

Q REVIEW



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THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

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A large, stylized letter 'Q' in a serif font, with a thin, light gray outline of the same letter behind it. The word 'REVIEW' is in a smaller, all-caps serif font to the right of the 'Q'.

Q REVIEW

THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

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OUR JOURNEY INTO QUEST

Travel a distance to the unfamiliar
Follow the unexplored boldly
Go tentatively into the unknown
Remodel old habits, form new ones
Make a difference by altering the known
Prolong by measuring many sides
Substitute one for another
Shift and vary to refresh
Exchange for growth
Settle into a peaceful place
Reach into the hearts of others
Remember loyalty builds trust.

DEDICATION

This 19th issue of *Q Review* is dedicated to those members of *Quest* who contribute to our mission and those devoted members lost along the way.

IN MEMORY OF:

Juan Baptista
Dora Fenster
Leonard Glass
Nan Robinson
Isidore Schwartzman
Ralph Shapiro

We also wish to remember our colleague, Henrietta Levner, and express our gratitude for her generous bequeathal to *Q Review*.

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70 YEARS — NO CHANGE

Robert Reiss

My mom told me that when I was five or six, I cowered when I went to the barber. Alas, 70 years later this fear has resurfaced after many decades of relative peace with my haircut providers. You see, what happened was that my old friendly barber retired and closed his shop. I am now forced to patronize unisex *salons*. They're called unisex, but we all know they're designed for women, and they cut the occasional male who wanders in. Therein lies the problem.

So what am I afraid of when I go into one of these fancy, schmancy coiffure establishments? Three things, basically.

First, what if I have to wait for my *stylist* to finish her last client? I'll have to choose one of the magazines the salon has so graciously made available for this situation. Here were some of my choices with the lead story in each:

Marie Claire – “America's Top Hair Secrets”

Seventeen – “Pretty Skin Secrets”

Shape – “Mind-Blowing Sex” (Naturally, I picked this one up — it was disappointing.)

OK – “I'm Glad I Didn't Have His Baby”

NYLON – “The Denim Issue!”

Redbook – “The Most Iconic Denim Looks of all Time” (Denim seems to be in this fall.)

American Salon – “Turn Up the Volume” or “Girls Will Be Boys” (Neither of these hair styles really grabbed me.)

Modern Salon – “Peacock-inspired Color Formula for Men” (Finally something I could relate to!)

Launchpad – “Hair News: Affinage Infiniti Intelligent Colour System” (Finally something *intelligent*.)

Clearly this magazine selection was not targeted to the 75-year-old male demographic.

After entertaining myself with the cover story titles, I was at a loss to fill the time. When I asked the receptionist for some “manly” magazines like *Golf Digest*, *Yachting* or *Motor Trend*, she predictably answered, “We don't get those, but I'll talk to the manager.” Yeah, right.

Having passed the “waiting” hurdle, I now submit to the inquisition phase. Brittany, my stylist, is friendly enough (which I will soon dread) but needs a lot of information. Tony, my erstwhile barber, seemed satisfied when I said “fairly short.” Brittany, on the other hand, wants to know if I want a scissor cut, if I want it straight in the back, if I want my sideburns raised, if I want my eyebrows trimmed, and that’s before a single strand is cut. How the hell should I know the answers to all these questions? I just want a regular haircut, like Tony, bless him, gave me.

The next problem arises, because having broken the ice interrogating me, Brittany now feels she has license to (OMG) *talk* to me. I close my eyes, feigning a nap, but she understandably interprets this as my wanting to keep hair snips from escaping into my eyes. No offense to the hair stylist sorority, but their training was not in the art of conversation. Sample:

Brittany: Bob, (they always get chummy right away) do you ever color your hair?

Bob: No.

Brittany: You’d look 10 years younger!

Bob: Mm hmm.

Brittany: This weather! Can you believe it?

Bob: No.

Brittany: (not discouraged at all) What do you do Bob?

Bob: Retired.

Brittany: That’s soooo nice! I would love to be retired! (She’s about 25.)

A few more minutes of this and I’m ready to jump out of the chair and my skin as well. Mercifully, she finishes the haircut and, save for the credit card transaction, I’m a free and fearless man... for another month, anyway.

BLACK CAT

Linda Rothstein

My lease says I may keep only one cat, but I like to have many. Mine are all black because all black cats look the same.

I tell them we must keep their number a secret. I insist only one may sit in the front window at one time. "After all," I say, "cats are many, but apartments are scarce." If they don't heed my wishes, I scare them by adding, "so many cats in this world, recipes to prepare them so few."

But, on Halloween Eve, I let them line up on the window sill, nose to tail, like paper-doll cutouts. I tell the landlord, "That's not cats you're seeing. Those are clay pigeons. I feel more like shooting if I dress them in cat disguise."

Purring, they parade across the casement to the delight of the trick-or-treaters on the sidewalk below.

I tap a tin pan on the radiator. The steam hisses. Electrified black fur shoots sparks. Cat eyes glow golden like candles inside a carved pumpkin.

The goblins and witches and gremlins and the fairy-tale princess, all disguised as neighborhood children, want front-row seats, but I live way up on the hundredth floor. And the poor dears are shivering in their scanty costumes, so I beam down a stream of hot steam. They float up on white mist, shrieking and quibbling over who can get black cats to purr.

The cats dance for the children, who purr like motors. The cat fur is static. Its charge holds the children in the air. They are suspended, pointy-toe shoes dangling like crescent moons in the night sky. They peer in through my window in the red brick facade.

Soon they tire and become sandy-eyed children, with red-rimmed, past-bedtime eyes. I say, "The peep show is over. Back to your mother. She'll be hissing at home with a teapot that wants to be poured."

So I wish them a playground and gently nudge each child to earth on a slide.

The cats curl in the corner. I take off their black costumes. We've fooled the landlord. One is really a striped yellow Tabby, and another is a Manx cat who's missing her tail.

EULOGY FOR A SISTER

Marian Friedmann

If you could see the bedroom that Diane and I shared for more than twenty years, you would see mirror images—two beds, two dressers, two nightstands, two table lamps, two desks for homework, each with its own desk lamp. Also bedspreads, bed clothes and blankets—all matching.

Grandma Betty and Grandpa Sol, still known then as Mom and Dad, made sure we had everything we needed without always having to share. Mostly. Diane and I did share the radio that she hogged, listening to each and every Brooklyn Dodgers game. She even did “game diagramming” to record every moment of the action, something I never understood, and escapes me still. Diane loved baseball.

We shared the red Schwinn English racer with those skinny, foreign-looking tires. Our father brought it home piece by piece to Kings Highway on the BMT subway in the heat of the summer of 1945. It was a rare gem in those postwar days when metal was still scarce. My father designed and built a bike rack for it and put it right in our bedroom; who could trust such a precious item in the apartment house basement?

And we also shared the air.

I complained to my mother one day that I wanted to switch beds with Diane because she got all the fresh air first. Her bed was nearer to the windows, two matching windows, of course. “It’s so unfair that I have to breathe used air,” I said.

The complaints of a snarky five-year-old fell on deaf ears, and it was not until Diane married that the window bed became available. I realized then that I didn’t really care about the bed or the air; I missed sharing the room with my sister.

When the family gathered at my house this year for Thanksgiving, it was the first time in my life that I did not share that day with my big sister. I missed her very much.

THE RUSSIAN WOMEN

Stella Gold

In the spring of 1944 we had been living in the village of Beauvoir for almost two years. It was an isolated hamlet bordering on the forest of Perseigne, seven kilometers from the closest town. People did not know we were Jewish. We had explained that the lack of food and the threat of bombing made life difficult in Paris, and it seemed to be a good enough reason to the villagers. We had developed a friendly relationship with Master and Mistress Labelle, who were tending a large farm half a mile from the village. I was going to school with Thérèse, their daughter. Jean, my brother, had become friends with Raymond, their teenage son.

One sleepy Sunday afternoon Raymond came to our house seeking my mother. Two foreign women, exhausted and fearful, had arrived at the farm. They didn't speak any French, and Mistress Labelle thought that since my mother was also a foreigner, she might be able to understand them. Therefore, she sent Raymond to summon *maman*.

This was intriguing, and in no time the three of us, my mother, my brother and I were on our way to the Labelles. Two poorly-dressed, very anxious women were standing inside the farmhouse. They had been given some food, and they were trying to communicate with the farmers.

Maman realized that they were Russians. She had been born in a small town on the Polish-Russian border and was familiar with both languages. The two women were relieved and grateful to be understood. They were kissing *maman's* hands and speaking to her with great emotion. They had been taken by the Germans as slave laborers and shipped to France. There was no essential industry in the area, and the reason for bringing them there remains a mystery. They were held in Mamers, a town seven kilometers from the farm, living in the girls' high school, which had been "requisitioned" by the Germans. They had been able to escape and had just walked out of town through small streets, through fields, entered the forest of Perseigne, and arrived at the Labelles. Their stories were heartbreaking.

The taller woman, tears running down her ravaged face, told *maman* how the Germans had killed her daughter right in front of her. She showed *maman* two round holes in the ragged jacket she wore, which had resulted from bullets fired by German soldiers. The other woman spoke less, mostly nodding in support. They were begging for help. *Maman* was very upset and moved by their ordeal. Mistress Labelle was a kind woman. She listened and agreed with *maman's* urging that she let the women stay on the farm. They were strong, used to hard work, and could be helpful at this time of year before the harvest. It was made clear to everyone there that the situation must remain very well guarded. It would be extremely dangerous if the German authorities got wind of it.

It worked out all right. *Maman* went to the farm every few days to make sure that things were going smoothly. Less than two weeks later, the Americans landed in Normandy. In five days' time they were in the village. We were liberated! It is impossible to describe our joy and our gratitude. The Americans were able to arrange for the repatriation of the two Russian women, who were very happy to be returning home, even though I believe they dreaded what they would find there. Our goodbyes were emotional. We never heard from the women again.

The following fall I became a boarding student at the *Collège Moderne de Jeunes Filles*, the girls' high school in Mamers, which had been returned to the municipality. The building had been emptied of all usable material (pots and pans, etc.), and the students had to take their meals in the *Salle des Fêtes* at the Town Hall. The school was poor, and we had to contribute to its maintenance. My first job was to light the stoves in two of the classrooms. It meant going into the basement and cutting logs down into kindling to start the fires. In that dark space I discovered two small cells built by the Germans: a sinister reminder of the Russian women's ordeal.

PLEASE DON'T CALL ME

Hal Cantor

All my life I have had an aversion to unexpected phone calls. I don't mean calls from friends or relatives or neighbors but from people I don't know or care to know. What with modern technology, you can generally know before you pick up the phone who is at the other end of the line or satellite dish. But when I am digitally informed that it is *Washington* or *Unknown Caller* on the line, I imagine it is the Internal Revenue Service or the lady whose dress I soiled last night when I spilled my drink at the Metropolitan Opera Bar.

I trace this irrational fear to a terrifying moment in my childhood. One evening, my father, usually punctual, was late coming home from work. The phone rang and a male voice at the other end informed my mother that a Mr. Murray Cantor had been injured in an auto accident and was in critical condition at the Kings Highway Hospital. My distraught mother raced out of the house, hailed a taxi and took off, leaving me—ten years old at the time—frightened and alone. My mother returned an hour later just as my father arrived safe and sound, having been detained at his firm. It had been a well-planned hoax designed to dismay and wound our family. The police could never identify the caller, but it had to be someone with an inside knowledge of my father's time schedule, possibly an employee who felt he had been unfairly dismissed or a bitter rival of my father's company. In any event, the incident left an indelible scar in my memory.

Nowadays when I answer a call with some trepidation, I insist that an unknown caller identify himself by name several times. I try to be cordial when, paraphrasing T.S. Eliot, I prepare a voice to match the voice that I hear. But we all know how annoying unsolicited calls can be—the requests for charitable donations, political messages, the soft-sell, cheery salesman who calls you by your given name. I flatter myself that I do not simply hang up on these intruders. Instead, I tell them to put it all in a letter, thus saving the Post Office Department from imminent bankruptcy.

I have a neighbor who has devised an even better way of getting rid of these phone pests. Being a musician, he has recorded a lengthy greeting on his answering machine which every caller must endure when my neighbor is not at home. To the tune of "The Lady Is a Tramp," he sings in a raspy baritone these words:

I'm very busy, believe it or not,
I'd like to talk but time I ain't got,
I'll call you back, I promise, my friend.
Just leave a message for me.
I'll hear the free, fresh sound of your voice,
I'll give you a choice, say when, say where,
Say what you want and when you'll be home.
Give me the time, the place and I'll phone.
Speak very clearly and give me your text.
I'll call you back. I promise you're next.
Now wait for the beep!

Only close, patient friends hear him out; some sing along with him and leave a message when they finally hear the beep. If they are selling something or asking him to subscribe to the *Wall Street Journal*, they lose patience after a while, hang up and move on to the next prospect.

In my view, my neighbor has found an ingenious way of warding off these phonic drones with song. I've decided to adapt his method. Henceforth, if an officer asks me to make a contribution to the Police Athletic League, he will first have to listen to my version of the Prologue to *Evangeline* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. I haven't made up my mind about the musical accompaniment yet. Probably some show tune by Rogers and Hammerstein or Cole Porter, I think.

HUNGER

Carol Cronig Abrahams

The body perceives
Cells' agitation

The ache in the belly,
The gnaw, the unease

Restlessness
Brain absorbs need

Yet we know not always
What we hunger for

MARIA

Sylvia Berg

When I was teaching, one of my students was a little girl of six. She was from Czechoslovakia, and she and her mom lived in the Ronald McDonald House. The Ronald McDonald House provides living quarters for children with serious illnesses and their parents. Maria had stomach cancer. The school year ended and I lost track of her.

Recently I visited the Ronald McDonald House. My temple, Central Synagogue, does a *mitzvah* (good deed) by providing dinner for the residents there. And so, on a Tuesday evening, we ordered Chinese food (no kidding) for dinner for the residents.

I was in the elevator at 7:00 pm when a lady said to me, "Aren't you Mrs. Berg?"

She told me she was Maria's mother, and she had stayed in the United States and now worked for the Ronald McDonald House. I was afraid to ask about her daughter, but she said, "Maria is going to Hunter College. She wants to be a teacher like you."

Now what are the odds, on a Tuesday at 7:00 pm, in the Ronald McDonald House elevator, I would meet the parent of a sick child who was in my class twenty years ago?

THE OLD WOMAN

Helen Neilson

My age rests heavily
upon a mind no longer young.
My step does not startle sparrows
though the tread is a heavy one.
My "spread" is more than strewed
nor is it a farm.
It belongs to the ages of
those gone before my time.

MY SISTER CORRINE

Hy Gold

Ruth was studying for her master's degree in math and statistics when I joined her family. She had three sibs and parents who welcomed me so warmly that I never doubted I would fit in. Ruth had an older sister, Thel, and a brother, Iz, who was a boy genius at school and later at university. He was Ruth's friend, mentor, protector and the muse who inspired her to make the most of her intelligence and love for learning. But it was her younger sister, Corrine, who interested me the most. Corrine was a Down syndrome person. Over the years, I found out what Ruth had always known: Corinne may have been cognitively impaired (she could only write her name), but had such knowledge and sense of feeling for others, that we called her a "people-person." If she saw someone misbehave, she would say, "Got no manners!"

The first time I went with Ruth and her mother on their regular visit up to Letchworth Village, the facility where Corrine lived, I held back, not wishing to intrude. But Corrine noticed me, and later told her friends, "My Ruthie has a boyfriend."

When Corrine was still living at home and later in her month-long summer visits with her family, she and Ruth were always so close that she was called "Ruth's shadow." Second only to their mother, Ruth helped raise Corrine. She taught her things one never gets in school, so that she got to be a relatively high-level cognitively impaired person.

Corrine taught people a lesson that many are late to understand: a person with one disability can often develop other abilities. With Corrine, it was exquisite embroidery. She made dinner napkins so intricate and beautiful that they could have sold for hundreds of dollars. Ruth instructed the staff at Letchworth never to sell the napkins, as she would buy them all.

Ruth told a story of their younger years. She and her "shadow" saw some friends playing skip rope. They needed someone to hold and twirl one end of the rope, and Ruth asked them to let Corrine do it. But with one look at her, they decided she couldn't handle the job.

Ruth almost came to blows with them before they allowed Corrine to try. She did a very credible job indeed.

Another story is a family favorite, and one I have told often. Many people, meaning no harm, will try to help someone with a physical disability. This happened once when a friend, without asking, helped Corrine into her jacket. Ruth saw this and afterwards said to her sister, "Corrine, you can do that. Why did you let her help you?" Corrine answered, "Make 'em happy."

There are other wonderful memories. At one family gathering in our apartment, we found Corrine and Stephanie, my niece's ten-year-old daughter, sitting on a couch, babbling earnestly, and, who knows, maybe even gossiping. They were so taken with one another that we wondered whether each thought she was taking care of the other.

The other members of the family also did what they could to make things enjoyable for Corrine. Her older sister, Thel, would always drop in to see Corrine at Letchworth while visiting her own son there (he had developed encephalitis and was severely retarded). Her father, though outwardly gruff, loved her dearly. He always made sure there was money from his salary to pay for taxi visits up to Letchworth.

Our housekeeper, Virginia, was also in Corrine's special group of friends. She would take Corrine with her on household shopping, and surely come home with things that Corrine said were needed. Once, when Virginia came in at 9:30 instead of her usual 9 am, Corrine was at the door and said, "You're late, Dearie," to laughter all around. She also took Corrine to the movies, *The Sound of Music* being a favorite. Long after that movie had disappeared from the theaters, she wanted to see it again. So we bought the tape, and she was able to watch it repeatedly.

Ruth's friends loved Corrine as much as any of us. One of her long-time friends, Ruth Beck, would always bring a present for Corrine when she visited, either a picture book, or a pair of pretty gloves, or something else she knew Corrine would appreciate. Ever polite, Corrine would protest, "Oh, you shouldn't have." And Ruth would say, "But I know you'll like it." So it would go back and forth until Ruth had the last word, and all would agree that Corrine deserved the present.

But a precious memory of Corrine was one we never got the chance to have. One December afternoon, Corrine, then 45 years old, was taken from her cottage at Letchworth to the hospital with a high fever and a cough. Pneumonia was quickly diagnosed, and she was started on antibiotics. By that time, it was evening, and the administrator on call decided to wait for the morning to notify the family so they could drive up in daylight. But daylight never came for Corrine. Was it fair that someone who gave so much joy to her family should be deprived of their presence in her final hours? They say that life is unfair. But so is death.



CREATIVE MINDS HOLDING TIGHT

Donna M. Rubens

I just read an excerpt from *Daily Rituals* by Mason Currey where he explores the rituals that creative people clung to as they did their work. People as diverse as Benjamin Franklin, Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath, W.H. Auden, Beethoven, to name a few. The idea behind this book is that ritual has helped many well-known people to soar to the top in their art.

Now, long in some kind of slump re this writing business, I feel I must cull through these many options and decide on one or the other. The question is, what kind of ritual will suit my unique creative self? If I take time out for a daily walk, or a midday nap, or a sure-fire meet up for two or so hours with a friend every day, how much more messy can I let my apartment get before one of these rituals causes the apartment to get to me? Or, instead of indulging myself in a sloppy sort of going one way or another differently each day, perhaps a daily ritual cleaning of the apartment will give me the space for my creative buds to flower?

I see already this new way of thinking has brought out my very best in erudite thought: *buds—flower—oh my*.

Everyone says walking is good for one's health. But Tolstoy walked out in a big snowstorm, and we know what happened to him. And walking, at my advancing age, is difficult for me in any weather. So perhaps I'll decide on the early-riser deal.

Hemingway liked to start his day before daylight hit. Sylvia Plath found her best work time to also be in the wee hours of the morning. Oops, I've wandered to two greats who both happened to commit suicide.

Another kind of creator, the solid citizen type, was Wallace Stevens, an insurance executive. He said the forced ritual of being at work every day provided excellent discipline for him, leaving structured time for his poetic endeavors. But Kafka went to work every day and never said anything good about this need to earn his bread. For him, this bow to reality worried his genius. He wrote despite his work schedule, usually far into the night, leaving very few hours for sleep.

There are more ideas put forth in this ritual book. Beethoven started every day with coffee—counting out exactly 60 beans for his morning

cup. This must have resulted in excellent fresh coffee, but I am much too impatient to spend my time counting coffee beans. Besides, knowing me, I would find that I had to start over at least three times every day, distracted by anything that I happened to remember during the count.

I'm skipping over the creative souls who carefully took their measured quota of opium, amphetamines, Benzedrine or alcohol so they could start each working day in tip-top shape: Auden, Coleridge, Ayn Rand, to name just a few.

Then there was Ben Franklin, who began each morning with what he called an "airing." He sat naked for a period of time in all kinds of weather before he went about his daily work. I don't think this one is for me either.

But I am trying to put an end to my awful slump—perhaps some daily ceremony will help. Hey, I've got it. Simple Solitaire is on my computer. I can (and do) play game after game, before I ever try some real work. This is a perfect time-waster. Imagine that—I do have a ritual. This problem put aside, now I can face what's left—the unwritten work of genius.

WORDS MATTER

Mary Ann Donnelly

Words matter.
Spoken they have power
to harm
to soothe
Written they have power
to damage
to protect
Sometimes talk is cheap
a look or a smile
the squeeze of a hand
is all that is needed.

POCATELLO

John Hood

Last summer my wife was out of town for her cousin's fiftieth wedding anniversary, and I noticed in the Friday *New York Times* that tonight was the final performance of the Mostly Mozart Festival concerts at Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center.

So about five pm I hopped on the subway to the 66th Street station and went to the box office. They had only a few tickets left, and I bought one in the balcony. I went across Broadway to get a bite to eat and was back at the concert hall in plenty of time.

My seat was in the last row of the third tier. No higher seat existed, but although it was hard to see the orchestra, the acoustics were superb. I was on the aisle, and a young woman, maybe in her thirties—although I'm notoriously bad at guessing ages—was seated next to me.

At the intermission we began to chat: the usual about how we liked Mozart, where we were from and that sort of thing. She said she was visiting with her sister for a few days and came from the West Coast. I asked where, since my eldest daughter lives in Los Angeles. She said Las Vegas. I said most people don't think that's the West Coast. She said yes, but many Easterners didn't know exactly where Nevada was.

I said, "I do," because I grew up in Idaho just to the north of Nevada.

She said she knew Idaho well since she was born in Pocatello.

I said, "You were born in Pocatello?" She said, "Yes."

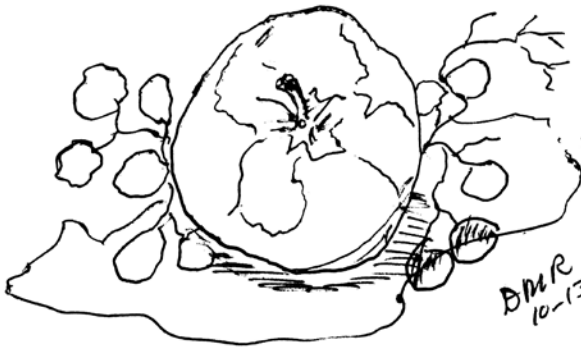
I said, "I was born in Pocatello! What an incredible coincidence."

Here in New York City two people meet who were born years ago in a small town over two thousand miles away. I asked her what her birthday was in case we could compound the coincidence, but she was born on a different day and month.

We both marveled on this happening and went our separate ways.

I later thought of the old Washington, DC saying, “They never go back to Pocatello,” which refers to politicians who are elected or appointed to office and come from small towns all over America. Very often they never go back home. “They never go back to Pocatello.”

I came to New York City sixty years ago and never went back to Pocatello.



A CELEBRITY ENCOUNTER

Rita Post

I was a college student at the University of Wisconsin in 1946. Students were excited because the Theater Guild production of *Othello* starring Paul Robeson, Uta Hagen and José Ferrer was coming to town. The production had been acclaimed in New York and elsewhere; Uta Hagen was a hometown girl because her father Oskar Hagen was an Art History professor at the university. I was a member of the Wisconsin Liberals Association and was arranging a reception for the cast. I lived in a small boarding house off campus because out-of-state students were not eligible to live in the dormitories. I was alone in the house when the telephone rang. (Nobody had their own phone in those days.) I ran down the steps to answer it, and a very deep baritone voice asked for me! It was Paul Robeson himself—I was in a state of shock! I do not remember what was said. I do not remember the reception. But I will never forget the incredible sound of his voice calling my name.

DRUNKEN SEA

Eileen D. Kelly

The drunken sea rushed in
Clumsy, pushing, jabbing, stumbling
Out of my way, it said, slurring and shouting
A look at the moon to snatch its beams and
Onto the land it shoved, farther and farther
Ho, never did this before, it said, loud and boasting
Rude and swirling, grabbing, drowning, dragging under
Respect's what I need! I'll show you who's boss!
You'll pay the price, it howled
So angry, but why? For fun
It sighed, now tired
In need of sleep, it went away.

A TRUE STORY: GOD SAVE THE QUEEN

Janise Bogard

On a crisp and sunny autumn day in 1961 I stood on the lawn at Windsor Great Park watching Prince Phillip play polo. I had been invited in the company of two American film producers, who, like myself, had been thoroughly vetted to make sure we were not terrorists of any kind.

A Queen's equerry approached to inform me that since I was a divorced lady, I could not be presented to Her Majesty. I knew that there was no point in indicating that my two male friends had both been divorced and that I had been merely annulled, and that this rule was simply royal male chauvinism. So I agreed to stand by myself and watch the polo.

He appeared out of nowhere. Tall and tanned with the brightest of grey-blue eyes. A little sweaty from the energetic game and slightly dusty from the sand thrown up by the horses' hooves. He looked like the Great White Hunter. Handing the reins to an attendant, he approached me. "What are you doing here?" he asked. "Watching you nearly fall off your horse, Sir," I gasped.

He reached for my wrist and held tight, "I say, where can we meet?" My mouth went dry, my tongue stuck to my palate. Answers raced through my mind. "Your palace or mine" would have been the cocky response. . . no, no, not a good idea. Here before me was a Jewish girl's fantasy dreamboat. A Greek god and a real prince to boot. I imagined the Queen saying, "Take her to the Tower. Chop off her head."

At that moment I did hear the unmistakable voice of the Queen calling loudly, "Oh Phillip..." He instantly dropped my hand. "Oops, duty calls." He brightly laughed and moved with the speed and grace of a leopard to his wife's side. What luck! My purity and reputation had been saved by the Queen herself.

My American friends returned to their places beside me. "Anything happen while we were away?" they asked. I casually replied, "No, nothing." I was not going to share my delightful two minutes of adventure with those lowlifes.

HOW SKIING CHANGED MY LIFE

Myra Nissen

I really should say “How *Not* Skiing Changed My Life.” Let me explain. In December of 1967 I went to a party and met a man who was limping badly. I learned that he had suffered not merely a broken leg but an explosion of the bones in his leg as a result of a skiing accident in March. He had been operated on several times. We began dating that year. His leg, which had atrophied to a toothpick, gradually returned to size because every day he tied three bricks to his foot, then sat on the kitchen counter and did leg lifts. It was the first year since he was three that he did not ski. So when we married, a year to the day after we met, he had never seen me on skis. Had he not had his accident, he would have asked me to go skiing with him one weekend, and that would have been the end of our relationship. Because I can’t ski. I do everything quickly: I eat fast, I talk fast, I walk fast, I drive fast. But I was afraid to gather any momentum on skis. Tony first saw me on skis a week after we were married, when we visited his folks in Iron Mountain, Michigan, and we went skiing at Pine Mountain, a little bump of a hill.

My wedding present from Tony was skis, boots and poles. Our belated honeymoon was in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where he dutifully went down the bunny slope with me, and then he took off for black diamond trails. I have skied the bunny slopes at many of the major ski resorts in the United States and France: Chamonix, Argentierre, Tigne, Val d’Isère, Jackson Hole, Mad River Glen, Mount Snow, Sugarbush. Our winter vacation was always a ski vacation. Fortunately my daughter, who started skiing when she was three, soon learned to ski the black diamond trails with her father, while I was content to sit in the lodge and read.

I never mastered skiing, but the marriage endured.

ARUSHI DANCING

Eva Shatkin

In the mountain darkness
a young girl stands expectant below us
as assembled wedding guests
watch from the patio
to the tune of Indian music.

In the darkness red and blues
splash her body from a light source
shift to green and yellow
as she dances before us.

She wears a long gown with a full red skirt
off a bodice, Indian-style.
It is fluid and floats behind her
as she pirouettes and swivels
her body and her hands.

She will come forward
then twist and switch back,
raise her hands up and down,
bend her body to us and sway,
gesturing to capture and attract
our eyes to her motions.

With athletic grace
her body ebbs and flows
as her undulations
presume to allure us,
to fall under the spell
she casts of sensuality.

But the sexuality is not there
not in her body nor her gestures
for the child does not yet know
what the dance should disclose:
a woman who arouses
from those who are watching
the mute passions of the flesh.

MAIDEN VOYAGE ON A CITIBIKE

Art Spar

Fearful thoughts abound
A bike will not be found
My key will not work
Getting lost like a jerk
Ride into a tree
Endure a broken knee
The ER doctor giving me the stare
Discovering my orange underwear
Banned from using bikes
No more biking Facebook likes

But bad thoughts change to good
A blur of motion whence I stood
A fluid body exercised
Lungs and heart energized
The vast Hudson sliding by
Ancient piers rotting where they lie
New York waking from its sleep
Workers with promises to keep
Seagulls screaming ferries barging
Sated garbage trucks discharging

I am a capsule gliding through the shadows
Of Carnival and Intrepid as they pose
For tourists questing something new
Women and men running in lycra
Revealing all they yearn for
Pick-up hoops where young men practice
Who they are becoming
Lovers on a bench
Closing a veil of intimacy before watching eyes
And the Freedom Tower grows larger
Commanding the heavens

I marvel at all this still
Waiting for the time until
I return to relive the thrill

THE PROPINQUITY EFFECT

Mary Ann Donnelly

With daisies in my hair
We married in '68.
Not the best year.
MLK RFK Chicago Riots Nixon
And V-i-e-t-n-a-m.
An omen for our future?

But we had propinquity.
He lived one parish away
united by the 40th street playground
and Chumpsky's candy store.
Experts promise
it's the glue of a good marriage.
His world was mine.
Irish grandmothers who ruled.
16 years of Catholic school.

But he was tough Irish
with black Donnelly moods.
And a no-grey-only-his-way
of seeing the world.
I might have known better
but I was a fool for love.
And he taught me about Jazz and Coltrane.
And was everything I wasn't.

Too much trouble to leave him then
and now too late.

I dread a future without him.

A LEAF FROM SERENGETI

Barbara P Gordon

a leaf falls
captured by
a passing breeze
skims and swoops

tilts onto
an open flower
pollen catching in its veins
coating wilted edges
until it flutters
to the ground

a passing Weaver
thinking of its nest
carries it aloft
bearing it for miles
until he spies a bug

released by bird
it floats and dances
in the air
then drifts down
landing on a pile
of twigs and other leaves
is compressed into a mulch
then bagged and shipped
from its native Africa
continents away

now *here*
spread upon a foreign field
a dust of pollen
from its home
lifts
to fertilize
another flower

A LEAF FALLS*

Barbara P Gordon

dancing and floating from hour to hour
it's captured by a passing breeze
then tilts onto an open flower
to land on twigs and other leaves

captured by a passing breeze
coated with pollen it skims and swoops
to land on twigs and other leaves
as gravity beckons and down it loops

coated with pollen it skims and swoops
compressed into mulch in great demand
'til gravity beckons and down it loops
and it's bagged and shipped to a foreign land

compressed into mulch in great demand
to fertilize another flower
bagged and shipped to a foreign land
dancing and floating from hour to hour

**The above is a Pantoum, which is a verse form consisting of an indefinite number of quatrains with the second and fourth lines of each quatrain repeated as the first and third lines of the following one.*

WHEN I WAS TEN

Stella Gold

Paris was occupied
By the Germans.
At home and in the street
Life had become opaque
And threatening
But school was a haven
My teacher liked me
And I had a best friend,
Yet I was tormented
By fear of being found out
As one born in Berlin
A “Boche,” an enemy.

Under German order
The French
Managed to uncover
All the Jewish children
Attending public schools
And my teacher received a list
Of those “tainted” pupils.
She kept me after school that day
And told me with concern
That she had seen my name.
Her sympathy was an immense relief
Eagerly I confessed
That I was even born
In Germany.

Some months later
When I arrived in school
Wearing a yellow star
Trying to hold back the tears,
My teacher
Kissed me
In front of all the class.

FRED AND ME

Donna M. Rubens

Floating, twirling, moving with the grace
of a butterfly. I have replaced Ginger—
my partner, Fred, leads me ever
so gently through the steps of the song.

My sheer sparkling costume shimmers
and shines, while diamonds do their own dance
from my ears. My truly glamorous self
all alight with the wonder of it all.

What is it we are dancing to—me, the class
klutz and he, the pinnacle of elegant moves?
Something familiar, slow, sweet. I am not
concerned however that I cannot recover
the name of the music. It is enough to be
in his gentlemanly guiding arms...

What discord comes to
break into this reverie—the sound of
city morning's garbage collection?
It cannot be—it was Fred and me.

It was.

LIKE THE TULIPS

Helen Neilson

Passing beautiful red tulips,
I remember another spring
when you and I spied them
near this very same place.

And the sky was bright blue.
And the sun promised warmth
and all the riches of springtime.

Soon the tulips faded away.
The sky turned an angry gray.
Promised warmth turned cold and
like the tulips faded away.

THE HUNGRY EYES

Helen Neilson

Eyes reflect the soul of a man
or so it has been said.
Most avoid looking deep enough
to pass the surface scars.
Dwell long on the blue or the brown
and the beauty that they see.
Look past the reflection of pain
left by some unknown loss.
Miss signs of hunger for the hunt,
remains of remembered laughter,
the need for more to come.

BAGELS AND ROMANCE

Betty Farber

Bagelworks on First Avenue
sells a variety of bagels
to please anyone's taste.
I'm waiting for my order to be filled.

A woman behind me is talking
on a cellphone to her boyfriend.
"I'm at Bagelworks right now.
What kind of bagel do you want:
sesame, whole wheat, pumpernickel
sourdough, poppyseed, everything?
What? A plain bagel?" She is incredulous
and complains to the nearest stranger,
"I thought he was unique, unconventional,
and he orders a plain bagel. I may
have to rethink this relationship."

"That man is in deep trouble," I say to myself,
as I pay for my bagel order.
With an eye on my own relationships
I take home sesame, sourdough, everything.

IT'S SO NEW YORK

Beverly Wasserman

Skating on the thin ice of early morning sleep, I am jittered awake by my neighbor's voice on the phone. Diane (6D) and I (3B) met in the laundry room years ago. This morning she sounds worried and concerned.

I Zamboni my mind of the night's debris and listen carefully to her breathless account of a report just heard on the radio of an impending Five Boro Bike Race scheduled to begin in an hour. She knows I am LaGuardia-bound and I must be alerted to what would surely be a traffic nightmare.

Arriving here from Adams, Mass. some twenty years ago, Diane loves being a New Yorker...and she especially loves being a Brooklynite. Occasionally she wonders if she has been here long enough to be considered an authentic citizen...I reassure her that she has earned her stripes and then some!

After all, didn't she spend five years working at Mt. Sinai with the World Trade Center Medical Registry? And as a labor organizer, doesn't she make regular trips to Greenpoint to give talks to Polish union members? And what about all those hours she spends on the F train? Don't they count for something?

And how can I not mention the Brooklyn politics she finds so endlessly fascinating? I mean how many of us can rattle off the names of our assemblyman, congressman or city council member like she can? Although I think that's what worries her...she knows most of us can't.

No one will ever accuse Diane of being callous and uncaring...or of being a big-city caricature of the unfeeling bystander. She stands up to be counted whenever and wherever her conscience demands.

She walks for Breast Cancer and she marches against war, to name just some of the myriad of causes so near and dear to her heart. And her neighborly obligations are so sacrosanct...that is why I am hearing from her this early Sunday morning.

I quickly call the car service and ask what's up with this race and is it going to shut down the BQE as well as every other highway, artery and capillary in the city? A bored dispatcher drawls that he hasn't heard a thing, but after a long wait while he confers with I'm not sure who, suggests I leave an hour earlier than I planned.

And so, at 11 AM the driver arrives and calls on his cell tells me he is waiting downstairs. By a quirk of fate Diane will tell you is "so New York" he turns out to be the same driver I have had at least twice before. With 500 drivers working for this company, she is probably right! We exchange greetings and in his thick Israeli accent regales me with a tale of traffic nightmares taking place all over the city and tells me to expect the worst.

While he points out the endless miles of cars that are at a complete standstill on the other side of the highway, I realize we are zipping along at breathtaking speed. Before I have time to digest the situation, we arrive at US Air's LaGuardia terminal in what is surely record time!

Not only that, but the curbside check-in guys are standing around doing nothing! They compete for my red roll-on and tell me how lucky I am. Flights have been missed all morning by hapless passengers. In a flash, my boarding pass is issued. I whiz through security and find myself with four hours before my flight departs.

I head for the Food Court...and as I sit down to eat my Thai Pad lunch, I notice the Chinese couple next to me eating Big Macs, the Hispanic family slicing into a pizza, and the woman in a headscarf enjoying a Mexican burrito. Thinking of Diane, I say to myself *this is so New York!*

A FORMULA FOR EQUANIMITY

Sy Amkraut

When I was a toddler and some other kid took my food
I grabbed it back and a fight ensued

As a kid in school when a bully was being crude
I struck him with a bat and my punishment ensued

As a young man when someone was rude
I can show you the wounds from the fight that ensued

When I was man and my wife disturbed my mood
No loving that night, that's what ensued

I'm older now, fighting back I find is not right
Nothing is gained when you stand up and fight

Hold your temper with all your might
Something is happening for which you must not lose sight

That person is unhappy, his mind is not right
Your ego has been satisfied, you have seen the light

Let your actions be guided by passion, don't be a fool
When you fight with fire, bulls get burned, jump in the water,
Stay cool

SHARP ANGLER

Roberta Curley

You're a slippery fish
I have a whaler's wish
you're salty and sweet
I like a dual treat

under a moonlit sea
we'll swish with glee
I'm no sinner
let's start with dinner

my dream is Dairy Queen
hot fudge makes me scream
a vanilla cone will do
let's not make a to-do

you lick my cone,
I'll lick yours
if DQ is closed,
we'll make s'mores

a fish meal, dessert
or nothing to eat
you ~ my lustrous scaly
love catch will be my treat

you're a fine fillet,
a gelatinous creature for sure
I've been angling to net you;
my patience can't endure.

FANCIES

Roberta Curley

I may not love you to pieces
but major chunks of you
titillate my toes
my eyes twinkle too

I'm neither a sweetie
nor a pie but if you call me
sweetie-pie, I'll be open
to any suggestion imaginable

I'm not trying to buy you
but you owe me big favors
for the coffee ice-cream cone
I bought you tonight

You rattle my wood chimes
shake my steel girders
play your cards right
we'll blow the house down

What do you mean
I'm suffocating you?
I was only trying to protect
you from a drone attack

What part of stuck on you
don't you get?
reveries of you cram my craw
night and day

Sleeping alone is
Purgatory
sleeping beside you
Nirvana

SURKA'S STORIES

Betty Farber

My mother told us
stories about Russia
where she lived as a child.
How she crept from her house
to a gypsy encampment
listening to music
and dancing with gypsies.

Her name was Surka
(Sarah in English).
A Romany man
said she was one of them.
“Your mother has fair hair
but you are dark, like a gypsy.
You were stolen from us
when you were a baby.”
She ran home in fear
and never returned
to dance with the gypsies.

My mother's great grandchild,
Theatrical Sarah,
delights in dancing,
and calls herself Surka
when she performs.
And what is the nickname
for dancers on Broadway
who perform for the love of it?
They are called “Gypsies!”

DILEMMA

Trudy Owett

Every day, I look at the pile of
New Yorkers accumulated over several
months on my dining room table.

Every week, after admiring
the cover, I place the new issue on top
of the others and wait for that rainy day
when I'll catch up and read them all.

That rainy day doesn't come and the stack
keeps growing. Knowing that I'm unworthy
of the wisdom and humor within each and
every issue, I put my New Yorkers out to be
recycled, and never to be seen again.

As a new stack forms, the mail repeatedly
warns that I must send in my check for
renewal this very instant. And if I don't,
they'll terminate my subscription.

I'm troubled by that constant "Special Offer"
78% off the cover price plus the exclusive
New Yorker Weekend Bag free with my
paid subscription if I renew now.

Twenty-three issues for just \$39.99
which makes it roughly \$1.74 per issue.
Must I decide whether this cost is too high
for those unread words of wit and wisdom?

My subscription runs out in September 2014.
So why this pressure? There's time enough
to dwell in my mind on the pros and
the cons of this matter, over and over again.

A problem of Shakespearian proportions:
I've always, always, had New Yorkers in
my home. Can I do without them now?

REGRET

Frieda Lipp

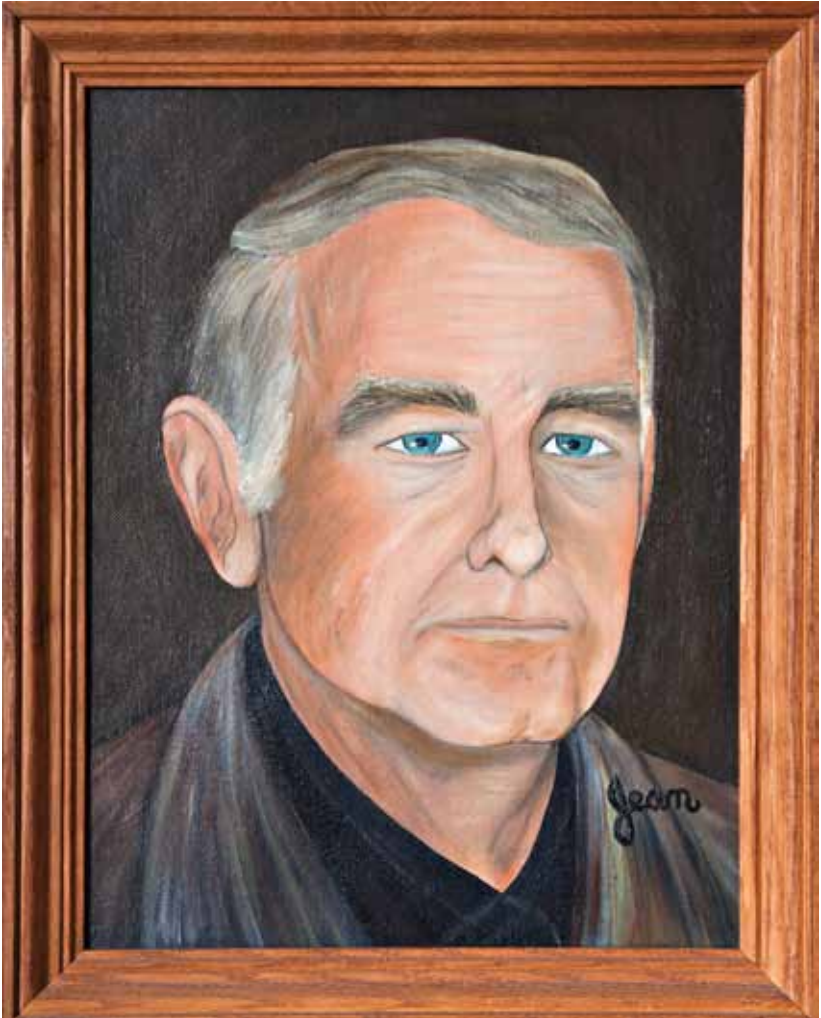
Just a word
Asked sometimes
As in "Do you have any?"
In passing
In a bar
After love
Whenever

And even before the first word
Her tears appear
Tears from long ago
So long ago

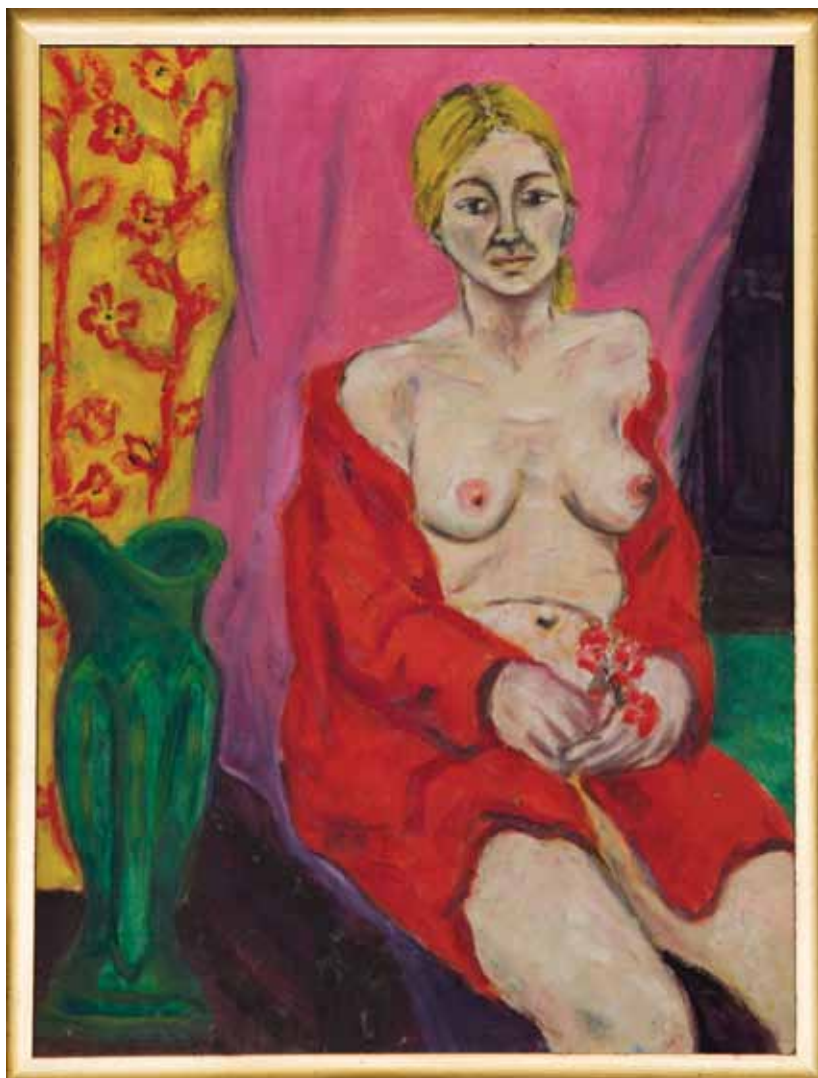
Three little girls sitting on a
 Bronx stoop
One in shadow obscured
 by time,
 nasal voice, stumbling words,
 hands twitching
And me

Proud, bragging
The one, picked by the teacher for
 first grade class choir
She, stumbling, nasal
 "I've been picked too"
And me "But you don't talk right"

Three little girls
Sitting on that stoop
She, her soft brown eyes welling
 with tears
Me, still seeing her eyes
So long ago.



Stan The Man, Oil on Canvas | *Jean Young*



Model With Flowers, Acrylic on Canvas Board, 1985 | *Donna M. Rubens*



Woman, Clay | *Rosalie Regal*



Pearls & Bubbles Necklace, Silver, Pearls, Stones | *Diane Figueroa*



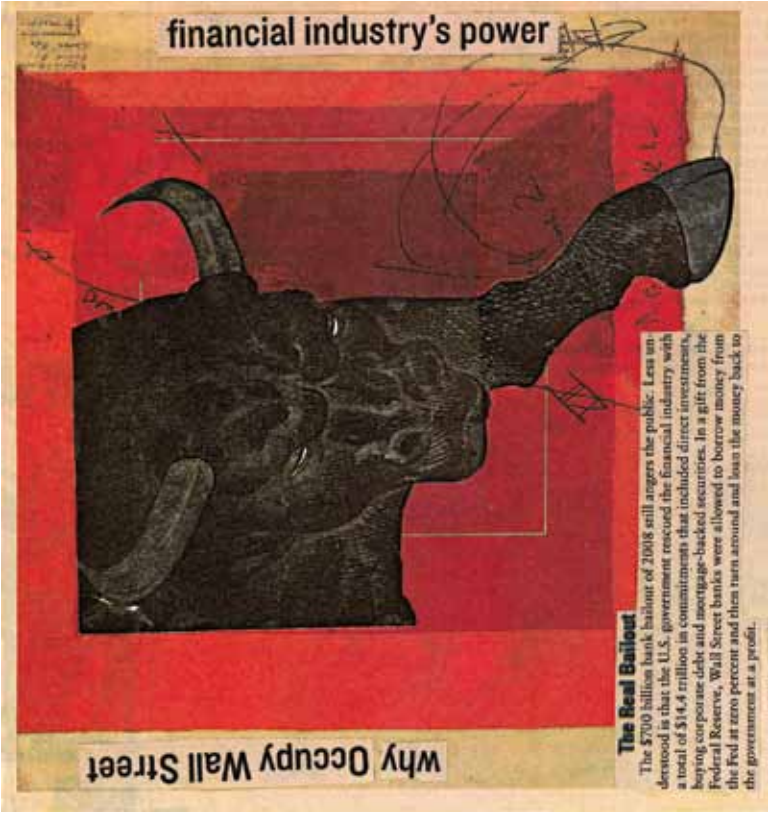
Desk Lamp, Clay | *David Lewis*



Sweet Pea, Water Color | *Pearl Zinner*



From My Window, Photograph | *Janise Bogard*



Why Occupy, Collage in Paper, 2013 | Mary Peltz Buchwald



The Alpilles, Oil on Canvas | *Paul Adler*



Finale, Multi Media Collage | Marilyn Weiss

back

front



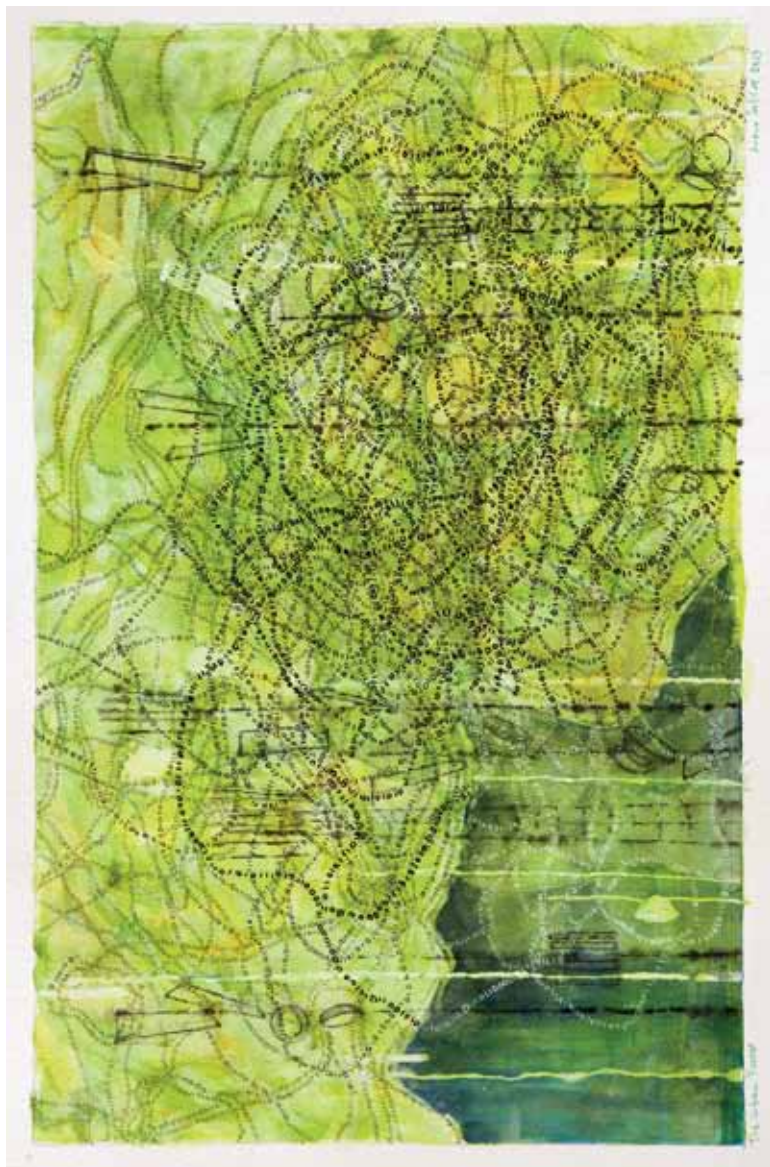
Adam and Eve, Alabaster | Al Gordon



Goldfish Do Dance, Collage | *Helen Neilson*



Seaside, Oil on Canvas | *Roslyn Schachter*



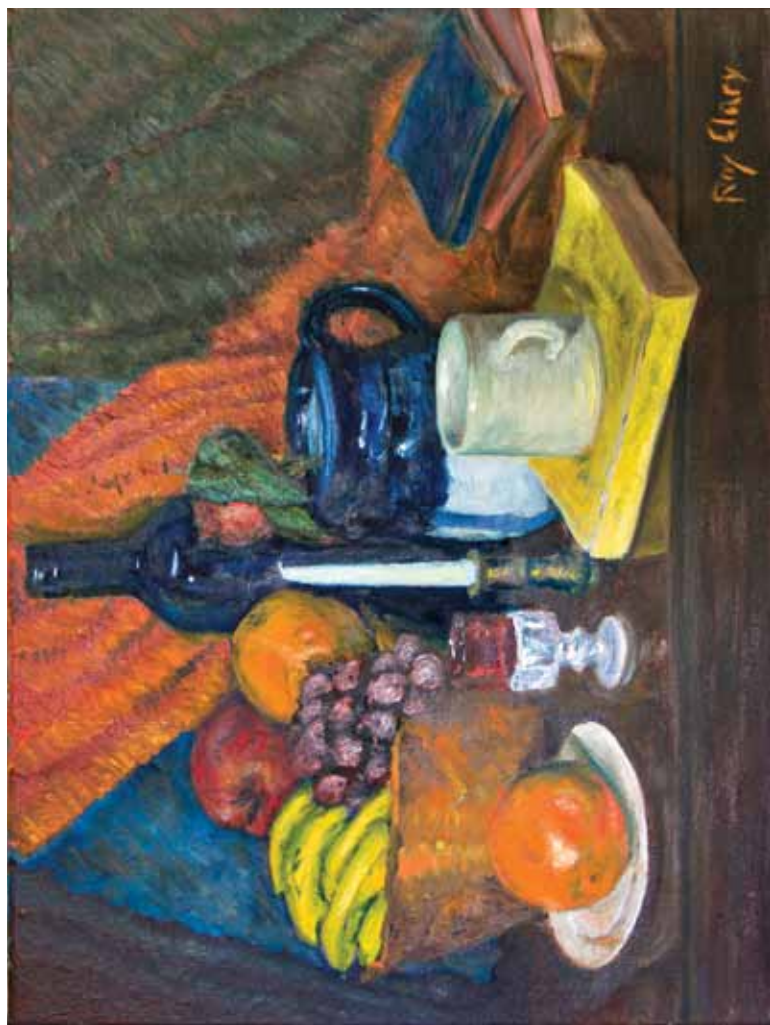
The Urban Forest, Pen with Colored Ink | *Lioma Salter*



High Line by Moonlight, Photograph | *Lila Heilbrunn*



Zinnias, Oil on Board | Sondra Lipton Sahlman



Still Life, Oil on Canvas | Roy Clary



Manhattan Evening, Photograph | *Beverly Francis*



Our Ever-Changing City, Photograph | *Michael Wellner*



Halloween on East 67th Street, Photograph | *Ruth Komer*

ENCOUNTER WITH MARTIN AFTER THE TAPE PIECE BY SERGIO AZOÑOS

Steve Koenig

When I was a boy we moved to the southern state of Virginia.
My uncle had a job there, building a water purification plant.
As we drove in the car, my New York eyes were widened:
A public bathroom with signs that read
“whites only” and “for colored only.”
One day with a bunch of white school friends,
A black youth stared at us from the corner of the subway car.
He wanted us to be scared of him.
We were scared of him.

When I was in junior high school we walked out of school
To a demonstration against the Vietnam War
Black kids, white kids with signs and posters and chants.
An old man said “you kids just don’t understand”
“I understand,” I said.
“Napalm, the bombing of Cambodia, all the lies you believe.”
I still have a dream.

When I was in college, friends and lovers were dying of AIDS.
Black, White, Asian, Latino, Indian.
We were not happy.
We tossed a black coffin over the fence
Onto the White House lawn.
The government was not happy.

When I was a teacher in a high school,
We taught about civil disobedience,
Took a group of students to protest apartheid in South Africa.
Some of the teachers and one of the students
Chose to cross the barricades and get arrested.
I was scared to lose my license, so I didn’t do it.
I still have a dream.

THE BAG LADY

Jennifer Jolly

Carrying bits from the super mart
The little old lady pushes her cart
And all her possessions are in there stowed
But she hasn't much in her total load

Her shoulders hunch towards her chest
She's lost in thought and not the best
In terms of health so limps along
But sometimes hums a cheerful song

How does she live on the streets alone?
Without any friends, not even a phone?
How does she manage to color her hair
An orangey-red so people stare?

She dresses in stockings and bright-colored clothes
Wears high-heeled shoes without any toes
Does she rummage around in the thrift shop store
Where bins of clothes are heaped on the floor?

She always wears makeup with bright red lips
Her nails are all painted with very few chips
Sometimes she talks to herself as we pass
Her accent is educated, hints of high class

What did she do in a former life?
Was she an artist, a writer, a wife?
Is she quite clever this dame of the street?
She must have great stories if we could just meet.

**ELECTRIC
TROUBLE**
ELECTRIC TROUBLE

Carole Cronig Abrahams

Wind 40 miles per hour
Clouds low, hovering grayly

Weak branches crack
Bring wires down

Deck emptied
Chairs in house
Flower pots underneath
Table behind

Twigs fly off trees
Boats moved
to inner harbor

Gas tank dials to Off
Perishable food packed

Windows boarded up
Doors locked

Evacuate

Little children puzzled
No TV

THE ROAD MOST TAKEN

Hal Cantor

A wedding is a journey, an age-old play.
It has a cast of bride and groom. Each taught
To say their lines and say them fast
Before their love vows get away.

Quite happy

When hors d'oeuvres and drinks are neat
Enough to get you high and loosen your bow tie,
Rehearsing pratfalls not yet in the script.

Do you remember our first quarrel? The custard pie
That hit you in the kisser—how we laughed.
Our angry fight on Midland Road? We never knew
What started it or what it was about.

The day

We nearly parted when our kids exploded
And shattered our brand-new hi-fi into bits?
You cried so beautifully, but you got over it.

Now I watch those newlyweds
Unwitting of the roadblocks just ahead,
Blind to the crosses and the crossings in the road.
I envy them their ignorances and folly.

Their smooth, unwrinkled hands,

Be-ringed, loving hands that will soon reach out
For what they crave. The joy will be giving.
Weddings, wakes and whiskey—this is living.

REMEMBRANCE OF YOU
Otilia Torres
(November 1916 – September 2013)
Eneida Cruz

Let your S M I L E be embedded
not fade away
from my Psyche.

Let my H E A R T
be filled
with the L O V E you gave.

L I F E
was hard.
You stood tall.

You S A C R I F I C E D
for your children
in the M I D S T of deprivation.

N E V E R
short of passion
to celebrate life.

F A M I L Y meant so much
Tommie and Angelo
the existence of your being.

“Tillie”
You will be M I S S E D
Your *strength*, sense of humor, and S M I L E.

SO INTERESTING

Hilda Feinstein

So interesting
how religious speak
can spark the passions
of the unsparked

so interesting
how its invocation
unharnesses harnessed tongues

so interesting
how when questioned
it unquiets the quiet
rouses resting, reserves of gray matter
defending the offensive
offending the defended
suspending disbelief from believers
provoking unbelievers to bleed deeper
into more believable disbeliefs

so interesting
that elusive truth may be in truth
illusion
hidden in full view
invisible
to both the faithful and faithless
so interesting

RECESSION BLUES: A TRILOGY

This trilogy was inspired by a series of *New York Times* articles assessing the recession's impact on Americans of various ages. Although the poem below applies to all age groups, the poems on the following two pages focus on the hardest hit victims of the Great Recession: *the young and the old*.

FORMS OF DARKNESS

Wayne Cotter

With each new dawn,
With every shape, manner and form,
Molding qualifications,
education,
desperation
into forms.

Electronic, eyeless passageways
Leading nowhere,
Starting nowhere,
Forming the formless,
Delivering the darkness,
Eternal, endless forms.

Eyes closing briefly,
Delivering new worlds
Devoid of shapes,
Devoid of forms.
With an unconscious smile,
I seek out the light.

WOODEN SPOON

Wayne Cotter

Am I refining my goals or downsizing my dreams?
The sounds of indifference shout louder than screams.
Trade blue collar for white was Dad's sage advice.
But who knew that knowledge could exact such a price.

Off to college I went; the first of my clan.
Returned a year later in search of a plan.
Self-doubt and debt make a bad combination,
Like oil and water or mental castration.

Worked a few temp jobs for minimum pay,
Some for a month, a week or a day.
Wiping down windshields, cleaning bus stations,
Lost in the mire of mounting frustration.

Like that old wooden spoon in Grandma's top drawer.
I know that's it's useful, but don't know what for.

I'm strong and I'm straight, but that ain't enough.
I'm smart and I'm stable and thought I was tough.
I'm forgotten, neglected; a mere afterthought.
The guy you might tip for the coffee you bought.

Dad joined a union; perfected his trade.
Raised a good family without any aid.
I can't support me or consider a spouse.
And forget about kids, a car or a house.

"We're not owed a living," Dad used to say.
"Work hard and be honest and you'll find your way."
But those rules seem dusty from some era gone by.
"Every man for himself" is the new *Battle Cry*.

I'm not an old spoon in a drawer, in the back.
And by the way, "*D'ya want fries with that?*"

THE CRIME

Wayne Cotter

With a hand on my shoulder, they passed me the forms.
Sign here, and then there, then out the door.
Say hello to your escort, our security man.
Thanks for your service, keep in touch if you can.

In a cold parking lot, I began taking stock.
Three decades of memories all in this box.
I stole to my car, slumped down, and reclined.
A dozen more payments and it would be mine.

A shabby departure neither expected nor planned.
No well-wishers, family or assembled fans.
No hearty handshakes, no terms of endearment.
Just a one-time, “generous” severance agreement.

Was this a new chapter? A blessing disguised?
An alternate pathway to the ultimate prize?
I’ll dust off that resume; give it some tweaks.
I’ll start anew; it may take a few weeks.

Weeks turned to months; and months became years.
I reinvented myself, then reinvented my fears.
My glass stands half empty; my nest egg half gone.
The haze of my window obscures the day’s dawn.

My friendships have dwindled, my mind is adrift.
They took back my car; can you give me a lift?
I still have my phone which barks night and day.
Can’t those carnivorous creditors seek other prey?

I could blame the recession, or yesterday’s skills.
But those aren’t the reasons I’m smothered in bills.
There’s only one soul I charge with this crime.
He turned me old; his name’s Father Time.

SAMBA FOR ROBERTO

Stan Raffes

Her restless fingers strumming
the hard plastic KLM serving tray like a keyboard,
softly playing a bossa nova on our connecting flight,
Bucharest to Amsterdam,
Lilliana, fresh from a concert in Romania,
her carnival costume overhead in the luggage compartment,
her three accompanists directly across the aisle.

We switched off our in-flight movies,
looked out at the sky, talked for three hours
about all the haunted geniuses of American jazz:
Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis.

She told me about her own Brazilian legend:
Roberto, the mulatto with jet black hair,
blinding smile and his mesmerizing hazel eyes.
His mother, a beautiful Brazilian chamber maid,
father, tall, pale, a detached aristocrat.

Became a musical prodigy at a notorious state orphanage;
rising to fame from tin shanties of the City of God,
high above the steep, misty hills overlooking Rio,
the Wild West slum where gunshots mix with samba.
Locals called him the Brazilian Stevie Wonder
when he was only six.

Later, star of the chic midnight jazz clubs in Rio,
adored by wealthy patrons, seduced by shadowy friends
with Mercedes in silk shirts, tinted glasses.
Rescued twice by society women
who played his CDs like religious mantras;
cradled him during seizures, night sweats, like a “crack” baby.

Finally at peace now, at age 37; very cool in silk and cedar
at the head of a procession of black limos thru the City of God,
while barefoot children in tin shacks still dance samba
to his music under the blazing tropical sun.

CHANGING ROOMS

Art Spar

I found a room I did not know,
with measured beat, glacially slow.
Where place and face don't dance away,
but stay with roots and tops that sway.

The room is clear to all but me,
each guest arrives when elderly.
I became old to my surprise.
Now shame it is that blinds my eyes.

No way, not me, I can compete.
I'm still on top with nimble feet.
I know each dancing step by heart.
Push hard, stand out, you're one apart.

But inner voice says to accept.
Enjoy this dance, be more adept.
Do not be fearful changing rooms.
The room you knew would seal your doom.

On this dance floor the goals have changed.
The outcomes have been rearranged.
I hesitate to try this dance,
or on this floor to seek romance.

A FEW MOMENTS

Helen Neilson

Those times that linger long
dancing deep in the mind
keep memory alive and well.

Some special someone came,
paused for a while and touched
a part inside left unexplored.

It may have been a smile,
something seemingly small,
a pat atop the head.

That “once” when you, a child,
did something right for a change
and the voice said so out loud.

When you saved the life of a thing
quite small, bandaged up
its awful wound to heal.

Those few moments in life
when everything goes well —
places to return to.

AVIVA
Stella Gold

A friend of our youth
Has arrived in New York.
We rush to welcome him.
On a grey autumn day
Three old comrades embrace.
White hair and wrinkled faces
Do not alter the thrill
Of being together.
Two gentle adult sons
Who came with him
Listen raptly
To tales of our long friendship.
We revive memories
Of their youth
As they show pictures
Of their own children,
Until at last
The name of Aviva,
Beloved Aviva,
Their mother, our friend,
Springs up.
She died two years ago,
But has been here with us all along.
Aviva,
Genuine and kind,
Caring for all,
For people for animals for plants.
All the flowers
On Mount Gilboa,
Where we hiked together
In early spring,
And all the flowers
in the valley of Jezreel, her home,
Were known to her.
The sadness wells up
Yet with it gratitude
For our friendship.

I WANT MY TIME BACK

Ellie Chernick

I want my time back
It isn't fair
Going nowhere
I want my time back.

Sat through only one symphony
Three were meant to be heard
Caught by pain
Needed to flee like a bird.

I want my time back
It isn't fair
After getting set in a seat
Doughnut in place
Removed hearing aids
Making room for hearing device.

But couldn't stay
There was no way
Needed heating pad
Needed it real bad.

When it's the end of my time
I'm sure I'll be ready
I must add on, tho'
I want my money back
No!

I want my time back
It isn't fair
Add it on.

TROUBLE

Eva Shatkin

From troubles that are brewing
we turn our eyes away;
goals once thought pursuing
are plotted for another day.

The prospect will surprise
as it lurks behind the scene
and we do not realize
what cannot be foreseen.

What mayhem may accost,
what evil waxes fast;
our age's holocaust
revives as from the past.

How violent our story,
unceasing our offence;
the nature of our history
partakes of violence.

SO RICH IS LIFE

Eva Shatkin

So rich is life
that just to be
is a surprise
a mystery.

The plot unfolds
in part ordained;
the story told
is yet unframed.

How dear the day
when comes the dawn;
what pleasures lay
within each morn.

When comes the night
I lay me down.
Done with my mite
let peace be mine.

FASHION DESCENT

Mary Ann Donnelly

Easter was celebrated each spring
with a new outfit or, at the very least,
a new hat.

Maybe a new navy spring coat
or only a new collar
for last year's grey.

Some years patent leather Mary Janes
with frilly white party socks.

One year red shoes
with a navy dotted-swiss dress and
a red polka-dot crinoline.

Always white gloves.

My first job interview found me in my
Easter 1963 black linen suit
with a bolero jacket
covering a watery silk "in the pink family" blouse
matched with a hot-pink skimmer hat.
Black high heels with a matching bag and, of course,
white gloves.

The white gloves were the first to go
followed by matching shoes and bag.
Hats were to keep the cold out.
When was it that my mother started
wearing slacks to church
albeit covered by a mink coat?
When was it that the world got so careless?

REMEMBERING MARTHA

Trudy Owett

We had planned to become eccentric old ladies together. It didn't happen. You died at 73.

I've never been eccentric, but you were, and I wanted to emulate you, to be as colorful and cool as you.

In Junior High, a glamorous fourteen-year-old. With long dark hair, sparkling eyes, and infectious laughter, you already had what would later become known as Street Style.

As a bride at seventeen, you wore black fishnet stockings, strappy platform shoes and, like Billie Holiday, a flower in your hair.

You filled your home with beauty. And, in a style strictly your own, you took great pleasure in embellishing yourself.

Starting with your trademark dark green nail polish, your collection of antique rings, scarlet lipstick and often a large silk flower pinned to your dress.

Vain, but never self-centered, other people's needs were more important than your own. You knew how to love... life, family and friends, me included.

But your aches and pains were your secret. Ignoring the signs, and not seeking help, you went when you did, sooner than you had to. Leaving me to grow old by myself.

THE FINAL ACT

Jennifer Jolly

An actress once with lots of fame
Poppy Hinton is her name
The lights on Broadway spelled it bright
With neon shining in the night
She's played in Shakespeare on the stage
The Poppy dance was once the rage
Now Poppy's almost eighty-eight
And has a rather fragile gait
Her little hands are frail and thin
With purple veins and papery skin
Once she had quite shapely legs
Now they look like skinny pegs
But still our Poppy likes to act
And dresses up so to attract
She wears a curly auburn wig
And Poppy doesn't care a fig
If folks all know this, let them stare
It covers up her own gray hair
She looks from eyes of faded blue
That once were violet through and through
Those eyes are ringed in pencil black
Her lips are red, her skin is slack
She'll wear a cape of orange hue
A pale pink blouse and skirt of blue
And on her feet are small black pumps
With bows and little heels like stumps
But listen now her voice is strong
And she can still belt out a song
I've heard her on the radio
When past performers have a show
What an act she must have been
When she hit the Broadway scene
And still she has her friends who write
She answers always so polite
But some claim Poppy's just a ham
Who's really mutton dressed as lamb

THE LECTURE

Ruth Robbins

If my father had something important to say to me, he took me to the side porch. It was the place he told me my mother had died during the night. It was the place he told me he was getting married again. It was the place he told me he had enlisted in the army and was leaving the next day for the West Coast.

At breakfast one day, just before I was to leave for college for the first time, he said he wanted to have a talk with me and to meet him on the side porch around four in the afternoon.

I knew it must be something serious. What could it be? I was very upset and, to tell the truth, scared. I couldn't think of anything it could be. Then I thought, "It's going to be a lecture about sex." To put it mildly, this thought made me feel worse. All day long I worried and sweated. "If he talks to me about sex, I'll just die," I thought.

Four o'clock finally came. We met on the porch and he said to me, "Never drink cocktails after dinner; never drink liquor with juice or Coke, only with water or soda; and if you want to be popular, only drink beer."

SOTTO VOCE

Stan Raffes

Every Mother's Day
My mother reads down to me from heaven
Her voice is once again young;
Her hair soft and auburn, eyes hazel.
The story book opens in front of me
Like a long highway full of pastels and watercolors
I listen as a child again to "Wind in the Willows",
Her voice as soft and gentle as the moon
Each page floats in front of me like a colored kite
Fluttering high against a perfect blue sky
On a hot July 4th afternoon
All the stories in that book memorized
Each page worn, brittle and frail by age
But silkscreened into my heart.

A SCARY DAY ON THE TRACKS

Jerry Wiesenberg

It was only my second or third day on the job at the Transit Authority when I was directed to report to PS 248, the company's training facility in Brooklyn. "What kind of training is that for?" I asked. The answer came, "Track Safety." "What does that mean?" I asked for further clarification. "To learn how to walk on the tracks" was the answer. Walk on the tracks: I was hired as an engineer; why would I want to walk on the tracks? Well, the answer came, "Everyone has to take that training, just in case." In case of what? I had no desire to go down on the tracks, especially when I stood on the platform many times and saw those giant rats running around on the tracks below. But hey, it was a day out of the office, even though I hadn't even started to perform the functions I was hired to do.

I traveled out to Coney Island and joined my fellow students in a classroom setting. We started out with a discussion about the third rail, that electrified rail, which carried 600 volts of electricity. I was well aware of what that kind of voltage could do to someone: kill them outright. But the instructor was kind enough to use slides showing the effect 600 volts could have on a human body if one was not safety conscious. The slides were horrifying. I looked away as soon as I got my first glimpse of an electrified body. Not for me I said. I'm not going down on the tracks.

In the afternoon we were taken outside into the school playground where a 75-foot-long railroad car sat on tracks, actually non-electrified tracks. We walked completely around the subway car, and the instructor pointed out the parts which, when electrified, became extremely dangerous. Well, I guessed that was it. It wasn't so bad. I was ready to go back to the classroom, get my attaché case and go home.

"We are going down to the station now to see the tracks," the instructor said. We marched as a group to a nearby subway station. "Where are all of the passengers?" I asked. This must be one of those abandoned stations we heard about. We walked down to the platform and were told to jump down to the track

level. How bad could it be: an abandoned station, non-electrified third rail and no trains? I could handle that. We were told to walk out to the center tracks. "Be careful stepping over the third rail," the instructor said. Right, I thought, another make-believe third rail. But I was cautious, just in case.

Alongside of the middle track, there was a high wall with a narrow archway every ten to fifteen feet. "When the train comes," said the instructor, "stretch your arms out wide and brace yourself. Be sure you are completely inside the arch," he said. "Don't stick out in the front or the rear." I thought, I will remember that if ever I get in that kind of situation.

And then I heard it: the roar of an oncoming train, the cool wind caused by the pushing of the air by the fast-moving train hitting my face. My knees began to shake. My g-d, he wasn't kidding us! There is a train coming. The motorman of the oncoming train kept his speed up but courteously blew his horn to let us know he had no intention of slowing the train down.

My arms flew out to the side as I had been taught. For a moment I thought the pressure of my arms against the wall might cause the arch to collapse. And before I knew it, the train was right in front of my face. The vacuum effect of the high-speed train zooming by gave me the feeling that I was going to be sucked out of the arch, right under those huge steel wheels spinning crazily in front of me.

And then the train was gone. It was over. I am still alive, I thought. It wasn't so bad. It was like the roller coaster ride at nearby Coney Island. You are scared to death when you are coming down those giant loops, but once the ride was over, you could say, it wasn't so scary!

Well, I said, only twenty more years until I retire, and then I can forget about walking those tracks. And now, twenty years later I can proudly say, I made it!

CONFORMITY

Eva Shatkin

Amy arrived home from junior high school to find her family outside on the sidewalk, dislodged because a fire had made their apartment uninhabitable. It was cold; Mama and the little ones stood shivering in whatever wrappings they could grab at the last minute. It had started in a closet due to a faulty wire connection and spread largely throughout the living room. But the efforts of firemen to contain it wreaked havoc in the rest of their living quarters. Where would they be able to sleep in the coming nights?

Her parents and the three younger ones could be housed in the basement where a stove and sink would serve to cook meals, and bedding could be brought down from unaffected rooms. Her older sister would stay with a close friend. Amy called her school friend, Selma Shelley, whose parents offered her a bed for the night. So taking a change of clothes in a paper bag, she waited at the curb for Selma's father to pick her up and drive her to their residence in Queens.

They ate dinner in an alcove away from the kitchen. Mrs. Shelley brought in large dishes filled with food. Unlike home, where Mama spooned out meals from a steaming pot from the nearby stove, the Shelleys each helped themselves from serving dishes passed around the table. She was hungry, yet resisted taking more than a small portion. Dessert was ice cream, and coming after the meat stew, she ate it guiltily, knowing it was forbidden under *kashrut* rules.

After dinner, Selma's parents went to the movies. Selma suggested they play cards in the living room. During the game, a strong urge to urinate overcame Amy. She was embarrassed to interrupt the game, to say she had to go to the toilet. She wet her panties, hoping that nothing had seeped through to her chair. As they prepared for bed, she shoved the wet garment in with her other clothing. After breakfast the next morning, Mr. Shelley brought her home.

Mama gave her a change of clothing, and the next night, she went with Anna, her older sister and her husband, Sidney, to his mother's house. For the night, they were given a double bed next to the kitchen. She slept between Anna and Sidney. She awoke, concerned that he might have impregnated her because it wasn't clear to her how babies

were conceived. Sidney's mother, florid and domineering, told them during breakfast that this arrangement could not go on. Since she had two other boys and a dependent grandchild, she had no room for them.

At Martha Levine's house where she went subsequently, her monthly menstruation began. At night, she washed out her rag and placed it on the towel rack to dry. Martha's mother told her that she must be sure to change frequently because boys went wild if they could smell the blood. Mama's attitude toward menstruation was casual, but Mrs. Levine said impressively that she took care that her husband never knew when she menstruated. "Didn't he see the rags hanging in the toilet?" Amy thought. An aura of shame and secrecy seemed to pervade the topic here.

Finally, she was sent to Uncle Aaron and Aunt Malke. They lived on Stone Avenue, not far from her junior high. Since her uncle's diagnosis of tuberculosis, he had been unable to return to his work as a laborer. He was frail with a timid manner, a reedy voice, and Malke towered over him in a blaring, bossy way. Both of them served as janitors of a tenement, and in return, they occupied a ground-floor, dark apartment. They had two boys but were thrilled to have a young girl in their house. They gave her the boys' bed and somehow arranged for them to sleep elsewhere. In the morning, they hovered over her breakfast: oatmeal, milk and glory be! a Dugan's cupcake with chocolate icing, a sweet forbidden at home and therefore craved. They prepared a school lunch for her, vying to please her with goodies. They kissed her when she left for school and hugged her when she returned at three. She stayed with them for two weeks, delighting in their company.

But a month later, when Mr. Kessler had completed the carpentry work and the rooms had been painted, she returned home: to her own bed, to her own family, glad to comply once more with familiar ways.

A SATURDAY AFTERNOON AT THE HAMMER GALLERY

Ruth Kovner

She had agreed to substitute for her friend Sandy, who worked for the Hammer Galleries on 57th Street. Sandy was recently married and preferred to be home on the weekends. So she agreed. This was definitely a New York experience and might prove fun and interesting, she thought. She had lived out of town for a number of years and had recently moved back to the area from Massachusetts. She'd taken several art history courses at college, was an avid museum-goer and felt she could handle one or two days on the weekends. She did have a full-time job, but this did not deter her.

It was a Saturday, a wintery day, snow was on the ground. The Gallery was not full, but there were people milling around, gazing at the paintings. The door opened. In walked Bill Cosby, a tall apparition with a long winter coat and a navy blue wool cap rolled down to almost cover his eyes, like a maritime sailor. Perhaps he thought no one would recognize him. Or they'd get the message he did not want to be approached. He was accompanied by a small boy in a brown English-boy tweed outfit. You know what I mean. He had on leggings with leather from knee to ankle, a tweed coat with buttons down the front, with a small leather belt in back, and his hat had a visor of leather. He was adorable. He must have been about six years old. His expression was very serious.

The show exhibit was devoted to Grandma Moses, and there were quite a few paintings in her inimitable style. Grandma Moses was a folk painter, self-taught. There was even one she had done in wool. As they walked through the gallery, Mr. Cosby frequently leaned down to point things out to his young son about the paintings. The boy listened attentively.

She watched carefully, though furtively, disregarding the others in the gallery. Occasionally someone asked her a question and she responded. She was trained not to approach visitors until they had sufficient time to view the paintings. It was simply not done. But her eyes kept drifting over to where Mr. Cosby and his son were standing. After about an hour, the two left the galleries.

Hurriedly she crossed the gallery to speak to Mr. Mitchell, the other sales representative on the floor. She asked excitedly, "Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Mitchell, did you see Bill Cosby and his son?"

"No" he said slowly. "Did you see Greta Garbo?"



REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST I (With apologies to Proust)

*Ralph Shapiro**

We were sitting in the lunchroom, the three of us—Sandy, Al and I—when the query “Where were you brought up?” was asked. I suppose it was a fallout from the presentation about the Soviet Union we had just heard. Some of the members remarked, gratefully, that their forbears had left in time.

“In what Mike Gold, the leftist writer, called the Golden Ghetto, Boro Park, Brooklyn,” I replied, emphasizing that it was long before the ultra-orthodox zealots had taken over the ’hood. My father owned a three-story private house (1325 53rd Street) with a porch on each level and a front and back yard for me and my two brothers to play in. He rented out the street-floor apartment; we lived in the second floor, and my maternal grandparents on the third floor.

Al’s eyes lit up. “I, too, was brought up in Boro Park,” he exclaimed, “in an apartment on 37th Street and 14th Avenue, and what school did you attend?”

And then we began to peel off the years of our youth. We had both attended the Yeshiva Etz Chaim of Boro Park, a Hebrew-English parochial school with Hebrew lessons in the morning and secular lessons in the afternoon to allow entry to the public high school system.

Al was about ten years behind me, but we both remembered Moishe Bragin, a pseudonym for the 8th grade English teacher. We understood his somewhat sardonic manner when we later learned that he wrote left-wing novels under his real name, Ben Fields. We both recalled the name of the Hebrew school principal, Mr. Richman; the English school principal was Mr. Kufeld.

And there were chicken markets on lower 13th Avenue, with the “chicken flickers” in full display, Rothman’s Department Store further up 13th Avenue, the hub of Boro Park, and as you got into the high 40s and low 50s, Meyers Luncheonette, the youthful hang-out, and Skilowitz Delicatessen. And who can forget the furniture store on 52nd Street and 13th Avenue with its huge Philco radio tuned in for all to hear?

**Deceased*

We recalled the two Loew's movies: the 46th Street on 13th Avenue and the Boro Park on New Utrecht Avenue, not to mention the local "itch," the Garden on lower 13th Avenue.

It was a great place to grow up. Punch ball, stick ball and box ball on streets which had not been converted to one-way and a few open lots for touch football.

The music stopped in 1929.

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST II (With apologies to Proust)

Al Gordon

Since I, Al Gordon, was born in 1927, the music played a different theme, one of survival, "Brother Can You Spare A Dime!"

We lived on the second floor of my parents' luncheonette-candy store, in the factory district. Sounds like a dream come true for a young boy, a candy store, but it was more of a nightmare! From early years, I was expected to work behind the counter, deliver lunches, check the milk delivery to make sure it was correct, and, at night, to spray with the famous "Quick Henry, the Flit Insecticide," to keep the ever present cockroaches in check.

I became an early commuter. At seven, I regularly boarded the train from Brooklyn to Varick Street, Manhattan, where the Schraffts Candy Factory would fill my order of boxed candy. To this day, I cannot comprehend how I managed to carry those boxes back!

At five years of age, I was enrolled in the Yeshiva *Etz Chaim*, still speaking only Yiddish, the lingua franca of my parents. My parents would give me a cut roll and five cents for lunch. I would go to Skilowitz Delicatessen, buy a quarter of a pound of salami to make the sandwich, and I then used the delicatessen's mustard and water. I think the owner had compassion!

My years at *Etz Chaim* parallel Ralph's, with the same teachers and the same punishments for such transgressions as talking to a buddy when silence was deemed necessary, or throwing chalk or blackboard erasers at the back of the teacher when he was writing on the blackboard. The favorite punishments were rulers across the knuckles, a slap on the head, or twisting of the ear. In the extreme, one would be suspended for a day, until a parent appeared. One of the parents that appeared frequently was the mother of Alan Dershowitz, even then a cut-up! Now, we can appreciate from where his lawyer genes came. His mother was a formidable defender of her son.

After graduation, much to my orthodox mother's dismay, I attended a secular high school, Erasmus. However, the long-standing friendships of the "Band of Brothers," nurtured at *Etz Chaim* were maintained. There are periodic meetings of *Etz Chaim* alumni. With the inroads of the ultra-orthodox Jewish population, *Etz Chaim* was deemed not suitably religious, and the Yeshiva did not survive.

The music stopped again!



MR. HADLEY'S COUCH

Eileen D. Kelly

What's that doing there? They told me they were gonna do it, but I didn't think they'd really do it. And that's what it looks like? I didn't think it would be so bulky. What'd they do with my TV? Oh, there it is, over there. How'm I gonna see it? They'll have to move it around for me. It's a flat screen one. I just got it, a big one. Hope I can see it.

And all my other furniture? I don't see my couch. They must have moved it out. Where's my company gonna sit? My recliner? There it is in the corner. That's no place for it, facing the wall.

Who do they think they are, these people, moving everything around and out and bringing that thing in? They're sure no decorators! Did I say they could do all this? I don't remember saying they could just take my couch, the red leather Chesterfield one Sally and I fell in love with and bought at Bloomingdale's so long ago. How long ago? Where is it? It's not here! And they didn't ask me! Why didn't they ask me? Who's got my couch now? I want my couch back!

"Hey, what'd you do with my couch?"

"I'm sorry nobody told you, Mr. Hadley. We had to take it out to get the hospital bed in here."

COLD

Sy Amerkraut

I feel cold when heat dissipates.

That makes sense.

A crime executed in cold blood

has nothing to do with cold or blood.

Being cold or indifferent

has nothing to do with temperature.

Cold hard facts are neither cold nor hard.

If you think this problem is confusing, try "cool."

I'm bewildered and confused, I'm going to bed.

I think I'm getting a cold!

I give up!

BROADWAY DRAMA

Ellie Chernick

The number 104 bus is my means of transportation up and down Broadway to the Upper West Side. I live in the Lincoln Square neighborhood. Whenever I board the bus, going up or down, a human drama takes place.

Just yesterday, a man boarded the bus by going up the ramp in a wheelchair. In fact, I had to leave my seat so that it could be folded back to make room for him and his chair. The bus driver had been busy getting me and my seatmates to move and forgot to fasten the wheelchair to the chain. For the rest of his ride, the man held onto the back of the bus seat so that his chair would not roll around the bus. I was worried about him.

It is not unusual to see a woman board the bus with a baby asleep in a snuggie around her neck while she carries a folded stroller in her hand. What mothers do! I don't think I could have done that, even as a young mother.

When a pre-school child boards the bus with a caregiver, sometimes our eyes meet. I keep that child occupied and amused by rolling my eyeballs around in a circle. The child and I become silent friends as my eyes roll.

Sometimes passengers board the bus with walkers or canes. They remind me how lucky I am to get about without assistance.

At times passengers and I make eye contact when an unconventionally dressed rider joins our midst.

The most fun occurs when a seatmate and I start to talk to each other like old friends. Every ride includes a new set of characters. May the show keep going on!

MY FIRST QUEST PRESENTATION

Sylvia Berg

I have been a member of Quest for many years, but I still remember the first time I presented. The class was called “Biography” and as the name indicates, we were to give the life story of a famous person. I chose Pamela Churchill, who had been US Ambassador to France.

I did my research, read her book, and tried to learn all about her. I wanted to give my very best, as this was my first assignment, and I wanted to impress everyone. I took notes prodigiously, and thought about how I was going to relate to the class while keeping them from dozing off.

When the day arrived, I was prepared. I had written information on a scroll, as I thought this would be more interesting than ordinary notes. I started the class by stating, “I wondered how an ordinary British girl would achieve such prominence to become Ambassador to France.” I then unfurled the scroll all the way down, and said, “These are all the men she slept with.” Needless to say, people did not go to sleep, and the lesson was a success!!!

CLEVER

Carole Cronig Abrahams

“Clever is as clever does”
stays glued in my brain
when poetry workshop’s turn comes round.

Wring the phrase inside out,
worry and shake the words, the thoughts.
Clever won’t revise itself.

Beauty is shunted away.
Rhyme resists.
Rhythm stumbles.

How clever can that be?

MUSIC AND THE METS

Mary Ann Donnelly

I've had happiness. I've fallen in love, danced at my big wedding, given birth to two children and rejoiced through all their milestones. I fell in love a second time with my first grandson and felt joy at the births of the four that followed. In truth, their achievements, from first words and first steps to recitals and home runs to awards at graduations, have filled me with more happiness than my own or my children's. This could be because I don't need to take credit or blame but just enjoy the moment.

But that feeling of euphoria or "great" happiness didn't come with those moments. It came to me through baseball, like the time the ball slipped through Bill Buckner's legs in the sixth game of the 1986 World Series or when Robin Ventura hit a "grand slam single" against the Atlanta Braves, keeping the Mets' hopes alive in 1999. Of course the Mets lost the next game—and the playoffs—when Kenny Rogers walked in the winning run, leaving me with a profound sense of loss and in a funk that lasted a week. This same euphoria is felt in sports or art. I remember being transported by Hildegard Behrens in *Die Walküre* and when a singer, whose name I don't remember, succumbed to Don José's knife as Carmen accepted her fate. I'm happy I didn't nearly lose my father's love nor die for *l'amour*, but these chilling performances and the soaring music momentarily let me know how that pain must feel.

The 9/11 memorials remind me of the dread I felt as I fled Lower Manhattan over the Brooklyn Bridge, watching the North Tower crumble. But I also remembered a different feeling when the following Saturday, still raw from the trauma, I sang The Star Spangled Banner with the audience at the New York City Opera. It was like being in Rick's Café in *Casablanca* singing *La Marseillaise*. It was exhilarating. I felt as if I shed something toxic that had attached to me on September 11th.

I've had my share of unhappiness and disappointments. When I was a child I harbored exaggerated hopes for things to come and was invariably let down when they never met my expectations. I gradually learned to adjust, but in order to soften the blows I've sometimes blunted the highs.

That's why I stay a Mets fan and have seen *La Bohème* at least twenty times. Through art and sports I can attain the heights and swoop down to the lows but emerge unscathed.



EGGS

Linda Rothstein

I was wheeling my cart down the aisle by the dairy case when I heard muffled cries. "Help me! Help me!" I peered into the chilly chasm. Had a small child fallen into the cottage cheese or the tofu?

No—it came from inside an egg carton. I flipped the lid open to see a row of oval eggs trembling. "We're so tired of being grabbed," they cried. "And it's so cramped in this carton. It's unfair. Look around. Do you see the vegetable bin? Look at the carrots with their roots hanging out shamelessly. Look at how the celery stalk is splayed out for all to see. They don't package the phallic-shaped food. They keep us under cover because we're round. Can't you help us, girl to girl?" they pleaded.

"If I can," I said tenderly. "Will you tell me your names?"

"We don't have names," they said, "because we all look alike, except some of us are white and some brown. But, then we don't share the same carton."

"That's a lie," said a brash voice from a higher shelf. "I'm not like them. I'm 'Grade A'. That's why I cost more."

"Ignore her," I was told. "She may be bigger, but she's not smarter. Why don't you ask her a question yourself, if you don't believe us?" Ask a question of an egg? I pondered the thought. What would the other shoppers think if they saw me bending over the dairy case talking to an egg carton?

"Go ahead. What are you waiting for?"

"Okay," I said, then asked Ms. Grade A, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?"

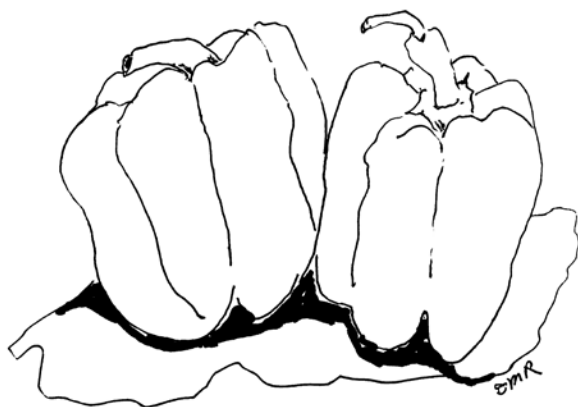
"The egg, of course," she said. "How else could there be a chicken?"

I was scratching my head, glad I had one, because eggs do not, when I heard the retort from the girls in the carton. "She's as dumb as an egg that got scrambled," they said. "Everyone knows the chicken came first. How else could an egg get laid?"

"I don't know what the point is about talking to you girls," said Ms. Grade A. "And, besides, I don't mind being grabbed at all." She eyed a rasher of bacon sitting upright on a higher shelf. He turned red and buried his head in saran wrap. "My problem is I can't get as much as a stick of butter interested in me. And look at my date stamp—I'm about to expire."

A tear came to my eye. How horrible to be an egg. Grabbed, tossed into a plastic bag to be taken to some stranger's home. To be cracked open, tossed into a bowl and lose your identity in a cake mix.

I closed up the carton, and the girls seemed to simmer down. Perhaps they'll be slow boiled, or maybe even poached. Perhaps the end will be peaceful for them. I could hope they would never sizzle on a hot griddle. I could pray their final moments would be spent floating in the warm currents of a double-boiler.



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2013 – 2014

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