

# Q REVIEW





THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

***Q Review 2021***

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**QUEST**

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## A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

This year has been a challenge for us all, as citizens, as friends, as family, and as members of Quest. We hope this publication will help you reap something of beauty and sensitivity after the work you have done to stay safe, healthy, and connected.

My thanks go to Q Review editors Mary Ann Donnelly in poetry, Donna Ramer in prose, and Paul Adler in art, who have gathered in our creative efforts. A special word of appreciation goes to Wayne Cotter, who, as Editor-in-Chief over the last four years, has ushered our publication into the digital age, mentoring our contributors along the way. He ensured that our 25th Anniversary Edition of 2020, which featured the work of our writers of the last quarter century, was delivered to the home of every Quest member, and he has graciously offered to do the same for our current issue.

And many thanks to you, our authors and artists, for reflecting on the past, interpreting the present, and visualizing the future. You continue to amaze us with your original ideas and their expression. You help us to see ourselves in each other and to treasure our common humanity.

We hope you, our Quest community, will find this 2021 publication an inspiring and absorbing read, and we hope you will consider contributing to our 2022 edition.

– Ruth Ward

## IN MEMORIAM

It is with deep sorrow that we note the passing of Quest members **Myra Nissen**, **Sandra Southwell**, and Quest Office Manager **Barbara Bianco**, whom we lost during this past year. They are greatly missed. We also express our continued gratitude to Ken Leedom for his generous bequest to Quest. Ken and his long-time partner Peter Cott were active Quest members for many years.

## NOTE

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



# Q REVIEW

THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

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**Orchid with Ant (Rasa Ampat, Indonesia)**

*Photograph*

Pete Weis

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## IN THE BASEMENT — SEPTEMBER 2020

Wayne Cotter

My name is Janie. I never thought I'd be living in Florida again — *this time in the basement.*

But here I am, in a basement in a 55+ community just outside Tampa. Am I 55 or older? Hell no!

Just six months ago, new worlds were opening up to me. I was 23, an NYU graduate with a major in dance. I had linked up with a talented troupe in Brooklyn and was actually earning some money in my chosen profession.

The bulk of my earnings, however, was coming from other sources. Over the past few years, I had worked on the wait staffs of several of Manhattan's priciest restaurants. It wasn't easy relating to so many privileged customers, but I soon found out they really weren't much different from me, they just tipped better.

I was sharing a Brooklyn apartment with two friends. I was working constantly and paying my share of rent. Life was good... *and exciting.*

Then the pandemic struck. It hit hard and fast. One moment I was busy night and day. The next, the dance troupe had suspended operations and all New York City restaurants were shuttered.

My two roommates were working remotely; I could not. I was eligible for unemployment benefits, but you have no idea how time crawls when you're waiting for your first unemployment check. Each day is a month. I must have checked my phone 10 or 12 times an hour, hoping to see that first week's benefit posted to my bank account.

My roommates paid my share of the rent, saying they knew I was good for it. I'll never forget their kindness, but after a couple of months I wondered how much longer they could carry me.

In the meantime, my parents were urging me to relocate to the Tampa area, where restaurants were still operating. One of their golf buddies even promised me a job at his popular chain. They weren't exactly high-end places, but they weren't bad.

Week after week, my parents pleaded with me to join them in the Sunshine State, rent free. They offered to pay off my Brooklyn lease if I would just leave that "rat-infested, crime-ridden, hellhole of a city." It's hard to believe they both were born and raised within the five boroughs.

Which leads me to another problem: my parents are ardent right-

wingers. They believe Democrats will usher in anarchy and destruction and raise taxes to unbearable levels. This was another reason I was not anxious to return home on a full-time basis.

Although I desperately wanted to remain in New York, I could feel myself weakening. Yes, my daily walks through suddenly serene Brooklyn neighborhoods were invigorating and pollution had certainly abated, but I had no clue how to earn a living.

Eventually, I gave in. My parents bought me a one-way ticket to Tampa. I packed a couple of bags, said some tearful good-byes, and did the unimaginable — began living with my parents again.

Don't get me wrong, it's not terrible. Their golf buddy made good on his promise and I am working regularly. The tips aren't bad, and I've learned to mentally tune out Fox News whenever I emerge from the basement to see my parents.

I'm not dancing or exercising regularly. My diet has certainly changed. I eat more steak and starches now. And when I recently heard a childhood friend, Denise, had contracted Covid-19 and was not doing well, I sobbed uncontrollably.

I get depressed easily. Last month, I was watching the Republican National Convention with my Dad when I heard the president's chief economic adviser refer to the pandemic in the past tense — as if it was over.

"Dad," I said, "This guy knows this thing's not over, right?"

"Oh yeah, sure," he said. "I think he means that the worst is over. Our president did a great job, but now it's time to move on."

"But Dad," I said, "the virus is still raging in so many states. Denise could die from it. It's not over by a long shot."

"I know that," he said, "and I'm sure he knows that too, but you can't expect the country's chief economic adviser to be a 'Gloomy Gus.' You have to be optimistic. It's just politics."

It's just politics? I may be politically naïve, but can this really be "just politics?"

Our friends and neighbors are dying. Our president could have saved thousands of lives simply by wearing a mask in public. If this is politics, I want no part of it.

The election is two months away. Although I'm in Florida in a basement, I feel lucky. So many people are far worse off than I am. I'm young. I'll bounce back, but how many others will not? I wonder: *Is this my generation's Great Depression?*

• • •



## IN GRATITUDE...

*Sandy Frank*

It's September 2020 and already the year will stand out for many of us as extremely long and complex. A period we had never experienced before: a pandemic, the world in crisis, financial woes, mass hunger, loss of loved ones and friends, environmental crises, violence, inequity, police violence, democratic norms broken, no guidance or leadership from the top, isolation, frustration, mistrust, fear, and anger. No proven vaccine, no treatment for the disease yet, and an overriding fear that our besieged health care system in the U.S. and the rest of the world might crack. A forthcoming presidential election that is of paramount importance. A Supreme Court nomination that is totally partisan. And a second wave commencing even before the first wave of the virus ends. *Yikes!*

In the midst of all this tragedy, one feels like giving up hope for the future. Yet this collective tragedy of Covid-19 has taught us important lessons on almost every topic you care to mention. It is hope, gratefulness, resilience, hard work, science, and community that will carry us through. It is with total gratitude that I not only appreciate but thank first responders and front-line workers for risking their lives to make us safe and secure. I am grateful to Governor Cuomo for his daily briefings, keeping us informed and protected.

I am grateful for the many health care professions, support staff, medical facilities, nonprofits, government agencies, and citizens who fought to bring the infection under control. I am grateful for the journalists who gave us the facts. I am grateful for Dr. Fauci, who spoke truth to power and corrected our President when he told falsehoods to the American public. I am grateful for having access to the internet and Zoom meetings. I am grateful for on-line shopping and home delivery of food. I am grateful for those who stepped up and made their voices heard for worthwhile causes. I am grateful for everyone who marched in peaceful protest against inequality and police brutality. I am grateful for my health, my friends, and my loved ones.

I am also so very thankful that I have Quest in my life. Quest is a striving, vital organization for our "intellectually curious" members who want to stay engaged. Theodore Roosevelt said: "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." Our Quest community — thanks to

our leadership team, committees, coordinators and participants — is amazing. Thank you all for your hard work and dedication to Quest. Thank you for keeping me engaged and informed. Thank you for reorganizing under Zoom. Thank you for giving a structure to my weekdays.

Carl Sagan wrote: “One, remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Two, never give up work (study). Work gives you meaning and purpose, and life is empty without it. Three, if you are lucky enough to find love (interests), remember it is there and don’t throw it away.”

Hawking said four things that really resonate with me:

- “Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change.”
- “Nothing is better than reading and gaining more and more knowledge.”
- “Our greatest hopes could become reality in the future. With the technology at our disposal, the possibilities are unbounded. All we need to do is make sure we keep talking.”
- “However difficult life may seem, there is always something you can do, and succeed at. It matters that you don’t just give up.”

In times of tragedy, of necessity, of pandemics, people do amazing things. The human capacity for survival, renewal, and creativity is awesome. Fellow Questers, welcome to our new Quest.

*Go Team Quest!*

• • •



# THE RETURN

*Ruth Ward*

After stuffing my underused N-95 mask into my dresser drawer, I stride from my ground level apartment for the first time in a year, grateful that Fresh Direct and indulgent neighbors have facilitated my prolonged confinement. As I reach the sidewalk, a Labor Day breeze stings my eyes and startles my cheeks. Smiling, I think of Quest. “Yeehaaa!” shouts my inner voice.

Fort Greene Park coaxes me to the right as a car rumbles past on the left. “I bet you can’t beat him to the corner.” Compete with a supercharged vehicle? No way. To the right, on the distant sidewalk I see a vertical figure pulling a horizontal form. When I freeze, the voice hisses, “Your neighbor always walks her dachshund here. You won’t meet certain death; just pass.” But Covid-trained, my legs say no, and I find myself trotting across the street, falling hopelessly behind the car I was supposed to best. “Chicken!” taunts the voice. Safe on the sidewalk, I march toward the park.

Dare I enter? At 11 a.m. such a horde of humans and canines; but no matter. After an eternity of zip-locked confinement, I’m ready to take risks. I’m in. On a grassy knoll, a Bichon Frisé and a miniature Doberman are hauling their owners toward the walkway... and me! I imagine myself in the eye of a dog fight, fraught with “Now Fido, be gentle,” and “Oh Rufus, you know better,” and my inner voice shrieking, “And don’t you dare bite the trembling lady!” Ugh. Why must people have pets?

To avoid a bloodbath, I rush to a bench, sit, and slow my sputtering breath. Inhale, 2, 3, 4. Exhale, 6, 7, 8. Better, but now at rest I feel churlish, and I recognize this as my default state of mind in the absence of Quest these past 12 months. Fortunately, since I must continue to live with myself, I’ve learned to write limericks to help restore my rosy, pre-virus outlook. As I watch Fido’s owner spirit his fluff ball to safety, I grumble that the man will never learn to live dog-free.

This irritant reminds me of a poem I recently penned about my teenaged latch-key housemate Nicole, who, despite my exhortations and entreaties, refused to wear a mask. Adolescents can be as annoying as dogs. I mutter,

There once was a young girl named Nick  
Who declared she would never get sick.  
She’d repeatedly cry that she just couldn’t die  
Her mortality clock didn’t tick.

How egocentric. How selfish. I grind my teeth at the thought of my equally irksome upstairs neighbor. You should know I've become a no-nonsense bookworm, deeply appreciative of my own company versus that of others, who unfailingly elicit my intense disapproval. For example, Fourth Floor Chatty old Matt was probably hoping for sympathy when he explained his avoidance of seafood. My inner voice recalls,

A middle-aged man called "Loquacious"  
Feared main dishes piscine and crustaceous  
He'd dreamt of a mobster ingesting a lobster  
Who'd morphed into something rapacious.

How grotesque and irrational. But as my eyes snap open, I realize I've been declaiming, as well as gesticulating like a lobster. Therefore, I should append myself to the list of bothersome people I know. Lack of fellowship has turned me into a vortex of unchecked emotions. My inner voice trills,

I know a recluse who loves rhymes  
And who says them aloud as she mimes  
Intensive emotions, internal commotions  
She thinks of distress as good times.

Wiping my soggy eyes, I revile my other flaws. Can you believe that during my entire exile from 25 Broadway I have not worked on my technophobia? I regret my chronic luring of housemates into my apartment to log me on to Zoom meetings. Granted, I've always offered them hot or iced tea, but still my inner voice jeers,

Let us pity a boomer named Fern,  
Who admits there is more she must learn  
Pursued by sure doom, she must subjugate Zoom  
Or in foul techno-Hell she will burn.

Damn that voice; I've actually been looking forward to a bright digital future. I rise from the bench, remembering the Metro Card I shrewdly inserted between two self-help tomes in my bookcase. Tomorrow I'll return to my sanctuary, Quest. They're offering a Noontime Knowledge computer course, so better late than never. As an autumnal wind brushes my face, I feel proud to have dared to plunge my admittedly crabby but vaccinated person into molecules of unfiltered oxygen and hopefully benign particles. I pass the drinking fountain and sip, envisioning my cyber independence. And tomorrow, among kindred spirits, I'll try hard to be non-judgmental. After all, Covid must have spared me for a reason.

• • •

## “STEVE CANYON” AT THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

*Roy Clary*

**Note to Reader:** *“Steve Canyon” was an American adventure comic strip created by Milton Caniff that ran from January 13, 1947 through June 4, 1988. In the strip, Canyon was in Air Force intelligence and operations.*

When I attended Ohio State, two years of Reserve Officer Training Corp (ROTC) was compulsory because the University was a land grant institution; both Air Force and Army ROTC were offered. Even though I could never be a pilot due to poor eyesight, I signed up for Air Force ROTC; I preferred the look of their blue uniform over the drab Army browns.

We Cadets spent half our time watching films explaining—in excruciating detail—what bombs dropped from airplanes did to a wide assortment of buildings. Accompanied by a vigorous and joyful soundtrack, we sat at our desks and took notes dictated by an Air Force instructor as building after building crumpled into dust.

When we weren’t in class, we were gathered in the nearby Parade Ground where we were put through a variety of military drills. Most of us were opposed or at least indifferent to the military, except for a few who opted for a future career as officers. These individuals were upper classmen who received a free education for their military decision. At the head of our Squad was an extremely self-important and anxious-to-please student Second Lieutenant. We despised him for his ambition and his overriding egotism; we did whatever we could to make his life miserable, even resorting to such foolish pranks as turning left when the order was “Squad Right” or neglecting to stop as he stuttered out “Haw, Haw, Haw” and piled up against the side of the ROTC building before he could manage to scream out “Halt!”

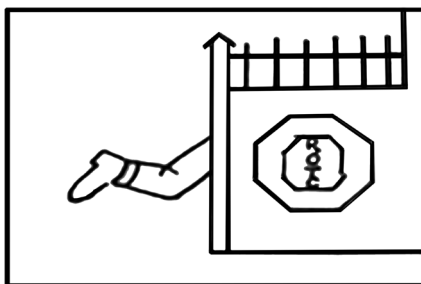
One day, a truly extraordinary thing happened. It was the beginning of a new year. Several hundred of us had reported to ROTC Class and were loosely assembled on the Parade Ground. Opposite me was a Young Man whose jacket was not Air Force blue and who was not wearing a tie. Our Second Lieutenant took his name, but when he was admonished for the way he was dressed, he said “go to Hell.” As we watched in astonishment, the student repeated “go to Hell” in response to several

queries from the Second Lieutenant, upon which the latter scurried off to get the Air Force Major stationed on campus to administer the ROTC program. We took the opportunity to warn the Young Man that he was going to be in a lot of trouble. His answer, as he lit a cigarette, was that trouble was his middle name.

The Major arrived, and being a muscular no-nonsense individual, soon engaged with the Young Man in a lot of macho back and forth, chest versus chest maneuvering. Finally, the Young Man broke away, but he was jumped on by a horde of student officers and there was a rugby-like scrimmage. Suddenly, he escaped and sprinted for the gate. A cry went up from the student officers to “let him go, let him go, we have his name.” They gathered around our Second Lieutenant, read down his Roll Call of names and there it was: “Steve Canyon.”

I don’t know what happened to the Young Man. His story spread all over Campus, but no one discovered who he was. As far as I know, the mystery has never been solved.

• • •



## THE WORST THING

*Eileen D. Kelly*

"I never told you the worst thing that happened while I was helping raise my stepchildren, who lived with us," Sheila said to her therapist. "Here's what I want to tell you."

One day, my husband Bill noticed that his son Ray wasn't coming out of his room and he knew Ray wasn't just studying. He wasn't the kind of kid to spend all day on schoolwork. First, Ray said he had a cold, so Bill told him to come have some soup or juice or something. Ray came into the dining room and sat down. For a good-looking sixteen-year-old, he looked like hell. His handsome, big brown eyes were sunken into his skull, and there were huge dark rings under them. When he lifted his head after much encouragement, those sunken eyes held the look of terror. His lips and mouth were dry as a bone, and he smelled; he smelled like a whole football team after the game. The dark, downy fuzz just coming in on his cheeks was plastered flat with sweat. He was in agony and panic, and we didn't know from what.

Bill signaled me to leave them alone and let them talk. Ray was hearing voices from the street below, sometimes telling him to jump out the window. Everything was weird to him, and he didn't know whom to trust, if anybody. He was even distorting what Bill was saying. When Bill inquired in disbelief, "They're telling you to jump out the window?" Ray thought it was another directive, that Bill too was telling him to jump out the window. Bill knew he needed to have a professional evaluate his son so he called his friend, Joseph, a psychiatrist.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you, your son is schizophrenic," Joseph told us after talking with Ray. You can imagine what a shock that was. Joseph also prescribed Thorazine, told us not to leave Ray alone, and consider putting him in a hospital for his own safety. We didn't want to put him in the hospital. Among ourselves, we made a plan. Bill, his teenaged daughter Lillian, and I set up shifts to stay with Ray and told him we would protect him. After a few days of Thorazine, there were no more voices, but he was still feeling "weird," as he put it.

About the fourth day, I came home from work to find Lillian and Ray gone. I called Bill at his office and he called Barbara, the children's mother. The kids were there. That night, Lillian came home and said that Ray wanted to stay with his mother for a few days. She said her mom was rubbing Ray's back and he felt calmer. We couldn't argue

with that. Lillian confided that he had stopped taking the Thorazine. We could argue with that but didn't.

Ray came home a couple of days later, much better. Whatever had happened to him seemed to be over. Over the next few days he told bits and pieces of a story. We were able to put it together and learn what really happened to him.

Shortly before Ray started hearing voices, he had gone to the movies with his mother. While there, she passed him a marijuana cigarette and he took a few puffs. He said it had a burning taste and made him feel strange, stranger than the other times he tried pot. While at his mother's home, he found out from her live-in boyfriend, Hank, that there was something new in the marijuana he had, called Angel Dust. "Maybe that's what made you feel so weird," Hank told him.

Everyone in the health field knows that Angel Dust became a notorious problem in the late 1970s, all over the country. It made its usually young victim psychotic, paranoid, and often suicidal and even homicidal. We found out Thorazine wasn't the drug of choice to treat it. Vitamin C worked better, some said, by binding the Angel Dust with its acidity and getting it quickly out of the system.

Who knew? So, Ray was never schizophrenic. He was simply poisoned by his mother.

• • •





## THE WALDORF

*Linda Rothstein*

Girls — and I do think I can call you girls because that's what they called us when this all took place — it was back when we were barely at the age of consent. You had a mayor here in New York who told the police that, if you see prostitution on the streets, look the other way. It was a field day for the girls in the trade. The hookers were lined up and down Lexington Avenue on hot, sweaty summer nights, wearing their miniskirts and showing their bikini waxes and tottering on too-high platform heels. Those shoes were designed to make their legs look miles long, to magnify the expanse from crotch to arch.

If you can remember that and laugh, you will be, like me, not an old lady but an old girl. And if someone mistook you for a hooker back then, you took it in stride as I did or, oops, maybe you were a hooker. Well, no matter.

Yes, I was mistaken for a hooker and why not? We all wore miniskirts up to our bellybuttons and had our long hair straightened and wore too much mascara. And even false eyelashes. Yes, I did, until I put my head in the oven to check on the roast and they melted and I had a devil of a time pulling them off, and when I did, there were my real lashes, glued down and gone for good.

I was there then, on Lexington Avenue and — would you believe? — staying at a hotel. If you think it was my place of business, it wasn't. I was in New York on assignment and no one left money on the bed stand. I had an expense account, and it covered a room at the Waldorf, the Waldorf Astoria, which also is on Lexington Avenue.

There was no other way to get to my hotel than to enter on Lex, as I did that night, when I worked late and made my way to the bar because all I could think of was a nice tall gin fizz. Maybe vodka tonic.

There I was, six feet tall in those shoes and thinking of the movie "The Attack of the 50-foot Woman," when the maître'd told me that unescorted ladies were not welcome at the bar. I was so tall I could see clear over his head, but I didn't frighten him a bit.

I don't know if I had ever been addressed as a "lady" before, but I did not like it a bit. "Lady" was his euphemism for prostitute. I would rather he called me a girl. A working girl, that's what I was. In New York on assignment, as I said, so I showed him my room key. That did not do a

thing except convince him I was what he called a “working girl,” the term he used when using “lady” got tiring.

I was trying to figure out an angle. I had to have that cool drink. I was tired and my feet hurt, and not from putting my body on parade up and down Lexington Avenue. It was then I saw the bouncer bearing down on me and I knew it was no use. And just when I thought things couldn’t get worse, they did. A dude at the bar swiveled around on his bar stool and held up his beer glass. “Girlie, you can sit here with me,” he beckoned.

Not on your life! I retreated to the sanctity of my own private, legally and singly occupied Waldorf Astoria hotel room and picked up the telephone and dialed room service.

This story has a happy ending. Soon there was a knock on the door and it was not a “John” looking for a good time. It was a waiter who rolled in a cart with a fresh white tablecloth. On the cart was exactly what I wanted, no less and no more: A jigger of vodka, a decanter of tonic and a sweet little plate with a doily. On that plate were perfectly cut wedges of lemon. And, oh yes, there was a swivel stick to stir it all up so it could calm me down.

• • •



**“A THOUSAND DREAMS  
WITHIN ME SOFTLY BURN”  
(OR HAVE YOU EVER REALLY LOVED  
A DOG, A NEIGHBORHOOD,  
AND AN APARTMENT?)**

*Hilda Feinstein*

While walking on Seventh Avenue in Chelsea the other day, I noticed how many shuttered and empty storefronts were evident in this busy and thriving neighborhood. It made me sad to see the losses that Covid-19 has wrought.

I lived in Chelsea for about 20 years, a good while back when I was young and energetic. No longer young and with markedly less physical energy, I nonetheless retain an abundance of memories and feelings of warmth toward this eclectic and now highly gentrified neighborhood. Despite its considerable changes over the years, Chelsea still feels stimulating and hospitable to me, and many of its cultural and aesthetic gems still exist: Joyce Dance Theater, Chelsea Hotel, Rubin Museum, and the lovely brownstones.

Still In my twenties in 1969, I couldn't have been more excited to receive the phone call from the crusty superintendent of a stately pre-war on the corner of Seventh Avenue and Sixteenth Street, advising that I had been approved to rent a 19th floor studio apartment (with an expansive midtown view) in this wonderful building, the Barney's building. I was working as a secretary and was probably earning under a \$100 a week at the time, but this was a rent-controlled building and the monthly rent was amazingly reasonable at \$110, which included gas and electric.

Needless to say, I grabbed the apartment — my first apartment in Manhattan in which I lived alone and then with my shaggy dog, Samantha (Sam for short). Over the years Sam and I trod many miles through Chelsea and contiguous neighborhoods — from the corroded west side piers on Gansevoort Street, through Hell's Kitchen and Times Square, most often through downtown into the Village, Soho and as far south and east as Chinatown and Little Italy. But Chelsea was our hub, and I think we both always returned home to our small but cozy studio apartment most appreciatively.

I watched Chelsea gentrify over the years, not completely happily, since I valued the socio-economic and ethnic diversity as it existed in 1969. Nonetheless, I watched as Barney's bought up Seventeenth Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues in an expansion move that callously displaced hundreds of Latino families. I marched with local activists in opposition to this takeover, but to no avail. High-end retail and

luxury housing encroached throughout what had been a friendly, low-key neighborhood as the tentacles of gentrification established a firm grip.

As Chelsea changed over those 20 years, I too changed and matured, meeting many interesting and idiosyncratic people and having countless noteworthy experiences, some perhaps interesting enough to be written about, but at another time and context. While living there, many major life decisions were made, including one to go back to college, a decision that undeniably changed my life's trajectory.

Although small, the Chelsea apartment was fairly quiet for New York City, affordable, and convenient to transportation. More important though, it always felt like home (warm and welcoming), so much so, that when I prepared to move into to a larger one bedroom in Stuyvesant Town, I wrote the following poem about the apartment.

## 161

I miss you  
You have been a stable, always  
bright and warm friend  
Through many years of my life  
This is true  
And you have seen me through  
Smiles and tears, joys and fears  
Forward leaps and backward creeps  
And all the in-betweens.  
I knew your turns, your wooden  
flaws  
The creaks, the leaks, the drips  
And ever-sturdy walls

Through the years  
You have unconditionally  
embraced me  
And welcomed me home with a  
widely opened door  
So it is with a bit of regret and  
sorrow  
That I pass along my keys  
And move forward toward  
tomorrow  
But I am left with deep and  
heartfelt memories  
That will long endure.

A sign in a shuttered Chelsea storefront — “A thousand dreams within me softly burn” — communicated the loss of an unknown person's dreams while triggering memories of a time in my own life when dreams were vibrant and everything was possible. I symbolically pass my Chelsea keys along to that anonymous person or persons in this time of Covid-19 and wish them well.

And, just for the record, Sam lived for 17 years and died peacefully in Chelsea.

• • •

## YOUTH, MIDDLE-AGE, AND YOU-LOOK-GREAT! 80 IS THE NEW 90

*Stephen Rosen*

In the locker room each day, after I swim, I place my wet swimsuit into a small spin-dryer; centrifugal force squeezes the water out of my black nylon Speedo.

The sign on the spin-dryer says “This unit is self-timed and will shut down automatically at the end of its cycle. It will not reset.” The message has been an epiphany. An inert spin-dryer sign is communicating not only instructions about a device, but also a decree: After 80 years of being vertical, I Will Not Reset.

Friends I haven’t seen in a while greet me with, “*You look great!*” But “Youth” and “Middle-Age” have passed me by. So I conclude that “*You-look-great!*” must be the Third Phase of my life.

If I really do look great, it’s a peculiarly unfair and paradoxical compliment. Why do people expect me to have the memory ability, the physical agility, the quickness-of-mind, the word fluency and vocabulary I had in my mid-fifties or mid-sixties, just because I may sometimes “look great?” At 80, I’m really what-would-have-been-considered-old in my parents’ era. If my parents were my age now, they would have been dead for seven years.

Why can’t I look my age? People ask, “What’s your secret?” I’ve got well-rehearsed, tongue-in-cheek answers. “First, you have to choose the right grandparents. [I did!] Second, you have to be happily married. [I am!] Third, you have to love your work. [Yes!] Fourth, you have to take naps. [I do!] Fifth, modern medicine. And, most important, you have to act immature. [Check! And Double Check!]” I get weak smiles at these sophomoric clichés. Sixth, Linus Pauling, a double Nobel-Laureate, at age one hundred was asked the secret of his longevity. His answer: “Always hold the bannister.”

I’m kidding-on-the-square, trying to deny the inevitable. I’m making fun of old age and longevity because, deep down, is the serious sub-text to my every autobiographical thought. I’m dying (so to speak) to squeeze out (so to speak) and to convey the defining stories of my life — my memories — before all the juicy life is extracted and wrung out of me. Like the swimsuit water extractor does to my Speedo.

\* \* \* \* \*

Memoirs are in the air, like avian flu, pollen, humidity, and I read them — and my own — with a grain of salt (Pliny's purported antidote for poison).

La Rochefoucauld said: "Old people like to give good advice as a consolation for the fact that they can no longer set a bad example." I can still set bad examples but avoid advice because my life's lessons learned refer to me alone.

I wrote my memoir because I had a stroke and was eager for my children and grandchildren to know more about me. My memoir was written for myself, not for my children and grandchildren, as an exercise in self-interest, as an ironic reincarnation.

\* \* \* \* \*

A baroque musician has left us instructions on how to write a sonata. First, find a sonata you like so you can use it as a model. Second, replace its treble-clef notes with a melody of your own, taking care to ensure it tracks properly and harmoniously with the original existing bass-clef notes. Third, replace its existing bass-clef notes with your own original notes to harmonize with your new treble-clef notes. Then write it down, and, voila! a New Sonata!

My life-themes — physics, music, helping lawyers, doctors and scientists — resemble the original Old Sonata with its old bass and treble notes. My new activities resemble those new bass and treble notes that replaced the old ones and create a New Sonata: changing careers, doing welded sculptures, writing songs. Yet the original Old Sonata still defines, echoes, and reverberates.

*But in a memoir, do I really have to **define** myself, dammit? If I'm to be re-incarnated in (or as) a Book, my experiences and circumstances, my adventures and misadventures, great happenstances and small occasions, my insights and outlooks, my foibles and legacies, my immodest achievements and embarrassing mistakes will have to speak for themselves. Thus...*

After Beethoven had finished playing one of his newly composed sonatas, I asked him, "But Sir, what does it mean?" Beethoven reportedly sat down and played the sonata through again and, when he had finished, refusing to be defined, said, "*That's what it means!*"

I said to my naïve young proctologist as he was about to insert a fiber-optic device into my lower colon to perform a colonoscopy (as Gloria Swanson says to Cecil B. DeMille in the movie *Sunset Boulevard*): "*I'm ready for my close-up.*" Pass the salt. Note the tongue in cheek. And the kernel of truth.

# THOUGHTS ON MY BIRTHDAY

*Bob Reiss*

Thoughts on turning eighty:

- I recently turned seventy-five. More recently I turned eighty.
- Eighty. So far, this is the oldest I've ever been.
- Eighty. This is the time of my life when even my birthday suit needs pressing.
- Eighty. I know I'm getting old when the candles cost more than the cake.
- Eighty. I don't feel old. In fact, I don't feel anything until noon. Then it's time for my nap.
- People have asked me how it feels to be eighty. Well, it's a little depressing to know that half your life is behind you.
- People want to make me feel good. They say "Oh, eighty is the new seventy." Why when I was seventy did they tell me that seventy was the new sixty? That must mean that seventy wasn't so great either.

Thoughts on getting old:

- So here I am, still vertical.
- I really don't mind getting older, but my body is taking it badly.
- I worry sometimes: How young can you be and still die of old age?
- I thought getting old would take longer.
- It's not that I'm afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens.
- But, really, I'm not afraid of death, after all, it's not going to happen in my lifetime.
- Really, I intend to live forever. So far, so good.
- I'd like to achieve immortality, not through good works, but by not dying.
- I try to explain old to my grandkids. When I was a boy, the Dead Sea was only sick. The Old Testament was just the Testament.

Advantages of growing old I have written down here in this matchbook:

- I can buy things now and they won't wear out.
- I was standing on the bus when a young woman got up and offered me her seat. I gratefully took it, looked up and noticed she was 9½ months pregnant.
- To be a successful senior, you've got to have a routine
- Every morning I grab the Times and read the obituaries. If I'm not in there, I make breakfast.

You have to be optimistic:

- When I go to my lifelong learning classes every morning, I take the optimistic view and bring my lunch.
- On the way back, I stop at the market and if I'm in an optimistic mood, I buy green bananas.
- I recently renewed my New Yorker subscription. I was optimistic and took the two-year option.

You must advocate for senior rights:

- I recently had to renew my driver's license. You've heard of the enhanced driver's license; you need it to fly domestically. They charged me \$130. I complained about the cost and they said yes, but it's for eight years. I said do you have a cheaper version that's good for only, say, four years? No dice. Another way they rip off seniors.

When taking courses in school, it was always important to pass. At Quest, the last thing I want to do is pass. But I find humor is a way to deal with this inevitable result

. . .





## FINDING FAMILY

*Bob Gottfried*

On November 5, 2017, I received a phone message that would have a profound and truly wonderful change in both Ellen's and my lives. The message was from a person I had never heard of, Lisa Feiner, from Atlanta, Georgia, who said: "I believe I am your second cousin. If you have an Uncle Max, an Aunt Sabina, and an Aunt Ida, then we are related."

Lisa and I are related through our mutual great grandparents, Beryl Dov Gottfried and Esther Raizel Gottfried. Josef Gottfried, my paternal grandfather, was the brother of Oskar Gottfried, Lisa's paternal grandfather. Ellen had thoroughly researched the Gottfried family tree and knew that Josef was one of ten siblings. What she did not know was that, although many of the siblings perished in the Holocaust, some of their descendants survived.

Lisa had begun searching her family history by providing DNA to 23 and Me in the Fall of 2017. Her first match was with our cousin, Jennifer Thaw, the granddaughter of Lina Gottfried, another child of Beryl and Esther Raizel. Jennifer resided in Yorba Linda, in Southern California. Lisa and Jennifer found me through a search of the records at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, where Ellen had provided testimony for Gottfried relatives who had been killed by the Nazis. After putting my name into a Google search, they found a link to my law firm's website, which has a testimonial to my father, Bernd Gottfried, an immigrant to the United States. Lisa, being the braver of the two cousins, was assigned to call me.

We were all so excited to have found each other and decided to meet in person. Just two weeks later, on November 19, Lisa, her husband, Cliff, Jennifer, Ellen, and I met in NYC. My plan was to take my new-found cousins to visit my Aunt Ruth (my father's sister and the matriarch of the Gottfried Family) at her assisted living facility in Teaneck, NJ. From the moment we first saw each other, the five of us bonded; it was like we had known one another forever.

On the ride to Aunt Ruth's home, we shared stories of our lives and our families. Three hours after arriving, we finally departed, but just to go across the street to have dinner. None of us wanted that magical day to end, so we stayed at the table long after we had consumed our

food, and then, only reluctantly, did I start the trip to take my cousins to their Eastside Hotel.

It was a real leap of faith for Jennifer to fly all the way from LA, and Lisa and Cliff to fly in from Atlanta, for a one-night trip to see unknown relatives they may not have been happy to know.

When Ellen and I arrived home that Sunday night, we both knew that we had to make plans to see our cousins again. We spoke with Lisa and Cliff and decided to visit them in February 2018. Having learned of our plans, Jennifer wanted to join us. From February first through the fourth, Lisa and Cliff hosted the first Gottfried Family Gathering with 25 descendants of six of the 10 Gottfried siblings. The Gathering was held in an apartment Cliff and Lisa owned in the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, a gorgeous venue with views of downtown Atlanta. Each of us had an ID with our name and photo as well as the photo of our Gottfried ancestor. It was a marvelous weekend that none of us will ever forget.

Following our Family Gathering, Ellen and I stayed in close contact with Lisa, Cliff, and Jennifer through phone calls, emails, and text messages. The next time we met was in person at the Second Gottfried Family Gathering held in my backyard in Plainview, the weekend of June 21-24, 2018. At that Gathering, we hosted 32 relatives from seven states and three countries (Mexico, Israel and the U.S.), visited Sagamore Hill, Planting Fields Arboretum, and ate more food than we believed possible. We also celebrated the first birthday of my grandson, William John Gottfried.

Since June 2018, Ellen and I have seen Jennifer on several occasions, in California, New York and on a vacation we took together with our cousin Lesley to Panama in January 2019. We saw Lisa and Cliff at their second home in South Carolina and again in Atlanta at Thanksgiving 2019. We now have virtual Gottfried Family Gatherings via Zoom.

The five of us — Ellen, Lisa, Jennifer, Cliff, and I — have developed very strong connections via text, Zoom and phone. Unfortunately, due to Covid, we cannot see each other anytime soon, although plans are in the making.

• • •

## MY REFRIGERATOR

*Susan Diehl*

I opened my refrigerator door 22 times yesterday. I was working from home, and going to the refrigerator made a wonderful diversion. Those door openings represented fixing meals (“fixing” is a loose term when it comes to the amount of actual cooking that transpired), finding snacks, getting soda, and, of course, the general looking as though I had forgotten what sparse contents were there.

Once I saw an episode of Martha Stewart in which she demonstrated how to organize your refrigerator. I had no idea that this was even a topic worthy of discussion. My refrigerator-organizing skills end at: There’s the space... Here’s the food... Insert. But there she was, telling me there was a correct way to do this.

First, she gathered her collection of antique soft-green glass containers. I immediately knew I was out of my league and should have changed channels right then, but I was too amazed to move. She started with the cheeses and meats and demonstrated how you should remove their packaging and cover tightly in Saran wrap. She then proceeded to put like items together in their own green glass bowl. The container holding the cheeses went on a bright yellow tray on which she collected all the other dairy products.

Cream cheese and butter were placed in their own antique glass dish. Even milk went into a covered carafe and placed on the dairy products tray. She then moved on to the eggs, which she took out of the carton and put in a bowl with a lid. Fruits and vegetables were the only escapees of the green glass containers: They were put in special plastic bags designed for freshness and placed together on the bottom shelf. Martha was using her large commercial refrigerator that did not have the usual bins and door shelves, and when she had finished, the inside of her refrigerator looked better than most people’s china cabinets.

I occasionally think of Martha’s refrigerator when gazing into mine. The similarity ends with the fact that they are both cold. My refrigerator doesn’t really need organizing; you can pretty much see all its contents at a quick glance. And it certainly doesn’t look like a china cabinet. With the odd mismatched Tupperware and Rubbermaid and a generous supply of take-out containers, I’d peg it more for a utility closet. However, if you open the crisper drawer beneath the top shelf, you will see that the cheese has been removed from its original packaging and wrapped tightly in Saran wrap. Martha would be proud.

• • •

## THROWIN' AWAY (ON JOINING QUEST)

*Ruth Ward*

I am not throwin' away my smarts  
I am not throwin' away my smarts  
Hey yo, I'm just like the new friends  
That I found around a few bends  
And I'm not throwin' away my smarts.

I'ma watch some classes in the CCNY digs  
I'ma sit in back in sneakers with no makeup & no wigs  
I probably shouldn't say, but they might blow me away.  
The problem is I got a lot of brains but I'm all alone  
I wanna turn my jawbone — into a megaphone.

I'm a dray horse but I'm good at hidin' it  
My time, it stalled, and I've just been bidin' it.  
Work to retirement was quite a transition  
Now I need to find some kind o' new ambition  
I got start-up ideas but need to fix my transmission,  
Pull out my rusty key and put it in the ignition.

I wanna join a group of older folks I can relate to,  
Open-minded people who appreciate the good and great,  
Who look at life like it's never ever too late to  
Join with chums and buddies who would never berate you.

Folks who are willin' to stand for what's right  
Folks who are focused, who never lose sight  
Of how they want the world to change  
Though not from day to night,  
Wearin' special spectacles that keep in the light.

Enter me, on this society's fringe  
Wantin' to do it all, eager to binge,  
Then admirin' what y'all are determined to do —  
I'm mighty excited to be joinin' you.

• • •

## CATALPA

*Steve Koenig*

First it hits me in the head; then it hits me.  
From this Catalpa on the side of our new house  
long, magically curved pods, the sticky long  
leaves ruffle and sigh as the wind sifts through.

A pod, a stick, practically, bounces off  
the back of my head and smacks the concrete,  
opening at the side; brown flat seeds peering out  
and I know where I've seen this before.

In Hebrew school in the fall, weird brown pods  
called bukser we were given, to chew on and smile  
as it releases a sweet and woody taste that fills  
the mouth, the seeds discarded. It's odd  
to eat wood. Is this the same pod, the same tree,  
the relative of a holy Carob pod  
which some claim a chocolate substitute  
when there can be no such thing?

Häagen-Dazs used to have Carob ice cream  
when it first came to town  
and I craved the cocoa-like mouthfeel and  
savor but it soon disappeared, and part  
of my palate was gone forever, although this  
Saint John's Bread also was his manna in the wild.  
The hard pod hits me in the head, this wild fruit of nature,  
and parts of my life flash before my eyes  
and I chew, tasting the tiny seeds,  
even though there's nothing in my mouth.

• • •

# MOTHER EARTH

*Linda Rothstein*

Our earth is so old she creaks as she turns  
And she is helpless as the wildfire burns

The oceans are so acid they belch  
And mercury is poisoning her fish

Her glaciers are slosh and snowmelt  
Such polar warming has never been felt

The beasts that once flew, ran or swam  
Are driven to extinction by the needs of man

More and more hungry mouths to feed  
Less and less food and more and more in need

Earth's been here four and a half billion years  
And all she has to show for her spinning are tears

. . .



## BANNISTER, SMEDLEY & CHASE

Wayne Cotter

In 1908 near London's Hyde Park  
A mother and newborn rest in the dark,  
While father pauses to dab tears from his face  
From his desk at *Bannister, Smedley & Chase*.

Although young Simon grew witty and smart  
A hole had emerged deep in his heart.  
His father, you see, seldom embraced  
Anyone but *Bannister, Smedley & Chase*.

Time passed; Simon studied year after year  
And soon the time came to choose a career.  
"Dad," he said solemnly with a brave face  
"I'd like to join *Bannister, Smedley & Chase*."

Dad's gap-toothed grin filled Simon with pride  
At last, thought he, we'll be side by side.  
His mother, however, said without grace:  
"The devil with *Bannister, Smedley & Chase*."

Dad was aghast at the tears that she shed  
"Hasn't the firm put us all in good stead?  
Brought food to our table; a roof for this place:  
Oh Thank God for *Bannister, Smedley & Chase*."

And Simon indeed joined up with his Dad  
But the old man quite often was weary and sad.  
And Simon labored at a merciless pace  
For the firm of *Bannister, Smedley & Chase*.

Then Simon one day saw a sight quite grotesque  
His father, slumped over, lay dead at his desk.  
And right there beside him, his tired briefcase,  
Property of *Bannister, Smedley & Chase*.

Now in church Simon sits with mother and mourns  
Scanning each pew with unrestrained scorn.  
Many mourners he sees with veils and fine lace  
But not one single soul from  
*Bannister, Smedley & Chase*.

• • •

## JULIAN'S BOWER

*Jennifer Jolly*

Atop the escarpment's northern end  
An ancient turf "maze" can be found  
A labyrinth in its design  
A circular shape sunk in the ground  
It's Julian's Bower: a mystical place, a magical place  
A spiritual place to meditate,  
Watch floating clouds in blue-gray space  
Commune with nature, free from hate  
Why it's built there no one knows  
Some say it dates to Roman times  
But speculation around it flows  
Some say it dates to Medieval days  
A sacred place where pilgrims trod  
Walked its paths and penance paid  
But in Shakespeare's time was a place for games  
Not where people worshiped God  
It commands the view of all around  
Look north, see on a clear bright day  
Across the Vale of York's flat ground  
York Minster forty miles away  
The hamlet of Alkborough lies east  
With a Roman camp and Saxon church  
Look west, there's a wild life sanctuary for birds,  
On watery flats with reeds and sedge  
Beyond that verdant, tended fields  
Go to the river's edge  
And then you'll see a sight of wonder  
A roiling confluence of rivers three  
Where the Trent and Ouse conjoin the Humber  
Which flows on to the dark North Sea  
While Julian's Bower stays calm and still  
Centuries old on its Lincolnshire hill.

• • •



## PROCRASTINATION

*Karen Neuberger*

I should just get to it,  
circumvent the waiting around  
for it to happen, as though it will come  
on tip toes in soft slippers carrying  
every childhood birthday cake  
and my first set of wheels and the easy  
wheel of roller skating down an incline.  
Instead, I should just leap in, hear again  
the yell I heard the first time I jumped  
off the high-diving board and realized  
the cry came from deep within myself.

• • •

## SUMMER LIGHT

*Karen Neuberger*

I dream of the light  
in our summer rooms  
and the way the rooms called us  
to their cupped palms, light emanating  
into a quiet that kept me  
wanting. I dream I knew then  
words that could have taken us  
into things as I wanted them.  
But, I couldn't even envision what that was,  
I didn't have the words,  
only an abundance of summer light  
gently enveloping us, so together,  
yet so separate, so private.

• • •

## NATURAL DELIGHTS

*Rachel Shor*

On my vacation in South Carolina,  
alligators emerging from algae-coated  
ponds were not to be molested, while  
an assault of crackling, tapping, shrieking  
led to finding ibis, red masked moorhens,  
a great blue heron, and other birds posing  
seductively amid cover of tangled branches.

I consumed the best crab cakes ever, had  
tasty hush puppies for breakfast, and  
lapped gelato in my favorite flavor,  
extra dark chocolate with hazelnut.

Returning home, climbing over dirty  
snow, I got fresh, delicate asparagus  
the first week as I did laundry, paid bills,  
found bright sweet peas the second when  
I set up my new modem, and relished a  
drunken veal chop draped in mushrooms.  
Even here, the early purple hyacinth were  
so delicious, I smiled along with the pansies.

• • •

## SUBWAY BEAT

*Rachel Shor*

In flowery harem pants,  
hot pink rubber slippers,  
a sleeveless undershirt exposing  
a muscular build and tattooed arms,  
a dyed-blond black man blasts  
a strong beat from his red radio,  
dances down the subway aisle,  
hangs upside down from railings,  
floats around the center pole,  
twice high-fiving me, eliciting  
a smile, a dollar, and this poem.

## ZOEY

### *Art Spar*

She poses before Fox Island  
Me snapping some pictures  
The air brisk  
Early morning weather

Hiking through  
Marshlands  
No humans about  
Timeless

Her eight pounds  
Prance proudly  
Keeping pace  
With my 170

Two behind legs  
Slightly to the right  
Of the two in front  
A jiggly wiggly stride

Shelley left sleeping  
Dreaming of... sleeping late  
I need to keep moving  
Restlessly

A lonely man  
Who found a friend  
To go walking with  
To find new places

I talk to her  
Awkwardly at first  
Embarrassed  
For no good reason  
She listens

Responds  
Comes close  
Binding us together.

• • •

## DUSTY

*Leonard Leventon*

Tiny as a speck of dust  
She looked up and pleaded with us:  
Take me home; take me with you

I'll show you the way  
to great gentleness  
The way to grow tall  
The way to great happiness  
When I fetch a stick or a ball

She grew to great heights  
Larger than her paws said she would  
She grew past our navels  
And tops of our tables

She ate from our stove  
When we left her alone  
She barked at the hot food  
When she gobbled it home

But gentle as silk  
At a hundred-ten pounds  
She'd scare the unwary  
When she'd prance around town

Dusty — the color of sand  
Loving forever — up to the end

Kidneys did fail  
After only five years  
With large dogs this happens  
We shed many tears

But gentle she was  
With a heart larger than she  
Dusty did show us  
What tallness should be

• • •

## SOYLENT BLUES

*Byrd*

When the lights and  
cameras go dim  
and those who  
get their hard core  
jollies asphyxiating the  
essence of we who possess  
hues darker than Indian ink  
will pontificate about law  
order and respecting a war  
song that pays homage to a  
200 year old plasma drenched  
red, white and blue tattered piece of fabric  
Have a REAL WORLD anti REEL  
WORLD rap session with Crazy Horse  
Red Cloud and Sitting Bull  
about the disrespected and the non respecters  
others longing for the Happy Days the  
non Nappy Hair People People Days  
will perform more human  
sacrifices in a Vain attempt  
to resurrect Jim Anderson and Betty Crocker  
6-11-2020 6:00 p.m.

• • •

# I AM SUPPOSED TO SAY...

*Betty Farber*

***News Item:*** *Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick is of the opinion that old people, i.e. those most at risk, should volunteer to die to save the economy.*

I am supposed to say  
That I would gladly die  
To salvage a booming economy  
For my grandchildren.

But then who would tell them  
How their great-grandmother  
Sailed from Russia, with her family  
On the ship The Fatherland  
When she was 8 years old?  
Who would touch her name proudly  
Etched on the wall at Ellis Island?  
Who would describe to the grandchildren  
A world without technology:  
No computers, no streaming, no smart phones?  
How we played Monopoly and marbles,  
Wore roller skates with the metal key  
Dangling from a string around our neck.  
Who would tell them about World War II  
Rationing, blackouts, war bonds?  
Who would describe living through  
Ageism, racism and sexism?  
And who will teach them  
To choose Life?

• • •

## MEMORY

*Eileen D. Kelly*

Remember when we could  
bare our faces and  
kiss and hug all  
as we wished?

It was years ago  
when we were free  
of deadly venom.  
Now we shun and shudder  
and cover our mugs  
or risk the bug that  
gets into our breath  
and shuts us down  
with a threat of death.

Newborns today  
see only eyes  
peering at them.  
They don't know  
smiles or frowns  
unless a criminal shows  
in gross entirety  
the taboo visage.

• • •

## WHEN I LOST RBG

*Barbara P Gordon*

I woke up this morning  
to discover that  
Ruth Ginsburg died  
and sadness took me  
once again  
as when I lost  
so many of my heroes  
(Martin Luther King  
and JFK)  
yet this felt personal  
as if a member of my family  
had passed away

I felt that how she lived her life  
and all she stood for  
was for me      that  
*my* life was only possible  
because she lived  
and worked and cared  
that even those who  
cursed her name  
didn't know she  
stood for them as well

• • •



## SKY

*Hilda Feinstein*

Never pondered much about the sky  
Always there  
An a priori eye  
Hovering — ever changing  
Yet consistently consistent

Colorful pallet cloud container  
Defined by the eye of the mind  
Inky black night  
Whispering dreams of the unimagined

Romantics swoon  
Under a panoply of mythological forms  
Engaged in play and parabolic adventure  
Amid falling starlight

Temperamental moody  
Storming with rage  
Through heat and freezes  
Merging into sun, shine and mild breezes  
Applying balm, stillness and calm  
Upon those tempest tossed  
Below

Dividing the vastness of space  
From our mortal coil  
The heavens from earth  
Sky, you do not judge  
Nor intercede in decisions human and binding  
While you oversee with wide wise eyes

Endless timeless sky  
Pure and true  
Are we blinded to your reminders  
Both subtle and strong  
With lessons to be learned  
Messages discerned  
From ominous shadows  
Of before and after

• • •



Gil Santiago, *Black Birds*, Black Metal Sculptures



Beth Callender, *Self Portrait*, Charcoal Drawing



Paul Adler, *Suited Up*, Casein & Acrylic on Board



Sondra Lipton Sahlman, *Seated Woman*, Alabaster



Diane Figueroa, *Exploding Bubbles*, Sterling Silver, Semi Precious Stones



Yona Rogosin, *Fusion*, Abstract Collage





Helen Neilson, *Music Moves*, Paper Collage

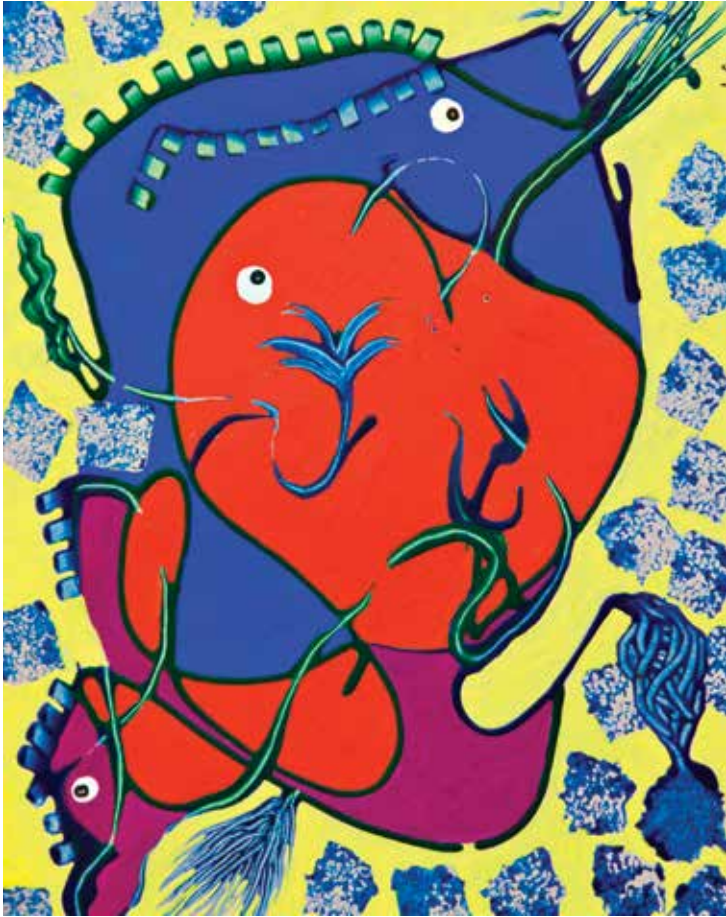




Deborah Yaffe, *Fruit Stand*, Photograph



Frank Montaturo, *Pink Bike, Pink Wall*, Photograph



Leonard Gold, *Transformed by Their Eyes*, Tempera Abstract



Marilyn Weiss, *Pin Point*, Collage, Mixed Media





Lila Heilbrunn, *A Day at The Met*, Photograph



Jeanette Himmel, *Flowering Vases*, Oil Painting



Gary Friedland, *At The Matisse Academy*, Watercolor



Roy Clary, *Helen's Cat*, Oil on Canvas





Helen McMahon, *View from South Cove*, Watercolor

# TRUTH ABOUT THE UNIVERSE

*Judy Hampson*

Exoplanets circling red dwarfs,  
Emitting light and warmth,  
Enabling life.  
It's all relative,  
As Einstein would jest,  
Chatting to Newton about apples  
As they observe our limitations  
From ultra-hot Neptune,  
Where dead scientists hang out.  
Did you know he had a most fortunate thought about the  
universality of freefall?  
Guess he and Newton were on the same page about them apples.  
Andromeda was formed by a colossal crash:  
Bang! Wham! Boom!  
As two stars bounced along  
Whacking into each other,  
Like soccer balls in a playground  
Knocking heads together.  
Nurse? Is she on duty today?  
Stick this icepack on the bump.  
Stars orbit erratically around twin clusters.  
Who made all this up?  
This expansive forging of super-masses  
Exploding into sparkling galaxies,  
Creating an optical lens out of gravity and space.  
Wasn't one of our brains, for sure.  
Is there one God over all this,  
Listening to our miniscule troubles  
While creating new planets and avoiding black holes,  
As he tiptoes across the Universe?  
Or is she split into numerous personalities  
To accommodate the multitude of faiths here on Earth, and  
other planets?  
There must be many other orbs like ours,  
Spinning endlessly in a milky way of stars  
Trapped in their own existence,  
Wondering.  
We are far too insignificant to be the only ones,  
In this vast, dynamic ball of energy we call The Universe.

• • •

## POETS

*Barbara P Gordon*

all over the world:  
sitting on porches  
hiding in bedrooms  
half buried in sand  
blinking behind masks  
hunched over desks  
strolling with notepads  
scribbling  
crossing out  
seeing  
imagining  
furious  
passionate  
inventing their world  
intruding on our world  
with hard punches  
soft sighs  
nourishing truths  
sometimes undecipherable  
absolutely necessary

• • •

# ISOLATION

*Betty Farber*

I am home  
In isolation  
Looking for comfort.  
I am exploring  
A new planet,  
Figuring it out  
What to do  
How to act:  
What I can do  
Alone or  
With others.

Every day I get stronger, better,  
Able to be sad and happy.  
Seeing friends in space,  
Sharing a new  
Harmony of spirit.  
Finding comfort  
In what is waiting,  
Reaffirming belief  
In a bright dawn.

• • •

# INJUSTICE

(after reading “What is Owed” by Nikole Hannah-Jones)

*Ruth Ward*

Sometimes you must fight fire with fire  
When they push you down lower, you must raise yourself up higher.  
If money is given to jails, not schools  
You’ve got to say, “My people, if given the tools  
Will have all the success of their light-skinned kin,  
It all depends on the setting they’re in.”

When they put red lines around you on a housing map  
And say that’s life, you must protest that pap.  
Join with England, Kenya, Turkey— and Brazil  
Shouting George Floyd’s name from the top of every hill.

When policemen kill with qualified immunity  
You must say, “No, they cannot act with impunity.”  
Make the police take stock of their actions,  
Not kill folks of color for minor infractions.  
There are no more Black codes but still there’s risk  
For the black and brown targets of stop and frisk.

You’ve got to repeat that “Black lives matter,”  
It’s a matter of fact, not political patter,  
And if a football player wants to take a knee  
Then applaud his protest of police brutality.  
Statues of heroes, take them all down  
If they dishonor citizens black and brown.

There is no such thing as a regular Joe  
Among those bent on keeping the status quo.  
Now a black fam’ly holds little more than one penny  
For every white dollar, and white folks have many.  
Black fam’lies earning 80 thousand dollars by count  
Live like white fam’lies earning just half that amount.

Sherman promised black folks 40 acres and a mule  
Johnson broke that promise, thinking Sherman a fool.  
So here we are 155 years later,  
Blacks like whites looking just the same to their Creator.  
It’s time to acknowledge it’s not a myth:  
Injustice needs to be reckoned with.

• • •

## **CRAYOLA CRAYONS**

*Helen Saffran*

Do you want to color?  
A new box first of eight  
And soon of 48 colors was a prize  
The way boys knew baseball statistics,  
Girls knew the names of Crayola Crayons  
Spring green, forest green,  
Sky blue, burnt sienna  
Standing perfect and pointed  
in a brand-new orange and green box  
Peeling the paper as the crayon wore down  
The waxy aroma

Deciding what colors to use  
In your coloring book picture  
And sharing a crayon with a friend  
When you both needed to use  
The exact same color

• • •

## **DADDY**

*Helen Saffran*

Hand in hand  
With her father  
Little redhead  
With bangs  
Walks smiling  
In the sun

Then she closes her eyes  
Still smiling, still walking  
Still holding hands  
with her father

Seeing such infinite  
trust and love  
my heart smiles  
With her

## ODE TO THE POTATO

*Mary Ann Donnelly*

My grandmother loved you  
Of course she's Irish you say  
She'd peel you each afternoon  
Lovingly removing your brown suit  
Revealing your yellowy white flesh  
Savoring a slice in her mouth every fifth one.

Always true to you  
Fried in the morning glistening in oil  
Boiled for dinner topped off with butter  
Every day  
Every night  
Never unfaithful  
Never succumbing to passion with pastas  
Or a romance with rice.

Did she cling to you like a talisman  
Superstitious fears of abandonment  
Folk fear of the Famine  
Promising love and loyalty  
In return for a promise of plenty?

• • •

## LUCKY ROCK

*Carole Cronig Abrahams*

Luck foretold  
is a stripe,  
a swoop of a second color,  
a sensitive, quiet  
layer of singular luck

• • •

# LINCOLN TOWERS

*Leonard Gold*

Sitting at the table having coffee  
I look out the window.  
Apartment buildings  
Towers  
Rectangular windows  
Rectangular balconies  
With rectangular doors.  
A tall, rectangular woman  
Emerges from one of the doors.  
She moves to the edge of the balcony.  
A voice from below:  
Rapunzel! Rapunzel!  
Let down thy hair.  
But the hair does not reach.  
Her apartment is on the twelfth.  
Had she gone for a lower one  
She might then have met  
Her knight  
In shining  
Armor.

• • •





## MASK ENVY

*Donna K. Ramer*

A walk in the park  
Down Madison or Fifth  
Shops closed and dark  
Designers sadly adrift

But look: a Tiffany blue and a red Jimmy Choo  
Face masks in all colors and hue  
Hermes orange and Lauren white  
A Chanel mask with pearls is such a delight

Eileen Fisher's are one-size-fits-all  
Paul Smith has stripes and Rowley's look like a shawl  
Raffaella's smile with bows and lace  
What a shame Capezio tulle covers that little girl's face

Jil Sander's paisley clashes with Burberry plaid  
But those DVF wraps always make us glad  
There's nothing between me and my Calvins  
Did you know Marimekko flowers are printed on satins?

Those fine worsted wools are from Saville Row  
And Vera Wang's are only for show  
So many are wearing a pricey Zegna  
Very well made so I don't really blame ya

I'll stick with a variety of fabrics for home-made MacGyvers  
Or disposable blues that are five for a fiver  
And my little black masks are always so right  
I have no mask envy cause they match day or night

• • •

**DANCE OF THE MOTH  
(A.K.A. HONEY BROWN BUTTERMILK  
ON THE ROCKS)**

*Byrd*

Fire Burning Soothing  
Turn Me On Honey Side Up Style  
Timber My Shivers Cantaloupe Sugar Style  
Zampoo-Ogie Me Hot Butter Body Style

SWEETBACKING DOWN TO THE GRITTY NITTY  
AS WE MERRY GO. ROUND ALONG  
YOUR MELLOW BRICK ROAD

Pelvic To Pelvic We Are One  
Brass Bed Booty Bumping  
Pubic To Public We Are One  
Betty Boop Me Bubble Gum Bumpstop Style

Spitfire Spitfire Let's Make It Fruity  
Spitfire Spitfire Let's Make It Juicy  
Scorch Me Black Mudkicker of Earth  
Until My Bones Are Charred  
Beyond All Recognition  
Of My Previous Artic Shell  
5-23-2020 3:30 p.m.

• • •

## ALREADY AUTUMN

*Judy Winn*

A day trip to the Catskills  
A blaze of October foliage  
Hair blowing in the wind  
In an ancient convertible  
Flying on the highway  
Trying to outrun time.

Sipping wine on a terrace  
Looking at hills of color  
He asked what I would do now  
My working days behind me  
I said I had done everything  
I set out to do.

I thought if I could have a wish  
It would be to turn back twenty years  
Keeping the lessons of those years  
Not too old and young enough  
To play with time and freedom  
But it was already autumn.

• • •



# SPINNING PLATES ON LONG STICKS

*Howard Seeman*

When I was young,  
my mother took me  
to see a show  
where a man ran up and down the stage,  
trying to save spinning plates on long sticks.

I was little then and didn't fully understand the  
spinning plates,  
nor know that they were coming.

I just tried to ride my bike,  
get Linda to like me  
and run faster than Arden.

Sure, I would see the ocean  
or Spring come  
or a funeral  
but right after it  
just go get a soda.

But it seeped in:  
when my goldfish died  
when my snowman was gone the next day  
when I couldn't find that hole I dug at the beach.

I am now very busy  
crossing out lists  
fixing the car  
and trying to get ahead.

I now see the spinning plates  
wherever I go.

• • •

## A CERTAIN SMILE COMES OVER OLD PEOPLE

*Howard Seeman*

A certain smile  
comes over old people  
when they see you again  
after not having seen you for a long time.

We have all seen it.  
We know it's not the usual smile.

Though we know how significant this look is  
we never talk about it.

We just rush by it with a polite hello,  
or talk quickly  
and hope they don't directly say why  
there is this little joy in seeing us again.

Then, sometimes, we run out of talking  
that covers all this up;  
we want to leave  
and make some excuse to do so.

We make believe  
we do not hear their need  
and start to turn away.

As we begin to go  
they usually shake our hand  
and touch us in some way  
that's a little stronger  
than we want to be reminded.

• • •

## IN THE BARDO

*Mary Ann Donnelly*

I died last night  
And the world went on

Calls placed  
Family informed  
Arrangements made  
Pictures sorted  
Meals delivered  
Drinks dispensed  
Music shuffled  
Stories told  
Tears shed

Do they wonder where I went?

They see my shape  
In every woman that passes  
Smell my scent  
For a time

But the world goes on

I linger a while, hovering  
Reluctant to leave

Listening

• • •

# SOULS

*Judy Winn*

Each one left in their turn  
Put to rest in a cemetery  
Prayers said, tears shed  
Mother, father, husband  
Their physical presence gone  
In my home they surrounded me.

Their souls inhabited my space  
Moved with me into every room  
Next to me day and night  
Nearer in death than in life  
I was engulfed by their presence  
A palpable floating nearness  
They were my guests for a long time.

Suddenly they were no longer there  
One by one I let them go  
Or was it that they had decided  
It was time to let go of me  
Souls resigned to being dead  
Moving on to wherever they went  
Finally knowing they could not stay  
By my side as I went on with life.





**BEAUTIFUL ILLUSION FOR  
WHOM I LIVE PAINFULLY  
SWEET FICTION FOR  
WHOM JOYFULLY I DIE**

(after the painting “bella ilusion...”

by Bernardo González López)

*Steve Koenig*

some think because I have taken vows  
I have given up my life my family my work  
but it's just a transformation, i'm transfixed

time is nothing. In my cell a clock on the wall  
is damp with tears. Others paint but even  
tight-lipped, my eyes drip translucent hues

when I was a girl I had dreams so real  
it felt like the devil was transpiring with my skin  
to combust 'til all I was was coal

now with flowers in corona over my veil  
I see what others don't, the flame with  
which it comes close, the flames of lace

surround my neck as a lover would  
I am dedicated to him although it burns  
I am dedicated to him though I am lacking

I am dedicated to he who knows I am here  
but does little to prove it except all the little things  
breath air sun illness jacarandas mynahs águilas monkeys

I am dedicated to he who knows I am here  
although I myself am not sure  
and when death comes

there will be  
an easing  
of faith

. . .



# MOTHER NATURE'S REVENGE

*Jennifer Jolly*

Destroying beauty polluting air  
Killing forests and creatures rare  
Plundering fuels, metals too  
Never again will they renew  
Destroying fish and reefs of corals  
By greedy men who have no morals

Earth's resources depleted soon  
Water scarce predicting doom  
As cities' infrastructures fail  
Plagues and illness will prevail  
Mouths to feed will wait in vain  
Famine will emerge, remain

Now Mother Nature takes revenge  
Man's damage to her she'll avenge  
Unleashing hurricanes, destructive floods  
Gales that bring down power and woods  
Fires that blaze and rage and burn  
Our precious forests with no return  
Ashes remain, a wanton loss  
While nature shows us who's the boss

Will we ever learn?

• • •

# SPRINGTIME ON THE CARMEL

*Stella Gold*

All of a sudden  
After a week of rain  
Spring had surged on the hill  
With flowers of all colors  
Everywhere on the new grass.

We had moved recently  
With our firstborn on the way  
To the top floor  
Of a building completed  
Six months before.

On the hilltop  
Above Haifa  
Inhaling the fragrance  
Of flowers and new grass  
Was magical.

It was a page  
Of a new life  
In a new country  
A time of hope  
Now, part of memory.

• • •

## FAHNESTOCK

*Leonard Leventon*

The summer light turned golden red  
Through the thick tree trunks  
Your silhouette glowed encased in the softening dusk

Peace filled the air, the spaces between the leaves  
As a bird or two whispered above the breeze  
And water rippled gently beyond the ridge.

Dinner was cooking on the small stove the size of one's fist.  
Then it would be time for the fire to light up our campsite  
in the darkness  
And deeply glow into nighttime 'neath the stars  
shining with bliss

In our tent we would listen to the nighttime  
As we slowly drift off with the stars  
Enwrapped in the world and the planets  
We'd fall asleep in each other's sweet arms

• • •

## RED BUDS

*Art Spar*

Late May in Wellfleet

The final days of imprisonment

In the time of cold Weathering nature's sleep

Almost not noticing the changing to longer days

Measured in evening dog walks without a flashlight or by

Storing away winter hats and scarves deep in the dresser

T Shirts and shorts replacing sweatshirts and sweatpants

Chowder giving way to raw bar Seedlings hardening off

Doors akimbo allow a breeze to bring the smells inside

Red buds last but a few days Shells protecting baby

Green leaves soon to fall reddening

The ground Each year

We miss red buds

Living the big city

Life Substituting

The red lights

Of Broadway

For nature's

Long running

Blockbuster

• • •

## POOR PERKY

*Jennifer Jolly*

“Here she comes,” said my mum, wiping her hands on a tea towel as she looked out the kitchen window. Sure enough, the white hen was strutting purposefully across the back yard, going past the air raid shelter toward the house. Her head was held high and carried its red comb on top like a signal; her bright black eyes darted back and forth. On nearing the kitchen, she stopped, looked around, hopped onto the windowsill, and tapped on the glass with her yellow beak. “That hen’s so perky,” said Mum, who was quite taken with her. “I shall call her that.” And so the hen was given the family name and became “Perky Brown.”

It was at the end of World War II, when England was bankrupt. To help pay the national debt, we had to tighten our belts. Clothing and food were scarce. People darned socks and patched shirts, pants, and coats. Shoes were re-soled many times while their uppers were carefully tended with polish and rubbed to a shine with elbow grease. We had to save coupons over many months to buy anything new. Food was strictly rationed and, like many people during those austere times, my dad kept chickens. They provided valuable eggs, which were in very short supply. Generally we killed and ate the birds after they no longer produced any eggs because meat was scarce and chicken meat was a rare treat.

Our hen coop stood on some spare land on the other side of a fence bounding our backyard. I was five years old and would go through the gate with Dad to collect the brown and white eggs nestled in the straw of the hen house. Often I heard the hens clucking and squawking, going “cluck, cluck, cluck, *kererk*,” with the noise rising to a shrieking crescendo when an egg was laid. At night they retreated to the safety of the coop to shelter from rats that lived in the nearby railway sidings. But during the day, they scratched in the surrounding area and ate worms, bugs, and grass seeds. They all kept to their territory, except Perky.

Why Perky separated herself from the rest and visited the house was a mystery. My mother thought she was special and began to look forward to her visits. Indeed, she did become special. We heard about the activities of Perky on a daily basis. Mum would say, “Do you know what Perky did today? She came to the window, so I went out to give her some breadcrumbs and we talked about how she was doing.”

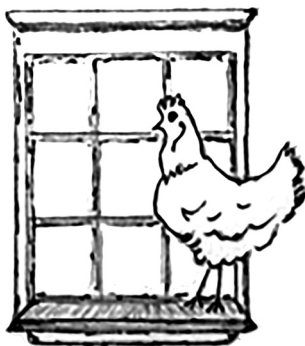
Mum encouraged Perky Brown and the hen grew bolder, even stepping into the kitchen. As time passed, Mum saw Perky as part of our household.

Dad went along with all of this. He indulged Mum and listened to her tales with some amusement, but to him Perky was a hen, not a human. She was there to provide eggs and her neck would be wrung when she stopped producing. She would then be roasted and set on the table for us to eat.

Well, this day inevitably came. Mum said she knew it was silly, but she didn't want to lose Perky. However, trying to be sensible and knowing that the family must eat, she eventually gave way and agreed that Perky would become a victim. And so it came about that Perky was killed and roasted. But when she was set on the table, it was too much for my mother. She burst into tears and sobbed that she just couldn't eat. The thought of killing and eating Perky Brown distressed her beyond endurance. She pushed back her chair and fled from the room.

I don't remember if the rest of us ate the bird. What stuck in my mind was Mum saying she didn't care how much of a treat chicken was she couldn't eat her little friend. My poor dad tried to comfort her and dug a grave for Perky's remains. We held a ceremony for her, but Mum continued to mourn for Perky and, for some time afterward, would wander over to the kitchen window as if expecting her to appear. Then she'd turn back with a sad, wistful look and let out a deep sigh.

. . .



## HOW TO PET A WHALE

*Pete and Judy Weis*

It started with a solicitation from one of Judy's acquaintances. Michael Stocker, a marine biologist, has been running trips to San Ignacio Lagoon on the west coast of Baja California for 15 years. We signed up for a nine-day trip in early March. To get there, one flies via Alaska Airlines from a West Coast city to Loreto, Mexico, then spends two days exploring Loreto and other towns on the way to Mulegé, a fishing village, at the end of a dirt road on the shore of San Ignacio Lagoon. This was a dirt-poor village in the desert until it was turned into a three month-per-year resort area. Why a three-month season? Because gray whales come down from Alaska to give birth there and raise their young until they're ready to migrate back to Alaska. So they are "in residence" from late January to mid-April. Six of us tourists, along with Michael and Pablo, arrived on a late afternoon in Mulegé and settled into our cabins.

Pablo, a resident of California, had grown up in Mulegé, where his father was a fisherman. Here is Pablo's story. "My father was out fishing one winter day, being careful to avoid the 'devilfish,' as they called the whales. A whale came up to his little boat, which was only one-third the size of the whale. This was scary, needless to say. But the whale didn't attack or try to upset his boat, just looked at him, then sidled up alongside with its back breaking the water's surface. This happened repeatedly over many days. My father was curious: Why was this devilfish coming right alongside like that? One day he got up his courage and reached out to touch it, then actually stroked it! He had quite a story to tell his friends that evening. The next day, the same thing happened, and again the day after — this time with a baby almost the size of his boat — to be petted. Well, one thing led to another and, after a few years, word had spread."

Now there is a seasonal tourism business and seven primitive resorts, with a government observer monitoring the boats that go out to be up close and personal with the whales; only 17 boats at a time are allowed into the whales' part of the lagoon. Every morning and afternoon for four days we went out in a 20-foot open boat to await our turn for a visit. It's an indescribable feeling when such a large sentient creature comes up for eye-to-eye contact and a scratch.

The activity was exhilarating, but the colors were not: gray whales in gray water under a gray sky. Fifty shades of gray! If a baby was included in the visit, we appreciated the trust. (“Baby” is a strange word for an animal the size of a car.) The texture of whale-skin, by the way, is like a wet rubber wetsuit. A whale’s visit was sometimes also an opportunity for the leviathan to scrape barnacles off her back by rubbing against our boat’s bottom. For a moment, we would be lifted up an inch or two and gently rocked as it slid underneath us. At every mealtime in the dining hall (with really good food), we had much to talk about. For example: Why did these whales want contact with us, when our grandparents had slaughtered their grandparents?

The local environment is basically desert and the only water supply is rainwater collected in cisterns. It did rain while we were there, so the cisterns were refilled. Our cabins had sinks, but showers were in separate buildings. Our toilets were composting, not plumbed; after using it, one threw a scoop of sawdust into the bucket under the seat.

The Mulegé residents, now with more than meager income, have TVs to plug into the electricity supply that had arrived with tourism, in their now-decent housing. There are cars parked outside many homes. The day we left was rainy. A mile out of Mulegé we and several other vehicles got stuck in mud. Slippery mud. Deep mud. But Pablo, who was driving, called a friend who had a four-wheel drive truck and, with a strong rope and slog through the mud in order to tie up, our van got the extra boost needed to reach the paved road ahead.

Once back in Loreto for beach time, good restaurants and internet connection, we became aware of the looming Covid lock-down back home. We considered waiting it out in Baja but relented and came home with a lot of pictures and videos of whalebacks being caressed by human hands and a story to tell about our most enjoyable time in Baja.

P.S.: If you’d like to see what we saw, check out  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JptoqiWd1A&feature=youtu.b](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JptoqiWd1A&feature=youtu.b)

• • •



## SQUARE BIZ DON'T FIZZ (WET OR DRY)

*Richard Byrd*

Darlene reflected on the day's events. She had passed the first three phases of her initiation with sky-high colors. She was aware the final two phases were the most important to the max. For over 500 centuries, all double X chromosomes in her family, upon reaching ten-times-two plus-one, had met the challenge heart on, and ascended to the exalted position of enchantress supreme. Darlene only needed two souls. One would think with the plethora of evil in abundance across the terrain, the pickings would be plentiful. However, competition was fierce among the various realms in the land of mystic mellowness. Her brother had already fulfilled all the requirements of the X-Y's and was deemed Mystic Maximus. Her ascent would complete the family legacy into the sacred realm of Omonjumon Phunk.

The pickings were highly anorexic where the chewing gum hit the cement; Darlene, everhow, peeped forward to the challenge with enthusiasm and double-checked her equipment. Everything was mellow, down to the hocus-pocus salty water. She was now ready for her journey to pigeon/snot planet Earth.

Carter peered out his window at the world below. He thought about it in relation to the world he had left five months past. The world of the rice-paddy boy created ghettos, the raped, plundered villages in a Hades orifice known as Vietnam.

Carter hyperventilated and went into convulsions every time the pictures traveled from his mind to his optic nerve. The pictures were always the same: Adults with barbecued bodies and children with severed limbs, screaming banshees, howling for respite; yet the onslaught never abated. He thought about one soldier in particular. Carter had nicknamed him Dracula-Plus-One, who he felt had a taste for blood that was, indeed, paramount to that of the Transylvanian Count. On the feel side of the sewer, Vlad the Impaler's desire for blood was based on a need to survive. This non-fiction soldier's need was pumped by a desire to feel powerful by inflicting pain. Guilt was the final and most agonizing of sensations, which did the Funky-Four-Corners on his soul. Every time he looked at these deemed the Wretched of the Earth, he saw kindred souls.

He remembered a cartoon a friend had shown him from an old *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper. The cartoon showed a black soldier guarding a Vietnamese prisoner of war. In the caption the Vietnamese soldier states,

“Why can’t you Amerikkkan-Negroes see the same dog is biting us that is biting you?”

Carter picked up the .45 caliber automatic and pressed it against his temple. Before he could fire, a light came in from the window. The warmth of the life engulfing his body caused him to put the revolver down. Carter realized he was here for a reason. He had seen the horrors of lives being taken; he vowed he would dedicate himself to saving and improving lives. Darlene smiled. She felt satisfaction to the max. She not only had saved his soul; Darlene had shown him his life had value and purpose. One soul saved, one more to go.

His name was Robert Henry-Clay Saunders. He had been the high sheriff of Dogburg for the past two years. Nobody referred to him by his given name. He was known affectionately as Count Dracula, or Drac for short, by the local populace, a nickname he picked up during his tour of duty in Nam. Reflecting upon those days always brought a smile to his lips. He always had led his squad with the clarion call: LAST ONE TO THE GOOK POOTANG IS A ROTTEN RED!!! He remembered when they would “liberate” a village. He had a strong proclivity for the 12-year-old girls. He could only climax when he licked the blood off their battered faces.

Enough daydreaming, he thought. He left his office, adorned with the pictures of his idols, Jim Clarke and Bull Connor. He got in his patrol car, his negro knocker at the ready. No better way to begin a day than whipping up on some coons, he thought. As he drove along, he noticed the sky began to change. The sky had morphed from bright yellow to a deep dark gray. Then the rains came, followed by the thunder and lighting. Drac’s vehicle began to skid. He crashed into the guard rail and started a slow descent. Upon impact with the ground his patrol car burst into flames. Darlene appeared. She called upon the forces of Omanjumon Phunk to carry his soul to the Land of Litterbug Turds, where his soul would spend an eternity in unadulterated agony.

Darlene headed to her home world. She thought about Drac’s soul. Darlene realized that to save a hundred good souls, you must vanquish one evil soul.

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## NAPTIME

*Leonard Leventon*

He grabbed his shoulder and gave it a twerk, then sat down in his favorite easy chair. But he could not say he felt easy. ‘Nell is safe and sound at her friend Steph’s fifth birthday party down the street,’ he thought. ‘What could be upsetting me?’

‘Maybe I’ll put on a kettle, and snap on the TV while I’m at it. Nothing better for the nerves than some of that ginger and turmeric stuff from Trader Joe’s,’ he thought. He picked himself up from his chair and lumbered to the kitchen. ‘What the hell is this dread coming over me? Jane’s locked up safe and sound — well — maybe not so sound — cross the creek at Vinnemora. Has been for nearly four months now...

He grabbed the kettle and filled it halfway at the sink, then placed it on the front burner and turned the dial up high.

‘Old man Billingsworth let me take the day off without much fanfare. Think he felt sorry for me. A loser is what I really think he thought. Married the most beautiful, sexiest chick in town — only to find she was also the craziest, sickest chick in Kings County.’

The whistle blew. Dick poured a cup, dropped in the Trader Joe’s bag and treaded back to his easy chair. He grabbed the remote and snapped on *News at Three on TV One*, then brought his mug to his lips as his fifty-inch screen came into focus.

“... Two of the three escaped patients from Vinnemora State Hospital were quickly apprehended,” the cute intern reporter announced. “But the third female is still at large.”

“Shit,” Dick almost gagged on his hot drink. He stiffened even more in his favorite seat. His eyes began dancing around the room... to the staircase. The intern was now talking about traffic problems on Main Street. But Dick wasn’t smelling the vapors of Sunoco or Flying A gasoline. It was that same shitty perfume Jane always seemed to take baths in the more and more off-the-freaking-wall she got.

“Even in fucking lockup,” he exclaimed aloud, “she managed to get her hands on that puke!”

Dick reached into his rear pocket. His first thought was of the only good thing to come of his life since marrying that whacked out beauty queen. But he put his cell on the table next to his mug when he heard the old music. Slowly drowning out the weather report, it came creeping down the staircase. Louder. Louder still... That same song that came down the stairs with her every time...

Dick unconsciously wiped some spilled TJ's off his left thigh and lifted himself from his chair. The scent was a present from sexy Jane. Beautiful Jane. Dutiful Jane.

"Sit back and pull on the lever, Dick," she would growl, while slinking toward him, her long blond hair draping her breasts as she would approach. It was fun at first. Even second. Even third. But as each successive time started exactly as the first... and second... and third... and fourth... and... and... it became more and more scary. Every word the same. Every slink the same. Every twitch, every movement... every time...

The music kept growing louder. The shitty scent of what was at first... then second... then... then... less and less... succulent perfume... descended into the living room... Stronger and stronger, along with that music...

Dick was trembling now, his forehead breaking out in a cold sweat...

"Shit," he uttered again. And twerked his shoulder again.

"Where are you going... Dick?" She loved to emphasize his great name. "Long time, no see... Dick!"

She was growling. But Dick was long past being sexually aroused anymore by the Prom Queen, now, of Villemora.

"Herb tea. Huh... Dick!"

Dick put his hand over his crotch. He had scar tissue down there from the last cup of tea he'd been drinking before her incarceration last spring.

"Where's Nell?" he asked.

"That little slut? Didn't you drop off our little darling at her friend's house an hour ago?"

Dick wiped his brow and almost shit himself.

"She wasn't happy there. So I brought her home with me."

That music almost drowned out his Beauty Queen's words. "Don't worry... Dick," she said. "I tucked her into Daddy's old bed upstairs. She's safe and sound... Dick."

As she descended the last steps, her husband noticed she was stark naked; her long blond hair encircling her breasts. Her perfume was choking him, the deafening music swirling over and around him. He had to get to his daughter. To see if Nell was just napping and not permanently asleep. But he had to get past psycho Jane first...

"Sit back down in your easy chair," she again growled. "And pull on the lever... Dick!"

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# I AM NOT A ROBOT

*Donna K. Ramer*

It was one of those days. You know, the ones you set aside every week or so to tackle the tasks scribbled across Post-It notes and scraps of paper, ignoring the lines. It's also the day to read or toss those articles you've torn from the pages of the *NY Times*, *New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair* and *Gourmet* (ok, and *Vogue*, but only sometimes), articles you really want to read before they become outdated or you've lost interest and wonder why you ripped them out in the first place.

So today was the day. Dell had a few hours to tackle what she hoped to be a short list before the twins, HP — Hestia and Penelope — picked her up for dinner. Sitting down at her desk, she was momentarily distracted by the rain knocking on the window. She swiveled in her chair to gaze out, breathing in the steam from the hot coffee in her oversized white mug, then swiveled back to face the clutter that was called her desk.

She started by reading and tossing the scraps and Post-Its as she made one to-do list for anything she couldn't complete that day (including online plays and lectures she would watch at some point) and a second of the books she wanted to pick up at the Strand later in the week (she threw that in her purse). She added TV shows and movie recommendations to the list she kept next to the remote. She trashed more than half the articles because they were outdated or no longer held her interest; the rest she put on the coffee table, committing to read them later that evening, after dinner. And when her desk was clear and the trash can under it littered with the detritus, Dell opened her iMacPro, hit the "on" button and watched as the signature apple came to life. She then began working on the first task: changing the passwords on her bank accounts and credit cards, which she never enjoyed but did every three months.

For the most part, Dell was very organized and security conscious, although she did keep a list of passwords (triple password protected) on her computer. After accessing the list, she logged into the first account and clicked on "change password." But there it was, that annoying pop-up demanding proof she wasn't a robot.

"I've already put in my account password," Dell growled at the computer. But she dutifully clicked on all the images of taxis and hit "enter" only to have a second pop-up ask her to type in a chain of letters,

numbers and symbols before clicking on the “I-am-not-a-robot” box. She successfully navigated the obstacle course and moved on to the next account, only to find she had to go through the same “I-am-not-a-robot” routine. This time she was directed to click on all the boxes that had crosswalks and then — *damn* — she was asked to click on all the traffic lights.

“I-am-not-a-robot,” she said to her computer, repeating it twice in that stereotypic robot staccato reminiscent of “Danger Will Robinson, Danger” from some popular TV show in the mid 1960s. Thinking she had made it through, she was surprised when a third pop-up asked her to type in zvJ68Q, but she screwed it up (typed a zero instead of a Q) and had to type in V7rD9z, which she did correctly and was allowed to change that password. She had gone through similar hurdles with several more accounts when her internal alarm made her look at the clock: she had just about an hour before HP would arrive. She managed to change the last few without any time wasters and shut down her laptop, with 30 minutes to spare.

Dell moved to the couch and was about to read the first of the articles she had tossed on the coffee table when HP showed up early. It had stopped raining so, after a few quick air kisses and elbow bumps, she tossed their coats on a chair as they moved into the living room. HP each chose seats near outlets and plugged in adapters from their bags. They then lifted their skirts and plugged the USBs into their hip sockets. Dell, who had taken a small screwdriver from her desk drawer, asked Penelope to help her remove the hip plate that read Model# TandyRobFem2099 because its mere presence was annoying her. When it wouldn’t budge, Dell gave up and sat on the couch to plug in. The three spent about 90 minutes tasting a few bottles of a new Shiraz and catching up. They then giggled “I-am-not-a-robot!” in unison as they unplugged before heading out to dinner at the new IBM café in midtown.

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## TUNA FISH LUNCHESES

*Helen Saffran*

I share an apartment with two cats, Jake, 14½ and Maggie, 16. There are some things, of course, that we don't share. They use a litter box while I prefer the toilet. But essentially, all is mutual property, including the kitchen table, where their food dish containing Fancy Feast grilled turkey or chicken in gravy is located.

I enjoy the company of the cats sharing the table when I eat, drink or write a little story, as I'm doing now. It's cozy; the family is all together. There is a celebration at lunch, ever since the vet said Jake needed extra protein. The ritual of tuna lunches goes like this: I yell out "tuna fish," open a small can of Genoa tuna, pour off some of the oil, crush it in the can with a fork (necessary because Jake has only one tooth and Maggie, two), and proceed to dole out the tuna in three small bowls. We each get a third of a can.

Such joy and excitement reigns.

If Norman Rockwell were still alive and illustrating for the *Saturday Evening Post*, I'd ask him to draw "Lunch with the Cats." But it probably would be too radical to make the magazine, because some people are just not ready to accept cats at the kitchen table.

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## FREDDY HILL

*Helen Saffran*

Last night I had a vivid dream about dating Freddy Hill. A few weeks after school started, he came to our second-grade class at School 27 in Yonkers, New York, from another state. He was a mysterious stranger and I was smitten.

In the dream, I spoke with Freddy's mother and told her that I'd been in love with Freddy since second grade, which was also the last time I was with him. My effusive behavior somewhat unnerved Mrs. Hill and I believe she was evaluating whether I could be dangerous.

Freddy was no Adonis. He had a pasty complexion and looked unhealthily skinny. But that didn't dissuade me from being a secret friend to him. The secret part was that I began to come to class early and would open the top of his desk and, every school day, put in some kind of candy. I never told him I was his benefactor. In fact, I don't really remember talking to him at all; it was my own private love affair. I do remember he had a habit of spitting occasionally when we were at recess, but even that was not enough to diminish my ardor.

Now the source of my largess was the cup of pennies my mother kept inside a corner cabinet in the dining room for her penny poker games with my aunts. There came a time when it became obvious to my mother that her pennies were dwindling. She accused my brother and sister, who were eight and twelve years older than I was, but she never thought to blame me.

Well, it took 71 years to finally win Freddy's affection, albeit only in a dream. But true love never does run smooth.

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# THE STORY OF CHARMING GREENIE

*Stella Gold*

This is the story of Charming Greenie, born in Riverside Park near the Hudson River during the Corona virus pandemic. One gray morning in June of 2020, in an old tree covered with luxuriant growth, a small black bird cracked open the shell of his egg and came out, surprised and totally unprepared, into his mother's nest. She checked him over, was pleased with his appearance and let him rest in the nest in order to adjust to his new situation.

This little black bird was covered in black down and black feathers except for the top of his head, which was adorned with three brilliant green feathers. His parents provided him with good nutrition consisting of seeds and small insects, and he grew up peacefully and learned to fly. When the time came for him to attend singing classes, Mother Bird took him to Mr. Merle's school, where other small black birds were already waiting. They all looked at him with surprise and, with an air of superiority, started to make fun of his green head. Mother Bird had already left and he felt lonely and intimidated by their sarcasm. They were laughing and calling him "Greenie, Greenie." He began to stay away from the other birds and would not sing with them.

Mother Bird decided that he was now a big boy and should take care of himself. Mr. Merle was busy with the other students and paid no attention. It was a very sad life for Greenie. Every year, in the month of July, Mr. Merle's school gave a gala concert and all the new students participated. They were all very excited, except for Greenie, who was off by himself, ready to cry. He was looking over the river and, for the very first time, discovered the glorious colors and majesty of the sun slowly setting on the horizon.

His chest filled with the need to express his wonder and joy at experiencing such beauty. Instinctively, he began to sing, and an amazing melody — velvety and strong reaching straight for the heart — emerged from his throat.

All the birds who had assembled for the concert were overwhelmed by the resounding song. They were wondering who in their neighborhood could be such an accomplished artist. They looked at him with amazement, called him a genius, so refined, so elegant with the three green feathers adorning his head. The best part of this recognition was that the young girl-birds, delighted by the music, called him "Charming Greenie," and this is the name by which he was known from that day on.

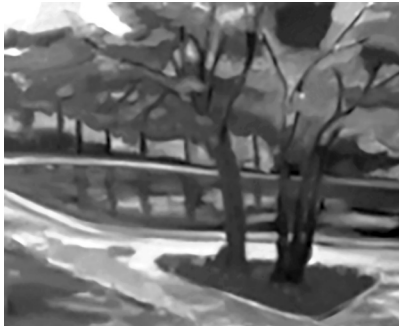
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# ALONE ON THE LAKE

*Rachel Shor*

Alone on the lake with  
my early morning thoughts,  
light birdsong the only sound  
save some sawing on a far shore,  
signs of people repairing, expanding,  
I share my silence with white and yellow  
water lilies, passing ducks, and a turtle.

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## BARBARA\*

*Ruth Ward*

Showers of spring light misted the room where Barbara and I, seated by the window, were admiring the dust patterns on her long-neglected photo album. As she slid a Kleenex from its box, her laugh tinkled like a gently struck triangle.

"It's a shame to wipe such a fascinating surface clean."

She pressed the tissue into the album cover, making larger and larger circles that revealed an NYU graduate decked out in toga, mortarboard, and faraway smile. She coughed, and then I coughed.

"The dust," she said with a little gasp.

I gushed, "What a radiant Cultural Anthropology graduate!"

"Yes, I was so happy to have finished my grad program." Her voice became distant, "and so eager to start my post-grad work in Africa. I was thrilled I'd be working on a team that awarded research grants in Kenya."

She coughed again and I responded in kind. "Pass me a Kleenex, please," I said.

She handed me the pink cardboard box standing at the ready on her coffee table. "You know," she intoned, "we could look at this album later."

Visions of the all-outdoors flooded my mind. I knew Barbara would rather be pursuing her current idea of fieldwork than marking time on an indoor activity.

She shot me a sly smile. "Should we start searching flea markets for those lovely embroidered handkerchiefs that were once *de rigueur* for women with coughs?"

"Absolutely!" I cried. "Great idea! Let's hit the Fort Greene Flea Market and see if it's our lucky day."

We set out on the long trek from Barbara's Flatbush apartment to the Saturday Fort Greene bargain spot, occasionally coughing to remind ourselves of the reason for our trip. The buzzing bazaar of memorabilia had many items of interest to some, but not to this pair of focused companions, who had little time for cookie-jar cats or chipped China cups.

"It smells a little musty here." Barbara looked about wistfully. "I wonder if we were wise to penetrate this land of bygones."

We pressed on with quickened step, eyes peeled for the gleam of neglected treasure. Barbara suddenly paused before a framed photo of an African American community church group. She picked it up gently, as if cradling a wounded bird. "Ah, that takes me right back to Kenya. You can't imagine how much I enjoyed working on that research grant committee."

“Yes, you’ve often mentioned it as a special time in your life.”

“It was. I so enjoyed the sense of belonging I had then. I relished being a part of my team and I loved attending Kenyan church services.” Her face glowed in the sunlight that bounced off the photo’s glass cover.

“I didn’t know you attended church.”

“Well I don’t now, but sometimes I wish I did.”

“You wish you still belonged to a church?”

“Not really, but I miss the sense of community. I had the same feeling when I was teaching at Vassar. Sadly, my income-driven gigs with ReServe these last years have been pretty solitary.” She set down the photo and we continued to walk.

“I know you’ve been looking for more satisfying work. I hope you’ll find a job that brings you in contact with lots of intellectually curious people. You’re so insightful, so good at empathizing and problem solving. I feel guilty being one of the few who get to enjoy that side of you.”

“No need for guilt, just consider yourself lucky,” she said, stopping to dip her forehead and bat her lashes.

“Oh look, an embroidered handkerchief!” I cried, seizing a large, brightly embellished cotton square from a crowded table. As I waved it about triumphantly, I saw her eyes dim.

“Oh,” I said, following her downward gaze, “I bet that purple stain will come out in the wash.”

“And if not,” she smiled, “it rather compliments the embroidery pattern, don’t you think?” Barbara was always an accomplished spin artist.

“Darn,” she said, scanning the table wares, “I see only the one.” I held forth the heirloom. “Well, the hankies were your idea, so you should take it. I will continue to endure the harsh caress of paper tissues.”

“Oh, modernity,” she sighed, gazing at the artifact. “So highly overrated.”

After Barb took the hanky and paid the requested \$5.00, we carried on our march through the Elysian field of under-valued prizes. When we reached the Smoothie stand, she stopped and did a quarter turn toward me. Her voice ascended an octave as she said, “Maybe we don’t need matching hankies.”

I raised my eyebrows. “But how else to celebrate our friendship?”

“Would the synchronous consumption of strawberry smoothies be an acceptable alternative?”

“What a problem solver!” I murmured, adding myself to the line.

*\* Our friend and Quest Office Manager, Barbara Bianco, passed away in summer of 2020. We miss you, Barbara.*

— The Editors

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