to glen (verb intransitive)

Gloriana St. Clair
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Gloriana St. Clair, August 2014

More of my memoirs *Trapped in the Outhouse*

Like other intransitive verbs, to glen requires no object to complete itself. Along with fellow intransitives, such as to be, to sleep, to work, to witness, the condition matters. Activities that might be categorized under this verb include testimony about faith, trustworthiness, balancing mercy with justice, and an evolving sensibility around the other. I grow in my ability to glen: my strengthening faith and increasing knowledge/wisdom allow me more frequently to be a conduit for the holy.

This summer, I taught an Osher class on Karen Armstrong’s *12 Steps to a Compassionate Life*, a truly remarkable book that I had already read with the Redeemer and Bristol book groups. Two members of that Osher class indicated that the Osher course had allowed them to forgive a difficult husband and a critical mother in law. At one juncture, I recounted Glen’s witness to me. While we were observing Memorial Day by driving around rural Oklahoma depositing mason jars of home grown roses on graves of parents, siblings, and cousins in desolate lightly kept cemeteries, I returned to the station wagon where Glen, who had been shot by a Nazi in a village near Remagen, waited patiently for the gaggle of women. “They are not there,” he said, and I knew at that moment the depth of his faith in the afterlife.

Glen’s best friend was his fellow fisherman, Bob Colombe. Together they pursued a sophisticated hobby of networking their way onto as many small farm ponds as possible. They owned jointly a light aluminum Lone Star boat with a 50 horsepower Evinrude outboard motor; they pulled this behind an aging station wagon affectionately known as “big red.” The post war rehabilitation had been so effective that Glen was able to walk with braces and a cane and could still engage in the favored feats of his prewar days—poker, fishing, and telling tales. Bob knew Glen better than Glen’s women—his mother Eunice, his sisters Mary Alice and Elva, his wife Doris, and his daughters Darla and Gloriana. Bob said that if a person ever had to entrust a large sum of cash to an individual for safekeeping, the obvious choice would be to glen.

Glen, who inevitably voted Republican, cancelling out Bob’s democratic vote, shared the prejudices of his age, ethnicity, and class. Yet, he believed in the dignity and value of his fellow humans. In the late 1950s, as president of the small town Chamber of Commerce, he told the movie theater owner that if the single black Tonkawa resident, a junior college student, chose to attend the free children’s Christmas movie, that student would be admitted or the Chamber would not pay for the movie. When another black student showed up at our local Methodist Church, we sat with her and invited her home for chicken and dumplings. The loyalty of his fellow soldiers was so great that another Oklahoman, a Native American, offered to sock a insulting soldier because officers were forbidden to strike enlisted.

My mother Doris was often incensed by Glen’s misuse of common pronouns, his affection for “ain’t,” and his occasional subject and verb disagreements. As a person with rarified grammatical antennae, I heard these infractions, but I also heard the basic commitment to human rights that was the essence of to glen.