

Chile Short Story

Mornings at Del GiGi's were always tough. Either my head hurt from too much wine or it was Monday, the day I tried to make a dent in the pile of bills, or I had to deal with some type of bullshit incident from the night before.

Actually, it was getting to be all bullshit. The burden of chasing the next peso is wearying. I am tired of the morning, noon and night of it all. Since I had been doing it most of my life, it was difficult to see how I could stop. Didn't have enough money to make choices and I needed the money I earned to support my wife and two boys. Well, at least one of our boys. Even though he is in his twenties, he still lives with us. Ah, my Carlos. I wish the world had worked out better for you. But it is so hard these days for the younger people.

Our older son, Teddy, got a bit lucky. He is some type of accounting big shot at Indomita Winery in the Central Valley and has been able to build a life for himself. He got married to a wonderful woman. She is tough on him and that is good. Strong women are the secret ingredient in many beautiful relationships. And, to my delight, they have given us our first grandchild. Serena is a joy to our world.

The cat curled around my leg as I sat at my desk. Oh yes, she wanted something as well. Unable to get in a full minute of self-pity, I stood up and made my way to the kitchen.

"So you get to eat too, my little one."

I smiled as I crumbled a bit of fish from the refrigerator into the cat's dish. She devoured it. I guess I do have a purpose.

I queued up some old blues from America on the house system and began my day. At least both the front of the house and the cooking areas were clean.

"Hola, old man," Geno said as he entered. "Hope it is a busy one today."

"Ah, Geno, you always say that."

"Yes, because you need to hear it."

I also needed it. I liked to believe that eventually I'd have some money and be able to kick back a bit. But as I get older my eventually shrinks.

The chill in the morning air reminded me I had to get the torch heaters out of storage and on the deck. It is early April and the nights will be getting cooler. I can look to the east and see a scattering of leaves in the mountains beginning to turn yellow, red and orange.

Geno began his prep work for the day and some for the rest of the week. He is a master in the kitchen but leaves a bit to be desired regarding ordering. We tend to have too much food left over on Mondays. He assures me that he creates very little waste and says that any leftover problem happens because not enough people visited Del GiGi's. Ah...that's what they all say."Not my fault." Perhaps, but it is my expense.

I went to the storage shed to get the torches. Thank goodness they have wheels for they are too heavy for this old man to drag to the deck. I put out all six at their familiar spots and checked each tank. Four were full enough but I'd have to take two in my truck to the propane station in Vina del Mar, about twelve miles south. Won't be doing that for a few days. I like to collect a number of errands day to day then make one trip.

With the dining deck set up and ready for guests, an old family friend stopped by. Señora Rojas grew up with my Gabriela. Over the years they shared smiles, sorrows and most importantly sanity as they raised the children.

"Madeline, what brings you here this morning? Gabriela is back at home baking bread."

"Oh, I know. We talked earlier. She has a surprise for you when you get home. She says you love her crusty rolls."

"I am not the only one. But tonight, it appears I am the lucky one. So, what can I do for you?"

"You are such a kind man and I hate to ask. My church is in a bit of a bind. As you know, we provide a home for those either orphaned by fact or by circumstance. These are kids nobody wants. Oh, and they are so lovely. And the choir! They sing like angels. You and Gabriela should really come by for Mass this Sunday. It is Easter and we have a special program. You used to belong to church. What happened?"

"Work. And more work. But also, yes, I left the church. In many ways, it left me. Look, while I don't want to have a philosophical discussion, I do recognize the good they do in the community and for those less fortunate. What they do is admirable."

"Yes, well they are in a bit of trouble. Money they invested, most of it has disappeared. The person they trusted to wisely and conservatively make investments gambled it on a 'sure thing' that blew up. He is not deceitful or dishonest, just gullible."

“We have been beset as a people by crooks. The American Chicago Investment Bankers came to Chile and treated us as rubes. They screwed everyone but themselves. Our good pension system has been destroyed so I am not surprised that these thieves have taken advantage of the Catholic Church as well. It’s what they do. They should have just left us alone. We are becoming more capitalist and less human. We are losing our local customs and way of life little by little as time goes on, all in the name of ‘progress.’”

“You are right and you are wrong. Yes, we have been taken advantage of. And those nasty people should be punished and in jail. But time moves on. Please don’t blame the march of modern society when it has done so much for so many.”

Maybe I just liked the solitude. My phone dinged--a text from Serena. Ah, modern society teaches me a lesson. I smiled and glanced down at my phone then back to Madeline.

“How can I help?”

Madeline laid out her plan for a big fundraiser. She wants many of our local restaurants here in Con Con to host a special night in celebration of the courage of these orphans. A fundraiser for orphan children? Who can say no to the innocent ones?

“Count me in. Who else will be involved?”

“Well, you are the first. I knew I could put my trust in you.”

I guess I should take some type of pride that Madeline knew she could rely on me for such a worthwhile cause. I feared, however, that I may be the only one taking part. Oh well. Sometimes the chase for the peso is for a good cause too.

“When is this fundraiser?”

“We are trying to be strategic. How does a Sunday sound? I am thinking that business may be slow on Sundays so it would be a good day for both of us. And we can remind our people at Mass.”

“Mondays are the worst day for us, but we can work with a Sunday.”

“Great. Let’s do Sunday May 1. May Day. That should be a great day.”

“May Day it is.”

After Madeline left, I remembered Serena’s text. I wonder if she is unhappy I didn’t text her back right away. Is the ding a new master? Eh, I have enough already. I decide to call her. Love to hear her voice. My call went to voicemail. I didn’t leave a message. Within 15 minutes, Serena showed up at Del GiGi’s. In person is much better than a phone call.

“My nieta, what brings you here?”

“Tata, I wanted to see you.”

“So my little one...I should stop calling you that. You are no longer little. You are becoming such a fine young lady.”

Serena smiled. She felt so comfortable with her grandfather. She knew she was loved unconditionally. And she also knew that inside her was a fire to test life, what it offers and the “conditionality” it seems to prefer. She often had other ideas.

“Will you take me to the shoe store? I saw some really cool new kicks I want to get.”

She confidently already knew my answer. She was kind to put it in the form of a question instead of a demand. I am happy to be what some might call “too easy” when it comes to Serena.

“Well, I do have to go to Vina del Mar on Saturday and get a few things for the restaurant. How about if I pick you up Saturday morning?”

I got a particularly warm hug. As I said, I am a pushover for her.

Saturday morning came and instead of having to pick up Serena, she rode her bike to the house ready to go. These must be very nice shoes. Or at least shoes for now. Who knows about tomorrow.

“Tata, can we have some fun today?”

“I thought shopping is fun for you.”

“Oh, it is. But I want more fun. Can we explore a bit like we used to?”

In times past, I would take Serena on long walks on the shore or up in the hills. I am happy she enjoyed those times and wanted to do more.

“We can go wherever your heart takes us.”

The drive to Vina del Mar was entertaining and educational for me. Of course we had to listen to her music. I was surprised and heartened that some of it was actually pretty good. Not sure where she found it. Our pop music here in Chile pretends to be serious but most is, in fact, puerile and shallow. I am frustrated as to where the line in current music is between commodity and art. What she played had depth and more than three chords. And no autotune! I was impressed. We talked, or I should say I listened, as Serena filled me in on current life for her from friends to fashion to music. I was honored that she talked to me about things that were important to her. We always talked, but I feared that as she got older I would be squeezed out of this level of intimacy. There was one part of her life, however, that she avoided. Well, maybe she didn't avoid it. Maybe she

neglected to talk about it. And that “it” was her “love” life, or what goes for one at fifteen. I was not the only one to recognize her beauty. I am sure boys in her class often made fools of themselves while trying to get her attention. I’d always promised myself that I would be open and honest when discussing love, sex and all things in between should she ask. While it may be uncomfortable for me, I owed it to her to provide some unvarnished truths, truths that maybe her parents evaded. That said, it appeared that I was safe, at least for today.

We arrived at our initial destination. As we walked through the streets of Vina del Mar, it became clear that she was shopping for more than new shoes. Serena also wanted to shop me and estimate just what she could get away with. Oh, these “searches” were not to assess how “bad” she could be. She wanted to let her mind wander freer of the guardrails she has at home. Yes, she would be testing me, but she would also be testing herself.

“Tata, will you teach me how to drive?”

Serena knew she could soon get her learner’s permit and her mother would be enrolling her in a Driver Education class. But my nina is impatient. I have been around her all her life and I am convinced that this one will be borderless, a world traveler searching for the next destination in life, eager to try out something new. And too impatient to tolerate the present.

“We can do that sometime.” I intentionally made my answer vague. She wasn’t having it.

“No, I mean today.”

What I like about this one is that she rarely packages her requests in unnecessary words. The girl says what she wants very directly. This pleases me for I am not one to “read between the lines.” I do so very poorly.

“I thought you wanted new shoes.”

“Oh, I do. But I thought that after we get them, we could go over to somewhere in the valley or up in the mountains where there is almost no traffic and you could teach me to drive.”

She knew she had me. I knew she had me. So I suggested we get an ice cream first. I got chocolate. She got something more complicated.

“So, my nieta, you are in a hurry to grow up.”

“No, tata. I am in a hurry to try new things. Growing up means I have to do the things my parents do.”

There is a purity in youth that somehow slips away as one gets older. We finished our ice creams and headed out the door.

The stop to pick up the new shoes seemed cursory. Typically Serena would look at every pair of shoes in every shoe store in town. Not today. Today she had freedom on her mind. For her, and my guess is for many young people, driving represents freedom. I paid for the shoes. She raced to the truck.

As we headed east, I went over all of the functions of each element of driving. Then I did it again. I was half paying attention to where I was driving. Then I came upon a turn up to the mountains.

“Let’s go this way,” she said.

Good enough for me. I knew of an area about twenty minutes away in the hills that was very rarely travelled. I thought it would be better because the turns would make her drive more slowly than she would on an open highway in the valley.

“Aim high in steering. Anticipate what is coming. Pay attention to the road and what you are doing. Driving demands respect.”

She nodded yes but I could see anticipation was taking over.

“Speed feels good and too much speed is dangerous. The only way you can learn about it is by experiencing it, controlling it. Because if you don’t control speed, it will control you.”

I smiled and realized that driving was much like love and sex. You can try to imbue upon a person a sense of responsibility, but until they are behind the wheel themselves, it is difficult to tell what, if any, wisdom was gained.

We finally reached the plateau I was targeting. Plenty of flat area to begin before challenging the hills and curves. I put the truck into park and turned to Serena.

“Are you ready for this?”

Who am I kidding? She bolted out the passenger door ready to take control. Here we go.

She had a fearful grin, but a determined brow. Her initial acceleration was a bit jerky, but braking for turns was better than I expected. On to more difficult experiences.

We climbed a hill then made a sharp turn at the top. Well done! I was fearful her impetuosity might win over safety. Gladly, that was not the case. As the course became more hilly, Serena appeared more confident.

A noise rattled under the truck. I asked her to pull over so I could check it out. I hate getting on all fours then laying on the ground. It hurts. It hurts to get up, too. I saw a branch stuck in the undercarriage. It took a long, sore reach to grab it and yank it out. As I struggled to my feet, I looked around for Serena. Didn't see her. I called her name and laughed, thinking...hoping she was playing a prank. Nothing. My steps became a bit more frantic as I looked everywhere while calling her name.

What is that golden fleck over there just above the bushes? As I squinted a bit to check it out, I realized it was a yellow and black butterfly. I love butterflies. As it lilted in the wind and got closer, it softened until it was no longer in the shape of a butterfly. It was a spherical bubble floating towards me. It became larger, resonating with a sort of golden glow. I ran to it. Bigger and bigger it grew, becoming a world of its own. Then I saw a little boy in the bubble smile at me. He reached out his hand, beckoning to join him. I smiled back and grabbed.

A euphoria overtook me as I glided through the air and landed in front of a huge glass house. The house glimmered with gold. I looked around but the little boy was gone. The sheer wonder of this new land made tears well up with joy. My head swirled with images of lives past, of inhabitants of this land from long ago. They seemed so happy.

I wandered toward the glass house but with each step closer, it seemed to retreat. It was something I could never reach. Nor could I reach back in history to those who lived here long ago. Yet their mere existence filled me with joy. Joy, and a feeling of missing out. I yearned to know what I have missed, what things happened to these people. I felt their love.

A chill took over. Forced me to sit and grab my knees to keep warm. I closed my eyes and rocked back and forth. Sleep came quickly. I had no idea how long my slumber lasted, but when I awoke, I was back to real life. I didn't see the glass house. I looked down and saw a broken arrow.

After a frantic hour-long search, I finally saw her at the bottom of a little valley, sitting on a large boulder. A wondrous and satisfied smile beamed from her face. Later she would say she followed a yellow and black butterfly.

Serena's small "r" romantic optimism has yet to be sullied by life's more harsh realities. So she sees a glass house. She sees a golden glow. She tells me of her experience.

I fear that Serena's gold will turn a tarnished yellow prematurely. I don't want her life to slip into the mundane, beaten down by circumstance. That said, she is one who fights. Perhaps my concern is misplaced. I hope so.

Shine, emerald eyes.

On the way back home, she peppered me with questions about our family. What were my parents, my grandparents like? Did they live in Chile their whole lives? What did they do? Was anyone famous? How did they live? What were their lives like? She was eager to know any information I had.

When I told Gabriela what happened, she was not happy and became very sharp with me.

"You are supposed to protect our granddaughter, not lose her in the woods."

I let her words settle and didn't bother explaining. I've learned not to argue, and especially not to win. There is no upside in "winning." But I smiled when thinking about Serena.

It was Sunday, the morning of the Orphan's Fundraiser. Madeline had succeeded beyond her dreams as most every restaurant in Con Con wanted to participate. So instead of being a full dinner, each place served their special appetizers to those who contributed. This was to be a tapas progression.

Ah, I noted, not just tapas but wine as well. People would gaily bounce from spot to spot enjoying the fruit of the chef's labor as well as the fruit of the vine. More than diets would be set aside this day.

My Gabriela would represent our family at each of the restaurants. She "volunteered" because, as she pointed out, someone had to do it and I would be stuck at Del GiGi's. I applauded her selflessness.

Geno had upped his game. It appeared that local chefs mounted a type of competition to see who would make the best tapas but this was surely to be a competition that everybody won.

A beaming Madeline found me on the deck rearranging two tables for a bigger party.

“You are a treasure. Because of you, we will have more for our orphans.”

“Oh, not just me. All who are participating deserve to be honored.”

“You are far too humble. Without you agreeing first, I do not believe the others would have followed.” She gave me an unusually warm and close hug, pressing her breasts into my chest. Caught me a bit by surprise since it was too early to have had too much wine.

The day was fun. The day was busy. The weather cooperated. Revelers streamed in and out well into the evening. I smiled. There are decent people in this world, I reminded myself. I try not to be too cynical, but many times reality requires it. So I decide to relax my mind and have some wine.

Music is important. It is the melody of life, the pleas of the soul. Good music uplifts, fulfills and has the power to transform. There is peace through music. Music is a communal aspect of creativity.

The music was particularly good that day. The ladies in the band were bright, funny and played with big hearts. Sure, there were Ana Tijoux songs mixed in. I tend not to mind protest, I even applaud it. The young, it will be their world someday soon. What is protest? Maybe trying to remake my generation’s mistakes should be celebrated. Anyway, while I am an old man, I try to appreciate, if not completely understand, those young ones who are looking for a better life. You see, I don’t have to understand. Soon, it will not be my parade.

You have to speak the language to contribute to the message. That’s one of many reasons I admire musicians. I can’t do what they can. I don’t have the talent to unlock that part of universal joy. I’m sad that I can’t be a member of their “society.” I can only listen, learn and enjoy.

As I age, I find the wine takes to me quickly. Like a young boy. But unlike a young boy, I no longer have the strength of spirit nor the stamina they have in abundance. So I guess I’ve become a cheap date. That said, I am also experienced. I know how to navigate the weak legs and the loose tongue.

It got closer to the end of the night and the ladies in the band offered anyone to come up and sing a song. Many revelers certainly were not shy. Laughter filled the scene and the dancing became a little more profane...in a mostly good way. Ah, young lust. I smiled, fondly remembered and was reminded of the chan chan--the lust of an old man.

“Getting a bit steamy out here,” a familiar voice said.

Madeline had completed her required tour of all participating restaurants and clearly enjoyed what each had to offer. She slipped her hand into mine.

“You are such a good, strong man. I bet you were a real stud when you were younger.”

“That is so long ago I can’t recall.”

“Oh, I don’t believe that for a minute. I see the way women look at you.”

“What? No, no. I just go about and do my job.”

She slid her hand from mine and down to my inner thigh. “We could have a lot of fun, you and me.”

I considered kicking contentedness in the teeth, but understood that way would be foolish. Am I a foolish old man? Well, I am an old man, but my youthful foolishness has been worn out. Now, I am mostly tired.

So I didn’t succumb, more out of fatigue than righteousness. Oh, righteousness still has a place in my life. My will to sin has faded. And anyway, I didn’t want to spoil what this day was all about.

I’m just about glad.

I let her down gently.

The bed is warm and sometimes the bed is cold. Gabriela says it’s not me but I know it is always me. My failures have to affect her because it is just the two of us which means she feels my failures. So if I am her failure, am I her regret? And is she my failure?

As it settles in with me, so it settles in with her. She won’t show it much, but I know it is there. Love doesn’t conquer all. We are stuck with each other. Stuck in a good way, too. Love is a joy. Love is a path to misery. Both can be true. I guess I am just an old man who reads love stories

Oh, we are kind. But I do wonder if there is not a twinkle in her eye for a different life. We are now old, so that possibility for each of us has passed. We settle. I, and I am sure she, hopes it is enough for each of us.

Our kisses are familiar and warm, but hot passion is for the young. I do know how to put a smile on her face and she seems to still like it. But just like an old song heard a hundred times, the melody is comforting but the crescendo mundane, less fulfilling. For both of us. I suppose it serves a purpose. In my dreams I would certainly want more, but dreams become rote as sleep slips into

just another check on my never ending daily list. We share a comforting familiarity with necessary intimacy.

I cling to her breast, but the hues of intimacy can fade. It is said that only the couple truly knows what their relationship is like. That makes sense. But it is also true that we can never really know what our partner is thinking or feeling. So we convince ourselves that “familiar” is “happy.” And we also convince ourselves that it is good enough. Sweet or bittersweet? Eh. Neither matters as much anymore.

We awake to our common pleasantries perhaps secretly hoping for a different day. But day-to-day responsibilities invade any morning satisfaction. I no longer dream erotic dreams of young senioritas. I clearly understand that I am not capable. I don't even lust for the past. Lust? That must have slipped by me a few years ago without my notice. Lackluster? Hey, I make a joke. As one ages, life becomes more black and white. So I add extra spice to my food.

Gabriela sensed a bit of grumpiness on my part. She knew of my discomfort at our future. In fact, I am more surprised that she isn't more unsettled.

“You worry too much.”

“No, my dear. Not enough.”

“But you are a good man.”

“So...I am a good man. Thank you but is that enough? What if I don't provide for us? What if I have to work until I am over 80 then pray that somehow we can go on? Being a good man? OK. But being a failure? That's all that matters in some respects. We make a meager living cooking for other people because that is all I know how to do. I don't know how to cheat and steal. Being a good man? Rich society rejects me, not that I care. I don't make a lot of money so in many respects I am worthless. We seem to only celebrate money and those who make it. Me? I am sure there are people who say, ‘What is wrong with you? You aren't rich.’ Heck, I can't even be depressed. I sometimes watch on those afternoon teevee shows about some rich person who ‘has it all’ who is depressed. Oh, and the host goes on and on about the many aspects of depression. If you have money, you can afford a more sophisticated type of depression I suppose. You can go on extended vacations to ‘find yourself.’ Without money, depression is annoyingly gray and shabby. The rich? Even then they are afforded the benefit of technicolor doubt. Even then they are excused. For the poor, there is no excuse. No understanding. Just a snide ‘What is wrong with them?’ look from others.”

“My dear, I didn’t know you felt so bad.”

“Oh, maybe I don’t. Maybe I am just tired. But I often feel that I have failed myself, failed you.”

“But you provide for us.”

“Yes but I am getting old, my love. What happens when I can no longer work? I become obsolete. I need to be thrown away. With the arthritis in my hip my days of running the restaurant are numbered. We used to have a better pension system here, but those Investment Banker crooks from America showed up and screwed everyone but themselves. As I have said, we are becoming more capitalist and less human. We used to take care of each other more. We are losing our local customs and way of life. This is a battle we can barely fight. And as I get older and more tired, I wonder if the juice is worth the squeeze.”

Who knows? Maybe I get closer to truth as I get older. In the past, I just glossed over what might be considered realities with a shrug of my shoulder and plunged forward. Certainly there were many lessons missed. And perhaps worthwhile friendships as well. Selfishness sounds so ugly when one believes oneself to be generous. But selfishness is embedded in many of my actions throughout the day. Or is it self-preservation? What is the line that shouldn’t be crossed of self-care versus unqualified giving? And what rationalizations do we employ to cover from our shame of not stepping up or not taking a risk that might provide a better life? But do we sometimes have to tell ourselves lies? And are they lies anyway? Again, self-care can be necessary or it can merely soothe the ego. Or cover cowardice. Is the path of one’s life merely a reflection of one’s cowardice? There are many forking paths. We settle because it is easier.

We can talk about truth, but can that letter ever be delivered? What have been the fears in my life? What did I do about them? And then there is the sadness. My “hopes and dreams” didn’t get met, in part due to my shortcomings and cowardice. Fear can be a mighty foe. Perhaps we are all cowards in one way or another.

That said, a person can’t be responsible for someone else’s fear. Nor can we call it cowardice for we have no idea of the provenance of their fears. It’s easy to be with someone when you both share a fear of intimacy. “I could never be that naked,” we assure ourselves. So is love really just a match of insecurities?

I think, therefore I am. I regret, therefore I am human? Descartes neglected to consider time and circumstance. So I pet the cat.

What is fulfillment in life? If one isn't happy, are they necessarily sad? If all of one's hopes and dreams are not met, is life a failure?

For all of these reasons, I learned long ago not to look back. Some people can recall the fun or accomplishments in their life and be happy. Me? I tend to look back at my disappointments. So for my soul, I look to today and maybe tomorrow.

I noticed her shoes before I noticed her.

I smiled. I was looking at my tomorrow. And she is beautiful.

“Tata, can we go driving again? Soon?”

Maybe I need to get uncomfortable. To challenge myself more. My regular day-to-day gets hollow and seems less purposeful. I used to be full of life. Now life seems to be less fulfilling. Oh sure, I have my work, my Gabriela, our sons and Serena. And I love them dearly. But I just have less enjoyment of life in general. Eating and sleeping have become more chore than choice. And my everyday makes life blend together to the point where I have a difficult time remembering many things. Is that age or boredom? So I should challenge myself a bit more. Do new and maybe uncomfortable things?

The problem with my new plan is that ideas I have take time. My time is mostly taken. And my “time” is limited. I am too old to chuck it all and start over. I recognize that I need to work with what I have. And I have Gabriela. I decide to shake off the shackles that can creep in on a long time relationship.

My desire to have a rekindling of our relationship doesn't just involve actions by me. I must change what we have settled into. I need to change my mind. So as much as I detest looking back, I force myself to make a mental list of why we are together. But with whatever emotional inventory I take, I also recognize that I need to change my actions. Not trying to recapture our youth but reinvent our future.

I used to compliment Gabriela more, tell her I think she is beautiful. And she'd play back. Who quit first? Doesn't matter. It's up to me to begin again. Time to start to reset our future together. I hope she is open to the possibility. To romance. Heck, I used to be pretty good.

We hold hands, and I smile. She smiles back.

My efforts led to a sublime contentment for both of us. We talked about it. We told each other why we appreciated our lives together. We understood that what we have is rare and IS love.

So while my body ached, my soul was happy. Yes, life can suck, but little indignancies were much easier to just slough off. My work became happier, even though it was still an uphill climb every day yet a downhill roll of pesos. And my hip still hurt. No matter. I had a lift in my step and decided to enjoy all of those who came to Del GiGi's. Many say "Life is too short." My advice to them is to get a bit older, then we can talk.

It was getting quite cooler at night. I did have the gas heaters fired up. We had a particularly good band this night, so I was confident that the chill didn't matter. And I was right. People were having a good time. I like watching young people dance. Sure, it's not how I'd do it, but I am confident that no one wants to see this old man dance.

One thing that makes me smile in my work is that I see so many young people coming to Del GiGi's and having fun. I love hearing their laughter and I have come to appreciate their music. In fact, as I think about it, I realize that Del GiGi's is successful now because of the young people. I take pride in that.

A young, well dressed man came over to me.

"Can we talk?"

"Sure. Having fun? I hope you liked the food."

"Senor, everything is great here. Me and my partners, we love it here. We see Del GiGi's as special. You bring in music of all kinds, your food is always good and we and our friends always feel we are welcomed here. That is so unlike other places in town."

Flattered, I said, "Thank you. I am happy when people enjoy their time here."

"Oh it's more than that. Del GiGi's is an institution. Other places just want us to spend our money and leave."

"Thank you for your kind words."

"I have a question. Would you consider selling Del GiGi's? To us, it is irreplaceable. I see that you are getting older. I don't want to be insulting. We promise we'd keep it just like you would. Your place means a lot to the community, especially to young people. We don't want Del GiGi's to ever go away."

I was taken aback. I'd never considered selling, and I'd never truly understood how this place fits in with the vibe, the history of ConCon.

"We will pay you a good price. We will even pay you to come around, be sort of an ambassador for Del GiGi's. We understand this place wouldn't be what it is without you. Again, and I hope I am not being rude, but we see you are older. Let us carry on. Let us keep this place what you made it. You may not understand, but we young people around here need a place like this."

I'd never considered selling. Only knew keeping my head down and working hard. I had no idea what this place is worth.

"Can we talk tomorrow? I still have a lot of work to do here before closing and anyway I have to talk this over with my wife."

"Absolutely. Sorry to catch you a bit off guard, but we love this place. We want to carry on the tradition you established. To us, Del GiGi's represents our history as we grew up. Please think about it. I can be here tomorrow at 4 if that works for you."

"Yes, yes." I had few words.

My world at Del Gigi's and at home will be changing. The restaurant will be updated for a new time. A new time with new realities but perhaps similar needs. My life at home? Wow!

Gabriella was already asleep when I got home. I am sure she enjoyed herself this day. For me, for us, it could be life changing. I didn't sleep well, an unexpected excitement rambled through my brain. Even my hip felt a bit better. On these types of nights, I fall hard asleep around 4am. My body finally surrenders. So I awakened a bit late, the smell of coffee much more pleasant than any alarm clock.

Our gerontocracy needs to surrender to the hopes and dreams of the young. Yes, we made somewhat of a mess, but I choose to think we did rather well in at least one thing--raising our families. There are so many good young people today. Maybe they will be able to fix either what we couldn't or what we caused.

And with that, I see my future with my Gabriella. So I guess I did have a purpose.

