Cultural Daily

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A Gift in a Wink

Hoyt Hilsman · Wednesday, December 21st, 2011

While it wasn't a holiday gift, I received a real blessing one hot Los Angeles day in August many years ago.

I was struggling as a writer, wondering whether I had chosen the right path in life. Even more troubling, my brave neighbor was slowly dying a painful death from AIDS. In the midst of a depressing afternoon, I heard a knock at the door.

When I opened it, I was greeted by a professorial-looking man in a tweed jacket and bow tie right out of my Mr. Chips childhood back East. He said he worked for the DWP (which I had trouble believing, considering the way he was dressed) and wanted to take a look at the air conditioning unit on top of my neighbor's house from my backyard. I agreed, showed him to the backyard where he took a cursory look at the unit, then came back inside and thanked me.

But before he left, Mr. Chips looked around at the paintings on the living room wall and asked "Are you a painter?" I replied that no, those were my wife Nancy's paintings. Then he asked what I did. "I'm a writer," I replied. He thought for a minute, gave me a wink and said "You're doing the right thing." Then he disappeared out the door as quickly as he had come in. I was dumbfounded, as if an angel had appeared from my past and given me the gift of courage to continue in my chosen profession. If I had written that scene for a movie, nobody would have believed it. But it felt like something right out of *It's A Wonderful Life* and gave me the resolve and the grit to pursue my dreams.

Image: Nancy Kay Turner, "Cultural Revolution," 16? X 16?, 2010-11, mixed- media on wood panel.

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