Process to my polished piece of work:

**June 21, 2010**  During free writing time on the first day of the writing project this memoir/creative nonfiction piece poured out of me. Since February of this year, I have been visiting my mother at the nursing home where she now resides. Observing human beings has always been one of my favorite pastimes. There are many opportunities to do so at the nursing home. The weekend before the summer writing institute, I observed a heart-warming interaction between one of the staff nurses and an elderly Alzheimer’s victim. *Eddie Knows* was born.

First Daft – *Eddie Knows*

Eddie is a short, well-built African American male with beautiful ebony skin. The sprinkling of grey in his hair says he’s been around this old world for a while. He is wearing deep blue scrubs and a kind smile. He is quietly confident, professional, one of the nurses of the elderly special care patients at my mother’s nursing home.

At first glance Eddie is just doing his job, handing out meds, giving a hand here, a kind word there . . . just doing his job . . .

Be careful of first glances. They can be deceiving. They can be wrong.

Eddie knows. Eddie knows that the elderly special care residents have talents, gifts that remain intact in the undamaged areas of their brains, these victims of Alzheimer’s.

He speaks French with my mother, a Francophile and former teacher of French. He encourages Virginia to recount stories of her southern debutant days. He invites Maureen to play the piano.

Maureen spends her days lilting through the 2nd floor hallway like a ghost. She looks like a ghost with her short white hair, white skin, and slight frame. She has a mischievous, but sometimes vacant, glint in her eyes. She floats up and down the halls, stopping to visit this person here, that person there. Sometimes she slides into another’s room . . . into someone else’s conversation, into the dining room and back out . . . but when Maureen plays the piano, she is all there. There is no doubt that those old fingers know what they are doing.

Yesterday Eddie asked Maureen to play the piano after dinner. Maureen slid onto the polished piano bench. She put her old, white, gnarled fingers on the ivory keys. She smiled. She started playing like a pro! She played a classical piano piece. The other patients clapped politely. I clapped enthusiastically and gushed, “Oh, Maureen, that was beautiful!”

Maureen got up from the polished piano bench to wander away. She is smiling graciously. Actually, she is smiling from ear to ear. Eddie asks, “Maureen, could you play one more?”

Maureen smiles and sits again at the piano.

Again, Maureen belies the vacant look in her eyes and comes alive from way, way back, years ago when she was young and beautiful in a different way.
Maureen played another piece for the assembled group of women, all in different stages of the awful Alzheimer’s. I smiled at Eddie. He smiled back at me.

Eddie knows. Eddie knows how to bring out the human beings the ladies (and gentlemen) used to be before they were attacked by the horrible memory-damaging disease, thrown away by our beautiful-people-loving society, before they were wrinkled, grey and not necessary.

Be careful of first glances . . . they can be wrong . . .

Eddie knows.

June 23, 2010

Read Eddie Knows to my writing group asking for my first piece with the group to be “addressed.” I specifically asked for help with my verb tense switching problems.

Comments:

• It does begin in present tense and then goes to past tense and back to present again.
• Use a highlighter to highlight the verbs to see right up front where the changes are.
• Ghost description is good.
• Name the classical piano pieces instead of simply saying, “She played a classical piano piece.”
• Repetition is effective.
• Add something like, “Eddie knows one has to look beyond face value” and/or “We can learn a lesson from Eddie” because they thought something bad was going to happen or that Eddie was going to turn out to be evil.

June 30, 2010

After letting Eddie Knows sit for a week, I wrote draft two. I also changed the title temporarily.

Appearances Can Be Deceiving (Draft Two of Eddie Knows)

At first glance one sees an African American male . . . grey in his hair . . . he has been around this old world for a while . . . quietly confident, professional, one of several nurses of the elderly special care patients at my mother’s nursing home. At first glance Eddie is just doing his job, handing out meds, giving a hand here, a kind word there . . . just doing his job . . . nothing out of the ordinary.

Be careful of first glances. They can be wrong.

Eddie knows. Eddie knows that the elderly special care residents have talents, gifts that remain intact even though their minds are going, victims of Alzheimer’s.
He speaks French with my mother, a Francophile and former teacher of French. He encourages Virginia to recount stories of her southern debutante days. He invites Maureen to play the piano.

Maureen spends her days lilting through the 2nd floor hallways such as a ghost would... she looks like a ghost... short white hair, white skin, skinny body, mischievous yet vacant glint in her eyes. She floats up and down the halls, stopping to visit this person here, that person there. Sometimes she slides into another's room... into someone else's conversation, into the dining room and back out... but when Maureen plays the piano, she is all there. There is no doubt that those old fingers know what they are doing.

Yesterday Eddie asked Maureen to play the piano after dinner. Maureen slid onto the polished piano bench. She played Moonlight Sonata. The other patients clapped politely. I clapped enthusiastically and gushed, “Oh, Maureen, that was beautiful!”

Maureen got up from the polished piano bench to wander away. She smiled graciously. Actually, she was smiling from ear to ear. Eddie asked, “Maureen, could you play one more?”

Maureen smiled and sat again at the piano. Again, Maureen belied the vacant look in her eyes and came alive from way, way back, from years ago when she was young and beautiful in a different way.

Maureen played Fur Elise for the assembled group of women, all in different stages of the awful Alzheimer’s. I smiled at Eddie. He smiled back at me.

Eddie knows. Eddie knows how to bring out the human beings the ladies and gentlemen used to be before they were attacked by a memory erasing disease, thrown away by our beautiful-people-loving society, before they were wrinkled, grey, and not necessary.

Be careful of first glances. They can be wrong. Eddie knows.

**July 12, 2010**
Received feedback on the Ning from members of my writing group.

- We as readers come to respect and appreciate Eddie through your writing
- We also come to respect, appreciate, and understand a little bit more about your mother, Virginia, and Maureen.
- I can picture Maureen’s behavior in the 5th paragraph, i.e. the idea of “sliding” into a conversation.
- I still thing the 2nd paragraph can lead to an unsettling feeling about Eddie, as if we should be careful about assuming he's a good guy.
- I really think you want us to think about how we first perceive the residents.
July 14, 2010
Received some more feedback on the Ning from my writing group.

- The first paragraph has several sentence fragments/sentences connected with ellipses. Make them all either fragments or short sentences.
- In the 2nd paragraph, change “glance” to “impressions” for a softer way of phrasing.
- Take out the parentheses around “and gentlemen.” Use both ladies and gentlemen.
- I can’t figure out who is they in “before they were wrinkled, grey, and not necessary.”
- I almost forgot that this is about Eddie when reading about Maureen. There are so many short paragraphs about the interaction with Maureen.
- Keep the focus on Eddie. (Maureen will get her time in another story.)
- Thank you for sharing your impressions of these wonderful people. It reminds us not to forget our loved ones, no matter what mental state they are in.

July 14, 2010
Sent *Eddie Knows* to e-anthology for someone from a different writing project to read and address.

I submitted *Eddie Knows* with this request, “Working on this piece for possible publication through my writing workshop . . . please address use of verb tenses and whether you feel evil is going to occur.

Feedback from a woman presently participating in the Great Bear Writing Project in Arkansas:

- I do not get the feeling at all that something evil is going to happen . . . to me, it seems that it is a tribute to Eddie . . . who knows how to bring out happiness in these patients.
- You do have a couple of verb tense shifts . . . the best way to fix that is to listen to someone read the piece aloud so you can hear the shifts.

July 18, 2010
Read the piece aloud to my husband, a nurse and an amateur writer himself. I read it to him instead of asking him to read it aloud to me. You have to know my husband.

My husband did not see the piece as my writing group, the woman from Great Bear or I saw it. He wanted to know “What first glance do you have to be aware of?” and indicated that my description of Maureen was that she was a social being with the other residents. That is not how I wish to portray Maureen at all. My husband suggested I describe the situation of the group of residents better.
Eddie Knows

Eddie is a short, well-built African American male with beautiful ebony skin. The sprinkling of grey in his hair says he’s been around this old world for a while. He is wearing dark blue scrubs and a kind smile. He is quietly confident and professional, one of the nurses of the special care patients at the nursing home where my mother resides. My first impression of Eddie is that he is just doing his job. He is handing out meds, giving a hand here and a kind word there. He is just doing his job, nothing out of the ordinary.

Most of Eddie’s patients look like empty shells, humanity that is no longer needed, no longer of value to the outside world. But Eddie knows. Eddie knows his elderly patients. He knows how to pull out the beauty and the talent that lingers somewhere within each resident. Eddie knows the gifts that remain intact even though his patients’ memories are going, victims of Alzheimer’s.

Eddie speaks French with my mother, a Francophile and former teacher of French. He encourages Virginia to recount stories of her southern debutant days. He invites Maureen to play the piano.

I never imagined Maureen, of all the residents, could play the piano. Maureen spends her nursing home days lilting through the hallways like a ghost. She looks like a ghost: short white hair, white skin, skinny body, and a vacant yet strangely mischievous glint in her eyes. Maureen floats up and down the halls, stopping to look at this person here, that person there. Sometimes she slides into another’s room and into another’s conversation, but she never speaks. She floats into the dining room and back out, not even settling down to eat. But, Eddie knows that when Maureen sits down at the piano and starts to play, she is all there.

The residents are gathered after dinner in the activity room. Eddie asks Maureen to play the piano. Maureen grins, sidles over to the piano, and slides onto the polished piano bench. She plays Moonlight Sonata! There is no doubt that those old fingers remember what they can do.

The residents clap politely. I smile at Eddie and whisper to him, “Thank you.”

Maureen gets up from the polished bench to wander away. Eddie returns my smile while saying, “Maureen, could you play one more?”

Maureen smiles from ear to ear. She knows that Eddie knows she is beautiful and she is talented. For a moment she is young again and in demand. Maureen sits down at the piano once more and plays Fur Elise for the assembled group of ladies and gentlemen, all in different stages of the awful Alzheimer’s. Again the patients clap politely, Maureen gets up to leave the room. She is still smiling. I am smiling. Eddie is smiling.

Eddie knows. Eddie knows how to pull out the beauty, the talents, the gifts that remain buried deep inside his elderly special care patients simply by caring about them.

Be careful of first impressions. They can be wrong. Eddie knows.

By Katharine Loveland