

Closing the Year's Door December 2021

John Muir, naturalist and author, wrote that “between every two pine trees, there is a door leading to a new way of life.” In just a few weeks, I will remove from its pantry peg the old calendar—heavy laden with notes of appointments, birthdays, positive news, sad news, and the scribbled et ceteras. It will not be discarded; it will be placed ceremoniously with all the old calendars. Between this old record and the new is a door. We will fit through it nicely, with equal amounts of anticipation and trepidation. We will hope for—welcome!—a new and refreshing way of life, as proffered by the image of trees and a forest floor.

Many of us are familiar with the saying that a closed door indicates that another door is open for us. The end of the year is somewhat like that. We can never return to a closed year, but we raise our glasses, when the bells ring midnight, and joyously herald in the new. We are assured, through experience and the laws of nature, that the door is opening wide.

A door is, revolving doors aside, a simple affair. There is the knob or latch, there lies the threshold over which we step, there are the hinges that prevent the door swinging from its frame from crashing down upon us. Doors have been of similar construction and structure since they first appeared in Egypt, some 3000 or 4000 years ago. The deceptive door, that which revolves, wasn't developed until the late 1800s, in Germany. It clearly is aberrant; it keeps us coming and going, all at once. Too much like real life. The simple door means that we are entirely in or entirely out; satisfaction results from such minimalism.

Once, however, I existed for a thankfully-brief moment in both realities. As a high school teacher, I was required to wear a long school-spirit-decorated lanyard which, as my extracurricular responsibilities grew, became bulky with keys. One late afternoon, the students dismissed, many teachers heading to their cars, I stepped into the faculty lounge to complete some task now forgotten. When I exited, I locked and pulled shut the door. Somehow, the key end of the lanyard stayed on one side of the door. I, my neck snug in the lanyard's noose, was on the other. Cell phones had not yet been invented. I called out, but this was a Friday afternoon. After some time, I heard a locker door close. I called out, and a student trotted down the hall. She giggled through my explanation and then set out to locate the evening custodian.

Perhaps Bilbo Baggins knew of such dilemmas when he muttered to Frodo, “It's a dangerous business...going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.” In my case, literally hanging from the door of the faculty lounge, there was no sweeping to be done.

When I was a little girl, my mother used to sing a then-popular song while she went about her daily chores. She knew all the lyrics, but I recall only this much: “Midnight one more night without sleeping. Watching 'til that morning comes creeping. Green Door what's that secret you're keeping?” Somehow I tangled the inability to sleep with odious creeping and an ugly green eye looming in the dark distance. I feared that I could be sucked into the green door's hideous world. And if the door eerily creaked? It was that much worse.

I gained in years and soon discovered the joy that results when a door shuts behind you. As a teenager, in a house of many rules and restrictions, I was finally granted my own room. Home from school, I shed my bookbag, kicked off my shoes, and in that moment, I was free to read any book, have any dream, dance any dance, play (softly, mind you) any record on my record player, open the window in the dead of winter and breathe in the ocean-salted air. Such peace, such freedom, such giddy ecstasy. Even a sense of safety, in my own little cubby. A mere room became my castle.

As I took great delight in my closed-door freedom, my best friend experienced something painfully different. On the bus to the high school one morning, I remarked at the sexy way Carolyn was wearing her long, thick black hair. Bending down in her seat, she swept the lock of hair back to expose a bruised eye and cheek. Days earlier, she had begun the habit, after showering and wrapping herself in her towel, of closing the door upon entering her bedroom. This enraged her father. Each night, he stormed down the hall and yanked the door open. The night before she showed me her injuries, he had severed the door from its hinges and struck my friend when she begged for privacy. He never returned the door to its hinges. She left home, secretly married, the summer after our high school graduation.

In my late twenties, a newcomer to the wild west, Wyoming, and Country Western music, I fell in love with a song, its most compelling line “and when we get behind closed doors”. No demons, no violence, just love, peace, and privacy. Yet, the song made me think about Carolyn.

Some doors are famous in history. Intricate doors, ones described as folding and sliding, were discovered among the ruins of Pompeii. Long before Vesuvius exploded, King Solomon, in 587 BC, charged that a door to the temple in Jerusalem be one of olive wood overlaid with gold. Martin Luther supposedly nailed his ninety-five theses to the Wittenberg door, thus giving momentum to the Protestant Reformation. And who doesn't know of 10 Downing Street? And who doesn't feel a fondness for the little hobbit who lived behind a small round door?

We have myriad reactions to the mention of doors made famous in literature and movies. Recall C.S. Lewis' wardrobe door to Narnia, Lynne Reid Banks' cupboard door behind which the Indian lived, Lewis Carroll's door to Wonderland, J. K. Rowling's creation of Platform 9 ¾, and the wooden bathroom door of *The Shining*. If you haven't yet read Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, you have yet to discover a sensitively developed exposé of domestic violence against women.

Long ago, my husband designed and built a beautifully cozy house that I believed would be our forever home. A few short years after we moved in, we sold the house to move back east. When we closed the front door for the last time, we locked inside countless memories. Yet, those same memories traveled with us. As I lugged the old, heavy calendar of year 2021 downstairs to its resting place, it was hefty with memories, memories that will find their way into our future, as if deftly slipping through two pine trees.