

THE RED CHAIR

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When my father died in 2007, and just a few years later his wife followed, all nine of his adult children mourned their passing fiercely. We had anticipated the end, and even in some complicated way wished for it, wanting each of them to be freed from their respective brand of illness.

In the gloomy time that followed, in tandem with our mourning, came the responsibility of selling their home (now ours) and the task of sorting the physical stuff of their lives. It was a year of saving and discarding, letting go and holding on. We found solace in this process and satisfaction as the day came when we would pronounce our family homestead “broom clean.” From oldest sibling to youngest we made our final requests, filling our vehicles with the a last of Norman and Norris’s things, too emotionally precious to leave behind.

Only the red chair remained, the infamous “channel back”, purchased when he split with my mother and moved to Brooklyn Heights. We all remembered climbing up its velvety sides and settling in Dad’s lap sometimes three kids deep. Pressing our cheeks against the rich, smooth upholstery, breathing the musty smell of second-hand shops mixed with our father’s own boozy cigarette scent. Later when Diane Arbus came to photograph Mailer she placed him in that chair, his leg slung over one of its arms, staring out at his nameless audience, with the angry, defiant Go F’ yourself expression he wore so often in the 60s.

But while this family artifact came with a good story, the years had not been kind. Diaper-less toddlers, dampened its seat, family pups gnawed on its legs, and finally a brother’s girlfriend’s two cats effectively turned it into a scratching post. No one claimed this wreck of a piece. “Curb-side” we all agreed. But then my husband’s voice, insistent, firm. “We are taking it,” he said, and without waiting for a response dramatically swept it up and car-

ried it down the four flights into the waiting pick-up truck. We were quiet on the way home. I thought sadly about how our family lacked sentimentality. When something broke we threw it out. Not so with my husband who believed in saving things. I imagined our chair all the way home, lovingly restored, its fabric smoothed over gentle curves, the clawed feet polished, the barren cushions brought back to comfy.

And so it is, my chair has found a new home situated in the corner of our cottage, punched out against the backdrop of the lake. Offering up daily its varied shades of pink to firefly reds along with the gift of a father, passed on and returned if only in memory.