

## **Birthday**

**by Phillip W. Weiss**

**Don just turned seventy-seven years of age. He sat back and reviewed his life. He thought of his parents, long deceased, his siblings, both now old, his childhood friends with whom he had shared his childhood and were mere memories now, his military service that happened so long ago that it was like a dream, the schools he attended, the work he did, his relationships that went sour, friendships that faded, missed opportunities, travels to foreign lands, money he made and money he lost, financial investments that did not pan out, medical problems that resolved over time and others that lingered, sports events that shook the world and today are barely remembered, hit movies that are now forgotten, television shows that are now antiques, and news events that are now footnotes in history books. Boy, did Don feel old. The papers he wrote, the plays he produced, the baseball cards that he coveted, the time he spent playing basketball in the schoolyards with kids who are now as old as him or maybe even dead, the first time he started noticing girls, his relatives who were now buried and whose presence he took for granted, the time he finally lost his innocence and time he had his first drink of beer, all now ancient history, like ancient Egypt or Greece, once mighty civilizations and now just ruins, or so it seemed to him. A feeling of futility came over him, wrapping him in a cloud of despair, as he surveyed the memories that comprised his life. It seemed like he had done so**

much yet accomplished so little. No one cared about him. No one threw parties for him or called to check on him or asked him for his opinion on matters of importance or on anything else. It was as if he never existed. He had climbed a mountain that led not to a peak but to a gully concealed in fog. The climb had been slow and arduous, with stops along the way to rest. Now he had reached another stop and was unsure if he could resume the climb. Maybe it was time to throw in the towel. He made himself a drink and quietly wept. He wished he could ask a girlfriend to come over and comfort him, but all his girlfriends were gone, some deceased, others just old and no longer vital. He remembered one girlfriend with whom he was especially fond. One day, she stopped showing up and he never heard from her again. That hurt. Then he turned on the television and switched to his favorite news show which reported that a certain well known politician, a senator from a certain state who was not much younger than Don, had suddenly died. Don was shocked by the news. What Don was contemplating had actually happened to this senator. That thought shook Don out of his lethargy and caused him to rethink all that he had just thought about his life. Maybe the bad times weren't so bad, the relationships not so empty, his work not so meaningless, his thoughts not so ignored, his friends not so deceiving, his travels not so limited, his laughs not so phony, his complaints not so baseless, his mistakes not so egregious, and his successes not so thin, the proof being that he was still alive. The senator had reached the top of his hill while Don had more to climb. The senator was now gone and being a public figure would be

officially mourned and eulogized and then forgotten while Don would continue his climb, knowing that sooner or later his final time to rest would come. However, that moment had yet to arrive. Don grabbed his drink, raised the glass and wished himself a happy birthday. It sure felt good to be alive.