Who is Brenda Busselman?

 Or maybe I should say, who does Brenda Busselman *think* she is, anyway? She has become a thorn in my side since December 24, 1981 when she delivered grave criticism to yours truly. All because I hadn’t contributed to the lake community association. (This fund apparently did some minimal upkeep on a piece of land bordering Lake Whatsitsname where I lived. Big deal.)

 It all started the year my husband (the first one) fell back into the clutches of Jack (Jack Daniels, that is.) I hadn’t really known what alcoholism was before this time, although I had (as a teenager) accused my parents of this condition for their one or two nightly martinis. I was still clueless as to the extent of my husband’s problem, but alcoholism is most assuredly indicated when you lock the wife out of your own house by mistake and don’t become aware of someone pounding on a window one foot from your head. He was sleeping (passed out cold would better describe the situation), and in his state of bliss, wouldn’t wake up to let me in. (I was forced to become as wily as a thief to get into my own house in the dark of night without being detected by any pushy neighbor or nosy Nancy.)

 It was one gentle snowy Christmas Eve shortly after my BAE (breaking and entering misdemeanor) when the carolers came around. It was actually kind of sweet, the first time I had ever been serenaded. They congregated on our small front porch, blocking the screen door from opening. Clobbering “Good King Wenceslas” with their sledgehammer voices, they imprisoned us while simultaneously violating the boundaries of our personal space. I hadn’t even managed to get into my jeans when they arrived (bright eyed and obnoxiously bushy tailed) so proud of themselves for making this huge personal sacrifice just for my (assumed) pleasure. That’s when it happened - right after the good king was put to rest (he must have slept very poorly, cringing over the many flat notes). Ms. Busselman blurted out her curse for all to hear the very shame of my existence.

 “Why haven’t you contributed to our Association?” She screeched as the last note still hung in the air. Everyone heard her. “You’ve lived here for three years already.” The softly falling snow cushioned all extraneous sound, and silence reigned more profoundly than Wenceslas ever had.

 No words came to me at first, although I suspect my face gave me away. In case you hadn’t noticed, I was not fond of the woman in the first place, mostly because I already knew she was the village gossip. I slammed the inner door in their faces muttering *that is NONE of your damn business* (did they hear me? I sincerely hope so) and returned to the couch to watch “All in the Family,” losing myself in laughter.

 You’d think that would be where it ended, wouldn’t you? But it wasn’t, not in the least. So, who was Brenda Busselman? She became the cheer leader of a (thank heavens) relatively short list of assorted people who haunted me over the years as a result of their petty insults. Memory of her stirred up my righteous indignation and obsessive defensiveness in a heartbeat laced with adrenalin. I learned to dislike, then hate, and then to abhor her over the many years as she managed to upset my equilibrium from time to painful time. She became the symbol (a gigantic finger pointing my way) of wrongful accusation and unwanted meddling.

 She is probably long dead, yet she still lives. And, what a legacy: Brenda Busselman, the mother of unfairness accusing others with impunity for high crimes against man and nature. Bossy Brenda Busselman, “the parent”, the one who told you what you should not be doing (of course, I’d never have done it in the first place). Ugly Brenda Busselman, who became a symbol for the sum total of all my forgotten grudges miraculously snowballed into a one big collection of trash.

 Say bye-bye, Brenda. (Here’s *my other* finger, right back at’cha).

 -Suzanne Bohrer Ashley