

Well Met
by
By Peter Albertson

It was parents' weekend at Williams College in Williamstown, MA, and I was sitting at the bar of Isabella's, my favorite restaurant in nearby North Adams, Massachusetts, with my usual club soda in front of me. The place was jammed, with perhaps a dozen or more people waiting for tables. A woman and her three companions came in. I can't remember two of that party; but I remember sharply the entrance of this youngish middle-aged, handsome, African-American woman and her daughter.

We chatted a bit. I offered to move to the end of the tiny four-person bar so they could sit down to wait for their table but she graciously refused to displace me.

Finally, after about twenty minutes of watching and admiring the kitchen action through the serving window, and seeing the chef, co-owner Drew and his sous chef Bob, slapping meals on the serving counter, they were seated.

About 10 - 15 minutes later she walked out of the dining room. I was sure she was going to complain about the table they were given or the slow service. I was sure that Leigh-Anne, the co-owner, bartender, meeter and greeter, thought the same thing. In soft tones, the woman asked for a very dry vodka martini with a twist.

She paid for it, then and there, in cash, instead of putting it on the party's check. I knew immediately why she did that: to save her friends from having to pay for her drink on a shared check, or because they did not drink and she wanted to save them from seeing her drink.

I looked at her as she took a sip. "Really," I said, teasing. "I like that you order it very dry, but gin makes a much better martini than vodka."

She looked at me, smiled and answered: "So, go ahead and drink gin,"

"No, I don't drink any more." She looked at me quizzically. "It interferes with my balance," I said, gesturing toward my cane hanging on the back of the bar stool next to me.

She smiled at me, sort of sympathetically, I thought, finished her drink and went back to her table.

An hour later, they came out to leave. As she came abreast of me, she said something like "Still here?"

"Always," I answered.

"Too bad." she said. "My name is Cristina. What's yours??"

"Peter," I said. We shook hands.

"And this is my daughter Noemi." Noemi was more than six feet tall and beautiful. She shook my hand with a firm self-confident grip, something one rarely sees in young women, or girls. She was 18 or 19.

Noemi then left with the rest of the group. Cristina stayed for a moment. "Would you like to go see her play in her first basketball game for Williams?"

"No, no, I don't do that," I said. "Walking distances is too hard for me. I don't even go to concerts any more unless my friends are taking me and holding on."

“I meant, would like to go with me? I’ll give you a hand.”

“Let me think about it,” I said.

Cristina rummaged in her purse and pulled out a business card. “I’m a private duty registered nurse,” she said, “and I know how to give people a hand. Don’t be afraid.” I gave her my e-mail address written in my shaky hand. “I have to go now, they are waiting for me.”

We shook hands again. “It’s been pleasure for this shaky, 77-year-old, white-haired old man” I said.

“And for me, too.” She smiled as she disappeared.

I looked at her card. On the back she had written her email address.

I wrote to her that night when I got home, telling her how much I enjoyed meeting her and teasing her about her martini, and meeting her daughter. I asked after the opening salutation (jokingly, my style) if it was okay to write to her as “Dear Cristina.”

She answered the next day, finishing a nice chatty letter by saying, “Well, my DEAR, it was a pleasure meeting you, and we’ll be in touch. If it’s convenient for you, maybe we can meet up for a bit when I come up. In the meantime be well, and may God bless and keep you always.”

As a friend to whom I told this story said. “It sounds like this woman is a real caregiver; she is called to take care of people.”

I think that is true. I do not believe she is looking to take care of me as if I were an invalid. I just think it is in her nature to help people, and because she has the training, to help those who are sick and perhaps somewhat infirm.

You can reach Peter Albertson at: albertson.p@gmail.com