cream--or something like ice cream. All I know, it was good. Nothing like gelato on a hot summer day.

For coffee, the greatest place was Vincenzo's, a coffee bar. There was no sidewalk around Vincenzo's, so the outdoor tables were out in the street. So I sat there at an outdoor table calmly drinking my coffee, with the cars just zipping around me. And speaking about outside, from my apartment window in Rome, you could see a cooked calf on a table, right outside one of the food shops. The weather was warm, but the calf was out there. And customers would come by and the people from the shop would slice up pieces of calf and make them sandwiches. And the calf was out there every day until it was eaten up.

I also remember the fish store. I was standing in the fish store and I felt something poking me in the back. So I turned around and there was an eel coming out of a barrel and that's what was poking me in the back. Later on someone wanted to buy an eel. So the person working there took the eel out of the barrel, put it on the counter, and chop, chop, chop, chop in small pieces. And the customer got the eel.

More adventures: We took the train when we couldn't take the bus. (The train, second class, of course.) So, we took the train to Venice, the city on the water. People lived in houses on the water. They traveled by boat the same way you would travel by car. Everything was by boat. I remember the ambulance--a boat. And I remember Bernie eyeing the ambulance. I remember he made a remark. I remember I made a remark--

"What! No you don't! We're not going on that ambulance!" We did not board the ambulance boat.

On land, the buildings on each side of the street were so close together you could walk down the street with your right hand touching the buildings on one side of the street and your left hand touching the buildings on the other side of the street. Then, of course, there was Florence and the church with the gilded bronze doors, "The Gates of Paradise," depicting different Biblical scenes. And, also, there was Michelangelo's magnificent statue of David.

On another vacation, we took the train to Rieka, in the old Yugoslavia, a favorite vacation spot for Italians. It was a communist country, the only time I visited a communist country, but it was like anywhere else. What a nice vacation spot, a beautiful, quiet country, with open space and trees and grass. I have a piece of art from Rieka that I have hanging on my wall, a wood carving. And it is a beautiful wood carving. The man who created it and sold it to us, was going to sell it for less than he did but his wife objected. So we paid more for it and it is worth it. I also remember being very tired in Yugoslavia. I was pregnant. That's why. But I didn't realize I was pregnant at the time. Later on, we returned home, this time to Bologna. We had moved to Bologna and Bernie had transferred to the University of Bologna. Soon we went back to New York to give birth to our baby girl. Then, after six weeks, the three of us went home to Bologna, where two years later Bernie graduated from the University of Bologna.

In spite of everything, I must commend Bernie. He graduated a foreign University, got good grades, and became a doctor. Psychiatrist!

LIFE IN REVERSE

Am I dead? “Boom!” That car is going to hit me! The car on my left is going way too fast! Love that music, “Down in the valley. Valley so low. Hang your head over. Hear the wind blow...” It’s a nice day for a drive, sunshine, blue skies...

I think I’ll go for a drive before going home to do chores. Good bye, Sweetie. Have a good time. We’re off to your play date. Get in the car Alice. Let’s go. Put on your sweater. Finish up breakfast. Alice says, “Mommy, I’m a big girl now. I’m four years old.” Let’s have breakfast Alice. Let’s get dressed, Alice. It’s a beautiful morning. “I’m up, Mommy.” Wake up, Alice.

Time for bed Alice. Party is over. “Happy Birthday to you. Happy Birthday to you...” Blow out the candles on your Birthday Cake. Happy Birthday. Wake up Alice. Tomorrow is Saturday and your birthday. You know what tomorrow is? Pleasant dreams. Good night, Alice. Eat your dinner, Alice. Alice says, “I love these mashed potatoes. I am eating.” “We played.” What did you do in school today, Alice?

I remember when Alice is just over three. We go outside with bubble stuff and blow bubbles. Sometimes I sit on the swing with Alice on my lap. We swing a little bit while I recite poetry to her. We go to the library and take out children’s books. She is very dear to me. There is nobody like Alice. “Happy Birthday to you. Happy Birthday to you...” Alice has a birthday party. She is now three. We have a Birthday Cake with pink icing. A chocolate cake with pink icing. Yummy!

It is summer, finally, and Alice is two and a half. We play with bubble stuff and blow bubbles. We swing on the swing. I recite poetry. As much as I love Alice, I do not

like spending twenty-four/seven with a small child. I always wanted Alice. I am glad I have her, but no more children. The play dates are great. Alice plays with a friend so I don't have to play with her. But I still have to be there because they are so young. I can remember when I was that age and even younger. My mother would constantly complain about me. I don't feel that way about Alice and her friends. They are just babies.

Alice is two. She is a sweet little girl. Every morning she watches first, "Sesame Street" and then, "Mr. Rogers." I often watch with her. I love those shows as much as she does. I just never grew up.

Alice is one. I'm nursing her. We both love it. I have to take good care of myself since I am her food supply.

Time goes by. Alice is smaller and smaller. She nurses more and more. She is so tiny right after birth. Her head is so much bigger than the rest of her.

Before, she is floating around inside me. She is smaller and smaller and smaller...

"Oh, John."

"Oh, Mary."

OXYMORON

There she was—determined, yet defeated. She was beautiful to all but her husband. He claimed there was a picture of her in the closet—getting uglier by the minute. And when no one understood what he was talking about, he told her they were ignorant. But everyone envied her, at least the ones who didn't know her husband, Prince Charming. What a beautiful title, Prince Charming. He gave her everything, including black and blue marks on her arms. He also gave her drugs, not illegal ones. He gave her legal drugs, used illegally. She went to a lawyer. She wanted to leave Prince Charming. Prince Charming got the doctors to “medicate” her and subdue her. What a nice husband. Look how he takes care of her, talking to her doctors. The drugs worked. The lawyer was gone. No need to leave Prince Charming. He was also concerned about her appearance and how she dressed. He didn't like it when she wore short sleeves.

She also worked for her husband. But he didn't pay her. So when she wanted to go on with her education, she couldn't—no money. When she asked her husband for school tuition he said, “no.” He needed the money to buy a new car. She became depressed—more medication. Look what Prince Charming has to deal with. But he didn't mind. As long as she wore long sleeves.

Then Prince Charming got sick. And she took care of him. And he got sicker. And she no longer needed to wear long sleeves. And he got sicker. And she no longer needed to get drugged up. And he got sicker. Then he went into a nursing home. Then he was gone. And she was free. But who was she? She didn't know who she was. Was she Mrs. Prince Charming? Was she the painting in the closet? She feels

unjustified having drunk from the sweet cup of bitterness, but she is not bitter. Who the hell is she? She is not afraid. There is no longer anything to be afraid of. She is resilient, but no longer has to fight anyone. She wants to move forward. But as the writer she is, she must look backward in order to move forward. So onward, onward, onward as she looks backward. Why write? To connect, to connect with words, and hear the silence of the mind. Now her days are filled with freedom.

No, she is no longer Mrs. Prince Charming. She is herself. She is love. She is friendship. She is beauty. She has won the battle. But there is still a war going on. There are still more battles to win. The battle of creating oneself. The battle of strolling down a busy street and going, going, going nowhere. Then stopping and looking around and liking where she is and what she sees. But sometimes she sees flashbacks. Then she hears, "stay in the moment." But the flashbacks are real. Which moment does she stay in? Does she really have a choice? Yes, she does:

She will be an inspiration to herself and to others. She is free now to run, to fly, to live, to love, to be. Who will she be? She will be who she is and who she is not. She will hear the silence in her head telling her to move forward while looking backward. She is resilient. She has won many battles and will go on winning many, many more. And she will be a light in the darkness. She will be understanding, determined, glorious, victorious.

Who is she? What is she? She is everyone who wants to be. She is a dream.

I AM AN ARTIST

I am an artist

I write and I paint

My dream and goal is to inspire myself and others

By painting pictures in words

The pictures are of goodness and self-worth.

WILL I MARRY?

No. I don't believe it

I can't believe it

They say marriages are made in heaven

Trouble is—"it ain't necessarily so"

I'm so afraid

No one listens to me

I'm so afraid of being abused

I want to love and be loved without being abused and tortured

The only time I feel safe is when I'm by myself

Safe in my own home alone

When I was little I used to hide in the closet

That's where I was safe—

Alone in the dark closet with the smell of the moth balls

I've learned how to take care of myself in this world

But I'm lonely, crying alone at night

I feel so lonely at night

I like the freedom of being alone

But not the loneliness

MY CHILDREN

Two little babies lie buried in the ground

Two little babies lie still in the cold, hard ground

Never to see daylight again

Clouds gather over them

White clouds—white clouds that turn gray with sorrow

And shed their tears upon the graves

It won't do any good

If a mother's love can't save them, what good are tears

The heavens open up and cry

In winter the white snow covers them with a soft blanket

This is their home now

God took them from me and put them in the ground

No one can hear them cry

No one can help them anymore

YOU ARE WITH GOD NOW

My little baby boy

Kicking for life and joy

You were a joy for me to see

But God said it would not be

And He took you to be close to Him

And far away from me.

LIVING THE DREAM

As we can see
We're in a land so free
Let's keep it this way
And happy we'll be
Hear our voice
We have to make a choice
To have free enterprise
So we can rejoice
Free enterprise means
We will live our dreams
And do business fairly
Like a game between teams

But laissez-faire
Beware! Beware!
We want free enterprise
But fair and square
We want to be
A nation that's free
With our values and rights
And responsibility
So march forward we'll do
To work for me and you
To make our nation
A wonderland true.

MY LOVE?

The poets love to write about their Love
That he's designed by angels up above
I, too, can write about my Love, but wait
I would much rather write about my Hate
I write about my Hate with pure delight
I start at morn and finish late at night
By day the pens and paper need daylight
By night it's lamps with electrical light
To write about my Hate's a mental quirk
Considering the fact that he's a jerk
His flaws outnumber all the stars above
So let him find some other fool to love
I close this sonnet with a parting verse
Thank goodness I am rid of that ole curse.

INBETWEEN

Gotta write a modern sonnet
I'll write about my dream
My dream for my modern sonnet
Is I make it to line fourteen
Now what do I write inbetween?
I'll write about this
I'll write about that
I'll write about rabbits
Pulled out of a hat
I'll write about cats
I'll write about dogs
I'll write about horses
I'll write about frogs
That was fun. Now I'm done.

INSANITY

Growing old is not to be
It is just plain insanity
And it is not very kind
To put yourself in that state of mind
To put yourself in a mental whirl
You're not old. You're a girl.
The opposite, Dude, is insane
I know the kind
Completely out of his friggin mind
He'll give a whirl
To any girl
We'll see what will be.
Nonetheless, I know his kind
Looks like nobody minds
No one looks at the whirls
That he always gives the girls
Between you and me what will be?
Just more insanity.
Do you mind?
I need romance and a whirl

Life's too tough on a girl
When there's nothing left to be
There is always insanity
I find that this is not kind.
What do you want from a whirl?
Are you that kind of girl?
What to be?
Is it vanity or insanity?
Are you being kind
If you loose your mind?
Knitting, kneedlepoint, Girl
That's all you can be
No! That's insanity
I'll be my own kind
I have my own mind
I'm a pearl and I'll whirl.
What will it be--insanity?
Are you the kind to loose your mind?
Just give the girl a whirl--she's a pearl.

A SEA SHELL SINGS

A sea shell sings

Songs of the sea

Sshhhhh...

My sweet little Debbi

You never knew your baby brothers

You were too young

They were with us for a while

A very short while

And then they were gone

Our twin little boys.

"The Lord gave

And the Lord hath taken away

Blessed by the name of the Lord."

My sweet little twin boys

I love you both

I will see you one day

In Heaven

Where is Heaven?

It must be somewhere

Where?

When?

MARS

I think I'll move to Mars
Or maybe to one of the stars
Where there's no mention of voting tricks

Where there's no Covid 19
No need to take a vaccine
And there's no tension of politics

But now, for what it's worth
We're still here on Earth

So let's all be sane
And let's use our brain

Let's celebrate life
And be done with strife

Or else some fine day
We will blow ourselves away

And have for a shroud
A mushroom shaped cloud

And no more prayers then
For us to say "Amen."

Amen.

THE CHAIR BY ANNE COHEN

In a chair

I am supposed to sit

With my hands folded

And my mouth shut

Is this the way it's supposed to be

If you are born female?

No. No

Not at all

You can get up

Off the chair

If your partner says it's OK

Or if he wants to sit in the chair.

God and Existence

God and Existence

Poetry

The trees touching the sky

Poetry

The birds flying and singing

Poetry

The colorful flowers budding and fragrant

Poetry

A mother nursing her child

Poetry

The cooling breezes on a summer's day

Poetry.