

The Liberation of Bon Guinee

By Dustin Guinee

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In memory of my grandmother Bonnie "Bon" Guinee, who's favorite poem was "The Cremation of Sam McGee" by Robert Service, which I read to her, the last day I saw her, in November of 2024, a few months before she passed. While the following poem is based on a true story, I did take some creative liberties to retell the narrative of my grandma, through the lens and style of Robert Service's original poem. However, while Bon was ultimately cremated and the original poem "The Cremation of Sam McGee", is essentially the story of a friend cremating another friend, after he passed away on an icy, treacherous hike in the woods, I replaced the darker premise of the original poem with a lighter interpretation. "The Liberation of Bon Guinee" was inspired by writing the obituary for my grandma combined with spiritual conversations I had with her, including one in which she told me her sister Pat had a near death experience and came back and said how wonderful and amazing the next life is, which provided Bonnie with a sense of peace and relief that maybe death wasn't so bad afterall. After learning of this story, I bought my grandma a book on near death experiences for her 98th birthday called, "Life After Life" by Raymond Moody and she said she enjoyed the book and it made her feel like heaven was a pretty great place to go to. So this one's for you Grandma. I hope you get a laugh from it, on the other side.

The Liberation of Bon Guinee

There are strange things done in the noon day sun
By the students of the 'Blue & Gold'
The Berkeley Hills have their secret thrills
That could connect you with lost souls

The Castro Valley lights, hold hidden insights
From angels circling round the Bay
Was that day I felt whole at Lake Chabot
When I saw the liberation of Bon Guinee

Now Bon was from Bremerton, Washington
Then settled in Alameda
For it was her folks that served on Navy boats
Raising a natural born leader

No her soul did not seek gold
She seeked independence and knowledge
Got an Accountant degree from U.C. Berkeley
When women didn't go to college

In the 1940's when minds were black and white
Just like their cars

For herself she'd think, painting her car pink
While reaching for the stars

A good Irish Catholic girl, she entered a new world
And Bon married John
They had eight kids and flipped their lids
Leading to separation

Bon bought a house without a spouse
Getting in to the real estate biz
A single mom, hanging on a Psalm
Trying to raise eight kids

Now divorce was shunned by the Catholic nuns
Who were keeping spiritual score
Yet a free spirit like Bon Guinee
Didn't trust God indoors

So she raised her kids and taught em to live
With an open mind
Black light parties with free thinking friends
Was the kinda vibes she liked

Starting her own company to be free
Homes she would buy and sell
She could flip a spot without a thought
And fix the place herself

Working day and night, her kids turned out alright
Only a screw or two loose
She did her best, a mom put to the test
With love and some gin and juice

Well the kids left home and Bon began to roam
Going from town to town
From Hayward to San Leandro
In Winlock her house burnt to the ground

Desiring to be free and live near the sea
Preferring reading over booze
She would drink black tea with friends and family
At a mobile home in Santa Cruz

She entertained guests and made 'em feel blessed

Waxing poetic on movies, books and life
Always ready to lend, a good read to a friend
A library volunteer escaping the strife

The conventional path felt more like wrath
Seeking liberation from a dungeon
She had dreams but like her favorite comic Maxine
She was an artist, philosopher and part time curmudgeon

A well read girl, she travelled around the world
From Puerto Rico, Munich and Paris (pah-ree)
With her kin going back to Ireland
To living Aloha with family in Maui

As her health declined a new home she'd find
Making new friends, her heart would fill
Finding a boyfriend at this place with a fuzzy face
In the Terraces of Roseville

As the years passed, till 99 she'd last
Determined to make it a century
She had her last rites before she saw the light
Her name was Guinee (guin-a) but they called her Guinee (guin-e)

In a dream I saw her soul at Lake Chabot
Asking me to cremate her last remains
I said, "I know you want to be free granny but you aint Sam McGee"
Yet she got cremated all the same

But before she went it was heaven sent
That her nails would be painted pink
By her granddaughter with her till the end
As she reached Valhalla's peak

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