

The Pinball Wizard
a monologue by Nora Louise Syran (when she was sixteen)

Show and Tell? In university? Really?

Five things? Five things that say something about me?

I don't really have anything. I don't have anything except what I have on. The hat? I feel a little awkward wearing this hat, but after I saw Jimmy Stewart in "It's A Wonderful Life," I just had to have one. I like old things. I stick out but... I like it and wear it whenever I can. The coat. Nothing special. It's old, too, but it doesn't tell you much about me.

I do have one thing, though. This is my father's watch.

They gave it to him 'cause he never missed a day of work in his whole life. He assembled pinball machines. As a kid, I used to stand behind him and watch him as he worked on the assembly line. The pangs of springs and beeps of bells bouncing off the concrete walls. I stood and watched him as he worked, testing the coil action of the starter, pulling repeatedly at the knob, smacking it in and out of place to bring light into the dark face of the machine. He'd have me hold the pinball --a smooth weight in the curve of my hand-- while he held everything in place and I'd drop it in for him.

As he worked, I'd move down the line. To the finished machines. The pinball, once set in motion, looked like liquid mercury speeding along under the glass as it shot up the side of the machine and glided its way along the flashing bumpers. No matter how many bumps and obstacles, it always, eventually, found its way back to the beginning again. Passing over and over again through the beeps, the bumpers and bells.

I watched the workers "test" the machines-- the light, the color reflected in their upturned faces as they checked the score. Took notes. Then tested another coming down the line.

My father never got that far down the line.

My father put them together. He worked on the insides. He didn't design them, but he might as well have with all the pride and care he took into fitting each piece in place, adjusting each socket and then dropping the ball in and firmly closing it up; passing it down the line.

If he had any dreams, he gave them up for his family and their dreams. My dreams.

(MORE)

I have a full ride here. A scholarship. I've never missed a day of school. I just haven't. My father had to quit school after the fourth grade. He didn't have an education. Like George Bailey, he didn't go to college. I wear his watch now.

If my father had any dreams at all, he kept them a secret from us, encased under glass, letting someone else down the line --me, his son -- bring them alive. Enjoy the light and the color.