

Some Writer

by Katie McKy

Unlike my neighbors, who met E. B. White at the post office and general store, I only met him in his books and essays. I bought my house in Brooklin, Maine, too late to be his neighbor or even do anything other than drive past his old house, where the people who bought it stapled a plastic black and red “No trespassing KEEP OUT” sign to their front gate, forestalling any would-be pilgrims. My Mecca is closed.

I can and do, however, drive on to what locals call downtown Brooklin, which comprises a general store, townhall, school, two gift shops, and tidy library once beloved by Mrs. White. There’s also a cemetery where E. B. White, his wife, and his son reside today, all buried in the back. No front and center for the Whites. That’s the way E. B. liked it, for when he worked at his New Yorker office and saw someone coming he didn’t recognize, he’d skitter down the fire escape.

E. B. and his wife have identical slate tombstones. Slate is 2.5 to 4.0 on the Mohs hardness scale for minerals, closer to talc in hardness than to granite. This was the right choice, for E. B. was fond of the farm implements steadily decaying into soil in Brooklin’s mostly abandoned farm fields, as the soft slate will also do. His tombstone is inscribed “Elwyn Brooks White,” which one could miss because

- A. Who knew E. B. was Elwyn Brooks?
- B. The only things distinguishing it are the stones and shells pilgrims set on its arched top.

I could love him for the soft, humble stone alone, but before I ever saw it, I also loved him for the unblinking horrors in *Charlotte’s Web*,

where sweet Wilbur might be reduced to lard and bacon and pig's feet, barely saved by Charlotte, the too-soon-dead heroine who mummified flies alive. His book confirmed that life comes stuffed, like an apple in the Christmas pig's mouth, with horrors. J.K. Rowling knows this too, for while Hogwarts is a place of heaped feasts, just beyond the bright lights, are dark corners and hissing terrors where the adults aren't just oblivious to the mortal dangers: they put them there.

Death was right around the corner in my childhood too. In seventh grade, my classmate died of leukemia. She was in *the* quartet of pretty girls, and she simply stopped coming to school. As an adult, I assume she grew thinner and paler and weaker in her hospital bed, but I only knew what I overheard, which wasn't much, for I was beneath her, a mere bookworm. When our English teacher said, "Sherry passed," I hated the phrase. Of course, *passed* is a common euphemism, but it didn't convey that she would never, ever pass anything again, not seventh grade nor high school nor college.

The next year, Brady, an affable classmate with sun-streaked hair, was killed by lightning while sheltering under a tree. If the pretty teens weren't safe from cancer and Zeus's bolts, where did the rest of us stand? Not under a tree, for sure.

There's another cemetery nearby, Seaside Cemetery in Blue Hill. It's a jutting, humped point with hoary oaks and sugar maples, and it tells the same story that E. B. White and my junior high told. There are three large tombstones—the patriarch and his two wives, the first of whom died young, likely in childbirth—and then a line of tombstones decreasing in size, for if you died your first day, you only earned a nub of a rock. The children who died at three, five, and nine were given incrementally larger stones.

As I admire Elwyn Brooks White's soft and simple stone, I also admire Brooklin's restraint. E.B.'s name isn't on the sign for Brooklin. Rather, it reads, "WELCOME TO BROOKLIN BOATBUILDING CAPITAL OF THE WORLD," an overly generous nod to the wooden boatbuilders here. It does not profit from Mr. White, unlike Gettysburg, where you stand on a ghostly morning at the gate of the cemetery and see the Golden Arches marching through the fog. Then there's

General Pickett's Buffet, which David from Zama, Japan, describes as "a lot of food for the price."

There's no Wilbur's Buffet or any such thing in Brooklin or its neighbor, Blue Hill. Wilbur remains, in a way, for the Zuckermans of *Charlotte's Web* still bring a young, scrubbed pig—always named Wilbur—to the Blue Hill Fair every August. But no kids squeal to see young Wilbur, and I fear a succession of the Zuckermans' Wilburs squeal with no Charlottes to save them. But anyone who addressed death as unblinkingly as E. B. White in *Charlotte's Web* knows how it goes. If Brooklin ever decides to note E. B., I hope they settle for "Some Writer" on the sign.