



THE MURALIST, MURIEL

At five-foot even, she stood upon whatever was handy; tables, chairs, milk crates...She was sixty-seven years old now, and her balance, unerring. She still joked that if she lost her touch with a paintbrush, she could always join the circus as a trapeze-artist.

But that was unlikely, because nobody could paint murals like Muriel. Tigers peering from the undergrowth, ships tossed at sea; light-houses and snowcapped mountains and crystal lakes--Muriel had painted them all. Currently, the big thing was naked human beings, frolicking.

"Why don't people ever ask for anything really interesting?" she asked herself. "Never take the time to look at each other," she self-replied. "Got to see it on a wall...in a club...or worse--on video. When did people start feeling so ashamed of themselves?" she wondered.

Then one day, she received an envelope made of flexible stone and she waited until after lunch to open it. Inside, was a note written on paper so white it made you smile, and this is what it said: "Dear Ms. Muriel, I understand that you are the very best muralist in the world. Therefore, I should like you to paint a mural for me. Money is no object, only that the mural make me feel a certain way, which I will explain when we meet. Signed, Griffin Z. Powell."

Well! As almost everyone knew, including Muriel, Griffin Z. Powell was the most famous inventor in the world--and just then the note he sent turned into a snowball, which Muriel rolled out the front door for her cats to play with.

In his time, Griffin Z. Powell had invented clothes that never needed washing and beds that never needed making. He'd invented kites that always flew, breeze or no, bicycles that couldn't possibly be stolen, and even a simple way for all high school students to do well in math, both algebra and geometry.

Muriel assumed Griffin Z. Powell must live in a mansion, but on the day she went to meet him found herself instead, standing before a modest, white cottage. Masses of climbing roses, red and purple and see-through covered the front porch, and as she admired them a man, all hunched-over, came limping around the corner of the house.

"You like?" he asked her in a foreign accent, his eyes scrunched up.

"Oh, yes," replied Muriel. "They're lovely and fragrant and doing so well, even with that large tree blocking so much of the sun. Yet, it is curiously light here, considering where the tree grows."

"Ah-Ha! You noticed!" exclaimed the man straightening-up, his accent gone. "That tree has special, highly reflective leaves. It actually creates more light than if it wasn't there at all! I invented it!" Then, as suddenly as the man's exuberance had sprung up, it died.

"Why, you must be Mr. Powell himself," said Muriel, and she tendered her hand. "I am Muriel."

"Please don't call me 'Mr. Powell'," said Griffin Z. Powell, accepting her hand. "It makes me feel so old--and I'm only seventy-one. Come inside, if you will, and we shall discuss my mural."

He led her into a small and charming room enclosed by window panes, with the exception of one, blank wall.

"I won't mince words, Muriel," he broke out. "I am not a happy man. I think the only time I was ever, truly happy was when I was a boy and would lay beneath the flowering cherry tree in our backyard, and my father would shake the branches and torrents of pink petals would flutter down all over me. What I would like you to do is recreate that feeling for me on this wall. Can you do it?"

Muriel didn't know what to say, so she said, "I can try, I suppose," which didn't sound very hopeful to Griffin Z. Powell.

"As I mentioned in my note, money is no object," he said hastily.

But money wasn't what Muriel was thinking about. Once more, she told Griffin Z. Powell that she would try, and then she was gone.

Muriel made all of her preliminary sketches at home, and then in one, furious morning's work, completed her mural on Griffin Z. Powell's blank wall. For lunch she ate a red apple followed by a cup of black coffee, then she invited Griffin Z. Powell in for the unveiling. He sat down in a chair he had invented that looked good anywhere and was comfortable to children and adults alike, and Muriel pulled back the mauve drapery she used to cover all her murals until this precise moment.

(Muriel, cont.)

Griffin Z. Powell stared at the mural. There was no boy in it and there was no flowering cherry tree with a tempest of pink petals. Instead, he found himself looking at a young woman, ice-skating. Around and around in the center of a pink rink she spun on one foot, the other lifted high-up behind her and held with one hand. Her back curved sharply inward, and her uplifted face was serene. Confident.

"This, Griffin, is a portrait of me, during the only time in my life when I was absolutely, truly happy."

And that is the story of how the unhappiness of Griffin Z. Powell was banished by the world's best muralist, Muriel.

© 1990 -- Charles Finning



### A LIVELY SPRING ON BELL STREET

Palm Sunday saw noted Cranston-born storyteller LEN CABRAL and some of his Healing Tales featured at Bell Street Chapel's Sunday morning service. Four weeks later, the Chapel pulpit was filled by an honored guest, LINDA LU SCHULZ, wife of the President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, who brought a report on the situation in Romania after the Christmas revolution (the Schulzes had led a Unitarian Universalist delegation to the Transylvania region, an ancient hotbed of Unitarianism, in January).

In between these two special Sunday mornings, the Chapel congregation celebrated the 100th anniversary of its first membership meeting with the Third Annual James Eddy Memorial Arts Weekend, April 27-29. Over 50 artworks were exhibited in the open, non-juried show; several well-known area poets graced a Friday evening group reading, and the Early Music ensemble MELUSINE performed their winsome music on Sunday afternoon for an appreciative crowd.

The Chapel hopes to sponsor more cultural events of this sort in the future; next on tap is a performance weekend in October. This unusual small congregation of Free Thinkers wishes to attract more of the West Side's independent spirits to share in its work of community-building. Check them out on a Sunday morning, or contact Resident Minister Mitch Howard (751-5593) for more information about the Chapel or its cultural programs.



**Set's Garage** (401) 861-1580

Specialist in all European and Domestic Sports,  
Classic and Special Interest Autos  
Major and Minor Electrical & Mechanical Works

1034 Westminster Street, Providence, R.I. 02903  
SETRAK JAWHARJIAN, Owner & Chief Mechanic

### LETTER TO THE ARMORY COMMON

On the Quality of Life in the Armory/West Broadway Neighborhood

The spring and summer months usually bring to mind thoughts of sun and fun in the great outdoors, feelings of freedom to enjoy casual clothes and walk barefoot in the grass. This is the norm everywhere else, it seems, but not always here in our beloved neighborhood. What has become the norm for those of us who spend most of our spare time at home here in the Armory/West Broadway neighborhood are some all too common experiences, such as the approach of one of those nuclear-powered automobile stereo systems as it and its owner get ever closer to your house (something like the shark in "Jaws" approaching a terrified swimmer) until it finally passes your open window and ever so slowly fades away. Unless it's your next door neighbor, in which case you may have to "rap" the night away.

Do you ever wish for central air at these moments? I do.

Of course, you may live on a relatively quiet street but have the opportunity to experience the daily routine of the future senior management of "Murder, Inc." as they go about the business of selling drugs, women or a variety of other in-demand products on a regular basis.

This is a tongue-in-cheek assessment of what, seriously speaking, is the decay of a once proud and stable neighborhood. Those of us who were fortunate to have been born and raised here remember the not too distant past when this was one of the safest, most crime-free, proudest neighborhoods in the City of Providence. I believe it can be that way again, with the continued work of groups like the West Broadway Neighborhood Association and a more determined effort by our local elected officials to insure that those city services -- which we are now not receiving but are paying through the nose for -- are forthcoming in an abundance not seen in the last six years. It's time for all of us to come to the aid of our neighborhood as though it were a sick friend and nurse it through this time of crisis. It's time to send a message to those in responsible positions who are looking the other way or couldn't care less for our plight, that we are not going to put up with this malaise anymore. I know I won't.

Anthony J. Paolino  
Slocum Street