

# Q REVIEW



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THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

***Q Review* 2017**

Volume 22

**QUEST**

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## A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

“You can’t use up creativity.  
The more you use, the more you have.”  
– *Maya Angelou*

I believe within each of us is an untapped reservoir of creative talent that, with a little prodding, can rise to the surface. Some say we are all born creative, but our imaginations become worn down by a rigid educational system and an unbending work environment. If that’s true, Quest provides an ideal opportunity to unleash that inner magic.

Quest members often tell me they are grateful to the organization for helping them unite once again with their creative muse. For many, it’s been a reawakening. The *Q Review* editors salute the dozens of Quest members whose contributions enliven this year’s edition and encourage all members to let their creative juices flow. Remember, creativity is an expanding natural resource: *The more you use, the more you have.*

– *Wayne Cotter*

## IN MEMORIAM

We note with profound sorrow those Quest members whom we lost this past year:

**Audrey Bloch**  
**Burt Saltzberg**  
**Irving Schiffman**  
**Beverly Wasserman**

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



# Q REVIEW

THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

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# THE TALE OF THE CARAMEL CRÈME PIE

*Jennifer Jolly*

After my maternal grandfather died, my grandmother came to our house for a cooked mid-day meal every Saturday. Often she came on Sundays and during the week as well. In fact, my Grandmother Bickerton was at our house nearly every day and was given to complaining.

Even when she came for mid-day dinner, Grandma complained, “If I’m not careful, I’ll get a bad stomach,” or “I’ll get indigestion with this lot.”

Meanwhile, she seemed to be strong as a horse and would eat everything put in front of her. But that didn’t stop her from saying, “I don’t know how I’m going to get through all of this,” or “You’ve over-faced me with all this food, our Thora.” Then she would tuck in and eat the lot.

My father managed to keep his mouth shut for the sake of my mother but would have much preferred a pint of the local brew with his friends at the pub across the way. My brother, Giles, sat and methodically ate all of his food. Though small in stature, not tall like me, he would pile his plate as high as he could and try for a second helping if possible.

“How does he manage to get so much into a small body?” I would wonder. I was a picky eater, but he ate everything put in front of him. One of his favorite deserts was a caramel crème pie my mother made from a gourmet cookbook recipe.

On this particular Saturday, five of us—my father and mother, my brother and I, and Grandma—were at the dining table and I could hear sounds of the BBC news on the radio in the other room. My mother set the vegetable dishes of potatoes and cabbage on the table, and we waited while Dad cut the joint of beef and put some on each plate. Then we helped ourselves to vegetables and gravy while Grandma grumbled to herself in the background.

We finished, and Mum cleared away the dishes, took them to the kitchen, and returned with a caramel crème pie. She put it in the middle of the table where it was watched intently by four pairs of blue or green eyes and my grandmother’s brown ones. You could almost see my brother salivating at the sight of the pie. My mother cut the pie into six parts. There was one piece each and one left over. The old lady

moaned and in a disgruntled voice said, "Don't give me much Thora, you know I can only eat a little bit."

The pie was served and my brother set to in his methodical way, working through his pie but with his eyes on the extra portion. The old lady was making comments such as, "It's nice, but it's a bit rich, our Thora," and, "Oh dear, I'll have to pay for this later."

The rest of us continued to eat, not saying much and trying to take no notice of her. Nevertheless, a satisfied silence hung over the table as each person dug into their pie and there was a scraping of bowls as everyone finished.

Now Giles was ready to make a bid for the remaining piece. Dad, Mum and I had all said we were full and although sure it was his, Giles still politely asked, "Would anyone like that piece of pie?" This was met by a brief silence and, taking this as an indication that it was his, my brother stretched out his hand. It was about to descend to take the pie from the plate when he was stopped in mid-air by, "I think I'll have that bit of pie."

All eyes turned to Grandma. On each face was a look of disbelief. Added to this were astonishment, frustration, and disappointment on my brother's face. The pleasurable anticipation of the pie, how good it would taste, and how it would fill the small gap left in his stomach was dashed to the ground as his hand hovered over the pie dish.

I had to put my napkin over my mouth to stop from laughing out loud. "Serves my greedy little brother right," I thought.

Seeing me out of the corner of his eye, Dad said, "Now stop that, Jennifer," although he too was trying not to laugh at the expression on Giles' face. Meanwhile, Grandma, totally oblivious to what was going on, lifted up her dish to my brother's outstretched hand and waited for him to put the pie on it. You could almost see him salivate as she ate "his" piece of pie and as she did so, she said rather grudgingly, "That pie wasn't so bad after all, our Thora."

• • •



## AN IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

*Eva Shatkin*

Once walking through Soho, I came upon a dark, robust man sliding a board held vertically across a patch of newly-laid cement. He was repairing a section of sidewalk in front of a store. He held a shorter piece of wood at an angle and smoothed out the surface, finishing it with a trowel.

On his knees most of the time and with back bent, my father's working life as an immigrant overwhelmed me. In his early years in this country, he did what this Hispanic laborer was doing, picking up small jobs when available. My father's command of the language was still poor; his education was patchy. All he could offer was his ability to do low-skilled, back-breaking work, training himself on the job.

There were good years and bad years. During the First World War he gained work because many male citizens were off to the Army. After the war, during the twenties, in the housing boom that followed, he hired men from his native land for contract cement work on foundations and sidewalks. In 1927, he gained the courage to buy a four-family house, taking out two mortgages to finance the purchase. Our building was on the block where he did the cement work. In our house, he added special touches to the basement and chose the house with the widest driveway. For a few years, tenant rents helped manage the mortgage payments and property taxes.

Then, the housing market contracted as depression deepened throughout the country. In the years that followed, our family could not have survived without the income provided by renting out the apartments. Though we had a home, we had little else except the money Papa brought in doing odd jobs, cutting his estimates to the bone to secure those. Competing with him at the time were Italian immigrants moving into the field, offering lower estimates for the same jobs. With my younger sister, I recall visiting one crooked builder, Fred Trump, to ask for money Papa was owed. Our presence at his door testified pitifully that the money was necessary for the bread and butter of children.

I don't know how Mama managed. She tended the coal furnace, washed the halls, took out the ashes and garbage, swept the sidewalks, and handled all tenant monies, fielding constant tenant complaints.

All that, and shopping, cooking, cleaning, washing and ironing, raising six children. Not until World War II did work begin coming more steadily since many able-bodied men were in the Army, and by then most of the children were out of the house, returning home only when trauma struck their households.

My parents' lives have followed the path of most immigrants to this country. What I observed in Soho was a more recent immigrant who will undoubtedly be followed by others.

When Father left Russia, he left behind his wife and two young children. Unlike many current immigrants, he was able to sail safely from Hamburg and land, though largely penniless, in the United States. He didn't face drowning in the Mediterranean like some current immigrants.

It takes intense courage goaded by dire circumstances to leave your homeland. Nor do you alight in Paradise. Instead, hard, unremitting labor awaits you. Neither you nor the natives understand each other. You are embarking on a voyage where, at best, your children may do better. But life will always be a struggle.

Pay tribute to these hardy souls.

• • •

## A MEMORABLE WEDDING IN BIG SKY COUNTRY

*Bob Reiss*

Back in 2005, my wife, Debra, and I attended a wedding in Montana that I won't forget.

First of all, how was it that we even knew anyone in Montana? Several years prior to the nuptials, Debra had been contacted by Tim Stonebreaker, a lawyer in Bozeman, who needed an expert witness in medical school admissions. Debra, former Dean of Admissions at Stony Brook Medical School, was recommended by a colleague. The case dragged on for many months, so Debra and Tim were in frequent telephone contact, although they had never met in person.

In one of their many conversations, Tim allowed that he was planning on getting married. After that, he would occasionally tell Debra about his bride-to-be. Deborah Goldman, Tim's fiancée, turned out to be—well—different. A nice Jewish girl, she lived in North Dakota where she owned and operated a cattle ranch. (If you're geographically challenged, Montana and North Dakota adjoin each other and Montana's 75 mph speed limit, seldom enforced, made Tim and Deborah's relationship viable). Tim said that in his office, he often had to tell his colleagues which "Deborah/Debra" he was talking about. Eventually, Deborah, his fiancée, became "Deborah with cows." This sobriquet, while effective in distinguishing Deborah from Debra, was radically inaccurate, as I later found out.

Several years after their first contact, Tim invited Debra and me to his wedding in Bozeman. As is the norm for wedding weekends, a Friday evening dinner welcomes the out-of-town guests and serves as an opportunity for friends and family to mingle. A small group of 15 or so gathered at the *Filling Station* restaurant and introductions were made. Sitting at the table, I found myself between both brides, Tim's (Deborah) and mine (Debra). I became deeply involved in small talk with Deborah and we started with the usual, "What do you do?"

My profession as traffic engineer didn't seem to elicit much interest, since Montana and North Dakota are not overwhelmed with either population or vehicles. Then Deborah volunteered that she ran a cattle ranch (which, of course, I already knew). Born and raised in Brooklyn, I was somewhat at a loss in asking any intelligent questions about ranches. Luckily, Deborah was quite forthcoming and explained that

her ranch, *JB Angus*, had only bulls. (Thus, “Deborah with cows” was a total misnomer).

I responded, “...er, so how do you get more bulls?” Deborah replied “We don’t; our ranch supplies semen to other ranches for breeding purposes.” Again, my Brooklyn origins left me adrift, but curious. So I asked, “...er, so how do you get the semen if there are no cows around?” She said, “Oh, that’s easy; there are plastic replicas of cows’ behinds that the bulls find quite attractive.”

At this point I found it quite surreal that I was having this conversation with a woman I had known for about five minutes. But soon I felt quite knowledgeable about how to persuade a bull to make love to a plastic cow.

As the evening progressed, Deborah Goldman quickly earned the title, as *Readers Digest* used to call it, as one of the most “unforgettable characters” I ever met. Born in Kansas, she served in the U.S. Army, then attended and graduated from N.Y.U. Law School. At some point, she recovered from law and bought her ranch. Surely, if and when she bought a dress, it was in the petite size department. I couldn’t imagine how this tiny wisp of a woman could boss around a bunch of burly ranch hands.

Tim, on the other hand, had a more conventional background. Originally from Chicago and a graduate of Dartmouth and Indiana University Law School, he was a partner in a successful Bozeman law firm. He met Deborah during the course of some legal proceeding and apparently love overcame the stark difference in their backgrounds.

The wedding took place at the *Lazy B Ranch*, a huge barn that had been converted to an event venue in which one was reminded that this was indeed the West. My most vivid memory of the affair was a huge barbeque spit just outside the entrance. Here, a whole pig, about six feet long, was slowly turning over a blazing charcoal fire. Evidently, Deborah’s Jewish roots were not all that deep. I must say, though, that the roast pork was delicious.

At the wedding, I also observed the collegiality of the Bozeman legal profession. Among the guests was the lawyer representing Tim’s adversary in the very case that Debra was consulting on. Our weekend concluded Sunday morning when the out-of-town guests were treated to a real western breakfast at the *Stockyard Diner*. The trip served as a reminder that we New Yorkers should occasionally leave our bubble and make it a point to go west of the Hudson.

• • •

## COURAGE

*Joyce West*

Only one of the men spoke fluently, and that was George who was hyperfluent. They had all agreed that going to social doings like a family reunion would be hard. I was the speech pathologist at the meeting, and I listened.

"No good," said Sol.

"Yeah. But family... good, good... family... kids... and... um... lots... people... good," said Tony.

"Could be, could be, if there is everyone, you know, everybody, and here's the story, Solly, you come, you go. It's a family, you know, and you come and you go, everybody's story, come and go." This was George. The others didn't understand him, but they were always impressed that he could talk.

"But, you know George's problems are different from yours," I'd say.

"Good, good, talk an' talk." If you have Broca's aphasia, someone who's fluent sounds miraculous. Even Shirley, Sol's wife, had asked me who was George's first therapist.

"George has been with me since his stroke," I said,

"But, why? Why can he talk and my Solly can't?"

"Well, he has a different kind of aphasia, and his stroke was in a different area of the brain called Wernicke's area. George can talk fluently, but he has a lot of trouble understanding, and what he says doesn't always make sense."

"So does Sol," Shirley retorted, "I mean he doesn't talk good like George, but you can't always figure out if he understands, or not."

"Actually, Sol understands pretty well. It's more that he has trouble with his answers; he says 'yes' when he means 'no.'"

"Oh, I know, yeah, yeah, I know. He does understand a lot better than he talks. But other people think he doesn't, particularly when he says, 'yes, good, no good,' and means he's not sure."

"Well, we'll have to settle for that being his 'maybe.'"

"Look, all I want now is that he come to this family reunion and not spend the time in the bathroom like he always does. This is his family. They love him. They want to understand him. Try to get him to try to talk to them."

The groups' response varied.

"No... no good," was always Sol's reaction.

"Now look here, Solly," said George. "It's one of those things, those things, y'know, we hafta do, like taking a bath, and no soap, so it's just one of them, what'd I say, them...them things. Yup, we just gotta do it, Solly. Love is good to have. Love, love is people, love is them, love is... family... yes, that's it, Solly, love is family and you gotta be strong and be... cergus, cerogus, curages; yes, that's it, courageous. You gotta be courageous, Solly."

Tony said, "Yeah, cour... age... yeah, courag... jus... cour-ah-juh, yeah."

"That's it," I said. "Sol, it takes courage. Courage that I know you have."

Tony tapped his chest, "medal... good... Viet... Vietnam... good."

"Tony's telling you not to forget that medal you won in Vietnam," I said.

Sol shakes his head slowly, "good, no...no good, good."

"That's a maybe," I said.

A week later, Shirley was waiting for me when I walked into the group room.

"How'd he do?" I asked.

"Oh, my God. You won't believe it. The day of the reunion, I walked into the bedroom to find Solly standing at the mirror. He's practicing! He says, 'Hmmm. Good. Good,' and then he frowns, and tips his head, and says 'hmhmm,' and tries it again. And he stands there and he practices. He uses his 'hmhmhs and goods' and his head nods like he really understands and has an opinion!

And you know what? He was a hit. With his family no one listens to anyone else and they all talk over one another. Solly just listened and let them talk and nodded 'hmhmh-ed' and everyone loved him. And he had a really good time."

When I congratulated Sol and told the group what a hit he'd been, George said,

"Ah, you see Solly, you did it, you were good, Sol, very good. You had it Solly... courage! Way to go Sol!"

"Yeah... yeah... Cur... gus," said Tony.

"Good... good." Sol threw out his arms to include the group as a whole and then tapped his chest, and grinned, "good... good, cur... eh... jus!"

• • •

## RED BANK, N.J. HERE I COME

*Dolores Dolan*

My daughters think I am crazy, at my age, to make trips alone at night to places I've never been. But, when I saw an ad for a play I had seen over thirty years ago on Broadway, I was thrilled. August Wilson's "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" was ending its month-long run at a little theater in Red Bank, New Jersey. I had never been deeper into New Jersey than Teaneck, but the information that, by train, Red Bank was an hour and a half from Penn Station didn't deter me. I called the Twin Rivers theater and made a reservation for the next evening, a Friday. I hoped to make a return train at 10:30 p.m. because the next train was at 11:45 p.m. When I found out that the play ended at 10:35, the die was cast. I booked the 11:45.

When I arrived at Red Bank in a nearly empty car that had been jammed an hour before, I found my way to the theater in the dark across the train tracks and settled into my center seat in a lovely, fairly new modern theater. The play was as wonderful as I remembered, and the actors were all very good. The play, set in Chicago in the 1920s in a recording studio, shows not only the exploitation of the black musicians by the white studio owners, but also the disappointment and despair of the musicians and how badly the musicians treated each other.

At intermission I spoke with two people seated next to me; one lived in New Jersey and the other in Manhattan. When I told them I didn't want to leave before the end of the play to catch the early train, the New York woman offered to drive me to midtown where I could catch a cab home. I was elated. But first, they both wanted to have a late dinner. Okay by me, since I was getting a ride. The only open nearby restaurant welcomed us at 10:50 p.m. by saying we could have a drink, but in five minutes the kitchen was closing. After a few minutes, a waiter felt sorry for us and said he would ask that the kitchen stay open for a light meal. We ate heartily.

Then we set forth for the parking lot. The Jersey resident bid his friend, the New Yorker, goodbye and I went with the woman to her car. It was now about midnight. As I opened the car door, she said, "Now, I have to keep my focus at night on the highways and GPS, so you must not talk to me." This was also okay by me, although for me to go almost two hours without talking was a challenge. But I did and spent the time looking out the window at darkened houses,

unfamiliar roads, and intersections. The amazing thing was that while the driver was listening intently to the robot lady on GPS, she made a wrong turn three times. I was thankful that I could not be blamed for distracting her.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, we came through the Lincoln Tunnel to Times Square. I thanked the driver profusely and looked around for a cab. No cabs available, but at 1:30 a.m., I was not going to take the subway. A crowd of noisy teenagers walked by. I stopped one and said, "Could you find me a taxi, please?" "Sure, lady, I would be happy to," and he did. So, at 2 a.m. I turned the key to my apartment door and was happy to be home. But, maybe, my daughters are right to call me crazy. Still, seeing the play again was 100 percent worth it.

• • •

## MATILDA THE WALTZER

*Jennifer Jolly*

Matilda O'Reilly was waltzing with glee  
Going one two three, one two three, one two and three  
This sprightly old lady is now seventy three  
But you won't believe it so upright is she

Her gowns are of taffeta, silk and old lace  
She throws back her head and she shows off her face  
Who cares if she's wrinkled, she dances with grace  
When off she goes waltzing all over the place

Her legs are quite shapely she's got dainty feet  
She keeps herself heathy she keeps herself neat  
Her partners are younger they could be her sons  
Matilda keeps up with their steps and some runs

She practices hard showing care and intent  
To travel around from New York to Tashkent  
Australia is beckoning she'll dance on a stage  
To Waltzing Matilda cos there it's the rage

• • •



## THE PAPER BOY

Wayne Cotter

I wobbled under the weight of the bag. But as I moved on, delivering the papers, the load got lighter, and toward the end, with only a few papers left, I felt stronger and light-headed and even powerful. *I was delivering a newspaper.*

– Pete Hamill  
*A Drinking Life*

It was my first job—a newspaper carrier. It was also the first job for hundreds of thousands of Americans, including my father, my son and me. What a glorious introduction to the work force! Yes, the job was often mundane, but paper boys (and girls) handled relatively large sums of money, maintained books and records, managed time efficiently, and developed sophisticated interpersonal skills. Added benefits included plenty of fresh air and exercise.

I use the past tense in the paragraph above because paper boys, like ice trucks and milkmen, are now relics of a bygone era. In fact, most part-time and summer jobs have dwindled for America's youth. Blame it on business efficiency, globalization, or the recession, but those cherished jobs of adolescence are far less plentiful than a generation ago. And that's a shame because my early jobs taught me lessons that no school could replicate—lessons about compromise, teamwork, and empathy.

And my earnings, meager as they were, fostered a strong sense of independence. Working as an unpaid intern at some financial services firm could never have replaced those menial factory, office, and manual labor jobs that helped shape my sense of self.

But it's that first paper boy job that engenders my fondest memories. When I walked my route, newspapers were still the major source of information for most Americans. In fact, I envisioned myself a vital link between our neighborhood and the outside world. I still recall the smiles greeting me in February 1962 when I arrived at my customers' front stoops with accounts of John Glenn's historic flight. I also recall the flowing tears a year and half later when I trudged doorstep to doorstep one bleak November weekend.

Thirty years later I rekindled those memories when I assisted my son on his Sunday newspaper rounds (the "dailies" he handled solo). Each

week we would rise before 7 a.m., enjoy some appropriate music, and begin assembling the Sunday monster. By 7:30 we were out the door, wending our way through the quiet magnificence of early-morning Sunday. No cars, lawn mowers, or people. A woodpecker occasionally would punctuate the silence to remind us we were not alone.

But my son was the last of a dying breed. The paper he delivered, *Newsday*, was the final major newspaper in the United States to convert from an afternoon to a morning edition. The newspaper's publisher said at the time that an afternoon paper could no longer meet the "lifestyle demands" of his customers. With two-income families dominating the later part of the 20th century, his claim was hard to dispute. Soon, adult carriers were completing their daily rounds well before dawn, and that's the way it remains. Of course, these adult jobs have also dwindled as more of us seek out digital news outlets.

Our grandkids, of course, have no idea what a paper boy is. In fact, I'm not sure they know what a newspaper is. Jobs are scarce for young people, but I hope by the time my grandchildren are teenagers, they'll be flooded with mundane summer and part-time job opportunities. After all, it's difficult to climb the ladder of success without mounting that first humble rung.

• • •



## CONTROL, OR LACK OF

*Roberta Curley*

Constance always hated instructions. If she had to open a child-proof aspirin bottle, she'd place the container on the floor and stomp on it until the pills exploded in a confetti-like spray all over her bathroom. The fits brought on by her direction-phobia were sometimes as extreme as the meltdowns that came when she resisted learning something new.

When she was in grade school her meltdowns surfaced in almost every class. English composition and history were exceptions. She was a child prodigy at composing and reciting poetry, including her own and that of Emily Dickinson and Bill Shakespeare. But when asked to follow a science experiment step-by-step she freaked.

Her parents hired a piano instructor for her, but the strain of instruction was unbearable. She barked, howled and growled at her teacher. As Constance grew bigger, so did her tantrums. When taught something new, she would often lie on the floor pounding her arms and legs until her face turned blue. Her motto was "Nothing is impossible to get out of if you try hard enough."

Pathological? Possibly. But it was not because she was lazy. As an adult, she ran a multi-million-dollar firm specializing in organizing household clutter. She supervised a staff of fifty "We Will Make Your House Nifty" anti-clutter corporate cleaners. The only instruction she needed emanated from her Wharton School of Business MBA. You might wonder how she got through college and grad school where assignments proliferated. Constance was quite successful in sleeping her way through the ranks. When she received a difficult assignment, she sought a teaching assistant for "aid."

Being computer-savvy would have turned her into a billionaire, but she refused to acknowledge an Apple as anything but a piece of fruit. Computers were anathema. Their arrows, buttons, and beeping noises sent her into *tizzyville*. She quickly returned her iPhone and Mac computer. She was elated to disconnect herself from the technological world and immediately went out and bought a royal blue Hermes leather pocketbook and a pear-colored Valentino scarf.

Some people need directions to create a stable environment. Others become panic-stricken when asked to read a subway map. I learned not to ask Constance to help install a new phone or to hang on the automated line with the Port Authority to get a bus schedule. But I was

always sure Constance would lend me \$10,000. The lesson Constance taught me was that we all muddle through in our own idiosyncratic ways. And I'll never get over how those European scarves and bags draped her as if she were Grace Kelly.

• • •

## ACROSS THE HALL

*Linda Rothstein*

The sobs came from across the hall, the cries of a woman emptying out her soul. A while back, this woman had blown in like tumbleweed from a small mid-western town. She had surrendered her husband, her children, and sold her house—all to come to New York to seek a new life of passion.

What was that life to be? A degree in poetry. Or, rather, “poetics,” she once corrected me. Uh-oh, I thought, of course they glorify the name when you pay a lot of money to study it. I think the combination of poetry and money and past due rent had something to do with those sobs.

It wasn't surprising that the sheriff soon plastered an eviction notice on her door. I don't know where she went, and I did not like seeing her furniture carried out, leaving her apartment so empty it seemed hollow.

A flight attendant moved in. She was a crisp little Southern pixie dressed in navy, trailing her carry-on behind her. She had a job, and I predicted a better fate for her.

Wrong! On the nights before her early flights, I'd hear the flight attendant thrust her window open and cry out, “Please, please let me sleep.” What I overlooked was the noise level of our building. Lots of young people with booming stereos and late night coked-up parties.

Night after night I'd hear her pleas, “I have an early flight—please, please, let me sleep.”

But they didn't. Normally I sleep so soundly a freight train could pass over my pillow, but this one night the stewardess's cries reached the pitch of a wounded animal's. Once more, sobs from across the hall. Then, like the poet, she disappeared.

It is sad to see what this city can do—lure you with promises it can never keep and then rob you of sleep.

• • •

## CHARLEY / BETTY LOU

*Roy Clary*

Jake had always wanted a boy. When his second daughter was born, he decided to call her Charley instead of her birth name, Betty Lou. The name stuck. Her hair was cut short. She never wore a dress, only shirts and jeans. At school, the teachers called her Betty Lou, but to everyone else she was Charley.

Jake played catch with Charley almost every day. When Jake came home from work, Charley would be there to meet him with a ball and glove. When it was time for dinner, Jake would grab Charley in a big hug, give her a pat on the butt, and they would walk into their house together. They seemed so close that I was surprised when Charley told me one day that she didn't really like Jake.

By the time she was twelve, Charley was the best athlete in the neighborhood. She was always the first to organize a game. She was a fierce competitor who did not take easily to losing.

Charley and I were next-door neighbors. We went to the same school. We were in the same grade. We were friends, but there was a rivalry between us. We were the same height, but she outweighed me. If we disagreed, Charley would often grab me around the neck, wrestle me to the ground, and hold me until I gave up. Usually, I gave up quickly, especially if she gave my head a few hard twists.

Sometimes, Charley and I would play baseball mumblety-peg. We played with a Boy Scout knife and flipped it off our wrists from a standing position. The way the knife stuck in the ground signaled whether we got a hit or an out.

One day, we were in a close game. Going into the bottom of the ninth, the score was tied. It was my turn to flip the knife. When I did, it stuck in the ground for a single. It wasn't much of a hit, but enough to bring home the winning run. Charley disagreed. She said the toss was an out because the blade had not cleared the ground by enough to count. We argued and then Charley charged me. She intended to once again throw me down and pin me until I gave up.

This time, however, I stepped back and punched her in the face. I had never done this before because I knew she was stronger and might really give me a beating. The blow surprised her. Charley stopped, but then came at me again. This time I hit her as hard as I could right on her nose. As blood poured out, Charley staggered back and in an

instant I saw her turn from a scruffy boy to a sad little girl. Confusion crossed her face. Then she looked at me with tears in her eyes and ran crying into her house.

Charley and I were never friends again. A few months later, my family moved to another town. One day my older brother and I were talking about how happy we were in our new home. I told him I hated where we lived before and what a miserable place it was. That's when he told me he had once seen Jake molesting Charley's older sister.

Even today, I wonder whatever happened to Charley. Did she ever meet anyone who would call her Betty Lou?

• • •

## HELPLESS

*Eneida Cruz*

Sitting on the second car of the #1 train, I heard a woman's chilling shout. I knew she was on the first car because as I rushed onto the train, I could see that something was wrong in that first car. Outside on the platform, there were commuters standing anxiously waiting for an announcement and trying to decide if they should find another route to work. I couldn't afford to have second thoughts about staying on the train or finding another route. No, it would be too time-consuming to make the change at this peak time.

But my concern grew for the woman on that car. After waiting and not hearing anything over the conductor's speaker, I wondered if I should move to that first car. The train was held up, seemingly forever. I became restless but remained quiet. The woman cried out again in her native language, "Ayudame! Help me!"

It seemed as if time stood still. Getting the woman assistance was taking much too long. Finally when help came, I saw the woman on the platform as the paramedics took her away in an ambulance chair.

My indecision had made me feel disheartened and helpless. I wondered if she was in labor. Could I have made a difference? Maybe she would have given me a phone number of a friend or family member—or information to give to the EMT?

I said a prayer.

• • •

## THE TWAIN SHALL MEET

Eileen D. Kelly

“Why are we stopping?” I asked the waitress in the dining room.

“We’re going through a lock,” she said. That was news to me. Just that day I had boarded the *American Queen* paddleboat on the Mississippi at Red Wing, Minnesota. Nobody told me there would be locks to go through. (What about bagels? I chuckled to myself, thinking that would be a good line when I got home.)

But for now, “What about these locks?” I asked Jerry, the guru of our group. “We’re going from higher elevation to lower, and that’s how it’s done,” he said.

“That’s it?” I asked. “All this fuss just to go downhill on a river?” The minute I said it I realized it wasn’t that simple and remembered what “downhill” looked like at Niagara Falls. Then I noticed that the wall of the lock we were in had numbers on it, and I saw the water line lowering, like water out of a bathtub. *The boat was being lowered!* It finally made sense to me.

The man standing next to me, said, “So that’s how it works!” I turned to look at him and saw an elderly man with a fluffy white mustache. He was dressed in an old-fashioned off-white linen suit. “How do you do? I’m Mark Twain,” he said.

I introduced myself, adding, “I’ve heard of you,” expecting him to say more, such as what he was doing there.

He didn’t; he just kept looking at the water line lowering and shaking his head, saying, “Amazing, amazing!” Finally, the lower gate of the lock opened and the *American Queen* sailed through to the open Mississippi. Mr. Twain stayed beside me at the railing. Looking out at the slowly moving green shore of the river, he remarked, “When I was a pilot on the river we didn’t have anything like locks. We just had to deal with whatever was there.”

“How did you manage?” I asked, thinking of rapids and waterfalls.

“Well, it wasn’t easy. There were snags and rocks and all kinds of things. Go into Hannibal when we get there and look around. Buy my memoir, *Life on the Mississippi*, there if you want to find out how we did it!”

He could just tell me, I thought. Then I let it go and said goodnight. He’s an old guy who’s been dead a long time, so what does he know?

But I planned to find out how nineteenth century pilots on the Mississippi dealt with rapids and such. My Google search showed that the early Mississippi pilots sailed only from New Orleans to St. Louis, Missouri, and back, a route where there were only slight changes in elevation, so no rapids and no waterfalls! The northern route, which was what my cruise was doing, from Minnesota to Missouri, had a several hundred foot drop in elevation. Should I tell Mr. Twain that he never piloted this route? No, I decided. Remember, he's dead.

The next day when I left the boat and started walking towards Hannibal, Mr. Twain showed up beside me. "I grew up here," he said. "I'll show you my house."

We went into a small house with a white picket fence, labeled Mark Twain's House, and took a look. "It's very ordinary," I said to Mr. Twain.

"Humph, it was pretty special at the time!" he grumbled.

The whole town was set up in honor of Mark Twain. There were old fashioned houses and stores, though not quite nineteenth century, but early twentieth, like a drug store with a soda fountain. I sat down at the counter and wasn't surprised to find my friend Mr. Twain soon beside me. "What should I be looking for here in Hannibal?" I asked as we sipped our cokes.

"First," he said, "would you mind lending me some money for this coke? All I have is two nickels and I want to keep one for a cigar later."

"Of course," I said, plunking down two dollars and change. Good luck finding a nickel cigar, I thought.

Mr. Twain's eyes grew large at the sight of dollar bills for simple drinks and said a modest "Thank you." Addressing my question, he repeated, "What should you look for here in Hannibal? Nothing in particular. I wanted you to pay attention to make sure you came in here. I like this Coca-Cola." As soon as he drained the glass, the tall man with the white mustache smiled, said again, "Read my books!" and walked away.

Such a pest; I thought he'd never leave. He still owes me a dollar.

• • •



## FROM PARIS TO BEAUVOIR, DECEMBER, 1942

*Stella Gold*

At Gare Montparnasse the train was slowly leaving the station. I was on board, standing with my valise in the corridor near the toilets. I stopped crying. I had made it.

I was on my way to Beauvoir, a village in the Département de la Sarthe. When the train's imminent departure was announced I had to find a seat, but they were all occupied. I started to panic, then decided to remain in the corridor. They did not force me out.

I was eleven years old. Maman had removed the yellow star from my coat. I was given directions for getting to the station by subway. I had never taken a train by myself before, but it was the safest way. The Gare Montparnasse was crowded with German soldiers. Jean, my brother, had made the trip two days earlier and had arrived safely.

It was a long ride, with a change of trains at Connery, to reach the town of Mamers in the late afternoon. There, someone was to meet me.

The French police had organized a raid in order to arrest all foreign-born Jews during the night of July 16, 1942. We were on the list, but the policeman who was to arrest us was the husband of our concierge. He was uncomfortable with the idea and told his partner, "We have enough people for now. Let's come back tomorrow." The concierge was quite upset and tipped us off the following morning. It was clear that we could not remain at home. We spent the night with a friend of my mother's. She was an old woman. The police had already arrested her daughter, but took pity on her on account of her advanced age and let her remain in her apartment.

When we went back home the next morning we found that the police had indeed returned and sealed the door of our apartment. We had nowhere to stay.

Maman entrusted my brother Jean and me to a Jewish organization, Union Générale des Israélites de France (l'UGIF), which had been given assurances by the Gestapo that the children in their care would not be arrested. The Jewish underground discovered that this was not true. The children's home in la rue Lamarck, where we were staying, was to be raided shortly, and Maman was urged to take us out and hide us wherever she could.

She recalled a couple she had met at the time of the exodus from Paris at the beginning of the war in 1939. At that time, Maman had left Paris and traveled into the countryside. She was able to join Jean and me in the small town of Mayet where we had been evacuated with our schools. There, Maman, who had been born in Poland, became acquainted with Monsieur and Madame Pencharski, a Polish couple who resided in Mayet at the time. The Pencharskis were glad to meet another person with whom they could converse in Polish and later remained on friendly terms with Maman.

Maman wrote to ask them if they would be willing to take us in. An underground Jewish organization would pay for our keep. Luckily, they agreed. According to plan, Monsieur Pencharski, now called Monsieur Pierre, was waiting for me with a horse cart, and we drove together to the village of Beauvoir where he was now living with his family.

Jean and I adjusted reasonably well to our new life in that new place. We were hidden in the open. There were no Jews in the village, and the inhabitants may never have met one. We told people that our mother had sent us to live with the Pierres because she was worried about bombings and the shortage of food in Paris. I was sharing a room with the two daughters of the family, while Jean stayed in the village with Joseph, a young man from Yugoslavia, who worked as a woodcutter with Monsieur Pierre. Since instruction was mandatory in France until age fourteen, I attended the small village school, but Jean, who was older and had started the lycée, did not have to go. He worked on nearby farms, where an extra pair of hands was always needed.

The most important point was that we were safe. There was also plenty of food. I became an object of considerable interest because of the quantity of food I could put away. When we first arrived, I was eating more than Monsieur Pierre or Joseph, who worked in the woods all day.

Unexpectedly, in the fall of 1943, on a warm Sunday afternoon, two German soldiers arrived at the Pierre's and asked for Jean. I had no doubt we had been denounced. I was terrified, but succeeded in leaving the house quietly. There was nowhere to hide. The only spot I could think of was the toilet in the henhouse, and I walked over there as quickly as I could. I knew there was a good chance that I would be discovered. I comforted myself with the thought that at least I could protect my mother. I would never give the Germans her address.

A long time elapsed, maybe an hour, and nothing happened. I decided to leave the henhouse and investigate. When I reached the house, the Germans had left. The Pierres, Joseph, and Jean were discussing the afternoon's events. Unbeknownst to us, in the forest to the north of the village, where Monsieur Pierre and Joseph were cutting wood, some German equipment had been sabotaged. Since it was Sunday and Joseph had nothing else to do, he went to check on how many trees remained to be cut in his lot. The German police were investigating, and since they found him alone in the woods, they began to question him. "Where were you last night?" He answered that he was asleep in his room in the village. "Can you prove it?" Joseph gave them Jean's name, since Jean was his roommate. After questioning Jean, they left, satisfied that Joseph was not a terrorist, but totally unaware that they had been speaking to a hidden Jewish child.

Clearly, everyone was relieved. They all made fun of me, the "coward," for hiding in the henhouse. I had made things worse by not closing the door of the coop and letting the chickens invade the vegetable garden.

A few months later my mother was able to leave Paris and join us in Beauvoir. She found a one-room house where we lived together until we were liberated by the American Army.

• • •

## GLOW AND GLIMMER

*Linda Rothstein*

Tied to the houseboats that float in the Orient  
are yellow paper lanterns.  
I saw them from the sky. They flickered  
on again off again  
like my memories of the fireflies  
back home by the lake in Illinois.

I could catch those fireflies between cupped palms  
and put them gently in a bottle  
where they continued to glow  
unaware they would soon die.

It was easy to catch fireflies  
but I could never ever  
catch a single smoke ring  
blown from the pipe smoked by my father.

Summer followed summer  
until the day my father  
coughed and then his lung cast a shadow.  
He was gone before autumn  
when the rains soaked the soil  
and drowned all the earthworms.

The worms lay in the dirt  
like little white corpses.  
They were strangely translucent  
and glowed like an angel on its way to the sky.

The engines are throttled.  
The seat belt light is on  
We circle for a landing.  
Soon we will be on the ground in Singapore.  
I wonder—I wonder—  
will anyone here know this song?

Glow little glowworm, glow and glimmer  
Lead us lest too far we wander...  
Glow little glowworm, glow.

• • •

# IN PRAISE OF BOOKS

*Eva Shatkin*

My shelves are awash with books  
sustenance for a solitary life  
assuaging loneliness and lassitude  
refuge from the workaday.

They take me far from home  
will-o'-the-wisp our destination  
back in time and into the future  
carrying me where they may.

Trapped in routine, adventure I seek  
prepared to revel in fresh horizons  
in other climes and other times  
craving transformation in my days.

I get lost in their pages  
caught up in fancy's spell  
transferred into the lives of others  
relating to their wayward ways.

Homebound I roam at will  
to romance, insight, conflict,  
finding compassion and revelation  
in the trail of writers at play.

When I find myself in isolation  
comfort is always at hand.  
I reach up to my bookshelf  
and transport myself away.

• • •

## PAPER & INK

*Wayne Cotter*

I don't dig digitized Dickens  
Or Othello online  
Or websites disguised  
To resemble *The Times*.

They're electronic imposters  
No binding, no glue  
No ink to stain fingers  
With daily tattoos.

No bookcases housing  
Treasured old friends  
No bookmarks or bookshelves  
Or gnarly book ends.

No notes filling margins  
No underscored phrases  
Damn digital demons!  
I be deaf to thy praises.

Now the world, it turns round  
Leaving some to its dust  
And others—like me—  
To just kettles of rust.

But from Aesop's old fables  
To Ibsen's Peer Gynt  
I still love your pages  
But—*please*—ONLY IN PRINT.

• • •

## BOXES

*Hal Cantor*

Homeless children with empty boxes  
Sully the streets with pleading;  
Wrinkled old men with mottled hands  
Fill supermarket bags for salvation.

Strange in chop suey joints  
Messages of hunger cry out  
From kangi-crafted containers  
Their pain reaching us and resurging.

Strange in secular cathedrals  
Fans of quick-flashed shadows  
Pass popcorn and pleas row to row,  
Pass the sobs of needy nations.

A thousand boxes court the city  
Staking their claims on thinning stocks  
Taking the stomp for nearly-lost causes,  
Each box a hope beyond fulfillment.

What coinage can be persuasive enough  
To bury the countless dead?  
You can't take the red off the books.  
You can't fill a grave with regrets.

A thousand signs on dreary streets  
Lead only to mazes that defy resolution.  
While in his shop a dignified merchant  
Counts to see if he has boxes enough.

• • •

# HELLAS

*Hilda Feinstein*

The complex day  
Whips past my world's window

I am cluttered

Bouzouki music races  
Between the folds of my thoughts  
Faster than my pen will write  
My toes tap the floor in time  
Fast  
Fast  
Faster  
Around  
About  
Through  
Over  
And  
Under  
As  
My mind dances to its tune

Fingers snap.  
I am transformed.  
I am a caryatid  
On the porch of maidens  
I am Melina,  
Then Olympia  
I dance with Zorba  
I hold hands with Zeus  
There is harmony in my hand  
And heart

I am  
Absorbed  
I am  
Clear

• • •



## STILL THE SNOWFLAKES

*Helen Neilson*

My world is white, a solid hue  
with not a track in sight  
and still the snowflakes fall.

It's March and the days grow longer,  
a herald of the season's change  
and still the snowflakes fall.

I yearn for Spring's return with warmth,  
the life it brings with it—  
the joy of blossoms in the sun,  
the freedom of the out of doors  
and still the snowflakes fall.

• • •

## A SLIVER OF EARTH

*Eileen D. Kelly*

Who are they  
Whose headstones line  
The sliver of earth  
Called Second Cemetery?  
There, for two hundred years  
On eleventh street  
So hushed and still  
Not a whisper past  
The locked gate.

Someone tidies the graves  
In the paltry place  
While another  
Lays a single stone on the wall  
And a passer by  
Puts one more there  
To remember those  
We don't even know  
And those we do  
Buried far away  
From eleventh street.

• • •

# INTERGENERATIONAL

*Art Spar*

Odysseus at the head of the table feels big  
Like Laertes did when he had that gig  
It's time to make way for Telemachus  
To yield the space without any fuss

Older living's no sentence of doom  
Nor an exile from your favorite room  
It's time to enjoy the rise of your heirs  
Give them the tsuris and all of the cares

Ecclesiastes wrote of everything's season  
Time's inexorable passage is a mighty good reason  
To cede control of all the decisions  
And turn your attention to more pleasant visions

Who could be wiser than those taught by you?  
Your wants and your needs are in their clear view  
Don't bar their way with selfish vanity  
Clinging to time is total insanity

• • •

## HANDS

*Ellie Chernick*

I thank whatever gods may be  
For these two hands bestowed to me  
To tie a lace  
To button a shirt  
To cream my face  
To salve a hurt.

To pat the baby til dreams arrive  
So through the night safely  
He will survive.

With these hands  
My love speaks to me.  
I thank whatever gods may be.

• • •

# THE ALBATROSS

*Gina Lebowitz*



I drag my body  
behind me,  
an aging carapace  
rusting and whining.

Smells of decomposing  
in every organ and orifice,  
the monster leaks  
mewls and moans.  
She is a calendar  
of bodily breakdown,  
deconstructing on schedule,  
cataracts fogging the way  
she sees her construct  
of the world.

She leaks, she creaks, she complains  
but make no mistake  
she is not me  
yet I must wear her,  
a heavy casement filled  
with foul indignities.

Till I am buried in her,  
till the purifying fires  
free us both.  
She is my albatross.

• • •

## WHEN I'M OLD

*Jennifer Jolly*

Once old age has come to pass  
I'll buck the rules of the middle class  
I'll always wear old funky clothes  
And thumb my nose at those who pose

I'll wear pink tops with dark blue jeans  
Or black striped pants with orange seams  
I'll also wear long floating skirts  
Peasant blouses and Indian shirts

Purple shawls and nails to match  
My dreams will be of plots to hatch  
Yes I'll be seen as a dame with a view  
Who says what she thinks and wants to do

And I'll shout out loud if I want to be heard  
Even if everyone thinks I'm absurd  
For I won't care a jot and I'll say what I think  
So happy I'll be when I make a big stink

I won't care a bit if they say, "The old crone  
We should avoid her and leave her alone,"  
For I'll have all my dreams and my thoughts of the past  
Fantasies too that I'll keep to the last

• • •

## THE HEART

*Helen Neilson*

The heart, a funny thing  
that seldom ever makes you laugh,  
plays games most all our lives  
with love and pain and even death.

The look across the room  
that trips the heart to skip a beat  
feels funny to the toes.  
Then something kicks the head awake  
to bring the feet back to earth  
where vows are made “never again.”

The rocky world corrects itself  
but soon takes off once more  
when new-found wonder wanders in  
and crawls into the heart  
where history repeats itself.

Then dark thoughts turn in on ourselves  
and darkness rules the heart  
with death and when and where we go  
and are we ready yet?

And all the while death hovers near  
watching the scene play out  
prepared to stop the heart mid beat  
and finalize it all.

• • •

## VALENTINE

*Marc Kouffman*

When the stars do not align  
And the sun has lost its shine  
I am yours  
You are mine  
That's what makes a  
Valentine

Certain days are very sad  
Sleepless nights  
Blur good and bad  
But do not gut  
Life's grand design  
Remember me  
Valentine

Muscles fray, tendons flare  
Bulging belly, thinning hair  
With this body in decline  
Thank God for you  
Valentine

There's still time  
Left to play  
To strike a chord  
In the fray  
Laugh, love, explore anew  
You with me: me with you

And when our sun  
does brightly shine  
It's because of you  
Valentine

• • •

# EVERYONE WORE BLACK

*Barbara P Gordon*

no one prepared her  
he would never tell her  
he brought her to the party  
as a trophy on his arm

golden haired and luscious  
ripe as a persimmon  
she swayed as she sauntered  
a blossom in the wind

the men wore tuxedos  
the women New York black  
their dresses draped and flowing  
hair a sculpted work of art

*how could he bring her*  
*it's not that kind of party*  
they whispered not too softly  
as their men were magnetized

*HER* dress was scarlet  
her lips were ruby red  
she wore *HIM* like a trophy  
the women wished her dead

• • •

# MARILYN IS LEAVING US

*Barbara P Gordon*

Marilyn is leaving us  
fragile, unsteady on her feet  
she finally succumbs to "senior living"  
somewhere in New Jersey near her son

former colleagues  
book club buddies  
we gather for a final lunch  
to say "goodbye"

a tiny blond, always perfectly turned out  
English teacher  
literary throwback to a former age  
Manhattan as they come

she painted beautifully  
rarely missed a concert or a play  
pecks at her food like the wren she is  
never gained an ounce

she'll be absent like a missing tooth  
when next we meet to talk about our book

• • •



*Denim-Daw-Ling-*

*MAW*



# METAMORPHOSIS

*Trudy Owett*

Last spring, the mirror was Clara Rose's  
enemy, as she moaned, kicked and screamed  
"I'm ugly... I'm fat."

In dressing room after dressing room  
her bitter tears did not help us find a Bat Mitzvah  
dress which would conceal the baby fat  
that was her Nemesis.

Later, from the Bima, she mesmerized her  
audience as she declared that while she,  
personally, doubted God's existence, there might,  
just might, be a small voice within us which was  
telling us how to live.

She shrugged. Those rave reviews for being a  
deep thinker were of no consolation, because her  
zipper wouldn't close and she'd rather be pretty.

Believing it with all my heart, I promised her that  
soon, just like her Mother who'd also been a  
teenage sufferer, she would become a beauty.

Then suddenly, that summer, the plump  
little girl who'd left for survival camp in July, returned  
in August. Who knew that while she'd survive the  
elements, that she would miraculously outgrow her  
unhappy adolescence, as well?

So now, a tall and slender Clara approaches the  
mirror, to brush her long and shiny hair.

• • •

## TO J AT 10

*Marc Kouffman*

Waist thin, shoulders wide  
Frame the wonder that's inside  
Lakes to swim, gardens to grow  
Much to do and much to know

It seemed to me when I was 10  
The outside world was run by men  
Technically speaking that was fine  
Until I had to wait in line

But that was then: now is now  
And everything is a-changing  
This new world belongs to youths  
with accomplishments far-ranging

So ditch the TV and video games  
Couches make you lazy  
Hard in body; strong in mind  
Your goals will not be hazy

Nature gave you special gifts  
To even up the score  
With those who started lucky  
But lack a vital core

Most gifts are wrapped in paper  
And paper's very thin  
Yours are wrapped with promise  
Find a place to put them in.

• • •

## MOMENTS

*Roberta Curley*

In a joyful moment  
when I spot a butterfly — I want you

in an ordinary moment  
when I wash my hair — I want you

in a bumpy moment  
when I ride the subway — I want you

in a tranquil moment  
when I listen to Brahms — I want you

in a stressful moment  
when I pay my taxes — I want you

in a blissful moment  
when I dream you're mine — I want you

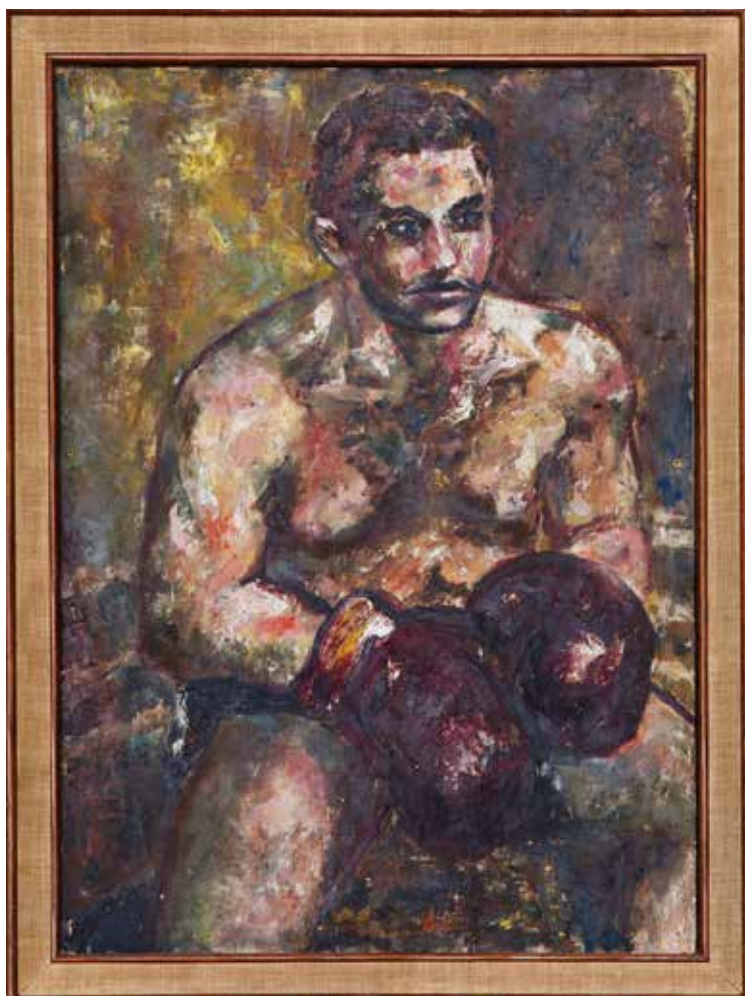
in a doleful moment  
when I look in your eyes — I want you

in a bittersweet moment  
when she grasps your hand — *she has you*

• • •



Jeanette Himmel, *In Bloom*, Oil and Collage



Donna M. Rubens, *The Boxer*, Oil on Canvas

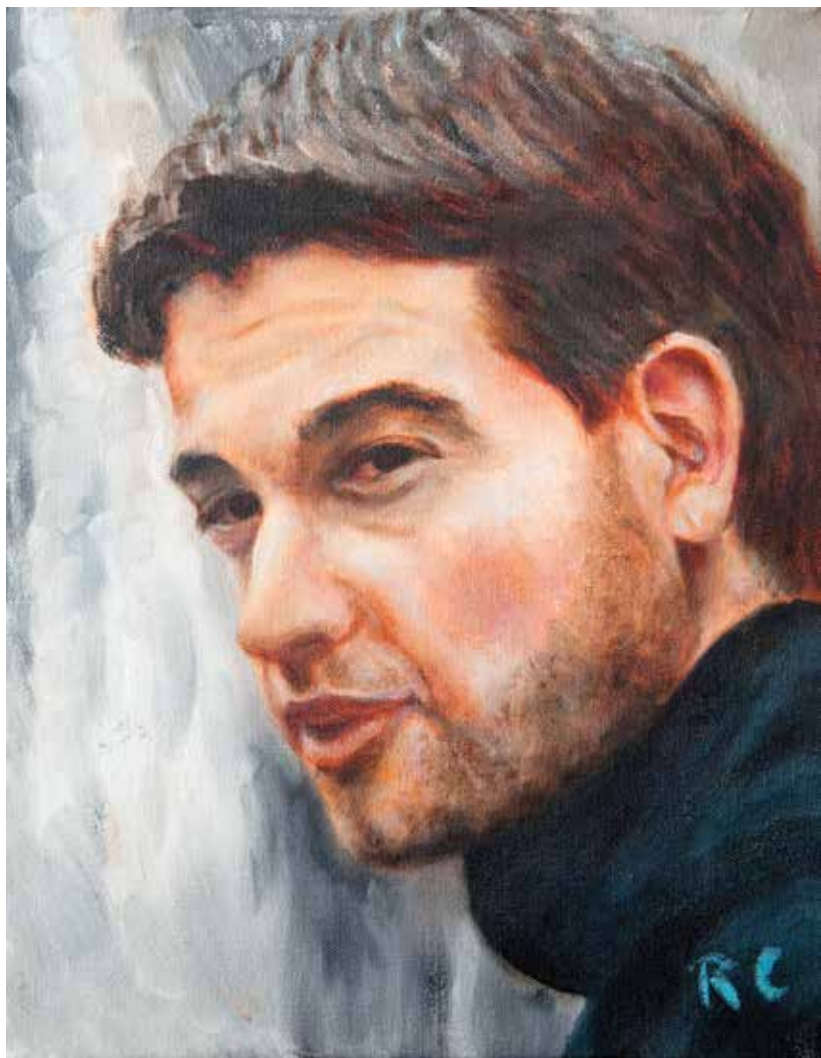


Rosalie Regal, *The Queen*, Clay



Paul Adler, *The Lady Gaze*, Graphite and Pastel





Roy Clary, *Ethan*, Oil on Canvas





Helen Neilson, *Sailors' Pastimes*, Collage



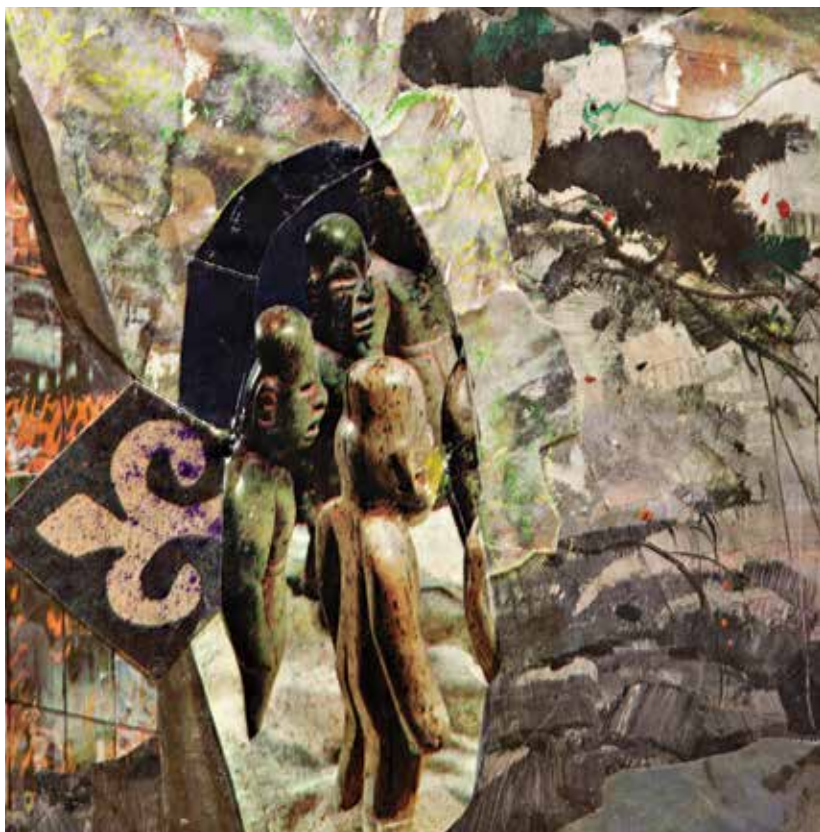
Sharon Krutzell, *Bonampak Mayan Warrior*, Crewel on Linen



Barbara Oliver, *From Russia with Love*, Hand Painted Glass Beads



Gil Santiago, *Shaft House*, Ceramic



Yona Rogosin, *After Anne*, Paper Collage





Marilyn Weiss, *Facing*, Multimedia Collage



Beverly Francus, *St. Lucia*, Photograph

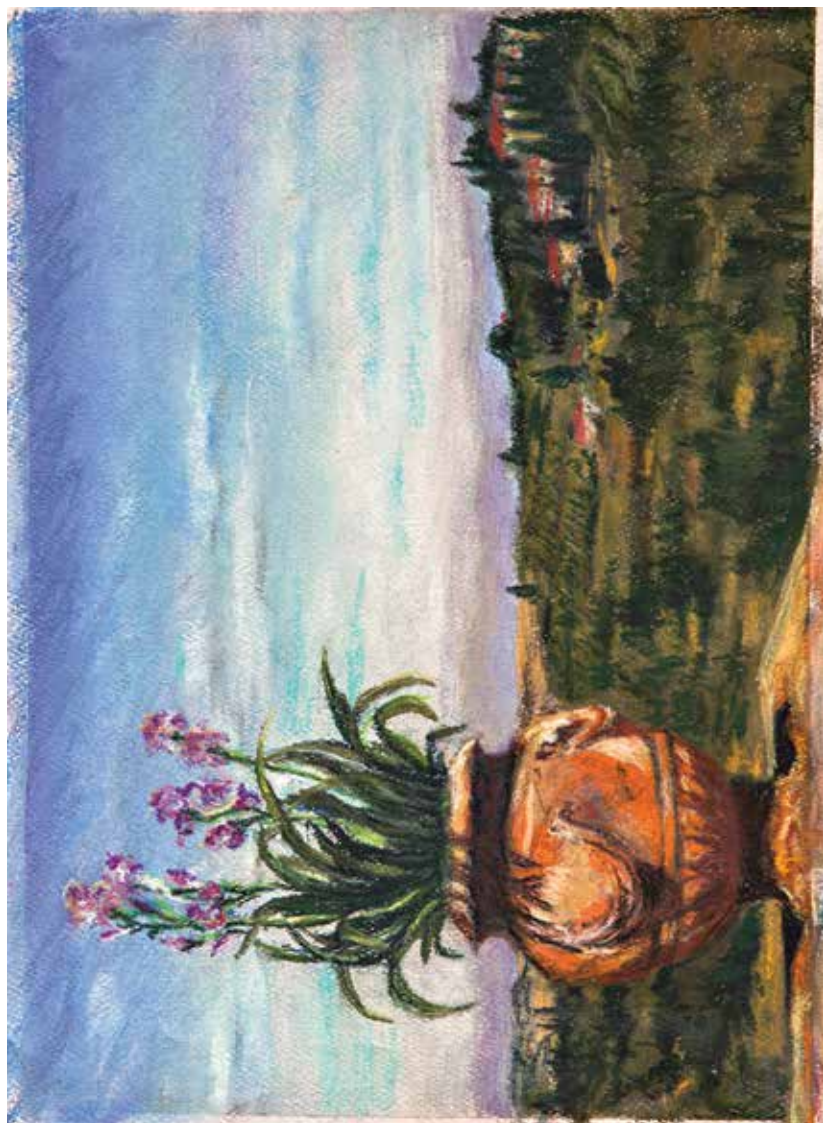


Lila Heilbrunn, *Resting Shadows*, Photograph





Florence Cohen, *Greenwich Village*, Acrylic on Canvas



Helen McMahon, *Outside Florence, Italy*, Pastel



Michael Wellner, *The Wild Horses of Assateague, VA*, Photograph



Deborah Yaffe, *Rural Church, VA*, Photograph





Margaret Di Piazza, *Cucurbita Maxima*, Watercolor



Roslyn Schachter, *Needle Case*, Silk Ribbon Embroidery



Pete Weis, *Casting a Net Hoi-An*, Photograph



Leonard Gold, *Gray Matter*, Tempera





Arlene Hajinlian, *Lucky*, Watercolor



Shoshana Kagan, *New Life*, Photograph



Diane Figueroa, *Forest Floor*, Silver, Semi-Precious Stones, Glass

## MY MUSE IS MISSING

*Mary Ann Donnelly*

It's March and my Muse is missing  
Leaving a hole in my heart  
And a void in my verse.

She must be on winter hiatus  
Or taking a semester sabbatical  
Sitting in a ski chalet  
Rocking by a roaring fire  
Warming her hands around a hot toddy  
Or slowly swirling a stem glass of Shiraz  
Seeking enough heat to fire up  
Cylinders of rhythm and rhyme.

Perhaps she's gone south  
Gathering seashells of similes  
Seeking a tropical sun  
To store up inspiration  
In the solar heating coils of her brain  
To be delivered to me with the daffodils  
Come spring.

But maybe she's stopped at another's residence  
Making a sick call on some other poet's muse  
Stirring a pot of poetry soup  
To cure the winter malaise  
With a mixture of wonder and words.

• • •

## JACKETS

*Carole Cronig Abrahams*

We went to Mexico—we went abroad!  
Well, we took baby steps into Mexico, across the border.

Nogales, Mexico—born of a railroad.  
A tourist town, then and now, unless maquiladoras thrive there.

We went to Mexico.  
Me, at twelve, and mother, crossed a border.

We were greeted along a dusty street by a young man,  
a hustler.

We bought two jackets.  
We had a picture taken with him.

We treasured those jackets, heavy with bright appliqués  
of dancing Mexicans on their backs.

One light, one dark,  
they hung side-by-side in mother's coat closet.

They were fun for the whole family,  
so far away in New England.

Those bright jackets brought a bit of daring—  
a trip abroad by mother and child.

American moths nibbled, enjoyed them, too  
until they shredded away across a border.

• • •

## DRINKING BUDDIES

*Steve Koenig*

Thinking of you with  
port on my lips &  
you're in Barcelona  
at a roundtable arguing  
with Communists  
and socialites like I've  
seen in the movies.  
You teach your kids  
comparatives, and me  
that *postal* has no e.  
I have no you, tangibly,  
crying in gutters  
after closing, hugging  
your bourbon, out of place  
in Jerez. It's an English  
novel and I, like Quixote,  
ride the windmill, flailing my head  
when the mailman won't come.  
I read José Cela and  
you Brendan Behan—  
We're all out of place, literally—  
Genet we won't touch  
til we're back at our table  
properly corked.  
Brits dissolve politics  
in alcohol and serious composers  
dance Jackson 5ive in West Side bars.  
You find the backstreet, wherever you are,  
flying aeros and postcards home:  
"I'll be back soon—  
My mom paid the fare."  
I'm thinking of you  
with my lips on the glass;  
the *vin d'Algérie*  
that we drank here last summer  
is now the Atlantic  
waiting between us  
until you come home.

• • •

## A DAY LIKE THIS

*Eileen D Kelly*

A day like this it'll always be  
With you gone  
Your empty shirt on the chair  
The bed cold on your side  
A damp pillow on mine  
Will it ever dry out?

Your music comforts me  
Though I don't know the names  
And pieces as you did  
What would you like to hear? you said  
So often it makes me cry  
How kind and thoughtful  
And sharing you were

Uncle Denny, a man who knew,  
Called from Ireland to say  
You think you'll never be happy  
Again but you will  
He was right

• • •



# **BURN FIRE BURN**

*Donna M. Rubens*

Cease fire –  
And still the bullets fly  
Still the rockets come  
Still the fires burn  
Still the people flee  
Still the people die  
Still the fires burn  
Burn Fire Burn  
Leave nothing undone  
Leave an empty town –  
Burn Fire Burn

• • •

# **FREE**

*Eneida Cruz*

Drowning in its  
Magnificent depth  
Suffocating the airways

Struggling with every strength of nerve  
To swim above to ground's surface  
Or find fatality

These experiences are lessons  
For greater understanding  
Some with painful settlements

As we choose  
To overcome trials  
We are set FREE

• • •



## THANKS

*Linda Rothstein*

My grandmother looked like a refrigerator  
She could die for an egg cream  
but she couldn't read

That's all I remember—  
Oh yes, she called me "shaina maidel"  
and I liked that  
once I learned what it meant

I look more like  
Miss America  
than a refrigerator—  
well, maybe not exactly  
though I can tell you this—

I have never known  
a Russian winter  
nor have I known  
the kind of hunger  
that made people  
come to America

nor have I ever  
opened my refrigerator  
and found the shelves bare

This country must be good

• • •

## A RUNAWAY STORY

*Stella Gold*

The size and shape  
Of a cashew nut  
My right hearing aid  
Disappeared  
Leaving me in a state of panic.  
I had lost the left one  
Less than a month earlier,  
That led to unpleasant talks  
With the Insurance Company.  
It had first accepted my claim  
Then denied it  
And finally to my relief  
Accepted it again.  
I could not face  
A new confrontation.  
I knew the sneaky hearing aid  
Was hiding in the apartment  
And I searched everywhere.  
Could a hearing aid crawl away  
Without leaving any trace?  
After taking a break  
I got down on my hands and knees  
Starting to look again  
When I perceived a pale shadow  
Below my desk in the bedroom.  
Incredulous I brought back  
My runaway hearing helper  
And peace returned slowly  
To my unsettled mind.

• • •

# THE PEOPLE THEY USED TO BE

*Marilyn Weiss*

I miss the people they used to be  
They know my name  
They know my face  
But they are not here

They are all loving and kind  
They sometimes ask the right questions  
They sometimes respond, correctly to mine  
But they are gone

They can't remember  
They can't relate  
They reside in their own world  
But not necessarily a sad world

But it is a world removed  
Removed from the realities of life  
The good, the bad  
The happy, the sad

And I forget, I pick up the phone  
Ready to relate a story, or something else  
And then I remember  
They are not here

And in the midst of all my joy  
With strangers and friends alike  
Hugging, kissing, and wishing me well  
I miss the people they used to be

Gone is the friend  
I could share my joy with  
Gone is the person  
Who would understand my sorrow

• • •

## MY NEW RING

*Betty Farber*

Impressionist painting  
Surrounded by silver  
Azure sky at twilight  
With sparkling pink stars.

This ring was a gift  
I bought for myself  
To honor my wedding  
Sixty-four years ago.

How do I know what  
He would have chosen?  
He could read my mind  
And he knew I loved  
Impressionist paintings.

• • •

## WALKING IN CENTRAL PARK

*Stella Gold*

On a wintry day  
In early March,  
I am seeking some signs  
Of early Spring  
But the trees are still bare  
The grass still brown  
And the lake below the terrace  
Of the Bethesda Fountain  
Still seems lifeless  
No geese  
No mother ducks and ducklings,  
Clearly I've come too soon...  
Yet on my way back  
A surprise  
On the side of a hill  
A pale army of snow drops  
Surges valiantly from the brown earth  
Offering hope that secretly  
Spring is on the way.

• • •

# DOWNLOADING HEAVEN

*Roberta Curley*

A triple-mast sailboat,  
flitting cormorant,  
a bobbing soccer ball  
coursing steadily toward the  
sanitation depot—mere icing  
on the cake

for I greet eventide embraced  
by my two BFFs

my commanding tangerine-pink  
sun sheds its citrus slivers on an  
overly pointy tin-roofed atrocity  
in New Jersey, morphing it  
momentarily into a majestic  
mansion

and the Hudson's waves  
rock and roll relentlessly in  
virtual polka-dot pattern—like  
drunk, dizzy, loopy Fluke in  
and out of cavernous fathoms

spellbound by the sun's  
ferocious Kodachrome as she  
bodaciously severs day  
from night

my subtle brackish  
Hudson gyrates regenerating  
life's most precious liquid—  
mesmerizing all who float  
upon her or gaze  
transfixed by her sparkle

• • •

## PLACES I HAVE LIVED

*Betty Farber*

### **BROOKLYN**

My sister and I did not talk gloom and doom,  
Though we slept on a couch in the living room.  
A few years later, almost grown  
We were given a bedroom all our own.

### **QUEENS**

With my new husband, I had the means  
To move to a building in Bayside, Queens.

### **NASSAU COUNTY**

Family growing, we needed space  
Glen Cove was a nice suburban place.  
With the loss of a job we looked around  
Found a cozy home in Levittown.

### **St. LOUIS**

A new job offer in the Midwest  
St. Louis County seemed the best.  
A place of comfort and of charm  
We bought a house in Oak Tree Farm.

### **MEMPHIS**

Daughters to college to get a degree  
Husband transferred to Tennessee.

### **NASSAU COUNTY (REPRISE)**

New York was calling; we formed a committee  
To look for a home in Garden City.

### **SUFFOLK COUNTY**

Living in Southold, life was a peach  
We started a business and sat on the beach.

### **NEW YORK CITY**

It was time for Manhattan; we were retired,  
Time to enjoy the things we desired.  
So I live on the East Side, after trying the West,  
And I think I have found the place I like best.  
So I don't plan to move, whatever the price  
'Til they find me a penthouse in Paradise.

• • •

## GRIFFIN IS GONE

*Helen Saffran*

I saw him walking alone  
And I asked about Griffin  
Knowing how old and thin  
The dog had gotten  
I was not surprised  
By his answer  
*Griffin is gone*  
He said beginning to cry  
I knew his beloved brown poodle  
For many years  
Although I never knew  
His owner's name  
We exchanged  
A deep hug and I said  
*Griffin was a wonderful dog*  
*You gave him everything*  
*And he gave you everything too*  
And Griffin's owner replied  
*He sure did*

• • •

## THE SWIMMER

*Leonard Leventon*

Strutting on shore  
In his speedo swimsuit  
The occupant wore  
His whistle—Toot, Toot  
  
He saved a few lives  
Too many to count  
He viewed a few wives  
Too many to account  
  
He wrestled the waves  
As he made his life saves  
He surfed the high seas  
And he took in the breeze

• • •

## A LAZY SABBATH

*Hal Cantor*

Arose at 8, now 11,  
Everything in abeyance,  
no pressure, no guilt,  
papers, chores lie idle,  
linger over Times obits,  
postpone checking e-mail and mail,  
take pleasure in routine,  
except when coffee spills a bit,  
at last time for writing poems,  
at last time to consider writing poems,  
somewhere bearded men finish Sabbath prayers,  
my service is over, now come dishes in the sink

• • •

## ONLINE

*Donna M. Rubens*

Online shopping is quite a gas  
Things come through the mail really fast.  
But virtual orders leave lots to chance—  
I ordered this? After nothing but a glance!  
No fingers feeling or holding up to see  
If what's on the screen will really suit me.  
So send it back and try again  
UPS kept busy while I spend.

• • •





## A POEM FOR JUNE

*Mary Ann Donnelly*

Art was the one who told me  
June was dead  
With a look I can't forget  
In a voice I'll always remember  
Pained, perplexed, incredulous  
*But June was my friend* he said  
As if friends didn't die  
As if friends would never leave you

She wasn't my friend like that  
I never called her to chat  
Complain about my husband  
Gossip about Quest or suggest lunch  
So why was I so stunned with the force of a blow  
Gasping for air, grasping for a reason  
Was it because I valued her thoughts, her words, her opinions  
Was it because I shimmered inside when she praised my work

It's peculiar isn't it, it's really remarkable  
That one person can touch you so  
Can leave such a mark  
Can leave such a hole in the world  
With their leaving  
June's did  
And the crack is still there  
And the gash is still deep

• • •

## JUNE'S GHOST

*Art Spar*

What happens at death?  
What continues?  
What ends?  
What?

When the bubble of self-containment pops  
The vitals whisper, "*no mas*"  
The river of life blisters dry  
Senses stop transmitting  
There's no reception  
*Sayonara?*

What happens to souls?  
Is there consciousness?  
An alternate existence?  
Ecstasy?

Will life return?  
Reincarnation?  
Reformulation?  
Reunification?

Mary Ann's poem put June's ghost on my shoulder  
In passing Christopher Street I think of her  
She's in the room when I teach  
Guiding my hands and mouth

Each life touches the world continuously  
Like a butterfly who begat a hurricane  
Pathways are formed by the march of the living  
Never returning, always advancing  
Carrying lives into eternity

• • •

## THE PINK CORSAGE

*Judy Winn*

He sat behind me to the right  
I sensed his eyes on me  
I shyly took some furtive peeks  
And saw plump and rosy cheeks  
His name was Johnny Cataldi.

We passed glances back and forth  
As weather turned from warm to cold  
And back to warm again  
We never said a word  
We were twelve.

In June came graduation day  
My mother dressed up in her pearls  
She made me Shirley Temple curls  
As we assembled at the school  
He handed me a box.

Inside I found pink ribbons  
Baby's breath and pink carnations  
The teacher pinned it to my dress  
The only girl to march  
With flowers on her chest.

When ceremonies ended  
Need I mention  
My family rushing towards me  
With just one question  
Where did you get the flowers?  
My answer barely audible  
From a boy.

It was almost 40 years  
Before I saw that face again  
On a billboard near the highway  
Plump cheeks now a little jowly  
Proclaimed in big red letters  
John Cataldi  
Best pre-owned in town.

• • •

# JUMPED

*Judy Winn*

She the mother calls me I am walking  
Down the street in late November  
She asks where I am I tell her  
On the way to the synagogue  
A good place to be right now she says  
And tells me Rich died.

I her cousin gasp and think a heart attack  
Suicide she the mother says  
I am stunned can hardly stand  
I go inside I am surrounded by little children  
Full of life a book fair before Hanukkah  
Jumped from a fourth floor balustrade  
Left wife and son in the museum gift shop  
Then jumped I should call my children.

I find an empty stairwell first call my daughter  
Rich died he jumped I tell her  
We share our sadness over his sad life  
A harder call my son fifty years they were close  
I tell him Rich jumped from a fourth floor balustrade  
Sobbing, sobbing, sobbing overwhelmed.

I walk into the empty and darkened sanctuary  
Images of cousin Rich surround me  
A curly headed boy of three or four  
Playing lonely in the backyard no playmates.  
I sit there in the cool and quiet  
Alone with Rich in the House of God.

• • •

## SIDEWALK STORY

*Donna M. Rubens*

Eskimos put their old people out on the ice when their time is up. I read that once and told my daughter about it when she was a young teen. At the time I thought to myself, “Too bad they don’t do it to the worthless teens too!”

But that is another story. This one is about me. There is no ice on this hot summer day on Long Island, and I am the old one. My daughter is now pushing 30. At 30 some years her senior, I am ancient history. Not to my pals who are my age—the survivors—but to my daughter and her friends, if she has any.

Ancient history; useless to anyone (her opinion), and she has parked me, walker, cane, and empty water bottle on a sidewalk here on one of the Island’s busy highways. I am lost. I can’t identify the highway and wonder why there is a sidewalk since I haven’t seen one human on it for the past two hours—the length of time I have been sitting here—my sunhat left in the car she rode away in.

She does not plan to return. I know this as well as I know that the water bottle is empty. I know this as I know that the sun has moved from the noon hour when I was first put out of the car. I know this from her cheery “good-bye”; it always resounded with a special note when she was running off to disappear for a day, a week, or however long it took to find her.

Cannily, she insisted my cell phone needed charging, although it was hers that had been used the whole time we were in the car together. Yes, I knew she was up to something. I know my daughter. Haven’t we been living together her entire life? So, when she stopped suddenly, braking so abruptly I almost went into the windshield, I was not surprised.

There was a pigeon in the road, she claimed. A pigeon! My girl was always ignorant. Long Island has pigeons, but they prefer populated places where they can make general nuisances of themselves. Then she changed it to a deer, a giant buck, his horns aimed at the car. Through the years, she has said she has visions, always of monsters of some kind.

But I'm her mother, stuck with her, and I know she's a liar and a story teller. She probably was day dreaming, thinking of the best spot to leave me off. In fact, she had found it, moved the car just slightly off the road (for affect) and put me out.

She had spotted this useless sidewalk. It stops almost as quickly as it starts. I have not mentioned that there are three very large residential-looking buildings with driveways that back the walkway. But these buildings were once "residential-looking." Now, they are in uninhabitable disrepair. And built, no doubt, before Long Island became auto heaven. No good for fine living with this spot of highway fronting them.

Just right for her purposes—a Godforsaken spot where Long Island people, secure in their automobiles, keep moving right along. Nothing to stop for here. Their eyes stay on the road or are scanning to make sure there is no cop car around. Who would see one old person, sitting in the sun on her walker, with an empty water bottle and no hat?

If any driver notices me at all, he probably thinks I'm some kind of statue, put up by a foolish starving artist who hopes to draw attention to himself. No, I know the score. Oh, eventually I will be found. Maybe a demolition crew for the houses or road workers will come by and see close up what is left of me.

No matter, we are all mortal, even my daughter. I'll be famous someday maybe—the Long Island Eskimo.

• • •



## DO YOU BELIEVE IN ELVES?

Sharon Krutzel

This past August, on my way to attend a conference on Norse mythology in Iceland, I read an article stating that more than 50 percent of Icelanders believe in elves, also referred to as the *hidden people*. I would need evidence to believe in their existence. And so begins my very own Nordic Saga.

After landing in Iceland, on the way to the conference, I visited the “Wonders Elf Museum.” Before entering a structure made to look like a cave, a guide gave us earphones and a TV remote-like device. “What language?” she asked. “English,” I responded. “All set,” she said, as she returned the device. “It knows your location, so no need to punch in the exhibit locations. It will play automatically.”

Inside were exhibits along with *female elves*, young actresses regally dressed in floor-length blue gowns, reposing on thrones. Walking from one exhibit to the next, I listened to the English explanations. In front of the third exhibit, for no discernible reason, my device changed to Arabic, then Spanish followed by French, Italian, then probably Icelandic. My attempts to fix the device were futile and my frustration obvious. Wordlessly, one of the elf princesses left her throne and reset the device. The interruption caused a delay, so I didn’t have time to watch the Northern Lights film. Northern Lights usually occur during the winter, so my chances of seeing a full display would have to wait until I watched it back home on YouTube.

At the conference we listened to Icelandic, Norwegian, Danish and American lecturers as well as musicians, painters, poets and a seer. They gave presentations about the Icelandic pantheon of gods; rituals; *Snorri Sturluson’s Edda*, a collection of sagas and stories from Iceland’s past; and music; poetry; the Runes; the golden circle and, of course—elves—the hidden people.

The seer was an attractive, well-spoken, grandmotherly Icelandic painter and scholar who has been sensitive to encounters with elves throughout her life. She explained the preconditions to seeing an elf: (1) you had to have joy in your heart, (2) your adult brain has to tell your child brain that it’s okay to see an elf, and, in my skeptic’s opinion, the caveat, (3) you had to be with an elf who wants to be seen.

As a child, she first met and befriended many elves in a park near her home, visited their homes inside the rocks, had tea with them, and spent her life engaging with them and learning their culture. Their ages and life-spans vary; many are more than 700 years old.

Elves, she found, live all over the world. And yes, while visiting New York's Central Park, she encountered elves, although, she explained, there are fewer in New York than in Iceland.

Eventually, she obtained permission from them to publish illustrated elf books and sell their therapeutic tea recipe. Based on the seer's descriptions, her niece, also a painter, illustrated the books. (Why not illustrate them herself, I thought.)

The talk was followed by an "elf walk." I chose, instead, to trek along the shore and was graced with a magnificent rainbow. Disappointingly, the people who went on the walk reported there were no elves who wanted to be seen.

Following the conference, a few of us went to Reykjavik, Iceland's capital, and home to our elf woman. She invited us to visit her park, and we did. From the outside it looked like a small space but, once inside, it appeared much larger.

As we walked, she pointed to a rock, "There are two elves guarding the park. Inside," she pointed to a hill, "is a palatial interior with gilded statues." We passed by meeting places, sacred spots, etc. I tried to take photos of the rocks but my smart phone, on lock mode, wouldn't accept my security code. When I pressed one number a different one lit up. I knew that all I had to do was reboot, but my phone wouldn't shut down. This was the second time that a device in my hands went awry. My companions with smart phones, some with identical models as mine, had no such problem.

"Weird," I exclaimed. "Strange," my companions agreed. "An elf is playing a joke on you," was our host's explanation. Apparently, elves can access you and yours by focusing on your unique vibration. Had I interacted earlier with an elf at the museum and attributed it mistakenly to a modern-day technology glitch? This park elf, or was it the same one, maintained the joke while I was in the park. I took only one step out of the park and my smart phone functioned again on its own.

Perhaps, as an apology, on the last night of my trip, the Northern Lights lit up the sky.

Do I believe in elves? Hmmmm. After I visit Central Park I'll let you know.

• • •



## ESTHER

*Ruth Ward*

Esther was fighting with a deep purple bloodstain on the floor beside the abandoned bed. Why hadn't she seen it when she changed the sheets? Next time she'd mop first. At least Maman, her foster mother, wasn't there to critique her performance.

She already missed Jawara, the Senegalese French Army soldier who had died of a thigh wound half an hour before. She wept when the orderly rumbled in like a tank to carry him from the warehouse of a room.

Esther studied the shrinking shape of the still crusty pattern. If Maman, the perfectionist, had made her life more tolerable, she would have stayed in school and become an artist. Maybe when the war was over... if she was still young enough... if she was still alive. She stared mournfully at the pale discoloration that the fury of her mop couldn't erase. She knew that cleanliness was crucial for survival, and she wanted to prevent unnecessary deaths. But, weren't all the deaths she had seen in her two weeks here unnecessary?

She stood up straight and exhaled, wondering what type of injury would replace the one that had claimed Jawara. Just then, the orderly and his son lumbered in with a stretcher carrying a patient from whose neck bloomed another maroon-patterned bandage. That was fast! I hope they don't slip on the damp floor, she thought, as she dragged her mop and pail to the well behind the hospital of Chartres.

The June 1940 sun hoisted itself into the eastern sky. After leaving her washing equipment to dry, she was supposed to go straight to the kitchen to help Henriette peel the knobby potatoes the old woman would boil and salt for breakfast. Having a local farmer's widow serve as hospital cook meant ready access to potatoes and turnips, but young Esther was thinking more of the new patient than of the grumbings in her stomach. A neck wound, she mused, what had been its cause? A bullet? A rope? The honed fingernails of murderous hands? She hurried back to the sleeping figure.

Lying at the end of the row of eight occupied beds, he seemed mysterious, charismatic. Despite the blood that streaked his face, he was somehow attractive. More than attractive, handsome, with forthright features and a dimpled chin. Even in repose, he had a commanding presence. How can that be, she wondered? As near to death as he appears, what could he command? The twelve angels of the pearly

gates? She took a step closer and followed the gentle rhythm of his breath. The thud of the orderly's footsteps reminded her of the woman who would scold her for arriving late for breakfast preparations. Relieved that the floor was now dry, she ran to the kitchen and Henriette's scowl.

As she sat down at the long wooden table, a weighty arm passed her a large bowl of potatoes and a peeling knife.

"Have you seen the new patient?" asked Henriette as she continued to pare her own bowl of tubers.

Beginning her onerous task, Esther nodded.

"Did you know he's our prefect, Jean Moulin?"

Esther had heard Maman mention his name to Papa.

"The Germans arrested him; do you know why?"

Esther shook her head.

"He refused to sign a document that blamed Jawara's platoon for massacring civilians." She paused and pointed her knife at Esther. "You and I know that's a lie!"

Esther winced. It was painful to think of the Germans as the enemy. She had met some wonderful German girls when Maman took her to the resort at Biarritz before the war. German families constantly bought drinks for everyone, the Italians and British, as well as the French. She could never see what difference nationality, much less skin tone made. Where did the hatred come from?

Esther thought about Jawara's end. He had told her how Henriette's family fed and sheltered his platoon before the bullet in his left thigh forced the other soldiers to leave him behind. He was overwhelmed that Henriette's brother risked his life to get him to the hospital. How sad that he had just surrendered the bed now occupied by Jean Moulin.

"What caused Moulin's wound?" she asked. Before the war, Henriette was as good a gossip as she was a cook.

The knife dug out a potato eye. "I heard that in prison, he was afraid he'd reveal information, so he tried to kill himself by cutting his throat with a piece of broken glass."

Esther sucked in her breath. How could anyone reach such heights of heroism? She had thought herself grand for defying Maman, running away from a comfortable home to become a lowly janitor in this germ-infested hospital. But now she saw her sacrifice as puny. Stripping off her arrogance, she dove into Moulin's neck wound. Her future lay there.

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# MY LIFE AS A ROMEO

*Jerry Wiesenberg*

I've never really considered myself to be a Romeo, but I guess at one time I probably was, or so it seemed when I was young. It all started when I was in the fifth grade at PS 69 in Queens when we began having coed parties: four boys and four girls! How it started, I don't know, but it certainly was a lot of fun!

What did I know in those days? The parties soon progressed from playing little kid games to the more exciting "kissing games." There was "Spin the Bottle" where the spinner got to kiss the person of the opposite sex who was closest to where the neck of the bottle pointed. And, there was "Flash," where the lights were turned off and the boy holding a flashlight pointed it in the direction of someone he suspected was kissing a girl. If the boy flashed on a couple while kissing, he was able to take the place of the boy caught in the act for the next round.

Our group was looked upon as "special." And the other boys and girls in the class pleaded to be invited to one of the next parties. But, it was a closed group, and we loved the notoriety our little romantic sessions brought. We were popular!

Then, after public school graduation, it was all over. At the age of thirteen, my career as a Romeo had come to an end. The original party group had gone on to different high schools and social groups. There were no more parties. I had to start over from scratch. It wasn't easy. In fact, it was almost impossible. What happened to all my charm with the young ladies and my reputation as a great kisser?

Life in high school was entirely different. Studying filled the evenings and when I wasn't hitting the books there were basketball games in the old school yard. Girls only got in the way! Wasn't it more fun to sit on a park bench with the other fellas, counting the number of convertibles as they drove by while talking about all the different sports that we followed daily? Well, what did I know back then?

Four years of high school passed quickly and it was on to college. I went to CCNY and besides spending hours and hours commuting on subways, there was a lot more going on. Fortunately, the ballroom dance lessons my mother forced me to take while I was in high school proved to be a great asset in the college's ninth floor lounge, which was a dancer's hangout. My prowess as a mambo dancer made me more

desirable, maybe not as a romantic partner, but at least as a dance partner. I prided myself on being one of the full-fledged “lounge lizards.”

All of the college girls I met lived either in the Bronx or Brooklyn. I lived in Queens. Without a driver’s license, let alone a car, it meant I would be spending half of my Saturday night date time riding the subway and buses to those outer boroughs and back. It wasn’t worth it. Maybe, I thought, after I graduated college, got myself a job and then bought a car, dating might be worthwhile.

Then there were the years of my twenties and early thirties. There were untold singles events: weekends at Catskill resorts, dances, parties and the single bar scene. I was doing so well as a single that the thought of packing it all in and getting married was the furthest thought in my mind. But I did, finally, and at the height of my single career years. I had narrowed down my sights to two or three eligible young women whom I began thinking seriously about. Soon after, I met the girl of my dreams, quit the single scene and got married. In my mind I had gone out as a winner!

Now, as far as “Romeo” goes, in my old age, and single, I am once again a “Romeo.” However, Romeo now stands for Retired Old Man Eating Out! What the heck, it could be worse!

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## ON MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH: LOUISE AND THE GIANT WATERBUG

*Helen Saffran*

Penny, a woman I have known for thirty years as a fellow student of a meditative kind of bodywork known as *sensory awareness* or *sensing*, called me last Thursday to soberly report “sad news” about Louise Baker. Louise is my *sensing* teacher, friend and fellow cat mom who lives in California and comes to Manhattan four times a year to give workshops which I attend faithfully. “Unfortunately,” Penny said, “Louise has died suddenly of a stroke and a possible aneurism. It was very quick so she probably didn’t suffer much.”

I experienced shock and incredulity, finding it hard to accept that my friend, with whom I had talked on the phone only days before, was no more.

Penny and I discussed the people I would call with the news and I asked her to try to find out how I could contact Louise’s nephew, who was like a son to Louise. Then I made my calls. First to Charles who said he would be happy to work on a *Celebration of Life* for Louise’s friends and students in New York and I said I would work on this also. I called Eshin, a long-time sensing student who is a psychotherapist and she said that Louise went fast and that’s all we could wish for when we die. I left messages to call me if people didn’t answer their phones.

As this was going on, a huge water bug appeared and climbed into a nearby basket. It’s a very unusual occurrence to see any bugs in my apartment, and I took the course of ignoring it and hoping my cats would chase it back to wherever it came from. They aren’t killer cats, but they do stalk intruders.

The day progressed. I had dinner with two friends who commiserated with me over my loss as I became more aware of how much I would miss Louise. I also mentioned the water bug and my friends hoped the cats wouldn’t kill it or frighten it to death.

When I arrived home in the evening, I got a return phone call from Lenore, one of Louise’s students. I broke the news to her mournfully. She asked me if I had heard the latest news about Louise. What could be “the latest news” about a person who had just died?

“Louise is fine!” she exclaimed. Louise is fine? Was this a variation of

she died quickly and didn't suffer. She said that it turned out, in a surreal turn of events, that it was a case of mistaken identity. The "Louise" who died also lived in California and had a nephew who was close to her but was a maid who had once been employed by Carol, a sensing student who came to Louise's workshops. Carol had mixed up the two "Louise's" and had called Penny to report the tragic news.

In Thurberesque style, when I called Louise to tell her about the goings on about her death, she told me that in this age of instant communication her obituary was already on the sensory awareness website and colleagues and friends were writing reminiscences and asking where to send flowers. She got a kick out of being able to read the comments and took the whole thing rather well really.

As for the giant water bug, as I suspected, it wasn't murdered by my trio of cats, nor, as my dinner companions had feared, had it died of fright from being cornered by my cat pack. The bug must have gone back to where it came from because after a careful search no body was found.

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## SUMMER FUN

*Harriet Finkelstein*

For a couple of months I debated with myself: should I or shouldn't I? The July 10th watercolor workshop in Warwick, NY, that I signed up for was getting closer and I had not picked up a paintbrush for a long, long time. Did I dare attend without putting in some serious catch-up painting time?

Dare I did! Sunday evening, July 10, all the watercolor and oil/acrylic painters, including me, were meeting and greeting and enjoying wine and cheese and other goodies. Next, we proceeded to the dining room where we randomly sat down at tables set for six. Five of us, who sat at the same table, were delighted that we were all watercolorists. Our group was so compatible that for the rest of our Warwick time, we ate all our meals together. We talked and laughed a lot at mealtimes, which was a good thing, because painting time was a whole other story. Watercolor painting at Warwick was a serious business—no time for idle chatter.

I really had not given any thought to who our teacher would be or exactly how the workshop would proceed. With all due respect to our Road Scholar organizers, I never, in a million years, expected the likes of our instructor. Deborah A. Rubin is an award-winning American watercolor painter who is well known for hyper-realism.

Debbie laid out the guidelines for us and we were there to obey. Sounds terrible? Actually, it was a wonderful learning experience. The workshop goal was to complete four projects by Thursday night to be viewed at a "Show and Tell" with the acrylic/oil people. Our daily painting sessions were scheduled for 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon and 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. If you wanted extra studio time, you could come in before breakfast, after dinner, or even at 3:00 a.m. if you were so inclined. Sitting and/or standing for hours and concentrating on the largest sheets of watercolor paper that most of us had ever worked on was totally exhausting, but the hours and days literally flew by. Debbie stood guard in a kind, helpful way, and we worked, worked, and worked some more. It was exhilarating, and I was so glad that I had signed on.

Our very first quickie assignment was a sort of warm up color-melding exercise, not really a painting. Debbie inspected our colorful sheets and

then murmured unsmilingly, “What can I say?” We looked at one another and then all of us burst out laughing. No gratuitous compliments from this lady. Middling painters all. Clearly we were going to have to work hard for any sort of approval.

The hour of reckoning was upon us for project one when we all received a black and white ink sketch of a couple of trees. You had the option of painting one tree or a bunch. Stylistically, you were entirely on your own. We were instructed to work up to a certain point and then it was up-on-the-wall-time again. Debbie made suggestions to each of us about how to proceed. Quickly, I was in trouble. I had a totally different idea. Not wanting to alienate my teacher, I painted a mini of what I had in mind, something quite unconventional. To my relief, Debbie told me, “Go for it.” When I finally completed my picture and brought it up to her, she yelled out, “She pulled it off.” Validation!

Did I learn anything new at the workshop? Hopefully I did add a couple of things to my repertoire, but mostly I just picked up, for better or worse, where I left off when I last painted. Amateur artists are like professional baseball pitchers who try throughout their careers for that one perfect game—their masterpiece. Baseball players have only until mid-life to achieve their goal, but amateur artists can keep trying for that elusive perfect painting until they reach the pearly gates.

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## ARRESTED AT THE LOUVRE

*John Hood*

My daughter, Katherine, who has lived in London for more than 30 years, was sent by her employer in 2004 to live in Paris for a year. She was given a spacious three-bedroom apartment on the Rue Barbette in the Marais.

Naturally, our whole family seized the opportunity for a free hotel in Paris and started planning extensive visits. Lucy, my elder daughter, and her two children were the first to arrive. My wife, Laima, and I landed shortly thereafter for a visit.

One morning we decided to go to the Louvre. Kathy said to take the metro tickets from the bowl in the dining room where everyone deposited the ones not used.

A short ride on the metro left us at a passageway leading to the Louvre. As we walked down the long hall we were met by two uniformed police women. They asked to see our tickets. We dutifully took them out for their inspection. "These are discounted children's tickets. It is illegal for you to use them."

We tried to explain in English how this had happened. They replied in French and broken English. They said the fine for using illegal tickets was 50 Euros per person.

Much as we protested our innocence, the officers made clear that we could either pay them 100 Euros or come with them to their police station for further negotiations.

Laima and I briefly considered our dilemma and made a quick decision. I reached into my wallet and gave them 100 Euros, and they gave me a receipt. Properly chastised, we continued on with a most enjoyable visit to the Louvre.

We later learned that the French Police patrolled this site thoroughly and found it quite profitable.

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## TRAVELS WITH JUDY: NOW OUR KIDS WORRY ABOUT US

*Pete Weis*

*"Allahu akbar!"* The predawn call to prayer woke us up with a start! Then we endured the usual few seconds of confusion when awakened in the dark while travelling. Soon, with our sense of place restored, we fell back to sleep.

Where were we? On an inter-island ship in Indonesia. When was it? Summer 2002. Why? We had just finished a month of fieldwork in a remote area. Getting there wasn't easy; it took three jet planes and two overnight boat trips. Now, we were on our way home. Our kids, then in their 30s, had been quite concerned when we announced our plan the previous winter.

Just three months after September 11, Judy responded to a notice from Operation Wallacea (Opwall), an environmental research and expeditions organization, announcing their next season of operations at their Indonesian field stations—one in a rainforest and the other on a tiny island surrounded by mangroves and coral.

Our daughter said, "What? You're going to a Muslim country? I forbid it!" Our son's concern was different. "What? You'll be travelling between islands by boat? I read all the time about these ferries. They capsize, drowning hundreds!"

Their worries were unfounded. Our Indonesian neighbors were just as horrified about the 9/11 events as were Westerners. ("Those weren't *real* Muslims!") The inter-island boat was almost the size of the Queen Mary.

Every day we would motor over from our home base on Hoga Island—one-square-mile, not seen on any map, and home to about two dozen natives—to Kaledupa Island, home to about 10,000. There, we conducted two studies: (1) snorkeling around mangroves at high tide to see what species of fish congregated there (even though the tide went out twice a day leaving them temporarily "at sea") and (2) observing at low tide how several species of fiddler crabs shared a mudflat.

Every evening was data-entry and analysis time until the generator was turned off. Our spare time (some afternoons) was used for pleasure, snorkeling around Hoga or diving on the reef. Meals were provided. Every lunch and dinner meant fish and rice except when it was rice

and fish. But meals were always delicious. The fish was local skipjack tuna; either fried, baked, stewed or grilled, each in various Indonesian sauces. It took more than a week to rotate the recipes.

Now, we were headed home on the second overnight boat to the city of Makassar on the island of Sulawesi—a 12-hour trip in an air-conditioned cabin shared with two undergraduates from Opwall's rain-forest station. We would spend the night there and fly out the next morning. We were looking forward to the pleasures of a nontuna dinner and sleeping in a real hotel with a real bathroom. The ship was due in Makassar at 10 a.m.

At 10 a.m. we heard the anchor chain rattling. Right on time! But when we looked out the portholes, we saw that we were anchoring in the middle of the bay instead of at a dock. Hmm!

After 15 to 20 minutes an announcement came over the PA system. This wasn't another call to prayer but something like, "This is your captain speaking." So, of course we ignored it. Then there was another announcement that got us to wondering. Judy and the two students suggested that I should find out what was happening.

There was another cabin with more returning Opwallers, including Iwan, a native Makassarite and dive-guide, assigned to escort us safely to our destination. I set out to that cabin. This wasn't easy. In addition to passengers in the first, second (like ours), and third class cabins, there were a thousand or more who simply occupied floor space in the non-air-conditioned tropically heated and humid passageways. Small groups of men were smoking and playing cards. Families were feeding babies. There were people managing large bundles of crafts to sell in Jakarta, the next stop. No portion of the floor was unoccupied.

"*Permissi*" (excuse me) I said, and the playing cards, babies, and bundles were moved aside for me. *Permissi* a couple of dozen times and stepping left-right-forward-left-forward-right, I arrived at the other Opwall cabin, knocked, and let myself in. "Iwan," I asked, "What was that announcement about?" "Oh, nothing informative; we are simply asked to be patient until we dock." "OK." I went back to our cabin—*Permissi, permissi, permissi*—and gave my nonreport.

A half-hour later, another announcement. So it was back outside again. *Permissi, permissi, permissi*, knock-knock: Iwan, what's happening? Iwan pulled out his cellphone and called the agency that would be delivering us to our hotel. Aha! It seemed that the Makassar soccer

team won the all-Sulawesi championship and was going to the nationals in Jakarta. Four thousand or so rabid fans also wanted to go. But only 500 boat tickets were available.

The police were summoned to deal with the unruly crowd. Our captain wisely kept us away from the dock to avoid one of those capsizing events that our son was worried about. So we waited. We napped, read paperbacks, shared bottled water and a handful of bananas, and snoozed some more. Meanwhile, the riot worsened. The army was called out and a big trash-fire lit up the night. (The next day in Singapore we would read about it in the newspaper.)

Finally, around 9 p.m., the ship pulled up to the dock. But it wasn't over yet! For security, only one gangplank was provided for about 2,000 passengers. After milling about in the sultry corridors for an hour, Iwan suggested that we wait in an alcove until the crowd subsided. Finally, we were walking down the gangplank and into the terminal.

What a mess the place was! All the benches had been torn from the floor, amid broken glass, splatters of food and paper plates. Outside, a phalanx of soldiers in riot gear (plastic shields, helmets, machine guns) stood at attention facing outward. We stepped between them and found the vans waiting for us. After signing in at the hotel, the youngsters all decided to go to the famous food stalls for local flavors. Judy and I went to bed.

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## A BUCKET LIST

*Beverly Wasserman*

Oh I'd like to learn the tango  
While traveling in Durango  
And in my belly-dancer pants  
I'd look good in the south of France  
While learning to bake a lemon meringue-o

I would read the Koran  
While visiting Japan  
But my Scottish kilts with tassels  
That I keep in my Highland castles  
Won't keep me warm while working on my tan

And while painting like Renoir  
In my marble-tiled spa  
I could make a raucous racket  
Singing opera in my jacket  
With the hood down on my cah!

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*Our long-time Q Review contributor  
and friend, Beverly Wasserman,  
passed away in 2017. We miss you Beverly.  
—The Editors*

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