

Q REVIEW



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THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

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QUEST

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

“There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written.”

– Oscar Wilde

I am sometimes asked if there are inappropriate subjects for inclusion in *Q Review*. “Very few,” is always my answer. Our key criteria for publishing a piece is that it is coherent, concise, and, most importantly, well written.

Working on this publication over the past six years, I’ve noticed submissions now tend to be more personal and opinionated than in past years, while some readers are more sensitive. This creates challenges, particularly when reviewing prose pieces.

I strongly believe, however, that publishing a potentially controversial piece is preferable to erring on the side of caution by rejecting it. The essence of Quest, in my opinion, is exploring alternative ideas, not casting them aside.

Please remember that the views expressed in these pages are those of individual Quest members, not the organization. If a piece concerns you, think about discussing the matter with the author. You may be pleasantly surprised by the results.

As Steve Koenig notes in his piece this year:

“We’re all on a quest to find the best ways to live with each other despite differing views.”

– Wayne Cotter

IN MEMORIAM

We note with profound sorrow the passing of former Quest member **David Lewis**, whom we lost during this past year.

We also express our gratitude to **Ken Leedom**, for his generous bequest to Quest. Ken and his long-time partner **Peter Cott** were active Quest members for many years.

NOTE

The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the views of Q Review or the Quest organization.



Q REVIEW

THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

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PROSE

Jennifer Jolly	6	<i>The Trauma of My Birth</i>
Wayne Cotter	8	<i>The Announcement</i>
Donna Basile	10	<i>We'll Always Have Galway</i>
Arlynn Greenbaum	11	<i>Buck Up</i>
Hilda Feinstein	12	<i>Coping</i>
Bob Reiss	14	<i>Percy Bysshe Shelley and Sandy Koufax</i>
Mary Beth Yakoubian	16	<i>Reunion</i>
Stephen Rosen	18	<i>Genius is Easy, Comedy is Hard</i>
Linda Rothstein	20	<i>Collar and Leash</i>
Joan Diamond	22	<i>Over the Mountains</i>
Diane Crothers	24	<i>Tale of Two Family Members</i>
John Spiegel	26	<i>The Walnut Caper</i>
Stella Gold	80	<i>The Girl With the Shaved Head</i>
Lillian Scheinblum	81	<i>Shifting Responsibilities</i>
Ruth Ward	82	<i>The ASPCA</i>
Marc Kouffman	84	<i>Tiger, Duke, Lana, and Me</i>
Phil Gisser	85	<i>The Hedge Fund Manager's Lament</i>
Sandy Frank	86	<i>The World Beckons</i>
Eileen D. Kelly	87	<i>Roboto</i>
Frieda Lipp	88	<i>Me and "Eli the Fanatic"</i>
Helen Saffran	90	<i>On the First Anniversary of Living with Noah</i>
Pete Weis	92	<i>Violet Wants a Tattoo</i>
Eneida Cruz	93	<i>Who's Watching?/Who's Listening?</i>
Steve Koenig	94	<i>Political Correctness and Self-Censorship</i>

POETRY

Betty Farber	10	<i>Irish Dreamscape</i>
Helen Saffron	21	<i>Advice from My Mother</i>
Jennifer Jolly	27	<i>The French-American</i>
Mary Ann Donnelly	28	<i>Society of Survivors</i>
Linda Rothstein	29	<i>The Stardust Hotel Is No More</i>
Wayne Cotter	30	<i>The Battle of Bowling Green</i>
Hilda Feinstein	31	<i>He Touched Me With His Cup</i>
Carole Cronig Abrahams	32	<i>Consent</i>
Betty Farber	32	<i>Up With Romance</i>
Gina Lebowitz	33	<i>A Family Tale</i>
Leonard Gold	34	<i>Not The Apple</i>
Stella Gold	35	<i>Watching Tara Dance</i>
Karen Neuberg	36	<i>Journey</i>
Judy Winn	37	<i>Three Memories of Fishing</i>
Barbara P Gordon	38	<i>Now</i>
Marc Kouffman	38	<i>On Lust</i>
Leonard Leventon	39	<i>The Red Ant</i>
Yona Rogosin	40	<i>In Memoriam</i>

POETRY

Art Spar	61	<i>Private Tour</i>
Martha Drezin	62	<i>Achoo</i>
Ruth Ward	63	<i>Triumph</i>
Marc Kouffman	64	<i>Eyeing 80</i>
Barbara P. Gordon	65	<i>Don't Despair</i>
Eileen Kelly	66	<i>The Wild Place</i>
Justin & Linda Downs	67	<i>A Gift To Travel</i>
Betty Farber	68	<i>I Love Mysteries</i>
Helen Neilson	69	<i>Swedish Death Cleaning</i>
Helen Neilson	69	<i>Ah, Spring!</i>
Leonard Leventon	70	<i>Duck & Cover</i>
Stan Raffles	71	<i>Brigadoon in Bryant Park</i>
Eneida Cruz	72	<i>Unique</i>
Roy Clary	73	<i>Father/Mother/Son</i>
Marilyn A Weiss	74	<i>Time</i>
Helen Saffran	75	<i>Scrabble Babble</i>
Helen Saffran	75	<i>A Thousand Miles Away</i>
Steve Koenig	76	<i>Salad Days</i>
Art Spar	77	<i>Holiday</i>
Ellie Chernick	78	<i>An Urban Stroll</i>
Ellie Chernick	78	<i>Friday Evening</i>
Karen Neuberger	79	<i>Faith</i>
Judy Winn	79	<i>This is Hope</i>
Mary Buchwald	91	<i>Two Haiku</i>

ART

Gil Santiago	41	<i>FIRE FIRE</i>
Sondra Lipton Sahlman	42	<i>Torso</i>
Diane Figueroa	43	<i>Goddess</i>
Lila Heilbrunn	44	<i>Remnants of Greatness</i>
Paul Adler	45	<i>Boxed In</i>
Yona Rogosin	46	<i>Small is Beautiful</i>
Deborah Yaffe	47	<i>The Red Boat</i>
Roy Clary	48	<i>Bronx River</i>
Pete Weis	49	<i>Everything is Looking Up in Palau</i>
Leonard Gold	50	<i>Vol de Nuit</i>
Arlene Hajinlian	51	<i>Scarlet Tanager</i>
Marilyn A Weiss	52	<i>Label Love</i>
Rosalie Regal	53	<i>Freedom</i>
Michael Wellner	54	<i>Tangier Island, VA</i>
Beverly Francus	55	<i>St. Lucia</i>
Jeanette Himmel	56	<i>A Colorful Street in Venice</i>
Helen McMahon	57	<i>Battery Park</i>
Mary Buchwald	58	<i>Save Our Planet</i>
Stella Gold	59	<i>Forewarning</i>
Helen Neilson	60	<i>Masquerade</i>

THE TRAUMA OF MY BIRTH

Jennifer Jolly

“Your father was horrified when he first saw you. Your head was a funny shape. All stretched out.” My mother was at it again. As a child, I listened aghast when she repeated this story. “You very nearly killed me; three weeks overdue. These days you would have been a Cesarean; it’s lucky you were not brain-damaged. Doctor Frazer must have been very careful when he pulled you out with those forceps. I didn’t think about brain damage at the time. All I knew was that I almost died.”

Oh, the guilt of it! I had been responsible for the near-death of my mother.

Meanwhile, I imagined the trauma of my birth.

My mother lies in a small maternity hospital in North Lincolnshire, England, exhausted from pregnancy. The baby is three weeks overdue. After three particularly hard days of labor and more pushing, the baby’s head begins to appear. The old Scottish family doctor carefully inserts metal forceps and starts to pull. It’s not easy. My mother is already very weak and will be badly ripped. He doesn’t want to damage the baby’s head, which has grown a lot in the final three weeks. He keeps pulling firmly but gently. He starts to sweat, the head starts to shift, he relaxes slightly, continues to pull and suddenly the head pops out. He delivers a huge baby girl just before midnight.

The doctor is shocked when he sees the baby’s badly stretched head but says nothing. He’s known my mum for some years so he reaches out, pats her hand and says, “Well done, Thora.”

She looks up, smiles faintly, closes her eyes and drifts off. She’s exhausted. Her face is deathly pale and her hair is matted to her head. The doctor stitches her up, washes his hands, and leaves her in the hands of nurses. He, too, is exhausted.

The drama continues when the baby’s father, my dad, visits. He feels guilty because Mum had to suffer so much. He goes over, kisses her and says, “I’m glad it’s over and you’re alright, love.” Then they bring in the child and he almost faints when he sees this creature with its stretched-out head. Not wanting to upset his wife, he says little but she has seen the look on his face. She sighs and says, “Yes, it looks bad, doesn’t it, Jack? And I know you wanted a boy.” He claims he doesn’t mind just as long as she, Thora, is alright.

He goes home, thinking his shock calls for a swig of whiskey. He takes a big one and then decides to find his father-in-law, who had been a butcher and was used to dealing with animals when he grew up in the Yorkshire countryside. Maybe he could shed some light on the matter. The older man says he'll have a look. He takes his trilby hat off the hall peg, puts it on, and the two of them set off for the hospital.

My mother's mother, my Grandma Bickerton, is already there. As usual, Grandma is stirring up trouble. "I don't know what you've done this time, our Thora. There's obviously something wrong with that child. Just look at its head."

My mother, an only child, is lying there helplessly. She starts to sob.

"What's the matter, Thora?" ask the two men as they enter the room.

"It's the baby! Mum says it's deformed!"

"I was just saying it doesn't look like Thora; it looks like Jack," says Grandma defensively, managing to add insult to injury. She's sitting ramrod straight and glares at the two men as if they have no right to be in the territory of women.

Jack ignores her while Grandpa goes to peer down at the offending object in its crib. Then he looks up with a smile and says, "Tha shouldn't a worry Jack, lad. I've seen 'orses born with their 'eads out of shape. They survive and are perfectly normal. She'll be alright. You'll see."

My dad sighs with relief. He's not convinced, but he's reassured by these words. The two men finally leave the hospital and head to the pub for a pint of the local brew to celebrate.

• • •



THE ANNOUNCEMENT

Wayne Cotter

A young married couple, Marcus and Sharon, are seated at a crowded Brooklyn restaurant with Sharon's parents.

Sharon: Mom... Dad—we have some very exciting news

Mom (Smiling): You do? Please don't keep us in suspense.

Sharon: You're going to be grandparents!

Mom: Oh my God! Really?! I can't believe it. After all this time.

Dad: That's great news! When are you due?

Marcus: In about four months.

Mom (To Sharon): And you're just telling us?

Sharon: Well, we wanted to make sure the pregnancy was going smoothly... and it is.

Dad: That's great... so, do you know if it's a boy or a girl?

Sharon: Well, er, we've made some decisions in that area.

Mom: Meaning?

Marcus: Well, Sharon and I think choosing one's own gender is very important so...

Dad and Mom: Choosing?

Marcus: Yes, so many people think of gender in binary terms.

Dad: Bisexual?

Sharon: No, binary—two choices—either male or female, but we believe gender is like a spectrum, with some people at the far reaches of the spectrum and some more in the middle.

Dad: I'm confused. (*Somewhat sarcastically*): I'm sure your child will have either a penis or a, a...

Mom: Vagina.

Marcus: Yes, of course, the baby will have a birth sex, but we don't know if the child will self-identify with that sex. Children shouldn't have their gender choices distorted by the stereotypes and prejudices of others.

Sharon: Yes, we want to ensure "they" have a choice and...

Mom: "They?"

Sharon: Yes, that's the pronoun we plan to use for the baby. "He" or "she" is too limiting.

Mom: They? "They" is plural. Why not use "it"? (*Dad laughs.*)

Sharon: Stop joking, Mom.

Mom: I'm not joking. I'm confused.

Dad: Me, too. Won't lots of people know the baby's sex?

Sharon: Like who?

Dad: Well you'll be putting "them" in day care, right? Won't the day care worker who changes diapers notice the baby's sex?

Marcus: Oh, that's no problem. We'll be using gender-neutral day care providers, places that promise not to share birth sex information with others at the day care center.

Mom: What about your father and me? We'll be changing diapers and helping with toilet training, won't we?

Sharon: Well... not exactly. Studies show that once people discover a child's birth sex, they can subconsciously convey stereotypical gender norms to that child.

Dad: So, your child will tell you his—or her—sexual preference?

Marcus: Yes, we'll wait for them to reveal their gender preference. We'll only dress our "theyby" in gender neutral clothes so as not to unduly influence their decision.

Mom: "Theyby?"

Sharon: Yes, a "theyby" is a baby whose parents have not revealed the birth sex of their child. Cute term, isn't it?

Mom: Hmm, I'll withhold judgment on that. So, when do you expect your "theyby" to make a gender choice? At two? Three?

Sharon: Well researchers say most kids gender identify well before leaving pre-school.

Mom: I don't know—this is wonderful news Sharon, Marcus... but I'm having a really tough time wrapping my head around it.

Marcus: Think of it this way. We don't want our child subject to all those old stereotypes—you know, little girls are princesses; boys must be tough. We hate those stereotypes.

Mom: Well so do we, and we always tried to avoid them with Sharon and her brother, but this... I don't know.

Dad: Have you thought about a name?

Marcus: Well, it must be gender-neutral—we're thinking about Soujourner Wildfire.

Mom: Soujourner Wildfire Goldstein?

Sharon: Yes.

Dad (Pause): Let me ask you something. Don't you think a name is also limiting? Shouldn't children really name themselves? You never liked your name, did you Sharon?

Sharon: No, not really.

Dad: Maybe your mother and I should have waited until you were seven—or perhaps 12 or 13. Then you could have named yourself. Wouldn't that have been better?

Sharon: You're joking, right?

Dad: To tell you the truth, I don't know.

• • •

WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE GALWAY

Donna Basile

I met Betty Farber by chance long before I joined Quest and was immediately struck by her grace, eloquence and sunny disposition. Little did I know she and I would share an unforgettable moment on a Quest trip to Ireland.

During that trip, I discovered another wonderful trait of Betty's: her love of walking. I never saw anybody walk so swiftly over cobblestoned streets sporting a cane. There we were, at the edge of the River Corrib that passes through Galway, enjoying the view of a small waterfall. A black wrought iron fence offered us protection from falling, but not from Betty losing her cane as she tried to snap a photo. The cane flew from her hand and plop! It was one with the river.

We peered over the edge, sadly contemplating her cane lying in the river bed. But Betty quickly jumped into action. She found the nearest pharmacy and bought a new one and within minutes was again trotting over cobblestones.

Now Betty, being Betty, wrote a poem about the fate of her cane. You may remember it from *Q News*.

IRISH DREAMSCAPE

Betty Farber

In a dream landscape in Ireland,
On a cobblestone walkway by a river,
Time moved in slow motion.
I leaned my cane against a metal fence
While taking a photo of an old stone church,
When my cane, looking for adventure,
Flew above the river, slowly falling,
Gracefully into the water below.

The memory of that cane floating through the air
Will be with me always.

I'm hoping that
As it drifted down the river, it landed
Near a cottage with a thatched roof
Inhabited by a woman of advanced age
Who needed some help with her walking,
And thinking it was the work of elves or fairies,
Used my cane happily ever after.

BUCK UP

Arlynn Greenbaum

Recently I sprained my calf muscle getting off a bus. My calf, ankle and foot swelled up. As I've been hobbling around, I've had to cut back on my activities. My friends have all been very supportive and sympathetic. But when I told my 91-year-old mother (who lives in Florida) about it, she simply said, "Buck up."

This wasn't the first time I'd heard that message from her. She said it during the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, when I didn't have any electricity or water and had to stay with friends uptown. "Are you sure you're a Jewish mother?" I asked her.

When we were growing up, she never let my sisters or me whine or wallow in self-pity. "Nobody likes a cry baby," she would tell us. And as a result, we're all pretty resilient. We deal with adversity and try to enjoy ourselves.

My mother was—and still is—very attractive. But she never just coasted on her good looks. She has a great sense of humor and cares about others. She's fun to be around and always tries to look on the bright side. She used to visit me in New York City on Mother's Day weekend. We would go to the theatre, museums and shops; she was the best shopper. One time, she dropped her wallet in the taxi cab on the way to my apartment. When we later discovered the loss, I thought she would be upset and it would ruin our weekend. "Don't be silly," she said, "it's only money and credit cards. Nothing terrible happened to me, so let's not worry about it." P.S., the cab driver turned in her wallet with all its contents, the next day.

Another time, she was scheduled to visit me about two weeks after 9/11. I asked her if she wanted to cancel since everyone was nervous about flying. "Are you kidding?" she replied. "I'm not letting Osama bin Laden ruin my weekend in New York." And we had a terrific time. She's in a wonderful retirement home with meals and activities galore and has a 98-year-old boyfriend. She's losing her memory and tires easily. I call her every day. If she's not having a good day, she always says, "Don't worry, tomorrow will be better." I'm very thankful to have a mother who has such a positive attitude and who has taught me how to "buck up."

• • •

COPING

Hilda Feinstein

Maria is afraid to go out during the day to buy groceries. Her sons go to school under a cloud of fear that their parents might be picked up in a raid and deported. She rationalizes that the American immigration authorities are after only Latinos not Filipinos, but that hardly assuages her fears. Since the Philippines was historically a Spanish colony, it can be difficult to discern physical differences between Filipinos and Latinos, the immigrant group most targeted for deportation. Maria and her family can, therefore, easily be mistaken as Mexican. She worries for the family. She worries all the time. While she tries to keep her fears and anxiety from her children, her husband tries to keep her calm, but he, too, worries and cries under the covers late into the night.

A large Philippine community exists in the U.S. Maria and Alberto are undocumented and live near Alberto's sister and other family members. He and Maria came to the U.S. in the hopes of providing their sons with the opportunity of a better future, the mantra of most hopeful immigrants. Maria with a high school diploma and Alberto with some college, work hard and are law abiding. Although they overstayed their visas, they, like millions of others before them, are simply seeking a better life for themselves and their children.

Maria and Alberto work as housekeepers for a friend of mine. They are trustworthy and conscientious and kind. They have provided competent service for ten years, caring for the home and children and have lived a hopeful and relatively worry free life in America—that is, until now. If they felt at all cautious or disenfranchised before, it has now become much worse and there are no signs that this increased anxiety will abate anytime soon. A presidential campaign promise to deport all immigrants without papers allows no realistic options for this model immigrant family. They feel they cannot go back to the Philippines nor do they want to; America has been home for them since their children were toddlers. But they may have to.

How do those who feel intimidated and unwelcome cope with their world? How do they wake up each morning, prepare breakfast for their children and put one foot in front of the other? How do they

keep their worry and tears at bay? The ‘conversation’ has been had with the boys... “stay away from crowds... if we are picked up, here are the numbers to call...”

Alberto, Jr., the oldest, has a passion for learning and has entered college this past fall; the younger, Peter, is in high school and both have absorbed the hope of the American dream. They are old enough to understand and they too worry, not for themselves as much as for their parents. As DACA children (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) they are provided with a temporary suspension of deportation and the authorization to work in the United States, but that authorization will soon expire. In addition, the addresses of all applicants are on record with the government, and no one knows what will happen next since DACA has become a political football. Its fate is in the hands of Congress, a mercurial president and his supportive cast of subordinates.

Today, here in the United States more than 11 million “undocumented” immigrants are considered so much illegal refuse by our government—to be discarded as quickly as possible. Although it is easier to deport the nameless and the faceless, it is not easy to look into the eyes of Maria and Alberto and their sons as they navigate their way through a complex political quagmire. This family is more fortunate than many as their employer is their advocate and will look out for them and provide whatever legal services they may need. Maria and Alberto, nevertheless, must act cautiously, even deceitfully at times in order to endure. Confused and not knowing who to trust, they cast cautious eyes over their shoulders, move furtively every moment of every day in order not to draw attention to themselves. Their courage to persevere, despite intense media attention and feelings of intimidation, is remarkable and inspiring. They are proud people who will continue to persist in their determination to be Americans—but they are very frightened and tired. Hiding in plain sight is exhausting.

• • •

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY AND SANDY KOUFAX

Bob Reiss

Someone asked me recently if I had read *Sandy Koufax: A Lefty's Legacy* by Jane Leavy. Well, of course I had. What blue-blooded Dodger or ex-Brooklyn Dodger fan hadn't? Although Sandy's exploits dominated baseball only after the Dodgers' reviled move to Los Angeles, he remained firmly in the hearts of his erstwhile Brooklyn fans.

So, what does this have to do with one of the greatest poets in the English language, Percy Bysshe Shelley? Well...

Some say Koufax's pitching was poetry in motion... but that's not it. No, it all starts with a vacation in the U.K. As usual, my wife, Debra, was our nonpareil trip planner. After much internet research, she came upon "The Shelley Cottage."

The Shelley Cottage takes its name from the famed nineteenth century poet who honeymooned at the cottage, then known locally as "Mrs. Hooper's Lodgings," during the summer of 1812 with his child bride, Harriet Westbrook. Debra and I were captivated by the website's description: "an award-winning hotel which commands spectacular, breathtaking sea views across Lynmouth Bay. Lynmouth was described by Thomas Gainsborough as 'the most delightful place for a landscape painter this country can boast.' A loving restoration has endowed the cottage with its own unique character, elegance and style."

Moreover, Debra negotiated a reservation for the very suite where the newly married couple had stayed. With our departure imminent, we packed and, as usual, I included several books for vacation reading. Among them was the aforementioned Koufax biography. (This pre-dated e-books; you had to take the real thing).

We were not disappointed with the cottage. It epitomized English charm. The suite included floor-to-ceiling bookshelves filled with vintage books by Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blackmore, and others who had purportedly stayed there.

During our multiday sojourn and between sightseeing trips to the Exmoor coastline and National Park, I did manage to finish reading the Koufax story. On trips such as these, I was accustomed, after finishing a book, to jettison it so as to lighten my luggage on the rest

of the trip. With that wall of bookshelves staring me in the face, it just seemed natural to place the Koufax book there for the reading pleasure of future occupants. To honor Mr. Shelley, I carefully selected a spot adjacent to his *Complete Poems*.

I often fantasize about what happens when a British vacationer, looking in those bookshelves for poetry to round out the “Shelley experience,” comes upon *Sandy Koufax: A Lefty’s Legacy*. First of all, being British, she has no idea who Sandy Koufax is. Second, she now thinks her education deficient since she’s never heard of a literary figure with that name. And finally, her curiosity takes over and she becomes one of a handful of people in the U.K. who are familiar with this American sports icon.

I think that over the years, these imagined encounters with my “contribution” to the Shelley Cottage library have given me as much pleasure as our stay at The Shelley Cottage.

• • •



REUNION

Mary Beth Yakoubian

Chris began to question the wisdom of this trip. She had skipped every previous high school reunion, so why bother slogging all the way to Middleford, Connecticut for this one? OK, it was the big one—fifty years—the only one she'd even considered attending. Half a century later and she still recalled those four miserable years with loathing.

Since graduating in 1968, only two events were momentous enough for her to make the trip back to the town she hated. The first was in 1980 for cousin Irene's funeral. A sweet, smart girl—woman actually—valedictorian of her class at the University of Bridgeport, put a bullet through her brain at age 27. That was a tough one. And then the other trip a few years ago for her brother David's funeral. No love lost there—died of a drug overdose—but still, he was her brother.

Chris had not been one of the “popular” girls in high school—definitely not part of the cheerleader group. The desirable cliques were populated with kids who fit the standard Middleford profile: fair skin, cute round face, blond, most of Czech or Slovak heritage. On the other hand, olive skin, angular features, brunette—these were considered ugly. The names of the senior class officers told the whole story: Janosko, Perubsky, Savko, Dorak. Her surname—Habiby—did not belong among them.

A lot of water under the bridge in the past fifty years. Chris knew she was no longer the wallflower she'd been in high school. She had moved—escaped—to New York City exactly one week after graduation. Gradually, painfully, she had managed to shed her feelings of inferiority. Her exotic Middle Eastern looks proved no longer to be a liability as they had once been. In a cosmopolitan environment, she discovered that people found her exceptionally attractive. An improved self-image contributed to her decision to focus her energy on getting a good education, which she did with gusto.

Chris was pretty confident that she not only looked better than before, but also had a superior résumé under her belt. So why the hesitation? One minute she was terrified of facing her former classmates, and the next minute she couldn't wait to see the looks on their faces when the new Chris walked in. But to be honest she did hesitate,

because of the very real possibility that they might snub her, just as they used to fifty years ago.

There was one person she was eager to see: her best friend JoAnn Russo. They had been buddies for four years but lost touch soon after they graduated and went their separate ways. JoAnn had been admitted to Bennington, and Chris was sure that experience must have had a huge influence on her.

Chris ultimately decided to throw caution to the wind and go to the reunion in style. She chose to wear a magenta knit dress that showed off her still slender, toned figure. Sitting in the car, she was grateful for the Uber driver's small talk during the ride from her hotel to the reunion at Riverview Bistro. His banter helped her ignore the ambivalence she still felt about showing up at all.

When she stepped out of the car at the entrance, she did not recognize the building; apparently it had changed ownership since 1968. She gripped the entrance handle and forced herself to smile. No sooner did she walk in than she realized she must be in the wrong place; there wasn't a familiar face to be seen among the milling group. She was reaching for her phone to call a car when she noticed a sign that read, "Middleford High School 50-Year Reunion."

Then an official looking man approached her. "I'm sorry miss, the restaurant is closed tonight for a private event." His nametag read Andrew Janosko.

"Andy, it's me, Chris Habiby." She remembered him clearly. He had never bothered to speak to her, except when he needed to cheat off her in Algebra.

"Chris! Wow, I'm so glad you could make it. Let's get you a name tag! We must take some pictures together."

She smiled again, this time for real.

• • •

GENIUS IS EASY, COMEDY IS HARD

Stephen Rosen

There's no evidence that Albert Einstein, iconic genius of the twentieth century, secretly wanted to be a stand-up comic. But there are vague hints to be found. Look deeply enough... and cherry pick.

Einstein was famously indifferent to fame. He said, "With fame, I became more and more stupid." Remember the photograph of him sticking his tongue out at a journalist who wanted to interview him? Accosted by a reporter who asked him for an interview, he said, "I'm not Einstein," and the reporter said, "Yes, you are. I've seen your picture in the newspapers." Einstein replied, "Who should know better—you or me?" He deflected intrusive reporters by saying, "People often tell me I resemble Einstein."

He hated being the celebrated superstar and stand-in for genius we know him to be. At times he was bored with fame: "Why should I be honored for doing what... came naturally?"

Just because you're good at something does not mean you have to like it. It's not surprising Einstein might wish to be good at something (aside from physics) he really enjoyed: being witty.

Others called him a genius, but he never thought so. Einstein said he wasn't smarter than anyone else—he insisted that he merely stayed on a problem longer than others. Of course, only a genius would say something like that.

His private life was enriched by romances, indiscretions, philandering, paramours, and sexual adventures. Or, as he put it, "I prefer silent vice to ostentatious virtue." He carefully guarded his privacy, including his intimate friendships with prominent women, like Elisabeth, the Queen Mother of Belgium. He wrote to her, "Because of a peculiar property I have acquired, anything I do is likely to develop into a ridiculous comedy."

In 1905, his *annus mirabilis* (miracle year), he produced four discoveries, each of which was worthy of a physics Nobel prize. However, he did not want to be remembered as a towering figure in the annals of physics. He said, "Yesterday idolized, today hated, tomorrow forgotten, and the day after tomorrow promoted to sainthood." He wanted to be remembered as a person who valued his private life. "Love is a better teacher than a sense of duty."

Of course, genius is easy, if, like Einstein, you're a genius. But comedy is hard, even for comics... even for geniuses. Scouring the Einstein

Archives, what fractional evidence can we find to support a truly dubious hypothesis that Einstein was a closet stand-up comic?

When asked, “What is the greatest invention of all time?” Albert Einstein answered, “Compound Interest!”

He inquired of a train conductor, while passing Oxford Station, “Does Oxford stop at this train?”

“Once you know the Universe is matter expanding into nothingness, wearing plaid with stripes comes easy.”

“We all know that light travels faster than sound; that’s why certain people appear bright until you hear them speak.” I suggest he was referring to journalists.

“Life is finite; time is infinite. The probability that I am alive is zero; in spite of this, I am alive. Now how is that?”

Einstein could be seriously charming, but maybe full-fledged comedy eluded him. Comedy is really hard. Perhaps, in a parallel anti-matter Universe, a night club owner would give him a few minutes on the stage of his comedy club. He could advertise these luminous one-liners from The Man-Of-The-Century... the ultimate stand-up comic? Yes, genius is easy (if you’re Einstein), but comedy is hard (if you’re Einstein).

Even though there was no known repulsive force at the time, Einstein added a “fudge factor” to his 1916 prediction of gravitational waves to allow for the possibility of repulsive force in the Universe. He famously remarked that this so-called “cosmological constant” was his “greatest blunder.” Too bad Einstein didn’t live long enough to know what we have recently discovered from the Hubble Telescope: a repulsive gravitational force *exists*, and it’s called “dark energy”—responsible for the accelerating expansion of the Universe.

“The only time I ever made a mistake was on the one occasion when I said I was wrong... and I was right.” He never said this. I did. But he should have. It would have been his comic cosmic trope.

“Always be yourself,” I was once advised, “unless you’re a jerk; in that case you should be someone else.” Some of us may have actually wanted to be someone else. In fact, when young I wanted to be Albert Einstein. After eighty-four years, it still hasn’t happened. I also wanted to be a stand-up comic, but that never happened either. So, here’s my Plan B: imagine Albert Einstein saying, “Genius is easy. Comedy is hard.”

• • •

COLLAR AND LEASH

Linda Rothstein

The only good thing about moving to California was that we took the dog along. I knew I'd be friendless at my new school. A new girl in the senior year? Who will sign my year book? Who will write about all the funny moments we shared? Who will say they will remember me always when they don't even know my name?

The dog was an Irish Terrier. He was kind of a sandy-red color and we gave him an Irish name—Dinty. He would have to serve as my best friend now. My best friend he was, until he wasn't.

For most of the 2,000-mile journey with my parents, I sat in the backseat with the dog standing on my stomach and drooling. It wasn't as bad as all that. Drool is cool and cars didn't have air conditioning back then. At first, the drive was a bore. Endless fields of golden grains of corn. Then we came to the foot of the mountains. That's where my father let me take the wheel. The road was so steep going up, I couldn't see over the hood of the car. One wrong swerve and we would have plummeted to the rocks below. I have no idea why the whole family's survival was placed at the mercy of a sixteen-year-old girl with only a learner's permit.

We did manage to reach Hollywood, and my mother found us an apartment there. I had nothing to do that friendless summer but take Dinty out for walks in the Hollywood Hills. We always went out early so he could frolic in the dewdrops on the grass—thick tropical grass. Everything here was strange to a Midwesterner, even the lawns.

What happened, happened on a Saturday morning. My mother handed me his collar and leash, as usual. I took them but did not use them, as usual. I wanted my dog to run free as the wind. To tell the truth, Dinty was as dumb as a bump in the road (he flunked obedience school twice), but that didn't mean he would run away. We walked up, up the slope, up to the Magic Castle, a private club where magicians roam, stopping at tables to pull a coin out of your ear, or to challenge you to pick a card, any card... a card to foretell your fortune?

I sat on a step to rest. I saw Dinty cross the road to sniff the bougainvillea on a house that looked to be as large as the Magic Castle. Probably a movie star's home. I saw my dog was about to lift his leg

where he shouldn't. I called, "Here, Dinty, come, Dinty." I saw the terrier ears stand at attention. He heard and he meant to obey.

It happened so fast that I never saw the car. What I heard was a souped-up engine from hell. It was coming our way and there was my dog, poised to step into the road.

I yelled, "Stay, Dinty, stay." His ears drooped. That meant he was cogitating, but Dinty was not good at any type of thought. He was confused. I kept yelling, "Stay, stay," but it was no good.

He went down with a whack. For what seemed forever, all I could do was look down at my own white knuckles. I was clutching his collar and leash in my hand. What use were they now?

I heard the car speed away as if life were a joy ride. I went to my dog. There was red blood on the road, the red of a rusty piece of machinery. I stroked and I stroked the red fur of his muzzle. He was wheezing. Only his eyes were moving—first, toward me; then the brown of his eyes rolled up into the sockets until only the white showed.

I always thought it strange how people look up to heaven when they need help. Now I knew that dogs look to heaven as well. I hope there's something nice for my dog up there. If I could send a note, I'd write, "Please let my dog lift his leg wherever he wants, even over someone's flower bed."

• • •

ADVICE TO ME FROM MY MOTHER

Helen Saffran

Don't make a mountain out of a mole hill

Don't hide your light under a barrel

Don't put all your eggs in one basket

Don't get ahead of yourself

Don't let your bangs hide your face.

• • •

OVER THE MOUNTAINS

Joan Diamond

Anna stayed with friends the night before she left town. That morning the pale, unclouded sky was reassuring, but Anna's confident façade crumbled when she said good-bye to her hosts. She drove across town, sniffing to pick up her old, brown tabby cat to take him with her to their new home.

Harry Cat submitted to swallowing a tranquilizer and being confined in his carrier. Anna positioned it among the suitcases and boxes in the blue hatchback so Harry would have plenty of air, closed the hatch door, and headed for Route 1. At the gas station she ran into a faculty acquaintance who knew her only as a colleague's wife. Anna remembered holding his drink for him at a formal campus celebration while he straightened his cummerbund. He asked politely where she was going, and she told him she was moving to Virginia to teach at a small women's college there.

The cat was so uncharacteristically silent during the drive south that despite the rush of traffic, which made the long dry roadside grasses swish, she pulled over and opened the hatchback. Harry blinked sleepily through the screen of his prison, eyes half closed and paws tucked under his plush breast. He responded to her anxious inquiry with a slurred meow.

Anna was unaccustomed to exploring new territory on her own, so she had not plotted her route with any care, just glanced at the map and set out to take what seemed to be the major highways heading south and then west. That was a mistake. She was not prepared to circumvent D.C., and she became lost in its labyrinth of one-way streets and the rushing cross currents of urban traffic. She blundered, sweating anxiously, until she found the intersection with the west-bound highway.

The day darkened as she drove across Virginia. She had seen the mountains looming around the valley where the college was located when she flew down for her interview. But she had not anticipated how long it would take to drive up, over, and down the winding mountain roads. Finally, she stopped for the night and smuggled Harry into her motel room. He curled up on the bed next to her, soft and warm as a cashmere blanket.

Anna had chosen campus housing for her new home: half a semi-detached bungalow with fat white pillars and a front porch. It even had a name rather than an address: Duchouquet Cottage. A taciturn, standoffish woman, a college administrator (who turned out to be a serious alcoholic) lived in the adjoining apartment of the cottage.

That evening the department chairman and his wife hosted a little get-together to introduce Anna to her new colleagues. She tried to study their interactions discreetly, and although their sociability seemed forced, she appreciated the effort they were making. When she returned to her new home, Anna let Harry out for the night. There was almost no traffic on campus and wide territory to explore.

In the morning Harry did not appear on the doorstep, nor did he come home that night. In a panic she put up notices in the college post office and informed the campus police. One of them called the next day to tell Anna that they had found a little black cat with a red collar. Was that her kitty? It wasn't.

The following day Anna's next-door neighbor found Harry Cat scrabbling at the cellar window on her side of the cottage. He was trying vainly to find his way into his new residence, but he had never lived in a divided house before. With time he, like Anna, would adapt to his new home.

• • •

TALE OF TWO FAMILY MEMBERS

Diane Crothers

Author's Note: *While exploring my family history I've uncovered some remarkable family stories that illustrate the human side of large historical events. The following piece primarily focuses on two family members: Captain Joseph Reid, a slaveholder and B.F. Towns, a well-known reporter and son of a fugitive slave.*

Descended from Scots Presbyterian immigrants, Joseph Reid was born in 1824, the eldest son of a family of successful South Carolina planters. His grandfather had received 300 acres of farmland for his service in the Revolution and subsequently bequeathed 650 acres and two slaves to Joe's father and family.

In 1835, after the removal of the Chickasaw Indians pursuant to the Treaty of Pontotoc opened land to white settlers, Joe's father moved his family and slaves to northern Mississippi's Chickasaw County.

By 1850, they had established a secure foothold as wealthy Mississippi planters. According to the 1850 Census, Joe's father owned 20 slaves, half of whom were ten years of age or younger. The young slaves were put to work as soon as they could stand and pick cotton.

Meanwhile, in another branch of the extended Reid family, we find a male, unnamed slave, born at the turn of the 19th century. This enslaved man—born in Virginia to a large slaveholding family named Towns—became a fugitive in the 1820s or 1830s adopting the name Benjamin Franklin Towns.

Towns ended up in a fugitive slave community near Toronto, Canada, and with his wife Cordelia sired a son in 1840, naming him after himself, Benjamin Franklin Towns. The younger B.F. Towns lived in Toronto until after the Civil War ended slavery, when he returned to the land of his parents' birth.

Four years after the War in the early days of Reconstruction, Captain Joe Reid shot and killed Thomas Jefferson Smith and wounded two or three other young white men when, according to the *Vicksburg Herald*, they "serenaded a freedman," probably one of Joe's former slaves. ("Serenading" was a term used by Ku Klux Klan night riders to terrorize black men from voting during Reconstruction.)

A jury found Joe guilty of manslaughter, although it is unclear whether he served any time. A question remains about whether his 1869 shooting spree against probable Klan members was to protect his former slaves or to maintain order, in his professional capacity as a police board official.

Meanwhile, B.F. Towns had become an acclaimed newspaper reporter and sought-after “race man” who gave lectures on the 15th Amendment, which extended the right to vote to black men. At his untimely death at age 50 in 1891, he was working on a book, *The Black Phalanx*, a complete history of the colored soldiers of the United States.

The lives and experiences of Captain Joe Reid and Benjamin Franklin Towns are linked forever in the descendants of the Reid/Towns family, which is my own family.

My mother was a great niece of Captain Joe and I married a man descended from B. F. Towns, whose first name was also Benjamin. Our son was thus descended from both Captain Joe and B.F. Towns.

The devastating costs to the enslaved of centuries of American slavery are reflected in the multi-generational history of this one American family. The wounds to those who defended their right to hold slaves are also significant, but of course, they pale in comparison. Of the eight sons of the Reid generation serving the Confederacy in my family, three were killed in the War and two suffered severed or shattered limbs.

Captain Joe was able to recoup ownership of 400 acres of land at the end of the 19th century, but had no spouse or children, suggesting perhaps a shadow life invisible to us. He lived to 97, nearly twice as long as B.F. Towns.

The former slave whom Joe may have been protecting in 1869 lived into his seventies, witnessing Captain Joe benefit from the fruits of his own uncompensated lifelong labor and unable to provide resources to his own children.

Benjamin Franklin Towns led a life of exemplary advocacy for black equal rights. His progeny survived Jim Crow, attaining graduate-level educations in lives of community service.

However, in the early 1990s B. F. Towns’ great-grandson still decided to leave the country of his birth to become an expatriate in Europe, free from the American burden of a brown skin. And, of course, the debt for centuries of unpaid labor remains uncompensated in the afterlife of slavery.

• • •

THE WALNUT CAPER

John Spiegel

It was one of the items on our Thanksgiving shopping list. “Would you mind putting these back in the bin?” my wife asked. “I’ve decided to use the shelled walnuts. We won’t have to waste time shelling them.”

“OK,” I said, turning to find the correct aisle. As I was emptying the whole walnuts back into the bin, I had the impulse to keep one. I mulled the issue over for a few seconds. *It’s wrong to do this, I thought. I wonder if anyone is watching? Am I’m being videoed?*

I decided I would chance it, that no one would notice or care, and I squeezed the corner of the bag to keep that final walnut from falling back into the bin. Trying to be nonchalant, I stuffed the walnut, camouflaged by the plastic bag, into my jacket pocket. Pretending to be oblivious but feeling slightly guilty, I withdrew from the scene of the crime. I decided that, if confronted, I was going to declare it an “Oops!” moment. I felt like I was back in the corner candy store at seven years old, stealing a penny candy.

I didn’t mention it to my wife until we returned home. I placed the lonely walnut on the back of the kitchen counter and left it there for two weeks. I saw it almost every time I reentered the kitchen, but I never had the impulse to eat it.

Finally, the day after Thanksgiving, I decided to crack it open. It sparked some wonderful surprises. I was immediately flooded by memories of my grandmother and my frequent visits to her home. She often had a bowl of walnuts with a silver nutcracker on her dining room table. It was a joy to unlock and eat the fresh nuts, each one more delicious than the last. The nutcracker took shape in my mind. I could see the intricate design on the grip, feel its grooved texture, its weight in my hands. I remembered that the bracket connecting the grips was loose and the handles were easy to separate and expand in the reverse direction, allowing me to draw an imaginary circle by holding the tips. I saw the cracked pieces of the nuts sitting on her tablecloth.

I was back *there*, with her.

I thank the walnut for surprising me with memories of youthful mischief and a special intimacy. Sometimes crime does pay.

• • •

THE FRENCH AMERICAN

Jennifer Jolly

In the midst of great kerfuffle
Miranda Parker ate a truffle
“That’s a strange thing she just had”
Said Dan of slow wit, “Is she mad?”
But Miranda fancied being French
To eat such things to her made sense
She said, “I’ll have some escargots
In garlic sauce not food to go
I’ll eat foie gras not curly fries
Or onion rings or pizza pies
Croissants dunked in café au lait
Will be my breakfast every day
Frogs legs too would really please
Plus chardonnay with Roquefort cheese
Quiche, baguettes, I love them too
Crepes Suzette, a bouquet stew”

Another student who loved meat
Thought burgers were a better treat
Said, “Why eat that awful Frenchy stuff?
To buy it here is very tough”
Miranda said, “I love French food
My tastes are fine while yours are crude.
I’ll write a book on French food yet
You think I won’t, let’s make a bet”
So off to France Miranda goes
She settles in forgets her woes
She tries out foods, makes notes in haste
Of everything that suits her taste
Then one fine day she starts to write
Working hard by day and night
Her book comes out to great acclaim
“French Food for Americans” is its name

• • •

A SOCIETY OF SURVIVORS

Mary Ann Donnelly

The bad begins with a bang
There should be a warning
Like storm clouds furrowing on a forehead
A rumble of thunder in the gut
A ripple of wind with a scent of smoke
Forming in the psyche
An omen of the impending doom.

Instead it comes suddenly, sharply, out of nowhere
A knock on the door, the phone call in the night
Popping sounds like firecrackers
The dark moment that separates the world you knew
From the new now
Never to be the same.

Before you knew it couldn't, wouldn't, happen to you
Now you know you could never be safe
Before you were clueless, but cautious
Now after, you're surprisingly free, knowing
That no other bad thing could ever come close.

The numbness recedes, you stumble, you stagger
But soon you choose
To put your pain in a box
Until someone else's world turns
And you take it out in solidarity.
A society of survivors.

• • •

THE STARDUST HOTEL IS NO MORE

Linda Rothstein

The Stardust in Vegas—no more
In its place is a gold-plated tower
For the billionaire and the foreign high roller

Lost in the rubble are my memories
Of yesterday's Nevada celebrities
No more shows while eating dinner
No more Bojangles or Dean or Sinatra

And what of the casino staff?
The cigarette girl peddling smokes and candy and stuff?
Every hour on the hour she'd show up
Like a blackjack or snake eyes or a cuckoo clock.

She was old when I was young
And her knees were all but gone.
She'd gained some weight around her rear
And her outfit clung like her underwear.

Now that the Stardust has gone to dust
And the one-armed bandits have gone to rust
Is she now selling cigarettes to the rat-pack's ghosts?

• • •

THE BATTLE OF BOWLING GREEN

Wayne Cotter

*The following poem is an ode to “Fearless Girl,”
the controversial statue, erected in March 2017, that
faced the Wall Street Bull outside Quest headquarters.*



Outside Our Doors
A Drama Plays
Out
Daily.
A Feisty Bull's
Domain
Threatened
By a
Small
Defiant
Wisp of a Girl.

He Snorts
Fumes
Threatens.
She Stands Tall
Arms Akimbo
Eyes Fixed
Determined.

I Am Going
Nowhere
She Proclaims.

The Battle of Bowling Green
Wages On.
Watch This Space.

• • •

HE TOUCHED ME WITH HIS CUP

Hilda Feinstein

Really touched me!

Crowded, cacophonous, clamorous
Screeching, lurching train ride home
Heading downtown
Elbows elbowing elbows
Exhausted shoppers, workers
Hungry, harried, homebound
Like me—
Then he
Unsolicited, unexpected, unwelcome
Bearded, grizzled, grimy and gray
Feet bare, clothes mismatched, shabby and scuzzy
Muffled beggar words
Clink, clinking coins in a metal cup
Unsteady, unstable, shaky
Suddenly, shockingly
Struggling for balance
Stumbling

Crashing to the ground
Head hitting hard

Unaware of his graceless fall
Un everything

Time stops
For me
For all who see

His cup
Landing in my lap
Coins jingling
Untouched, unfazed
Unlike
My feelings
For him

• • •

CONSENT

Carole Cronig Abrahams

He said
She said
“Yes”

Consent

Swiveling meaning of agreement
Corrupted, smothered autonomy

Sweet convincing
Still exists

But consent coerced
Has seen some light

Illuminating
He said
She said
“Yes”

• • •

UP WITH ROMANCE

Betty Farber

On the DOWN escalator
In the subway at 59th and Lex
I stared at a couple on the UP escalator
Kissing as they moved through space,
He one step above her
She reaching her lips up to his.
What awed me most as I held tightly
To the moving black bannister
Was: how do they keep their balance?
LOVE and YOUTH, I answered myself,
Stepping nimbly off the escalator steps
Using, of course, my indispensable cane.

• • •

A FAMILY TALE

Gina Lebowitz

My mother, born in Israel,
Was one of seven sisters
Each more beautiful than the next

But after WWI, they had no food
Except the corn they fed the chickens.
My grandmother would bake a
Chicken corn pie
And everyone would have
Only one slice.

The most beautiful sister
Was the eldest, Sima.
An overheard rumor
I could never prove
Said that one night
As she walked home,
A rich Arab man
In a big car,
Made her an offer
Hard to resist
When you're starving.

Some nights, he would
Pick her up in his Mercedes
And return her the next morning
With money for more than chicken corn.

Too late, I cannot prove this tale
No one of the seven beautiful sisters
Left to ask.
(Nor would they admit it)

• • •

NOT THE APPLE

Leonard Gold

Long rejected
For not being what he expected,
Too fat,
Too sissy,
Not the apple of his eye.

Now, his last days
Have come.
With help from an attendant
He limps off the plane.
“Daddy, it’s so wonderful
You have come!
Now, you will get
To see the baby.”
He replies:
“It’s you I’ve come to see.
I’ve come to see you, Len.”
We embrace,
And I find myself falling backward
Into the paternal womb.

• • •



WATCHING TARA DANCE

Stella Gold

Resolute she walked
In front of the stage
Where middle aged tourists
Were stomping with gusto
To the beat
Of a rustic bourrée.
There she started dancing
Petite Tara
Golden from the sun
Was moving her body
With joyful assertion.

On this summer night
In the South of France
Watching Tara dance
With such pleasure
And confidence
Sustains my belief
That our little girls
Will find out
They hold the power
To confront
The challenges
Tomorrow will bring.

• • •

JOURNEY

Karen Neuberg

Mother goes off one day.
But not *just like that*.
First, she's leaves modest
clues along the path to
cliff's edge. She describes
a tugging as a gentle nudge
and begins giving away extra
shoes, small, colorful scarfs,
and favorite bracelets.
She points to the drawer
of important papers, names
the purpose of each.
In the hours before her actual
departure, mother tries to turn
back, to return, to push against.
She accepts a harness to keep
her from accidentally
wandering too far. When her
bed turns into the Grand Tour,
when she lies back and waves
to invisible people hanging
above her, still out of reach,
and speaks to them in a new
tongue that is older than me,
I want to take back every
cruel moment I gave her
and replace them with every word
of thanks I have in me,
still have in me, that I'm still
saying and know I will
always be saying until my turn
and I hopefully see her waving to me
from what is no longer ceiling.

• • •

THREE MEMORIES OF FISHING

Judy Winn

Brigantine Pier stretching far out into the Atlantic Ocean
Waves slapping against the pilings the railings wide apart
A two-year-old could easily fall through into the roiling sea
My father put a rope around my waist and tied me to a rail
I wandered on the pier as far as my tether would let me go
Holding a little pail I asked the fishermen "want some bait"?

The wrecked pier in Longport had rickety planks spaced wide
Very careful at nine not to have a foot fall through the cracks
I dropped my hand line into the dark bay waters to catch fish
We filled a big carton with crabs to take home but it got wet
The bottom broke when my father lifted it and crabs scurried
On the street, he picked them up and put them into the trunk
And ran to find a bucket and then he cooked them until red
We ate all the crabs, sucking meat from the claws we laughed
About crabs running around on the street by the trolley tracks.

Deep sea fishing off of Cape Cod lured my husband and father
We got caught in a downpour on the way to meet them at six
My new madras plaid shorts ran green and blue down my legs
I sat with my mother in the window of a restaurant and waited
Until seven and eight and then it was dark but no boats came
I saw myself a widow at twenty-two, raising a baby on my own
They came at ten, a captain who chased after a school for miles
There is a photo of them grinning next to a giant tuna on a dock
But no photo of me looking desperate with green and blue legs.

• • •

NOW

Barbara P. Gordon

getting older
now alone
lust for bed games
fade
other pleasures
now abide
to satisfy
a current craving

the smell of coffee
brewing in the morning
sunlight shining warmly
on my face
the embrace of velvet
on my shoulders
the taste of chocolate
melting on my tongue

but best of all
as evening closes
and I am worn and weary
to set my head upon
the softest pillow
and bid farewell
to one more day

• • •

ON LUST

Marc Kouffman

I remember lust
Lust sired me
It fired me
Crashed a train
Through my brain
Made me swell
Afraid to tell
Turned me sour
Stole my power
Then I found
A beauty rare
Voluptuous grace
Visage fair
Emitting rays
Of colors bright
Cool all day
Hot at night
A succulent feast
Juicy, plush
Pungent, sweet
Ripe and lush
Stoked my hunger
Gave me thrust
A love vessel
For my lust
Joy emerges
Pain declines
Amaryllis bloomings
In my mind

• • •

THE RED ANT

Leonard Leventon

Into the forest n through the trees
Gentle comes humming the wind through the leaves
Stumbling from branches darting through the debris
Go insects, rodents, carnivores, bees

Crickets n walking sticks all hiding around
The red ant comes stalking, slinking along the ground
Crawling through the crabgrass, marching down its blades
Cutting off a broad leaf's corner, devouring the maze

Carrying off a comrade fallen in the dust
Hurt or dead in combat to their underground fortress
The red ant keeps working—pulling his weight—making no fuss

The little boy then finds him climbing up a tree
He pokes and prods from behind him, pulls him from the bark
But the red ant just defies him—bites his hand—leaves his mark

The boy then quickly drops him down unto the ground
He falls onto a dead leaf without a hint of sound
The red ant keeps on walking back to his fortress
He's king of the great big forest, beast of the underbrush

• • •

IN MEMORIAM

Yona Rogosin

The day I went to see you I got lost,
but someone at the school nearby
happened to know of the Iron Arch
and showed me the way.

The day I went to see you
I brought a rock from my new home
to let you know I was close by.
Not a stone's throw, not in the same town,
but close enough.

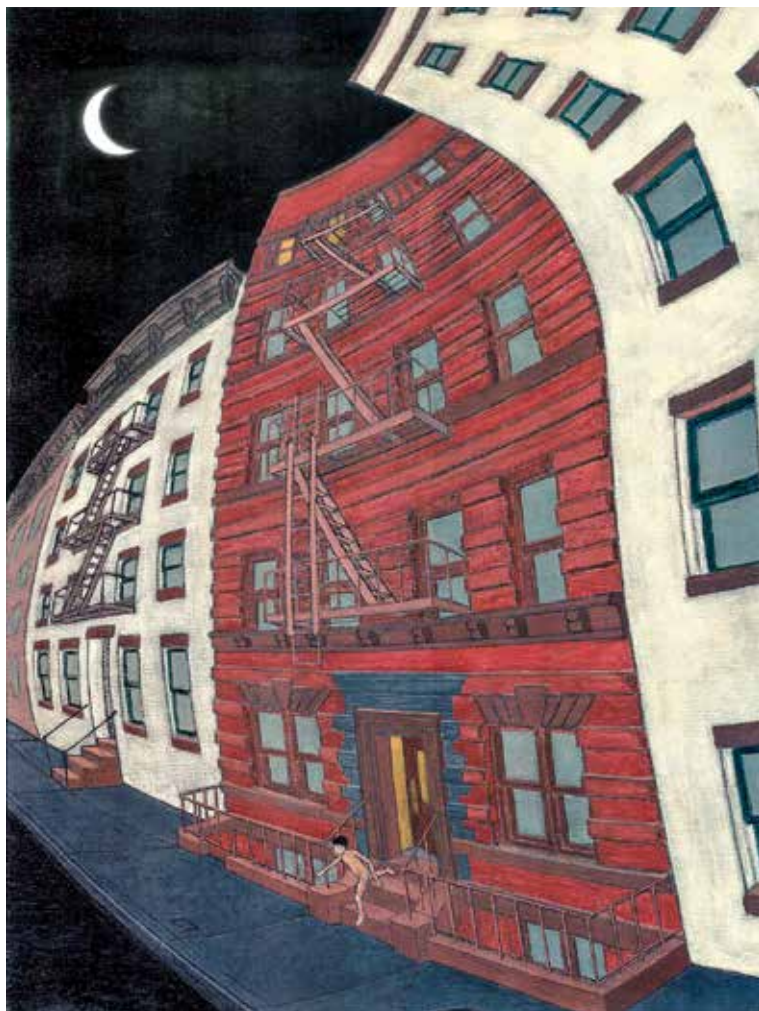
The day I went to see you
I walked in and found you right away
behind your two sons and the women they pursued.
I looked for but did not find your grand niece
who passed when she was only two.

Standing there feeling your presence,
the funny stories you told me sitting on my bed,
the freight train's passing signaling it's time to sleep,
you tucking me in and caressing my curly head.

What pride I felt
walking down White Street holding your hand,
the shopkeepers waving and calling out,
"Mrs. Fixman, Ah, little Nonie's here to visit you again!"

The day I went to see you
I counted how many years it had been.
Does it matter now why it has taken so long?
I am here and close by.
Our circle is no longer broken,
but complete, enduring and strong.

• • •



Gil Santiago, *Fire, Fire*, Acrylic on Canvas Sheet



Sondra Lipton-Sahlman, *Torso*, Zebra Wood



Diane Figueroa, *Goddess*, Silver, Amber, Agate



Lila Heilbrunn, *Remnants of Greatness*, Photograph



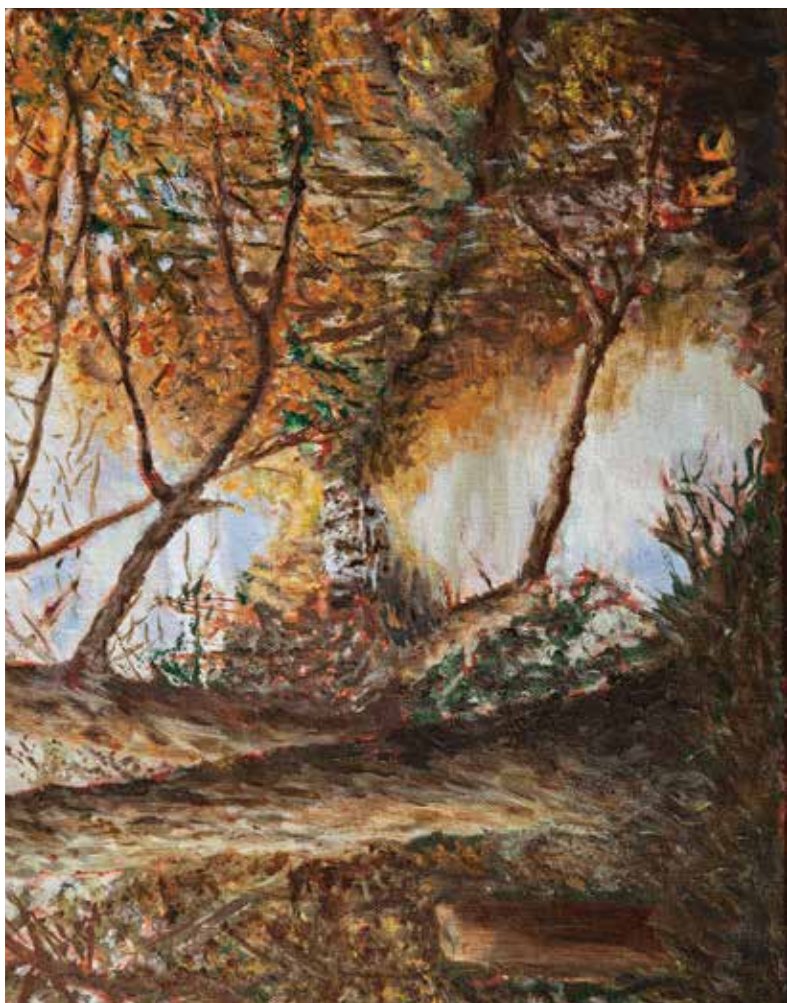
Paul Adler, *Boxed In*, Graphite, Pastel, Paper



Yona Rogosin, *Small is Beautiful*, Collage, Mixed Media



Deborah Yaffe, *The Red Boat*, Watercolor



Roy Clary, *Bronx River*, Oil on Canvas



Pete Weis, *Everything is Looking Up in Palau*, Photograph



Leonard Gold, *Vol de Nuit*, Tempera on Paper



Arlene Hajinlian, *Scarlet Tanager*, Watercolor



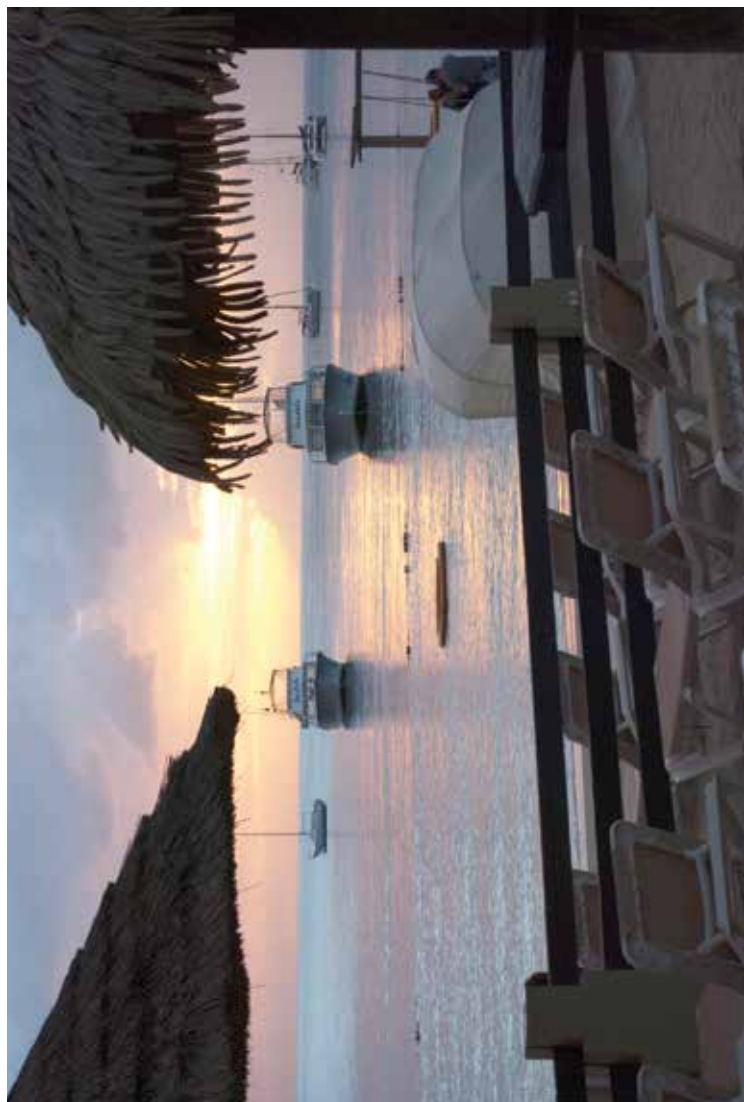
Marilyn A. Weiss, *Label Love*, Acrylic, Multimedia Collage



Rosalie Regal, *Freedom*, Clay



Michael Wellner, *Tangier Island, VA*, Photograph



Beverly Francus, *St. Lucia*, Photograph



Jeanette Himmel, *A Colorful Street in Venice*, Watercolor



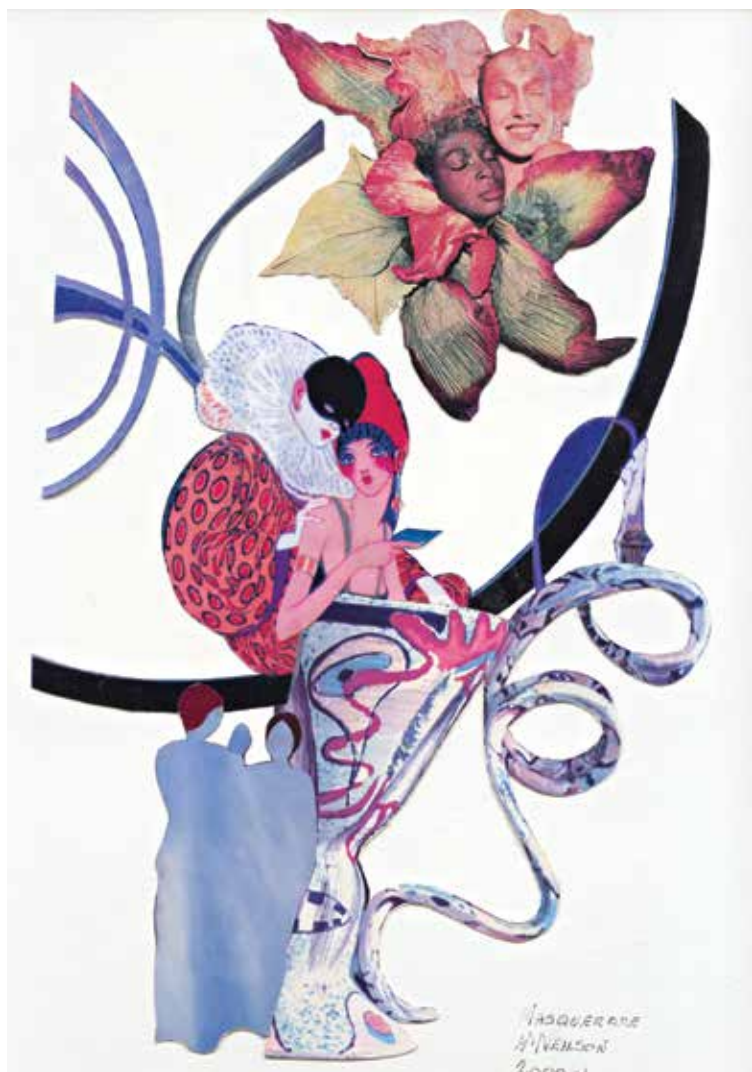
Helen McMahon, *Battery Park*, Watercolor



Mary Buchwald, *Save Our Planet*, Paper



Stella Gold, *Forewarning*, Collage on Paper



Helen Neilson, *Masquerade*, Collage

PRIVATE TOUR

Art Spar

Meditation commences with
breath
Curtains close
Alone
Only breath

What is breath?
What is no breath?
I see myself in a box
Eternally still

Death is my Virgil
Opening my eyes
A tour of reality
As best can be seen

I breathe out
Thoughts fall away
I breathe in
Opening my heart

Death is a circling
Bird of prey
Reminding the small
Where they are

Darkness is no curse
It is a reunion
Rejoining
The One

Waste not days
With woulds and shoulds
Fill life
With passion and love

• • •

ACHOO

Martha Drezin

DNA delivers. Every combination and sorry permutation shouts stubbornly, ancestry. Hair, skin and eye color easy to see. Style, speech and gesture insinuate sneakily.

Take my children. They are winkers. They wink with little provocation, but usually to soften their own misdeeds. For instance, the Thanksgiving when Nancy put string beans up her nose.

Their father was a winker I sneezed at, achoo. His wink tempered covert activities, proclivities made palatable in hostile circles, when mediated by one friendly shuttered eye.

My kids wink and their dad shines through, though he died in 1989 and is long overdue to follow his star to Mars, where there's no gravity, spousal or otherwise, and his Mars-born children can insert okra or whatever they manage to grow there, in their noses to work the crowd.

Instead, my winking deader-than-a-door nail ex, is working his program in a West Coast granddaughter, distracting her from academia, sending her up trees, off cliffs and into a flurry of bespoke fantasies with multiple and expensive costume changes.

Not what you were thinking.

• • •

TRIUMPH

Ruth Ward

His mornings were too orange to think,
By noon life was orange-red,
Afternoons were excessively green,
And evenings, far too purple.

But night time, oh, the blueness of it all!
Perfect for stewing, for mulling, for musing
For ruminating, for cogitating,

For turning the world askew,
For getting an altered view,
For seeing everything anew—
Yes, that was the virtue of blue.

A good, dark blue, not a powder puff hue,
Not a pasty, pale robin's egg covered in dew;
Assorted shades might work, yes, there were a few
Like cobalt or royal—there was cyan, too.

So, he slept by day and wrote by night,
His kitchen untidy, his bedroom a fright,
But when he had finished, he put things right
And knew, somehow, he'd won the fight.

Then the morning suns turned a glorious red
And afternoons softened to a soothing green,
Cool evenings shared their shimmering purple,
The most peaceful colors he'd ever seen.

• • •

EYEING 80

Marc Kouffman

Getting there
In this school year
Has overcome
survival fear
Credit luck, determination
Swim, gym, vegetation
Poetry, piano, robust genes
A good wife, a healthy spleen
Fewer pleasures, random thrills
The blue ones, my only pills
Group therapy once a week
Hardly gives me time to speak
Gone are uncles
Fewer friends
To tie up
My loose ends
I am Johnny on the Spot
Business, family, the whole lot
They turn to me
Who has less gumption
A severely impaired
Executive function
This is the drama
I've created
Hyperbolic, unabated
To soldier on
While life remains
Because the remedy...
Is all too plain.

• • •

DON'T DESPAIR

Barbara P Gordon

if the hair on top is growing thin
and much more pink is peeking through
you'll find more growing on your chin

when your belly starts to sag
and rubber muscles cannot hold
conceal it with your shopping bag

if folks give you that furtive look
when you fall back in your chair
look purposeful and lift your book

and when the black spots in your eyes
begin to blur the page you're on
it's time to stretch your arms and rise

when memory begins to fade
and you say "er hi" and not their name
be thankful for the friends you've made

you still can walk around the block
you still can chew and swallow
you know you can't turn back the clock

so don't despair

• • •

THE WILD PLACE

Eileen D. Kelly

We went to the wildest place
where fauna flowed 'round us
and cared not when we swam
through their schools
Just parted and let us pass
like a current or wave
But barracudas
and moray eels?
They studied us sideways
No staring up front
to challenge or bite
These are the rules in the wild

This was our time
A wild adventure
where the sun doesn't set
it splashes
And the moon doesn't rise
it shimmies up velvet
then shimmers like opal
The tides slosh softly
on pure white sand
while trade winds
huff from the sea
puff gently all 'round
cooling and calming the Wild

• • •

A GIFT TO TRAVEL

*Justin Downs and Linda Downs
(a collaboration)*

Born in the Indian sea bed,
embedded in mud at death,
a fossilized starfish to fit a human hand
wakes at 17,000 feet.

The slab lines the
Himalayan salt route to Tibet
pushed uphill at 2.4 inches per year
a mountain's heartbeat.

The hardened, compressed mud
from the Mesozoic past
builds the gargantuan heights of
shape shifting stones
cast off like dead cells from a living body
full of primordial treasure.

• • •



I LOVE MYSTERIES

Betty Farber

Though biographies and histories
Are books on which I binge
My favorite tomes are mysteries
Though violence makes me cringe.

When the detective looks for facts
Behind a grisly killing
Done with a knife or with an axe
With actions that are chilling,

Murder makes me feel alive
I'm so ashamed to mention
All my senses seem to thrive
I'm in a new dimension.

Best of all, the great appeal
That I cannot resist:
Secrets often are revealed
In a surprising twist!

The resolution is so clear
No hiding or pretending,
And all protagonists will hear
The final happy ending.

These mysteries inform my life
And teach me, at this age,
When I myself encounter strife,
To smile and turn the page.

• • •

SWEDISH DEATH CLEANING

Helen Neilson

Leave it to a race of folks
who scrub their own doorsteps
to come up with a plan,
a gentle art, to free
the final years of life
from a lifetime collection of clutter.
They call it "Swedish Death Cleaning."

It frees yourself and your family
from things that lost their joy,
an exercise to clean a house
while reliving pleasure
that filled a long, long life.

• • •

AH, SPRING!

Helen Neilson

I have waited so long,
watching for your return
wanting your warmth and light.
The flowers bloomed to say, "Hello."
Today I sniffed the air
noticed at once a change.
Your magic wand did wave
a pleasant warmth and you were there.
Ah, Spring! Welcome again!

• • •

DUCK & COVER

Leonard Leventon

“Size places, boys & girls
Line up against the wall
Duck & cover under your wooden seats
Don’t be beaten by the beasts
 With their bomb coming
 From the East”

East of Europe along the Ural Range
They aimed their weapons
 Of mass destruction at us
We thought they were mighty strange

Back then we survived their taunting
Their threat to our very lives
Right now our own dear children
 And children’s children
Live highly different lives

“LOCKDOWN—LOCKDOWN CHILDREN
BACK INTO YOUR CLASSROOMS NOW!
No need for size places
 Don’t line up for God’s sake
Up against the wall!

“Duck—Yes, Duck & Cover
Under your wooden seats
The weapons of mass destruction
Are coming from down the street”

• • •

BRIGADOON IN BRYANT PARK

Stan Raffes

Mary Oliver, our matchmaker
Cement planters sprouting fall flowers,
Our Scottish heather.
I, the world weary Gene Kelly, scowling
Stumbling across the moors of New York,
Waiting for my own Brigadoon to emerge
Just once, every hundred years.

A back ordered poetry book from
The Coliseum Book Store on 42nd Street
Drew me to Bryant Park.

Met Vali from Romania
Sitting, smiling at a table drawing in pastels,
A picture of smiling children playing
In front of thatched cottages in the Romanian countryside.

She'd never been to Bryant Park before
She thought Mary Oliver
Was an extra dry martini
We talked about art, poetry, New York, Romania.
I read to her from Oliver's *Fall Song*
"Another year gone, leaving everywhere
Its rich spiced residues: vines, leaves,"

We got married, me for the first time at age 60,
On a cold clear February night
On a terrace of a hotel overlooking Times Square
Just as the pastel miracle of Brigadoon
Emerged from the mist.

• • •

UNIQUE

Eneida Cruz

You came into the world
Your announcement, “I’m here to stay.”
You put up a fight
at your premature birth

Your eyes seemingly closed
Your lips swirl
to a sound of a whistle
as you slept in the incubator

You would stretch
your long arms
and shapely long legs
removing your breathing gadget

Your weight 2.2 pounds
The skin a pinkish hue
A tiny girl—yet so beautiful

You were the prettiest
of all the preemies
at the ICU ward
Next to a preemie handsome boy

My daughter, a picture of a thousand words
Mesmerizing with her beautiful smile
her large lovely hazel eyes
Never changing to be someone else.
Today unique, a special young woman

• • •

Editor’s Note: *Q Review* sends Eneida Cruz our
best wishes on all her future endeavors.

FATHER/MOTHER/SON

Roy Clary

My father had a straight razor
With a curved crimson handle
And a long silver blade.

Some mornings I would watch him
Prepare to remove
The night's growth of whiskers.

He grasped the crimson handle
And sharpened the silver blade
On a big black strop.

One day I happened to spy
Mother in her slip
With hands held high as
Father shaved her underarms.

Their smiles of intimacy
Stay with me still.

• • •



TIME

Marilyn A Weiss

It's coming too soon
It's going too fast
It's gathering speed
It's gushing by

I don't like it
I can't accept it

I yell. I Protest! I Rebel!
I'm dancing as fast as I can!
I'm not giving in!

And just maybe
By not accepting
By not conceding
Just maybe
I can make a change

At best,
just maybe,
I can slow it down

• • •



SCRABBLE BABBLE

Helen Saffran

I have no place to go
I have all vowels
I have all consonants
You have all the good letters
Pass me the letter bag
You took my place
Pass me the letters
You opened a triple
I opened the board
That's not a word
Pass me the cookies
You had all the s's
You had the j, z and q
Pass me the cookies

• • •

A THOUSAND MILES AWAY

Helen Saffran

On my bed at 13
Listening to Alan Freed's
Radio show

"A request for
'A Thousand Miles Away'
By The Heartbeats
Dedicated to
Bruce from Betty
On the anniversary
Of our first kiss"

On my bed at 13
In a time capsule
A thousand miles away

• • •

SALAD DAYS

Steve Koenig

Salad. From early words for salt, how brine makes for long life. Salada Khadra needs six cucumbers (peeled, seeded and cubed), a little cracked black pepper, a few tomatoes, a bundle of green parsley and one lemon's juice. Garlic and radish wedges. Maybe some shanklish cheese if you're Lebanese.

Chop the leaves if you're Syrian. If you're Georgian, which is to say in the American South, you take your knife into the fields for your greens.

Martha Al-Bishara, 87, finds her dandelion leaves not far from her house; she has trouble walking and speaks little English, even after decades living here. On an overgrown patch on the property of the Boys and Girls Club, Martha, knife in hand, cuts the leaves roughly and thinks in a short while she'll toss the leaves with garlic and lemon. The salad will help her cholesterol.

The 911 caller says the woman with the knife isn't a threat. The caller described the woman as wearing a "Muslim hat-looking thing," said there were no children outside and that the woman said she didn't speak English. Five-foot Martha doesn't put down the knife and plastic bag when the officers approach and shout at her. She just stares at them. The 6'3", 250 pound officer tases her, first in her left breast by her heart, a second prong on her stomach.

Dandelion weed is edible from the flower to the roots. They grow almost everywhere. They grow where land has been disturbed. The food writer explains he picks them in a field owned by the local elementary school, and is safe, never sprayed with chemicals. Try to separate the flower from the green base, which is very bitter. "Less-lethal force is the practice we normally follow, however..." Martha is recovering in the hospital and reports she's still a little sore.

• • •

HOLIDAY

Art Spar

I need a holiday
A holy day
A day to laze away
Free from the daily grind

I need a holiday
A holy week
A week with no promises to keep
A parole from weekly vows

I need a holiday
A holy month
A month to escape vexation
A furlough from tribulation

I need a holiday
A holy place deep inside
A silken tent welcomes me
Where the only sound is, ohmmmm...

• • •



AN URBAN STROLL

Ellie Chernick

A profusion of stately trees
Grazed the landscape during a breeze
With not a leaf in sight
Their nakedness revealed their plight.
Just a few days later
In the month of April
I received a lasting thrill.
Spring had come
No peccadilloes
Budding leaves were now home.

• • •

FRIDAY EVENING

Ellie Chernick

It is almost dusk
As I sip my drink
Outside on my terrace.
Clouds touching each other
Leaving little blue
To peek through.

My thoughts wander
What's on the other side
No tall buildings I'm sure
Maybe something or somebody
Wondering for sure
Who or what is here.

Now my drink is done
Sun set is nigh
The candles are lit
The challah tastes sweet
Shabat shalom everyone
A peaceful week to all.

• • •

FAITH

Karen Neuberg

A foggy glass globe
to carry like a small creature, beating
heart, body warmth. It disappears
into the daily, into the wars
and fires, into the weeping and floods.
I think it lost but then it unexpectedly
returns, surprising me
with its familiar insistence.

• • •

THIS IS HOPE

Judy Winn

The voices of a children's chorus
Float up into the gothic arches
Of this grand and magnificent space
The sweetness of silver sounds
Blending in harmony and rising
To the vaulted ribs enclosing
A historic house of prayer.

Apocalyptic visions appear
The arches crashed to the pews below
Surrounded by half-standing columns
Littered with fallen chandeliers
Among shards of stained glass saints
The roof open to a bright blue sky
A single red sneaker in the rubble.

Pushing the black thoughts from my mind
I look down from my balcony seat
Touched by the purity and innocence
Of the beatific smiling faces.
THIS IS HOPE.

• • •

THE GIRL WITH THE SHAVED HEAD

Stella Gold

Last June Abby, Abigail, my pretty ten-year-old granddaughter, decided to have her head shaved in order to raise money for an organization that supports research and treatment of cancer in children. Her parents were concerned that she might be traumatized after the fact. They warned her of the shock she might feel when looking at herself in the mirror, but she remained firm in her resolve.

With the permission of her school principal, she wrote a letter for circulation throughout the entire school that children would then take home. She also got a list of her parents' friends in order to explain the project. She had a head-shaving party, and for a few months thereafter she wore cute little hats and went on with her life. She had succeeded in raising nearly eighteen thousand dollars! I felt immensely proud that my lovely little Abby cared so much for the pain of other children that she sacrificed her own physical appearance to support their treatment.

In 1942, during World War II, when I was a year older than she is now, I was faced with the prospect of having my head shaved. For two nights in July, there were roundups of foreign Jews in Paris. We had been tipped off by our concierge, whose husband was one of the policemen making the arrests, and we went into hiding. The following day we found that the French police had sealed the door to our apartment.

Lacking an alternative, my mother placed my brother and me in a Jewish children's home run by the UGIF (Union Générale des Israélites de France) under the surveillance of the Gestapo. Among other deprivations at the time, there was a shortage of soap, so lice were epidemic. A doctor came to check the children's heads once a week. If he found any lice, the child's head would be shaved immediately. I knew I had lice. I was in a state of panic. I had to go to school, and the thought of appearing in the classroom with my head shaved was unbearable. I spent hours in the toilet on the days of the doctor's visits to avoid his verdict. Ultimately, I was lucky and kept my hair.

The stigma attached to a shaved head was powerful among the French population. After our wonderful liberation by American troops, some French men, seeking to show their patriotism, forcibly

shaved the heads of women who had “befriended” German soldiers and paraded them along the main streets.

Today, in America, Abby’s decision to have her head shaved, in addition to making me so proud of her, makes me grateful that she is growing up in another time, in a country where, despite bitter social divisions, a young girl is free to work for a cause in which she believes.

• • •

SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITIES

Lillian Scheinblum

After leaving my first home with my parents, I gradually moved on, at age 20, to assume the role of wife and mother. My husband was a physician in a neighborhood practice for twenty years.

After my husband died, I became the go-to person in his office. It was a natural role, since I had long worked there, managing his practice. I then passed my exam at Kings County Hospital and became a radiology technologist. When my mother and father were in their 70s and were functioning well in their lives, they reached out to be included in my life, bringing me home-made soup or tending the Peace Roses that my father planted in my small garden.

One evening my mother called and said, “Norman is having chest pains.” I went to their house and decided to take my father to the local emergency room. We stayed there until about 6 a.m., at which time the resident physician was preparing to send him home without a definite diagnosis. He was considering “gall bladder versus cardiac infarction.”

At that point I suggested going back to my home office for my father’s old EKG result so that it could be compared with his present tracing. The doctor waited for my return and after evaluating the prior EKG said my father was having a heart attack. He was admitted to the hospital that morning. After he recuperated his cardiologist told him he could no longer ride his bicycle. My father died at 88 years of age, but, happily, not as a result of a heart ailment.

• • •

THE ASPCA

Ruth Ward

“What do you think you’re doing, Sis? I’m gonna report you to the ASPCA!”

It wasn’t my brother’s words that frightened me. No, it was his white-hot outrage that froze my pitching arm, at the end of which I clutched a writhing, mewling kitten.

Seeing from the sidewalk that his threat had stunned me, Victor strode up to the porch, where the feline and I were both trembling. “Did I just see you hurl a cat out of that box? Were you gonna fling this one, too?”

I shook my head.

“Do you know how fragile these kittens are? Their bones aren’t even fully set, and you’re treating them like Tonka trucks!”

I could feel what Victor meant, as he had always let me use his Tonkas to transport my Betsy Wetsy doll. “I am not! I’m measuring the kittens for the door of their house.”

“Oh yeah?” His voice was tense. “Then where’s your measuring tape and pencil?”

I dropped the creature into the cardboard Sony reel-to-reel tape recorder box, where its three tiny siblings were crawling all over each other. “I don’t need those things,” I answered. “I just hold up a kitten to the wall of the box to get an idea of how big a door to cut.”

Victor cast a sideways glance at the steak knife I had borrowed from the kitchen drawer. “You just hold one up? And when you’re done with your so-called measurement, you just toss the cat away?” His face was turning purple.

I was not used to such high-minded fury. “No, when I’m done, I just put it back in the box.” Yes, it was a lie, but I had to say something in my own defense.

“You *put* it back? No, I just saw you toss it like a dishrag. How many times did you have to ‘measure’ like that?” Victor was seething. He advanced toward the 18 x 18 inch carton that had served as home these past two days to the four babies my mother had accepted as a favor from my baby sitter.

“I didn’t count; I just wanted to get the size right. I’m going to cut the door now, if you’ll give me some room.” I hoped I was holding my own.

“Not so fast. I just saw you abuse a defenseless animal. That is a serious offense. If I ever see you do that again, I’ll report you to the ASPCA!” His voice was hoarse. Only as he caught his breath did I realize that I didn’t understand his threat. I blurted, “What is the ASPCA?”

“Are you kidding? The ASPCA,” he enunciated, as if only the most ignorant inhabitants of Queens would need an explanation, “is the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.”

“An... And what do they do?” I felt my tender age gave me the right to more information.

Over the clamor of soprano mews, he intoned, “They have agents who go around New York City in marked patrol cars or under cover, investigating charges of animal mistreatment. They seize people hurting pets and arrest them for the crime of animal cruelty.”

I shivered as an imaginary policeman clapped handcuffs on my bony wrists and hauled me to a cell at our local animal shelter. My brother’s basso explanation joined a feline chorus as I saw myself fall into a moldy oubliette, like the one in our second-grade edition of *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

“Oh no, don’t call the ASPCA! I promise I’ll never hurt another kitty as long as I live!” Having tasted hell, I actually meant what I was screaming.

My brother’s face relaxed. “Well, you better keep your word because next time, you know what I’ll do!”

Rub it in, I thought, licking my wounds, but there won’t be a next time. No, I will worship at the shrine of the ancient Egyptian Mafdet, lion-headed goddess of justice and capital punishment. I had just seen a giant stone sculpture of her during a field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I reassured myself that Mafdet, being a feline, would help me treat all cats nicely from that day forth. To prove my resolve, I gave my brother a toothy smile as I stroked each kitten in turn.

• • •

TIGER, DUKE, LANA, AND ME

Marc Kouffman

I never had a dog. My wife Lana loves them. Her dog won the Moscow Show Prize for the best personality. But back in Stuyvesant Town, a long way from Moscow, we opted for parrots. Enter Tiger, a green Eclectus, and Duke, a white Cockatoo. These beloved enemies have three pairs of separate cages.

When Lana came home after a month in California, Tiger turned his back on her and now bonds exclusively with me. Lana feeds and bathes him but gets only growls in return. She has to remind me to pay attention, put him on my shoulder, and say good night. Yet, I get all the good stuff. He even shares his masticated food with me. Ask Tiger whom he loves and the answer is “Marc.” Duke, on the other hand, cuddles in bed with Lana. If I approach, his feathers flare and he circles frantically, poised to attack.

In September, from our deck in Connecticut, Tiger flew off my shoulder into the green woods below. We spent several days searching. I attached a speaker to my cell phone and trumpeted Eclectus calls throughout the woods—but to no avail. Back in New York City, Lana and I and even his archenemy Duke were devastated. We returned to Connecticut a few days later, but still, no Tiger. We were sure that, at one pound soaking wet, he had either frozen to death or been eaten alive.

At the end of the week, we received a call from our friend Myrna. Tiger was clinging to the wire fence on her deck. Given his clipped wings, how he travelled so high above the nearby lake is a mystery. He wasn’t there the day before. Fourteen years ago, frightened by an earth tremor, Tiger and Duke had both flown the coop. Days later, Myrna found Tiger hidden in an evergreen. This time Myrna raced to our house and brought Tiger’s cage back to hers. Once secured, he drank and drank but was unharmed physically. During his absence, I felt I had lost a family member through my negligence.

Tiger and Duke, with proper care, can outlive us by 20 or 30 years. We’re putting them in our will so they’ll behave better now and appreciate us after we’re gone.

• • •

THE HEDGE FUND MANAGER'S LAMENT

Phil Gisser

I'm a hedge fund manager. One of the best. I make about a billion dollars a year. Pay my taxes too—\$200 million every spring. That leaves me with only \$800 million dollars.

The last presidential campaign really scared me. Both candidates said they would close the “carried interest” loophole. Why they call it a loophole I don't know. (Frankly I don't know why they call it “carried interest” either, but my accountant tells me that's what cuts my tax rate in half.) I had pretty much reconciled myself to paying \$400 million this year. The thought of that really hurt.

As it turned out, the new tax bill didn't change a thing. So now I have an extra \$200 million in my pocket that I wasn't counting on. I certainly don't need it to live on, so I guess I'll invest it. But in what? I know! I'll put that \$200 million into U.S. government bonds. Here I go. I'll just write this \$200 million-dollar check to the U.S. Treasury, and in the corner, I'll write “loan.” There! Done!

That sure was a lot easier than writing a \$200 million-dollar check to the U.S. Treasury and writing “taxes” in the corner. And I can sleep well knowing the government has enough cash to keep operating. My accountant tells me that now I'll get all of the \$200 million dollars back in interest over the next thirty years, and then they'll give it back to me again as a single payment when the bond matures. What a generous government. What in the world will I do with that money? Guess I can retire on a bigger yacht.

Having some second thoughts, though. As a professional investor, do I really want to invest my money in a government that handles its finances so foolishly? My clients certainly wouldn't stay with me if I didn't handle their money better.

Guess I'll go ahead with U.S. bonds this year. I already wrote the check. But next year, I'll be faced with the same problem all over again. And the year after that. I'd better look for some other investment. Maybe Chinese bonds?

• • •

THE WORLD BECKONS

Sandy Frank

When I was a little girl one of my grand uncles, after he retired, travelled the world by steamer. He sent my mother, his favorite niece, wonderful postcards and letters from exotic and faraway places. My mom shared those cards with me and we would study a map and read about these places in the encyclopedia. Although Mom also had a thirst for travel, she was busy caring for her parents, uncles and children, and she never had much time to spare for excursions. However, my quest for travel began early.

Unfortunately, first school, then work and life got in the way of my roaming the world. But I started small with weekend trips and then ventured out, journeying extensively throughout North America. I discovered so much beauty in so many natural wonders while hiking in national and state parks, and I delighted in exploring caverns, Mayan ruins, and even totem poles in rain forests. I visited art and history museums and explored different neighborhoods, enjoying the local cultures and foods. I went white water rafting, took helicopter and small plane rides, rode on Cog railroads, and visited volcanoes. These experiences were thrilling.

Next, I discovered Europe and was fascinated by each country's history and culture, their wonderful museums and cuisine. I was amazed to walk on sites where ancient cities had been built. I was awed by their magnificent architecture and their grand cathedrals. It was stupendous to explore their fjords, canals, locks, valleys, and mountains.

I travelled to Central and South America, followed by a highlight trip to Antarctica. Everyone should get to see the penguin populations in the Falkland Islands, fly over the Andes Mountains at sunset, and hike in Patagonia. Now cruising has become a favorite form of travel for us. We've cruised in wonderful locations and have explored some exotic and not so exotic locales.

I read a quote by Mario Cuomo years ago which always stuck with me: *"In this life, you should read everything you can read. Taste everything you can taste. Meet everyone you can meet. Travel everywhere you can travel. Learn everything you can learn. Experience everything you can experience."* My grand uncle, my mom, and Mario knew what they were talking about. Get out and explore!

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ROBOTO

Eileen D. Kelly

He arfs and greets me every time I come in the door, this little guy, and follows me around on his soft, gently padded paws. He sweetly arfs again when he wants me to pay attention to something such as plants that need watering or the faucet I left running.

His name is Roboto and he's a machine dog, companion, caretaker and almost anything else you'd need in your life. Except, well, you know, right, he doesn't do that. He probably could if he were programmed for it, but it would seem indecent if he did.

Besides, Roboto does enough. He's in charge of the other robotic things around, such the coffee maker, the rice cooker and Roomba, the vacuum cleaner. Roomba doesn't usually need any help or direction unless she gets stuck under something, such as the couch; Roboto then comes to the rescue and pushes her out.

He's very kind and understanding and doesn't yell when I forget to lock the front door or put the milk away in the fridge. He just arfs with the particular arf he has for each of my forgotten tasks. We worked all that out in the beginning.

Roboto needs a battery boost every so often and goes to his electric dock, plugs himself in, relaxes and closes his cute plastic eyes for about five minutes. He may need some reprogramming, though. Lately, every time he gets his battery boost he gets a little too frisky and tries to grab my leg and hump it like a real dog, though his angular legs don't quite make it. I might call the Apple company that created him and see if they can re-fix him. Or maybe I won't; I think I like Roboto like this.

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ME AND “ELI THE FANATIC”

Frieda Lipp

It's a short story by Philip Roth, and my tale begins this past summer with the confluence of two events: the recent death of Roth and my search for a short story. I'm one of three coordinators for Contemporary Short Stories at Quest. Before the start of each semester, each coordinator comes up with two stories. We then add these to class contributions and use selections from an assigned book to fill in the gaps. Thus armed, we prepare the upcoming schedule.

I no longer remember how or when I recalled that many years before I had read “Eli” and, amazingly, with my dubious memory, even remembered seeing a Broadway one-act adaptation with the actor Joseph Wiseman. We're talking back in the '60s and '70s—impressive, particularly considering my diminishing memory cells. Actually, the story's particulars were in a black hole and yet its memory stuck over all these years. Why? How could I not check this out for the upcoming class?

My quest began with Book Culture, an independent store on Columbus Avenue and 82nd Street that I often frequent in my limited and futile attempts to support and defend a real store on a real city street against the Amazon onslaught. The story was originally part of *Good-bye, Columbus*, a short story collection published in 1959. It's not on any shelf. I'm told it's out of print, but perhaps with Roth's recent demise it might be reissued. In hopes of that iffy event, I put myself on a list.

Confirmed Luddite that I am, and ever engaged in my private war with the Amazon behemoth, my next step is the public library. Again, it's not on the shelf. I'm told there are some forty-odd copies citywide in the system, sixty-odd folks on the waiting list, and it would probably be weeks before my turn comes. I add myself to that nebulous list.

Still on my West Side hunt, I try Barnes and Noble on Broadway and 83rd Street. Nothing. I now remember that some years before, there was a street vendor who hung out in front of Zabar's and who sold Roth's “personally autographed” books. Roth was a local, so not altogether improbable. Of course, the vendor is now nowhere to be found.

A Hail Mary occurs to me, a used book store I remember from the '70s, yet. It's still there on Broadway between 80th and 81st Streets,

one of those marvelous old, dark, crowded book shops with overstuffed shelves that seem to rise several stories high. I check it out. Nada.

I give up. My West Side search is now over. On another day I'll trek downtown to the Strand, home to the world's used books. For now, it's home to 86th Street and Columbus Avenue. But first, I head up Broadway to my favorite street vendor for fruit. He's on 86th, just east of Broadway. Before turning between 85th and 86th, I pass a book vendor and stop just to browse. His stand is always filled with those huge art books and fat musty hard covers that I would never buy (so I always tell myself), not least because my modest one-bedroom apartment is already filled on every flat surface available with every conceivable object ever created in a book store or flea market I'm just browsing – yeah right! There, practically falling into my lap, is a big fat book of short stories about three inches thick that I need like another hole in my head. Nevertheless, I pick it up. It is a 20th Century Collection selected by Clifton Fadiman and published in 1986. The inner flap tells me there are 62 stories inside. Near the bottom of the third and last page of the Table of Contents, almost at the end, is "Eli the Fanatic." Eight dollars later...

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ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF LIVING WITH NOAH

Helen Saffran

Noah is a big, orange tabby cat with deep, penetrating eyes who came to live with me and my cats Maggie, 11, and Jake, 10, a year ago. I immediately swept Noah up after his human mom, my friend Dorothy, suddenly died.

Noah had lived with Dorothy after the second time she found him, still a kitten, sitting in front of her apartment door. She lived in a huge apartment house and said she had never seen a stray cat in her building before or after Noah entered her life. He had obviously chosen her over the hundreds of other tenants in the building.

Dorothy was disabled by childhood arthritis and used a wheelchair. She was not expected to live past 15 but was now 70. Her eyesight was very poor, her speech difficult to understand; she wore hearing aids, and her bones were delicate. Whenever I went to visit her, Noah would be sitting on top of his favorite chair or curled up in a cardboard box. He would walk on the table so he could get close to Dorothy and she could pet him. She was too fragile to have this big cat on her lap.

Right from my first meeting with Noah we had a bond, and I knew that if Dorothy died, I would take him to live with me. Although it was never talked about, I feel that both Noah and Dorothy knew this, too.

Despite a rough start, Maggie, Jake and Noah have established themselves as a trio with many nuances in their relationships. When Noah came to stay with me, he had probably never lived with other cats and he had been taken from the only home he knew. He was mourning Dorothy and kept to himself for months, hardly sleeping.

His defense was to hiss and growl whenever Maggie or Jake got close to him. After about a month of not responding to the hisses, Maggie suddenly decided, as the saying goes, that she was mad as hell and wouldn't take it anymore. She exploded into wild caterwauling and hisses of her own that I had never heard from her before. For months after that, whenever Maggie and Noah crossed paths, there would be a loud altercation with fierce batting battles. Curiously, these frightening interactions never resulted in either cat getting even one scratch.

In public, Maggie doesn't let Noah get close to her, but when she goes to the litter box, Noah follows her into the bathroom and they have

some kind of secret interaction, with imploring sounds filled by long silences. Whenever I go in to see what's happening, they both look at me with startled expressions and I feel I've interrupted a lover's tryst.

Noah and Jake are buddies and sleep side by side at the foot of my bed when I tuck in for the night. When he was living with Dorothy, Noah didn't have toys, and he's thrilled to have tons of them now. He sometimes sleeps on the floor with his head on a soft toy. I took a photo of him lying on his back with his paws in the air, surrounded by about a dozen toys; I call it "Noah ecstatic in toy heaven!"

Every morning as I'm having breakfast, Noah comes up onto the kitchen table to join me, and with his sweet kitteny meow—hardly what you would expect for a cat his size—he lets me know it's time to brush him. This has led me to brush Maggie and Jake every day too, which we all feel good about.

Happy First Anniversary, dear Noah.

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TWO HAIKU

Mary Buchwald

WINTRY

Snow: white and sparkling
Clings to tree arms and railings
Wind gusts blur the scene

JANE

Cherry tree on hill
Planted in her memory:
Prospect Park lover

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VIOLET WANTS A TATTOO

Pete Weis

Our son, Eric, lives and works in Providence. When his daughter Violet was in pre-school, it was conveniently near his office. So, they would commute together on a bicycle with a “trailer” from which she was supposed to assist by pedaling from her seat. The following event took place on one of their trips home. It is presented as best as Eric could remember when writing it down that evening after dinner. Violet had recently turned five years old and was beginning to read.

Location: A side street in downtown Providence, Rhode Island

Time: 5 p.m., early July

Dramatis Personae: Eric David Weis, Violet Jordan Weis

Violet: Daddy, does that say “tattoo?”

Eric: Yes, dear.

Violet: Why does it say tattoo?

Eric: Because that’s a tattoo store. You can get tattoos there.

Violet: I can get tattoos?

Eric: NO NO, you can’t get tattoos. Those aren’t the kind that wash off in the bath. Those tattoos last forever.

Violet: But I want one.

Eric: Not until you’re 23.

Violet: What does it look like in there?

Eric: Well, there are special chairs to sit in, and lots of pictures on the walls of tattoos you can get.

Violet: What kind of tattoos can I get?

Eric: You can’t. Those pictures are of tattoos other people have gotten.

Violet: Can we go in there? I want to see what pictures people can get tattoos of.

Eric: Er, yes, I guess we can go in—some other day; right now, we’re late getting home and I don’t want to turn around.

Violet: What pictures can people get tattoos of?

Eric: Anything they want, I guess.

Violet: Even a rainbow? Or a princess in a fancy gown and a necklace?

Eric: Sure, I guess.

Violet: On my forehead?

Eric: NO NO!!! Not on your forehead—that's a bad idea.

Violet: Why is that a bad idea?

Eric: Because no one will ever give you a job if you have a tattoo on your forehead.

Violet: Why will no one ever give me a job if I have a tattoo on my forehead?

Eric: Because it shows you have terrible judgment, that you don't know how to make good decisions.

Violet: But why?

Eric: LOOK... OVER THERE! A SQUIRREL IN THE PLAYGROUND!

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WHO'S WATCHING?/WHO'S LISTENING?

Eneida Cruz

Have we become so desensitized that we seem to have forgotten to observe our environment? Is the high-technology of cell phones, iPads, iPods, and all these fast-paced devices for communication keeping us so busy? These inventions are a great source of keeping in touch, sharing mass information and learning, but when do we ask ourselves are these gadgets taking too much of our time?

Pitiful, if we cannot find our way back to reality. These are good inventions, but constantly accosting our lives. No exception where they attack: traveling, restaurants, leisure time, and at home. These devices have so occupied our time; we do not observe our surroundings. We're captivated, and in some way, have become prisoners of this new-era technology. Are we so oblivious?

It's unfortunate for Americans who have become immune to the dangers of not watching and not listening because of these devices. Are we living in an age of mindless ignorance?

Let us be attentive at all times, especially when we are out and about, but never lose our peace of mind.

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POLITICAL CORRECTNESS AND SELF-CENSORSHIP

Steve Koenig

Trigger Alert: This is a musing about language, sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll and political correctness.

I hate the word “bitch” when used as an insult or descriptor of any man, woman or child. I detest its use in everyday conversation, and that on TV and in film it has become almost mandatory to use the term “bitch” to, playfully or not, insult someone, man or woman. And don’t get me started on the ubiquitous jokes about male prison rape.

In the seventies, my gay male friends and I debated whether calling each other “bitch” was acceptable, even when not in “mixed company.” Most of them, like me, had grown up with the women’s rights and lesbian separatist movements providing a lot of our (let’s use the old term) consciousness-raising.

That being said, I don’t hold any truck with being “politically correct.” Instead, I do believe deeply one must be what I call “politically aware,” which the young’uns now call being “woke,” as in “awakened.” Being politically aware means, to me, understanding the present and historical contexts for ideas, points of view, and language, and then acting within that context. Think before you speak.

It was an odd situation. I had submitted my Next Week at Quest (NWAQ) blurb for Classic Rock Albums, and word got back to me that someone bristled at the language, not only in the blurb itself, which I admit was sexually frisky (hey, after all, the album is titled *Sticky Fingers*), but also was taken aback by listing the title of a song from the album, “Bitch,” which itself shocked me in 1970 by becoming a major A.M. radio broadcast hit the first time that word crashed the public airwaves.

Is there any woman who has never been attacked by the word “bitch”? I totally get how one can be made uncomfortable by seeing the word “bitch,” whatever the context, but I believe context is everything.

There was a claim that the Rolling Stones are a misogynistic group. Sure, the group has some lyrics that are misogynistic, and others that are quite the opposite. The lyrics of the song “Bitch” never once refers to or calls a woman a bitch; it uses the common vernacular that a rough situation is “a bitch.” Love itself, that trickiest of all states, is subjected to the term.

I'm upset that I allowed myself to self-censor the blurb because it was easier than having a last-minute discussion, and more important, to avoid having our put-upon NWAQ editors make yet another change.

Taken to an admittedly absurd conclusion, to avoid all or even some misogyny and potentially disturbing topics, we'd have to remove all rock 'n' roll, all pop songs which call a woman a "baby" or a "girl" (and men "boys"), and forget about all opera, most of Shakespeare, and a whole lot of the literature we read, not to mention history.

A suggestion to change the blurb was not a request to remove material from our curriculum, nor was it a demand. Should I print it with a disclaimer? A "trigger" warning? Should I say, "Hell, it's just one word; make life easy and just delete it," which was ultimately what I did. After I made the change and sent it in, I became angry with myself for the self-censoring.

It brought back memories of happy days when I was an English teacher, and my Department Chair told me to remove one of the 150 choices I gave students for their independent book reports, Rita Mae Brown's classic *Rubyfruit Jungle*.

She handed me as proof-positive of her position a copy of the book with all the "dirty words" underlined. "What if a parent objected?" she asked. "That's simple," I countered. "They can change to another title," as they could do anyway.

I'm very sensitive to these things. I had assigned a book report on a horror novel; we were doing genre fiction and analyzing elements and structure. A student disappeared for two weeks. I later found out that her grandmother had severely beaten her for reading "the devil's work." Afterwards, I always instructed, "You know your family better than I do. Take that into consideration when you make your choices." The Chair said if I had to teach a book about "those people," I should do *Tea and Sympathy*. I pointed out that *Tea* was a book in which an underage teen found redemption by having sex with an older, married woman. Ultimately, after a discussion with the Superintendent, I was allowed to keep *Rubyfruit* as an option, and as a lagniappe from my supervisor, I was instructed to include more LGBTQ material in our curriculum.

We're all on a quest to find the best ways to live with each other despite differing views. Luckily and happily, at Quest we do.

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