

Q REVIEW



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THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

This year has continued to challenge us all as citizens, as friends, as family, and as members of Quest. We hope this publication will be uplifting for you as you try to stay well and connected.

A warm thank you goes to *Q Review* poetry editor Mary Ann Donnelly, prose editor Donna Ramer, and art editor Paul Adler, all of whom have embraced our creative efforts. We are grateful to our Technical Advisor, Wayne Cotter, who has assisted with the challenges of producing a digital publication.

And our appreciation extends to you, our authors and artists, who have unravelled the past, decoded the present, and shed light on the future. You continue to inspire us with your original ideas and expression, helping us to empathize with each other and to cherish our common humanity.

We hope you, our readers, will find this 2022 publication an invigorating read, and we hope you will consider contributing to our 2023 edition.

– *Ruth Ward*

IN MEMORIAM

It is with deep sorrow that we note the passing of Quest members **Trudy Owett**, **Rita Post**, **Marty Halpern**, and **Rick Salter**, whom we lost during this past year. They are all 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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GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Art Spar

Ilana was conceived with great expectations. Shelley and I were in our twenties when our daughter Amy was born. Ilana came ten years later. Her conception followed the death of my older brother Len, whose loss created a vacuum of love that Ilana hopefully would fulfill.

I expected a son. In the delivery room, my heart skipped a beat. One beat. I didn't miss the second and I never looked back. Ilana and I became buddies. I took her on outings with "the guys." When she was in second grade, I spent Tuesday mornings assisting in her computer workshop. Ilana became a runner and we began running together. We ran road races in the sweltering Wellfleet Fourth of July five miler and in the frigid New Year's Eve midnight runs through Central Park. A few years ago, we kayaked for several hours to find the "Disappearing Island" in Cape Cod Bay, the subject of a storybook I read to her as a young child.

Shelley and I learned that Ilana was romantically involved with another woman after she was out on her own. Gathered at our summer retreat in Wellfleet, our older daughter Amy asked us to come into the living room because Ilana wanted to talk to us. She told us she was in a serious relationship with Sarah, the woman who would become our future daughter-in-law. On the sofa, my heart skipped a beat. One beat. I didn't miss the second, and I never looked back. Shelley and I offered our full support. It never occurred to us to do anything else. Ilana was the same daughter we loved before and after she informed us of her relationship with Sarah. We were happy she took her sister into confidence first. They will need each other long after Shelley and I are gone.

I don't think my relationship with Ilana would be any different had she partnered differently or not at all. I gave her advice, which she usually ignored, respectfully. I urged her to wait until after she and Sarah committed to marriage before buying real estate together. She ignored me and it worked out well. I advised her not to wait to renovate their house before having children. She ignored me and we now have the most beautiful granddaughter, Adele. In fact, Ilana and Sarah make very good decisions for their family like Shelley and I did for ours.

I know so many parents who watch their children make unexpected life decisions. Some parents like to retain control, usually disastrously. Most

parents eventually gain the wisdom of acceptance. For me, watching Ilana take her place in the world is like reading a good mystery novel. She keeps me guessing.

My great expectations have been realized. They are simultaneously different than I expected while satisfying every need they were conceived to fulfill.

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SILENCE IS GOLDEN

Helen Saffran

In sixth grade, our young and creative teacher, Richard Monaco, gave us an assignment to do in class. Because the group had been making a ruckus, he had us sit down, take out paper, and write on the topic, Silence Is Golden.

Our writing assignments were usually done at home with my brother helping me, just a little. His assistance had the effect of making me feel insecure about my writing ability. Although I always got top marks on my papers, I wondered whether they belonged to my brother, not me.

Doing this in-class assignment without the benefit of outside help was scary and I felt it would be my undoing. Perhaps I would be found to be a fraud.

I don't remember what I wrote in the composition on the topic, Silence Is Golden, but what I remember well was that I got an "A" and praise from Mr. Monaco.

This gave me the feedback I needed to know that the small additions my brother made were not responsible for the glowing grades my compositions were given, but my own natural writing ability.

It was a turning point in my writing life.

• • •

IT'S GOING GREAT!

Bob Reiss

When our son, David, outgrew summer camp in his early teens, we signed him up with American Youth Hostels (AYH) for bike tours. Of course, we experienced some anxiety as we got the impression that these trips were kind of lightly supervised by a leader not that much older than David. Maybe the leaders were seventeen or eighteen. Anyway, his first such trip had a girl leader of about that age to lead a dozen young teenage boys. What could go wrong here?

With some trepidation, we took David on the departure date to AYH headquarters in lower Manhattan with his backpack and bike. There the group was bused to the foothills of the White Mountains in New Hampshire to begin their journey.

This was a pre-cell phone, pre-email era, so it was about a week before we heard from our son when he checked in one evening by telephone.

"Hey, Dave, how's it going?"

"It's going great, but I have a little problem with my bike."

"Oh. What's the problem?"

"The fender is a little bent and it's interfering with the tire."

"Oh, how did that happen?"

"Well, I guess the car caused it."

"What car?"

"The car that hit me."

"Oh God. Are you alright?"

"Yeah, I'm fine except for my arm."

"Oh Geez"

"It's Ok. The doc said I don't need a cast, just an Ace bandage." It should be alright in a few days, after my bike is fixed.

"Oh, so the group will wait until then?"

"Not exactly. Most of the group already left. Me and a few friends will finish the trip on our own."

"Geez, David. Will you kids be alright on your own?"

"Yeah. We'll be fine. We have all the maps and stuff and the campground reservations."

As a parent, all I could do was to tell my son to be careful, which I'm sure at this point was totally superfluous advice. After reviewing the situation with my wife, we decided to take a little vacation to New

England and try to intercept the leaderless boys at one of the campgrounds on their itinerary, which we had gotten from AYH. This plan was somewhat out of character for us as we did not think of ourselves as “helicopter” parents (a term not yet in use at that time). But, with higher-than-normal anxiety levels, we left for Massachusetts, trying to calculate where they would alight and when. Our best estimate was Boston Minuteman Campground in Littleton, MA, on July 21st. A long shot, maybe, but, hey, we were now on vacation anyway.

So, on the appointed date, we showed up at the campgrounds, went to the office, and spoke to the manager. She seemed a nice lady, so we explained why we were there.

“Have you seen a small group of boys, about fourteen or fifteen years old, on an AYH bike tour without a leader.”

“Oh them.”

Our hearts sank.

“That ragtag bunch left this morning, thank goodness.”

Our hearts sank a little lower.

“Nice boys but a little discombobulated.”

Well, we took solace in that if discombobulation was the worst thing she could say, maybe all was not lost.

And indeed, all was not. A week or so later, we got a call from David to pick him up at AYH in Manhattan. Everyone was fine and he was glad to be home.

• • •

THE HARP

Carole Cronig Abrahams

Soon after my mother met a harp teacher, a very large and heavy harp-shaped case was delivered to our home. It had to be wrestled up the front steps, but then we didn't know where to put this wonder. Mother chose the sunroom at the end of our dining room while the sweating delivery men waited.

No one in my family had a clue about harps, though we may have realized that the pegs at the top of each string could be tightened or loosened. However, we delighted in the golden beauty of its decorations, including a fabulously shining high post with a glorious top and delicate paintings on the sounding board below the strings. Mrs. Price, the teacher, told us the harp should be moved away from direct sunlight, so it went across the front hall and into the living room to stand near the grand piano. Now we had a music-centric living room.

Anything played on a tuned harp sounds good. Just strumming fingers up or down amazed listeners; easy pieces were impressive. Coaxing sound seemed angelic. But the hardest part was tuning each color-coded string. The tuning fork was not my friend, nor was the tool for turning those tuning pegs. Sometimes it helped to play a corresponding note on the piano but the tuning process was looooong. The pedals turned out to be the way to create accidentals on each string. What a delight; one pedal in a different notch could make all the strings of that name change at the same time. One move of the F pedal could give all the F strings a sharp or a flat, and so on. The harp was like a piano turned on its side, but easier to play than remembering when to hit those black keys.

My father had nothing to do with the sudden appearance of that golden harp in our New England rural/agrarian/port town home. Amazement flooded his face as this Lithuanian immigrant came in from the kitchen to be dazzled by the glow as sunlight (that initial landing was in a sunroom lined with windows) shimmered off the gilded instrument — when we figured out how to free it from its gigantic black case — that was taller than he. Father, who had begun life in the United States as a teenager knowing no English and having no money, gazed at the most elegant instrument of them all and his child would be plucking those strings!

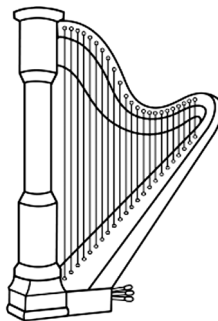
My immigrant mother said the harp was a bargain. The harp, and lessons, of course, were her idea; she presented it as a wonderful opportunity as excitement flowed from her. I was in. I was her last chance. My two older siblings had not sung in a chorus, played an instrument, or studied art. I had taken some ballet and elocution lessons and was already taking piano lessons when my mother was told that playing a wind instrument might help my asthma; suddenly, I was taking clarinet lessons. What, you say, does this have to do with the sudden appearance of a harp for me? It shows a history of co-operation, involvement, and enjoyment by me. It shows pressure, too.

Mother's father had died when she was young. The neighbors complained that she and her younger sister were unsupervised while her mother worked. They said the girls were "running wild" in their Lithuanian farming town. Those two littlest children were sent to live with relatives in Wales, each to a different family.

Grace, the youngest, lived with a wealthier family than did my mother. Grace had piano and painting lessons. My mother had neither and had to leave school after the third grade to help in her new home. Those cousins were kind but needed mother to polish the brass fireplace fittings (no central heating then), run errands, and more. She and Grace sometimes got together, especially at sleepovers after parties or dances. Both girls emigrated to the United States as young adults.

By the time I was born, mother was primed to provide me with things she had wanted. Voila! Three instruments for me!

• • •



ELEVATOR

Helen Saffran

All we needed was a hammock, the huge Sears and Roebuck catalogue and our imaginations to play Elevator.

My Aunt Lillie, who lived on a farm in a small town near Peekskill called Shrub Oak, always had a Sears and Roebuck catalogue, the precursor to Amazon. Everything you could imagine having was in their catalogue and could be delivered to your door. It was that great Come-and-Get-It Day in a weighty book on very thin paper with illustrations.

Elevator was a game made up by Lillian's ten-year-old son, my cousin Stanley. He and my eight-year-old self could get totally absorbed in it.

One player was the customer and got to sit in the hammock and make it swing back and forth to indicate the floors. The other player sat in a chair holding the mighty catalogue and played the elevator operator, calling out each stop and telling the customer what was sold on the floor. Big department stores with elevators were not everyday experiences for us.

Main floor. Shower curtains, bathmats, shower caps, bubble bath, sinks and toilets.

Second floor. Radios, phonographs, records, musical instruments including pianos, and the latest sheet music.

Third floor. Stoves, pressure cookers, pots and pans, and a special sale today on Fiesta Ware dishes in all colors.

Fourth floor. Nightgowns, silk stockings, girdles, slips, brassieres. (Brassieres would always make Stanley and me laugh.)

The player in the hammock could say what floor they were getting off and what they wanted to purchase: a flannel nightgown in red, a silk slip, a pressure cooker, a phonograph, Fiesta Ware dishes in yellow.

It was so exciting to hear what was sold since it was different each time we played. Just being able to handle the immense catalogue was totally fascinating.

• • •

SPHERICAL SENILITY

Stephen Rosen

At 87, I've been granted tenure in an institution called "old age," aka "senior citizenship."

It resembles a lifetime appointment in a university, where tenure is granted because of your books, articles, the quality of your teaching. But in tenure-due-to-elderliness, the entrance requirements are entropy, chronological time, the density of your complaints, and your bone-density. Aging into senior citizenship transforms your transient maladies into thermo-dynamic decay.

I spent a few hours last week trying to remember the word "Eureka," a word I used often in my lectures. Familiar, yes; recall-able, not. Much later, I was able to remember. Tenure-time is spacious. The ideas and words are still there. You just have to wait; Einstein said he wasn't smart, he just stayed with a problem longer. Genius is merely continued attention.

'Spherical senility' means we look old from every angle, every vantage point. Despite the pandemic and creeping decline, why are some of us "tenured elderly" so lucky, so unreasonably effective? Cheerful? Productive?

* * *

Despite such pervasive medical issues and cognitive decay:

- Can you still read your own handwriting? How long does it take you to start the day? Do you wear suspenders and a belt? Does your body tilt forward when walking (even when there's no wind)? Do you still understand song lyrics? How about opening pill bottles, or dropping pills? How about your sense of taste? Sad, especially when it's moi.
- Do you know why young people beep their car horns at elderly people who stop at red traffic lights? The red light has changed to green and the old guy hasn't noticed. Sad.
- Do you know anyone who waits for a stop sign to turn green? So very sad.

continued

- Distractibility? As in going into another room for a piece of paper, and, by the time you get there, you think you need a pencil. Or you forgot your mission.
- When watching old movies, you almost remember who the old actors are. Or mis-remember. Is that William F. Buckley — or William Bendix?
- Don't say "hello" to the guy at the gym because he almost certainly remembers your name, but you can't remember his. A friend has developed a greeting strategy: "Hi pal! You look great*!"
- Have you noticed increasing wait times for tech support? Is that because senior time flows differently than junior time? Or because pandemic forces have increased the demand for help, especially from seniors.
- Spelling? When I type words on Google email, the app completes my word. Problem: It isn't the word I was thinking of. For instance, I type "to" and out comes "too." I've been second-guessed by an algorithm but It's Not The End Of The World.
- Did you ever know a man who shaved one side of his face, got called away, then forgot to shave the other side? I knew him. *C'est moi.*

* * *

But all is not lost. Repairs are available...

How about music? Name that tune: "Beethoven's Fifth" or "I Got Rhythm"? "Swanee" or "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star"? An app tells you the name of the piece, who is performing, when it was recorded, and so on. Thanks very much!

Technology? Unbelievable. Miracles of the 21st Century: Electric cars! Helicopters on Mars! Dark matter! Artificial meat! Modern medicine! Entertainment excess! Thanks again!

As we age, our moderate eccentricities become less moderate. I have always heard 'distracting' melodies in my head, like "Mares Eat Oats," or the Ice Cream Man's tune. A Grammy Award-winning friend pointed out that our ear worm is a gift. "Aren't we lucky to be able to carry these melodies around with us?"

When young, doing physics, writing a book, trying to focus on any chore or topic, or conversation, I noticed my mind would wander over a long seemingly-random list of topics unrelated to what I was supposed to be concentrating on. Now I view it as an asset to my imagination and creativity. Thanks!

Twelve years ago, I had a stroke. Got to the hospital in time. Had time to think and enumerate my life's woes. Here are the kvetch-lyrics my inspirational hospital stay inspired, to the tune of "Everything Happens To Me":

*I take a lot of naps, get lost while reading maps
My teeth have many caps, I imagine hearing taps
I guess I'll go thru life, getting lots of real bum raps
Senility is zapping me with zaps
My face gets very red, I need a lot of med
Lie down in my old bed, but not yet am I dead
I guess I'll go thru life complaining, like I said
It's nothing, not really, to dread*

Thanks for listening.

* 'You look great' is a euphemism for the third phase of life, the one that comes after youth and middle age.

• • •



TAKING CARE

Dennis Sherman

I pull on my facemask as I turn from the day's heat into the building. A luxury of cool air embraces me, announcing how high-end this residence is for those nearing their own ends. Patrick is behind the welcome desk; he greets me by name. I fill out the visitor's form, walk on the plush carpet to the elevator, enter the code and ride up to the sixth floor. I've been here so often. The nurse, the aids, the entertainers, they all know me. I'm quickly told that Pat has been taken to Lenox Hill Emergency. A bump on the head. Protocol.

I cab there, over-tip, get past security and into the ER. The room is filled with mostly the young (doctors, nurses, techs, aides), here, I think, on pause, anticipating a rising career path. Most are leaning into computers. I don't bother with them, though I get a few glances. The floor is a grey, spongy linoleum; good for falls and mopping up. I check each partially curtained chamber; narrow, even coffin-like, some empty but most with someone in bed who would rather be elsewhere.

I see Pat from a little distance. She hasn't seen me yet. She is clutching a sheet up to her neck, cocoon-like, rocking from side to side as she does these days, a comfort of soothing rhythm. When close, she sees me, her face breaks into a smile. Within seconds she starts crying. It's not the crying of pain; it's the crying of relief from being without help, lost, away from home. The bed dwarfs her. She was always small, coming up to not much more than my shoulder, but powerfully small and more than a match for me. Now she seems small in such a needing way. I caress her face, her head, her hair, tell her I love her. And again.

I want to be functional as well as caring. I find the assigned nurse, who warns me of tests that might be needed. I push for the doctor to come. He does. He's young, has a practiced assured voice, and is wearing a small yarmulke. I try to project a sense of my own competence so he will trust me with the decision I think I will make. I want to tell him that I have advanced degrees, that my friend is a doctor, that my internist is associated with the hospital, that I use MayoClinic.com, but I don't. And in not so much time, declining an offer of more tests but being assured by doctor that taking her back now is a reasonable decision, Pat and I leave. I hold her hand.

Back at the residence, I stay with her for an hour or so, then leave when it is almost her lunch time. She is ok, as much as ok this morning, these days, might mean. And, I suppose, so am I, as I take the elevator down, exit into the muggy late morning, and head up West End Avenue.

Already I know I will write about this because I should. Already I know I will talk about it to my best friend because I should. I am taking care, of her, of me, of my dog. I am old enough to do this and too old to do this well. I don't bother with thoughts of all those who have it worse, with how common this human experience is. I think of her seeing me and starting to cry. I am haunted.

• • •



ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

Rachel Shor

"Tomorrow?" I asked in rising voice. "Tomorrow?" I repeated in disbelief. Rarely a night owl, I was surprised when I got home one night at eleven to hear my daughter Lisa's eager voice on the phone. "Hello Mom. I'm calling to settle when and where we are meeting tomorrow."

Lisa was referring to the trip to Quebec City she and her partner Mike were giving me for my 80th birthday (five months ago). Although some friends had questioned this gift knowing our mother/ daughter relationship is not always smooth, I was looking forward to it; Lisa and I had always traveled well together. When I received their plane arrangements from D.C., I had carefully set up mine from New York to coordinate our arrivals in Quebec. Only with this call did I realize I had purchased tickets for the right hours on the wrong weekend! In a period both instantaneous and endless, I wanted to cry, was sure I had ruined the occasion planned for me, wondered how an experienced proofreader/editor could have gotten the dates so wrong, and was ready to be admitted to the closest Alzheimer's institute. Above all, I was angry with myself.

Fortunately, adrenaline turned my distressed ineptitude into cool efficiency. First, by phone and computer, a patient Air Canada employee cancelled my tickets and found four new ones required for the trip. Since it was less than twelve hours to flight time, I had to pay not just a replacement fee, but for both the original and new tickets! She also helped me set up a boarding pass. Tickets confirmed, I made a list of what else I had to do. First on it was calling a cab for later that morning (it was already past midnight) while packing was about last since, if necessary, I would get onboard in the clothes I had on.

It happened that for the four days I would now be away I had numerous appointments. This meant I had to quickly write email apologies and postponements to sleeping friends and closed offices, along with my new flight info for Lisa. In ironic contrast to my inefficiency, I had already set aside my passport, some Canadian cash, and a small empty suitcase. While charging my camera and phone, I rapidly packed another pair of pants and shoes, pjs and extra underwear, my toilet case and travel journal. Leaving a reminder on the kitchen table: Garbage, *Windows*, *Lunch*, I finally went to bed.

Later that morning, despite very little sleep and after setting up cell service in Canada, I had a friendly talk with the cab driver who took me to La Guardia. Several hours and two planes after that, in Quebec City's small airport, I again heard from Lisa. "Hello Mom. Our plane was a bit late, but we're here. Where are you?" I calmly directed them to my bench at the airport exit.

The rest of the visit was terrific; grand architecture, a river, lots of good food including every kind of crepe imaginable, and a huge amount of walking, or rather climbing as historic Quebec, a UN Heritage site, is indeed a hilltop fortress. It was also an opportunity to be with my daughter and her partner as a middle-aged couple on neither their turf nor mine. At the end of the long weekend, I happily thanked them without mentioning — nor did they — the near disaster, instead requesting that "for my 85th, if I make it, let's go someplace flat."

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ROAD TRIP MEMORIES

Yona Rogosin

“Slow down,” she yelled from the back of the pickup. “There’s a gas station ahead. I need to make a pit stop.” Greg, my high school bestie, looked at me rolling his eyes as he braked. Petunia always had to pee no matter where we were.

The station looked half abandoned; an old Sunoco sign swung in the wind, half torn away from wire fasteners attached to a rusty pole. Paint peeled from the stucco walls housing what could have been a garage. The lone gas pump had a hose lying on the ground.

“I’ll just be a minute,” Petunia said, as she jumped from the truck bed. Then she peered in the dirty windows of the garage door and ran to the back of the building looking for a bathroom.

We knew the routine. After traveling with Petunia for the last three days, it was not difficult to know her needs. Upon awakening, she rose from our big bed of sleeping bags and blankets lining the floor of the truck bed and insisted we eat a big breakfast, preferably at a Mom and Pop restaurant if we could find one. Otherwise, it was the first fast food joint that we came across.

After stuffing her face, she would use the facilities and return with a big smile. Then she would climb into the truck bed, sit cross-legged on her rumpled sleeping bag and meditate while looking up at the sky. Within twenty minutes, she was asleep.

Greg and I knew Petunia from high school. She had moved to our town from Rutland after her father went bankrupt from having too much inventory and too few customers in his bookstore. Most of our classmates made fun of her; they taunted her about her name and made rude comments about her clothes, saying she looked like a homeless person.

As the outliers of our class, Greg and I found both her name and strange habits amusing and refreshing. We befriended her, partly to reinforce our reputation as eccentrics and partly because we thought she was cool. Over time, we came to appreciate her offbeat humor and intelligence, her new-age interests and her free-spirit personality.

When spring break approached our senior year, I proposed taking a trip down the back roads of the East coast to see how far we could get in three or four days before turning around to go home. Petunia and Greg loved the idea and I persuaded my father to let us use his old pickup.

When five minutes had passed and Petunia had not returned from the restroom, Greg shrugged and turned on the radio. When five more minutes had gone by, I got out of the truck and began walking to the back of the station while calling out Petunia's name. Before I had uttered it a second time, Petunia appeared wild-eyed and excited.

"Oh my God," she shrieked between sobs, tears streaming down her face. "You will not believe this. Poor thing in that dirty bathroom giving birth. I just don't know what to do. She's wailing and looks so frightened."

This news was so far from what I expected that I stopped dead in my tracks. First aid and CPR were all I knew from my summers as a life-guard. "You stay with her," I shouted. "I'm going back to the truck to tell Greg. He may have some ideas." Greg was the most grounded of the three of us and his father was an orderly.

As soon as he heard what was happening, he threw some maps he had grabbed from the glove compartment to me. "I'll bring the truck around. You figure out where we are and find the closest hospital."

I suspected we were near Charleston, but had no clue about our location, having paid little attention to road signs as we meandered on our drive south. Worse still, I was sure it was Sunday. Except for the howl of the wind, it was quiet; the surrounding area appeared deserted.

Greg parked the truck near the bathroom door where Petunia stood straight and immobile as a guard. "Grab a blanket and the water cooler," he instructed as he ran to the bathroom.

"What the hell, Petunia," Greg shouted. Petunia jumped from the truck and raced to the bathroom with supplies in hand. I followed her.

There, on the floor, lay the mother, a scraggly golden retriever, obviously in pain and clearly giving birth to a litter of puppies.

I knelt down, stroked the dog and looked up at Greg who winked at me, turned and smiled at Petunia. While holding our bellies, we fled from the bathroom and burst into peals of laughter.

• • •

NO PASSPORT NEEDED

Frank Montaturo

So it was to be the inaugural run for my recently street found shopping cart (two stacked wine cartons deep]. UWS to Astoria to forage and harvest in a carefully curated selection of shops not easily found in my neighborhood. End of the line; Ditmars to Rose and Joe's: Sicilian bakers for a bag of mixed taralli, Southern Italian looped biscuits in fennel red pepper and whole wheat varieties. St Anthony and the eponymous St Joe high up, peering benignly, Irish soda bread available. Then across the street to the Italian *alimentazione*, shelves of bronze cut imported Neapolitan pastas ... fresh take away pizzas and rice balls on the spot, but it was mortadella on my mind. On the playlist: Ornella Vanoni, now 86 — one of my favorite Italian cantanti — posed nude for Italian *Playboy*.

Then rounding Ditmars to the Green Parrot, a narrow Albanian food emporium; careful not to knock a jar of Ajvar off the shelf. Into the cart go goat milk yoghurt, halva, a paving-stone slice of eggplant pie, a jar of preserved lemons and that Ajvar. Carefully avoiding the stacked olive oil — that's for another place — squeezing out the door and continuing on to a real butcher shop! Today: just a skewer of chicken souvlaki, thank you. Oh well ... how about that lamb steak. Nothing else, pay at the cashier, return with the slip.

Now things get serious. We head out, following the El back south ... weaving between piles of snow and slushed corners daring the NASCAR track that leads to the Triborough Bridge to visit a Greek marketplace, a Titan of a shop, for three liters of Cretan EVOO. We redo the cart to position the large tin, ignoring the tantalizing offerings of honey drowned sweets and savories. On to Mediterranean Foods at 30th Ave yet another Greek establishment... to spread the stimulus check as far as we can. Here they greet me. I can only say Ti kanis? and ask if they are keeping safe. Into the cart go a pound of feta from a selection of perhaps eight or ten, various small containers of olives, and a large slice of spanakopita to join the eggplant pie for that evening's dinner. Forgot the sage mountain tea. Sweeping back around the corner: vegetables, where today? Elliniki Agora? or United Brothers? Two dealers literally side by side. And both thrive. Dandelions? Red chard? Fava beans? Maybe just romaine and broccoli crowns today. Bearing down on the finish: Grand Wine and Liquors, in and out with four bottles,

two Greek two Bordeaux. Senior discount applied. The manager: a guy from Toulouse. *Bonne journée*. But there is still EuroMart for a second three liter tin of EVOO. We know where the prices are competitive. And a long counter of Balkan charcuterie, bacons and sausages smoked and cured that will brighten any pot of beans.

Bakeries along the way, but no bread for us. We bake our own.

The cart has served us well, as tightly packed as an egg, as neat as a completed jigsaw puzzle.

Well, we knew it before starting out: there is no elevator at this station. The excursion was its own reward.

• • •



THE PORK SAUSAGE

Jennifer Jolly

When I was small, horses pulled the wooden carts that delivered milk and bread each morning. After work, they grazed in a field at the top of our road until they were stabled for the night.

One late afternoon, when I was about five, my dad said, "I'll take you to see Moses Cranidge dealing with those horses, our Jennifer."

And so he took my hand and we walked along a footpath, past some little plots by the railway lines where people grew vegetables, until we reached the red brick stables.

Along the way he said: "You know, Jennifer, horses are like people: all a bit different. Some are friendly, others have tempers; some are quiet, others like to make a fuss. I know one that likes to look at its reflection in shop windows. Can you believe that? The thing is you've got to understand horses to know how to treat them and Moses knows his horses."

We arrived to find that Moses had already mucked out the stables and brought the horses in. We watched as he groomed each one and fed it hay.

Moses was a small man with a weather-beaten face and strong gnarled hands. He looked old to me though he was probably only in his forties. He dressed in workman's leather boots that laced up the front, grey wool trousers, a leather waistcoat over a grey wool shirt with sleeves rolled-up, and, in cool weather, a tweed jacket. Everything was topped off with a flat black cap with a peak. He was a typical North Lincolnshire man: plain spoken, hardworking, down to earth, and good-hearted underneath a gruff exterior.

Every morning Moses got out his old upright pedal-bike and cycled three miles from his home to let the horses out and harnessed them ready for work before he cycled home. After the horses had finished their morning rounds, they grazed in the field until Moses cycled back to stable them.

Now, in addition to taking care of horses, Moses owned a smallholding where he kept chickens and pigs. One day, Dad said Moses was going to kill one of his pigs for meat. It was toward the end of World War II in England when meat was scarce and strictly rationed. We were allowed about four to six ounces per person each week, so meat from a whole pig was unimaginable.

“Well, our Jennifer, what do you make of that?” Dad sat down, lit up, took a strong drag on his cigarette, pulled it into his lungs and exhaled the smoke.

“I don’t know, Dad.” I thought killing a pig sounded a bit heartless. I shuddered as I imagined it squealing and carrying on. Dad had grown up in a village near to farms where such things were part of life and continued, “The thing is,” he said, “Moses and his missus are going to take some cuts of meat, then salt some to preserve them. They’re also going to make some bacon, some sausages and a pig’s fry.”

“What’s a pig’s fry, Dad?”

“Well, I never. A pig’s fry is when all the bits, like the liver, kidneys and offal, are put together and fried. It’s delicious. But Moses is going to give us some of the sausages. It’ll be a real treat to have fresh sausages.”

Sausages didn’t sound too appealing to me, but my dad said, “You wait and see.” Then he settled down, stubbed out his cigarette, lit up yet another and picked up the newspaper.

A few days later he said to Mum, “Moses has given me those sausages, Thora.”

“I’ll fry them for dinner,” she said. “We can have them with potatoes, cabbage and gravy.”

That day we sat down to eat and a pork sausage was put on my plate. I’d not seen one before and it struck me as a strange looking thing. Rather like a big fat finger. I poked at it gingerly before cutting it with my knife. Then hesitating, I carefully put a small piece in my mouth. I was ready to spit it out but suddenly realized it was delicious.

Dad watched with a twinkle in his eye. “Well what did you think of that pork sausage, our Jennifer?”

“It’s the best thing in the whole world, Dad!” He laughed. “Did you hear that, love?”

Mum smiled, “Yes, her and her imagination,” she commented irrelevantly.

But it was true and still is. My mouth still waters at the thought of it. Never have I had a sausage that gave me so much pleasure as the one from Moses Cranidge and his wife so very many years ago.

• • •

Leonard Leventon

How's your ink this morning?
— Waiting for you —

• • •

FREE TIME

Ruth Ward

What should I do with my free time?
Fly a kite, see a sight,
Compose a ditty for New York City?
Leisure needn't cost a dime.

But does my soul crave something more?
Does it wonder as I blunder
Left and right, shunning the trite,
Groping blindly for my core?

— Down with dull, timeworn routine!
I'll quit my perch, expand my search,
Turn a stone, unearth a bone,
Grow a beanpole from a bean.

What's left of all my heart's desires?
—To assail my culture like a vulture,
Repudiate calm, swoop down on a psalm,
And bask in the sabbath candle fires.

I'll inhale all the spice in my Havdalah box,
Pursue my roots in hiking boots;
After eying a sliver of chopped liver,
I'll wolf a bagel stuffed with lox.

I'll reflect on my childhood and cry to the trees,
"I'm a female hero, not a girl zero,
Though shoved to the back, I suffer no lack,
Though never Bat Mitzvahed, I have no disease.

So, I'm not a perfect Jewish ten,
Unevenly blessed, I've done my best
To see apples, not onions, high arches, not bunions,
I've learned to prize equally women and men."

And when I return to my brownstone shrine
I'll make a dish of gefilte fish;
I'll savor the labor and share with my neighbor;
We'll pair it with Manischewitz wine.

So what should I do with my precious free time?
Avoid being clinical, callous, or cynical,
"We mustn't stray far from who we are,"
Being me won't cost a dime.

• • •

I WISH

Barbara P Gordon

I want to travel to the stars
to walk on planets
other than my own
to see four moons
chasing one another
across a crimson sky
to greet a sentient being
looking nothing like myself
but alive and curious
to know me too

I want to leave behind me
famine war disease
but realize that
only when we solve
those scourges
will we invest our treasure
in dreams that bring
such voyages
within our grasp

If I were choosing
how and why we'd
venture into space
not Star Wars
but Enterprise
is how I'd light our way

• • •

VILLANELLE

Betty Farber

When you are old and grey and full of sleep – W.B. Yeats

Though I am old and grey and full of sleep,
I still can choose to write and laugh and love.
I know which dreams to lose and which to keep.

At times I smile at fortune, times I weep,
And lift my tearful eyes to heaven above,
Since I am old and grey and full of sleep.

Memories sustain me, thoughts can creep,
Some cheerful, some I am unworthy of.
I know which ones to lose and which to keep.

Let go of loneliness, although it's anchored deep
Within my soul— I'm lost without my love,
Since I am old and grey and full of sleep.

When drowning in despair that is too deep,
I call on thoughts that I am tired of.
I know which dreams to lose and which to keep.

So when you see me sighing, do not weep.
It is the sound of mourning, like the dove.
Though I am old and grey and full of sleep
I know which dreams to lose and which to keep.

• • •

WE HAVE EVERYTHING WE NEED

Helen Saffran

Jake is 15
Maggie is 16 and a half
Ripe old ages for cats

Jake weighs only 5 lbs.
I call him my valiant cat
Every few months I panic
And think he's dying
But he marches on
In spite of being anemic
And having a heart murmur
And possibly cancer
He marches on
Living on love

Maggie is totally healthy
She climbs to the top
Of cabinets that are over
The refrigerator and
Has a plethora of sleeping spots
She has become a kitchen cat
Keeping me company
When I eat or prepare meals

Every day the cats
Have a Genoa tuna fish lunch
Which is their elixir of health

We live peacefully in a
Small apartment
Where we have
Everything we need

• • •

MEMORIES IN SMELLS

Judy Winn

Smells told me which way the wind was blowing
A north wind sent the smell of yeasty beer
From the massive brewery on the corner
A south wind sent the smell of tanning leather
From the open windows of a factory
A stench that made me want to hold my nose.

If the wind was coming from the west
The smell of garlic wafted across the street
From the four table restaurant that had no sign
Men sat inside the plate glass window and smoked
Eating ground meat rolled to look like little sausages
Cooked by an old Romanian lady.

Fridays brought the sweet smell of challah
From the bakery below our apartment
On other days the smell of rye bread kneaded
By flour dusted bakers looking ghostly
As they shoveled loaves into coal ovens
White aprons and hats moving silently
Carrying trays of bread to the store front
The smell of unwashed clothes came from the poor
Who lined up to buy day-old bread for pennies.

My mother gave me scarves to play dress-up
The smell of her perfume is still in those scarves
I have never had them cleaned in forty years
Since they ended up in my dresser drawer
I wrap one around my neck and I am back
Resting my head on her ample bosom
That many years later lost a breast
From the cancer that snuffed out her life.

• • •

THE WISDOM OF AGE

(with apologies to Lewis Carroll)

Jennifer Jolly

“You are old my dear Grandma,” her grandson said,
“And your hair has become snowy white,
I think at your age you’d be soft in the head
And not know your left from your right.”
“In my youth,” said the woman “my hair was quite brown
And my brain was insightful and witty,
But now that I’m old it has wisdom I’m told
Though it’s slow, it forgets, it’s a pity.”

“Now you’re old grandmamma,” said the grandson again,
“Your teeth are not white but are yellow”
“Young man,” said his grandma, “I’m glad they’re not false,
Please don’t criticize. Be a good fellow.”
“But Grandma you really do wear some strange clothes
Of bright orange and purple and blue,
Old ladies wear gray, black or brown I am told
So, what pray has happened to you?”

“In my youth,” said the woman, “I always conformed
With school uniforms dark brown or green,
Now I like to wear colors and break from the mold
And at my age I don’t give a bean.”
The young man grew pensive and viewed the old crone
It seemed that she treasured her age,
Perhaps the old dame’s not as dumb as he thought
But in fact she’s a bit of a sage.

The old woman eyed him and gave him a wink,
“Getting old isn’t bad,” she then said,
“Now be off with you, go, leave me all to myself
While I paint my nails brilliant red.”

• • •

2021

Dennis Sherman

I don't have to wonder
after decades of all that honesty
children and dogs
and a hundred pages of last words

or what it will be like
after leaving beds unmade
a thousand books unopened
and two hearts unbroken

or why the amyloid plaques
thicken each day
and I stand rocking in silence
after taking care
and crossing that street

or if some god knocks
on neighbors' doors
and stands aside with a Buddha smile,

but maybe I can find a painting
of blue skies that will fit
under the clouds just outside my window
that would have helped us
when we walked hand in hand
down the sidewalk
from the rest of her life
to that dirt-grey river
that once went somewhere important.

• • •

VIENNA ON MY MIND

Trudy Owett

*In memory of Trudy Owett, frequent Q Review contributor
and former Assistant Poetry Editor. We miss you Trudy.*

It has never been
the City of my Dreams.
But last December,
the Christmas Lights like
giant chandeliers, lit up
all it's streets. And Vienna
was a wonderland.

I took my grandchild to
familiar places, the school,
the parks where I had played,
the many places
that had cast me out. No,
it was not a gift to
have been born there.

Pointing to the third floor windows
of the ornate building on
Mariahilfer Strasse, I said
“that was our apartment”, and
it was here, that a small girl
had tried to comfort her despairing
Mom and Dad.

But now the Viennese were
welcoming and kind. And so
I thought, that maybe this time,
I'd be able to reconcile
the pleasures of the present
with the memories
of the past.

Home of Opera, Mozart, Klimt,
and Schiele, Vienna remains
a place of poetry and inspiration.
Awed by the wealth
of it's beauty, we loved
every minute of our stay.

But those who deceive
can be beautiful and charming.
After all, it took these people
fifty years to concede that
they were guilty of the crimes.

Perhaps the smiles and pleasantries
conceal remaining evil underneath.
And so, the doubt returns.

This story has no clear beginning,
middle, or an end.
I will never understand
how I feel about the city of my birth.
It's time to stop the thinking,
It's time to let go.

• • •

EIGHT WAYS OF LOOKING AT SNOW

Linda Rothstein

This moment
A snowflake
Like no other

Field of snow
One footprint
Sunken deep

Snow cover gone
Blades of grass
Rise once again

Tree —
You turned white overnight
Did the snow scare you?

A winter remembered
Mounds of snow
Ploughed and forgotten

Snow predicted
Rain instead
The snowman melted

Buried in snow drift
Newspaper
Predicting a blizzard

After the storm
A patch the snowplow missed
Oops!

• • •

NEW PLANET DISORDER

Byrd

CAN YOU CALL IT SPRING

AIR IS NOW A WMD
EARTH'S THROAT HAS BEEN SLIT

the urine soaked boulevards
are the new roads to perdition
aspirations are gobbled up
by the poison people eaters

mean
while
mother
nature
searches
for
the
one
who
castrated
her
left
mammary
gland

father time
works at
restoring his
emaciated right
side testicle

the masses now spend their hours
locked in the embrace
of the serpentine's fire
4-10-2021 10:05 A.M.

• • •

A MIGHTY QUERY*

Yona Rogosin

Why are oceans, rivers and trees
not used for green power
but polluted and drained
so drilling and logging proceed,
the world order maintained?

Why are third world nations
exploited and shattered
their economies in tatters
their culture no more
from bigotry and war ?

Why are refugees fleeing from starvation
camped in crowded filthy stations
huddled in the long cold dark night
afraid to protest what is not right
waiting for their promised liberation?

Why does the power of money
make humans greedy, racist, corrupt
quick to blame the “other” the needy, the sick
while excusing the wrongs
of the tyrants, the rulers, the rich?

Why do politicians dismiss
proven truths of world scientists
and valued lessons of man’s history?
Why the increased inhumanity?
Immorality? inequity?

Because my inquisitive naïf
dominance, malice, avarice
are the dark, selfish sides of man.
Read Plato, Machiavelli,
Jung, Nietzsche and Ayn Rand!

** This poem partly inspired me to create
the collage The Dark Side of Man that is
in this Review’s Art Section.*

• • •

FLORIDA WANTS YOU

(with apologies to Emma Lazarus)

Wayne Cotter

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis said [today] that he is hoping to sign legislation that would give unvaccinated police officers a \$5,000 bonus to relocate to his state. "If you're not being treated well, we'll treat you better here, you can fill important needs for us, and we'll compensate you as a result," he said.

— Newsweek, October 24, 2021

Give me your maskless,
Your deniers,
Your muddled masses
Yearning to breathe free.

Let your wretched refuse
Adorn my teeming shores.
Let your voiceless speak loudly,
Your choiceless choose proudly.

Let your battered,
Most tempest-tossed
March through my gate.

And with untainted limbs,
Shall they long hold high
The Torch of Freedom.

• • •

**THIS YEAR OF FEAR —
ROSH HASHANAH 5782 – 2021**

Art Spar

Uncertainty feeds our gnawing fears
Weighing heavily upon each breast
Covid miseries streaked with tears
Waves of cases upon us crest

Where to find the source for calm?
I've looked to the sky with sunlight fading
For a God who will keep me safe from harm
From the heavens I'm still waiting

Instead I've looked inside my soul
In search for God's existence
Acts of love make our world whole
Bringing forth God's holy presence

God lives within every heart
Like love they glow with truth
Each act of kindness plays its part
God's immanence is its proof

Instead of fear of what may come
Let's rest within the moment
To do as best as can be done
Grateful for blessings abundant

With community we join in prayer
Beseeching divine intervention
God's response is always there
When we're open to introspection

May peace be always at your side
My wish for loved ones dear
May a tranquil spirit be your guide
As we welcome in our sweet New Year

• • •

SPRING

after Takashi Miike's Hara-Kiri: Death of a Samurai

Steve Koenig

A rare sight, the half moon
lay on her side in a bed of clouds.
Now, above slim branches
reaching into the darkened sky,
a full moon rests on a single cloud.

My milk is poison
but what else can I do
He brought me a sweetcake
wrapped in his bloodied, dead palm
I placed some to my lip
It was healing, so
I touched a crumb to my dead baby's mouth.
Mad, am I?
I was only waiting for Spring
When all is in its place

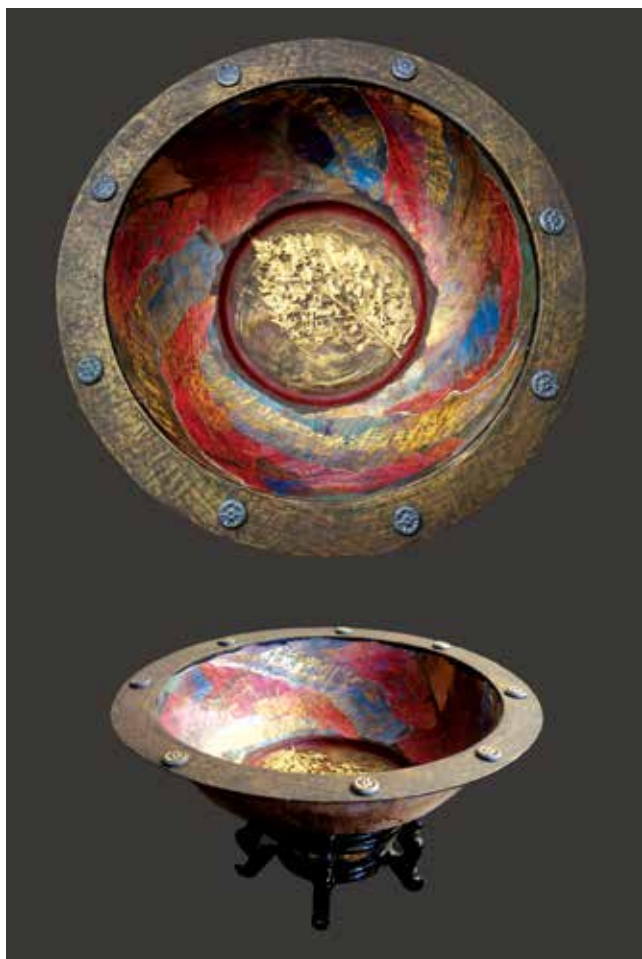
• • •

EVERY SWING SHOULD HAVE A TREE

Betty Farber

Every swing should have a tree
Like this giant pine that's holding me.
Head back, my hair can reach the ground.
The creaking rope's the only sound,
And I'm so far from city swings
Held up by bars with iron rings
Like chains to hold, it seems to me
That every swing should have a tree.

• • •



Beth Callender, *Cosmos Bowl*, Paper Mâché



Victor Brener, *Young Man with Denim Jacket*, Oil on Canvas



Paul Adler, *Turban Lady*, Acrylic on Masonite



Jeanette Himmel, *In Bloom #2*, Mixed Media



Pete Weis, *Mother with Shy Child*, Photograph



Rosalie Regal, *Alliance*, Clay



Ellen Shapiro, *Anne's Dock*, Watercolor



Yona Rogosin, *Dark Side of Man*, Mixed Media Collage



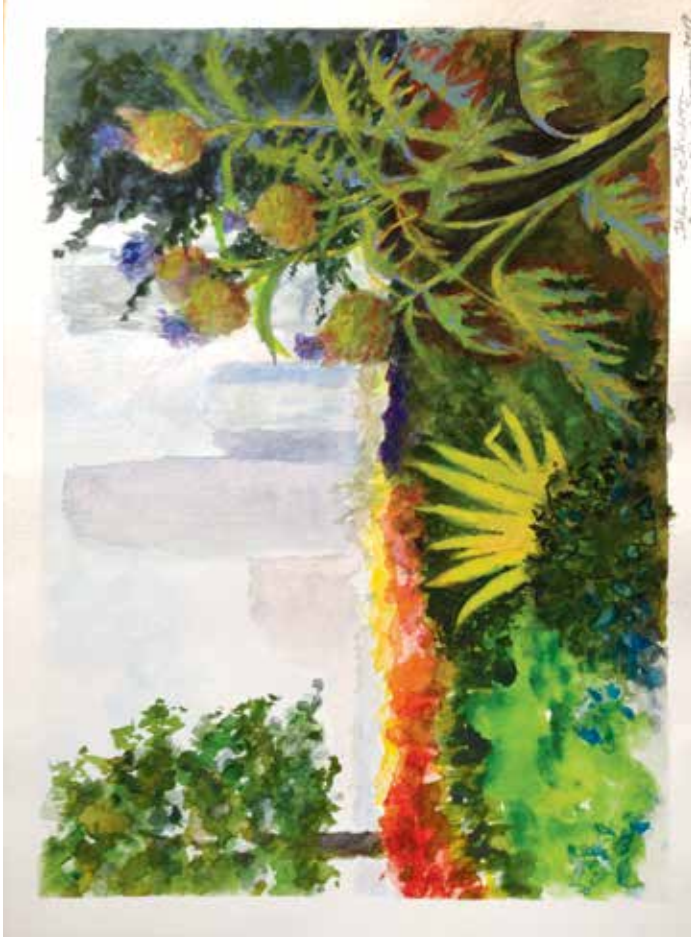
Gil Santiago, *Gate House*, Ceramic



Diane Figueroa, *Scraps into Art*, Sterling Silver



Marilyn Weiss, *In Contrast*, Collage, Acrylic, Multimedia



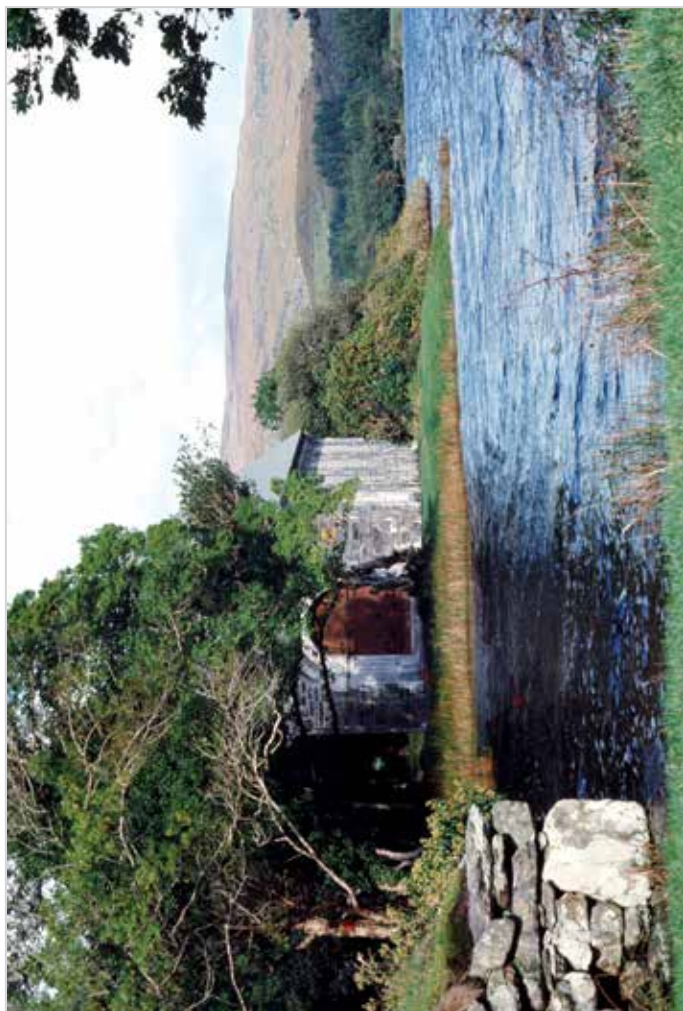
Helen McMahon, *Battery Park Summer 2019*, Watercolor



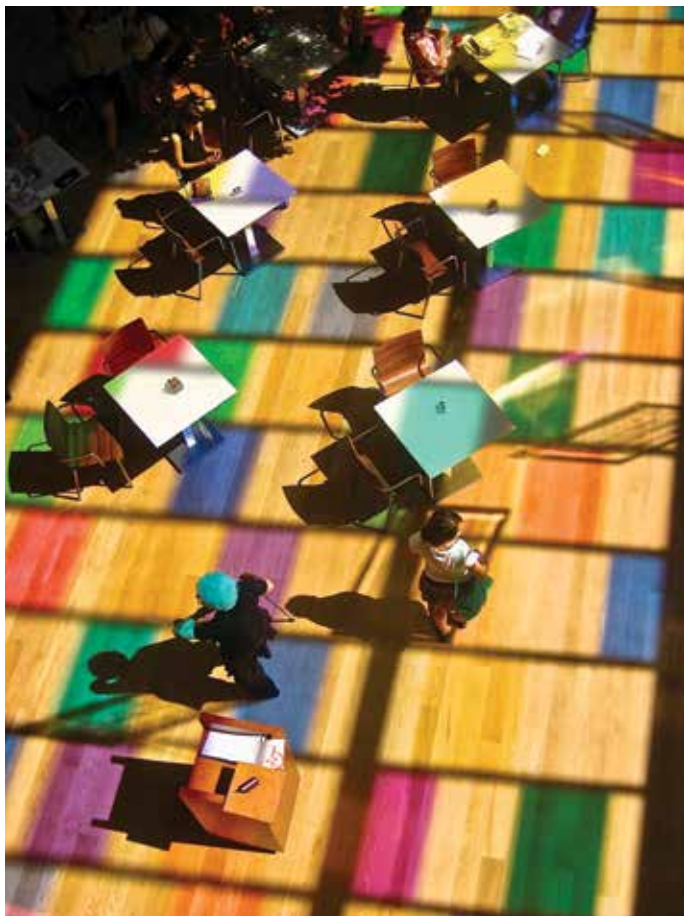
Roy Clary, *Runners*, Oil on Canvas



Ruth Kovner, *Twinkling Lights*, Photograph



Deborah Yaffe, *Ireland 1971*, Photograph



Frank Montaturo, *Coloring The Grid/Morgan Library*, Photograph

THE LENNI-LENAPE CALLED THIS GROUND IHPETONGA

Karen Neuberg

From this ground, this “high, sandy bank”
I look out to the water below

still busy—but less so than in
Whitman’s day—with ferries, barges,

tugs, leisure craft moving
between shorelines.

This tidal estuary/New York Harbor/
East River, that I view

from the end of the cul-de-sac
a few steps from my building’s door,

reveals the mood of the day to me
and carries past present future

and all the intricate histories
flowing together, floating

and sinking, riding the wakes
as I, like countless others

watch the light show
sun provides on its surface

• • •

COUNTRY EVENING

Deborah Yaffe

To the tall tops of trees
Come darknesses
And the sound of evening birds

WHAT HAPPENED?

Pereta Rodriguez

The George Washington Bridge, Harlem River, Washington Heights
and New Jersey have all moved
And they didn't even tell me.
I'm surprised and totally shocked!

We've had a 38 year relationship,
with my greeting them every day
And being available at night when they need watching.
I've been available to them during the hot summer days,
cooling Fall, freezing Winter,
and glorious singing Spring.
I'd be hurt but don't think it will help.
I'm prepared to take this up with someone,
but a friend suggested to discuss this with the wind.

• • •



LET ME SING THE GARDEN

Karen Neuberg

Let me sing green and stroll
the garden, collect the yellows
and purples, bathe in the luxury
of butterfly and bee. Let the humming-
birds hum the afternoon light,
let the fireflies light the blue hour.
Let me sing. Let me sing the garden.
Let me be a tree. Let me reach.
Reach into the song of the seasons.
Let the seasons keep their pace, steady
in promise. Let the promise be a garden.
I'm lost in a dream with no garden.
I'm lost in a world where green is lost,
where creatures are lost, some who
we never met or named. Let me sing
the garden. Sing the birds. Sing
the flowers. Let me sit in the crotch
of a tree. Let me be a nest.

• • •



STREAMING THE VISION FESTIVAL

after Muriel Rukeyser and Ada Limón

Steve Koenig

You said "Let's listen to the second set first. We can do that, right?"

You said that with the technology of past and present

You asked which of the six vocalists was barking

You said "Isn't that someone I know in the audience?"

You said "William Parker's bass..."

You said this music is crystalline

You said "Look at the sky. It's so dark. Isn't it going to rain?"

Patricia announced "Get your food and drinks now

before the next set begins"

You said "Amina's face is beautiful"

I added "Yes, but her hairdo is unfortunate"

You said that my paté looks like dog food so I gobbled some.

You chuckled, wrinkled your brow,

and said "Now you *smell* like a dog"

You said "The piano, bass and viola

should call themselves a string trio.

I replied "Actually, they do. Matt Shipp's String Trio"

You said oysters and okra tomorrow

a Jacques Tati movie after

M Hulôt's Holiday peut-être

• • •

CYCLONE

Leonard Leventon

Cyclone spinning wildly
Circling in the sky
Twisting through the atmosphere
Spiraling on by

Blasting all to smithereens
Both on shore and out to sea
Kaleidoscopic mists of ocean spray
Blowing in both night and day

Wonder wheel going round n round
Dazzling lights, dizzying sounds
Step right up n win a prize
Ride – ride – everybody rides –

The bumper cars – the barker cries
Toss a coin, don't be denied
Win a plate, or fish or bird
Roll a ball, don't be absurd

Mermaids dance n swim ashore
Prance the sand n surf for sure

Cyclone spinning wildly
Bumper cars crash nightly
Kaleidoscopic mists n sprays
Blending rightly night n day

Step right up
Step right up

• • •

FROM THE SEVENTH FLOOR

Dennis Sherman

We spent decades together
after numbing routines of flushing sex
hung coats in the same closet
hovered in silence over frozen dinners
buoyed for life by scars.

Enough with memories
of giving and taking
lovers and partings
though I still see her sitting on the bed
brushing the cover the color of tea
with printed cheer and twining vines
her hand straightening the wrinkles
and evening the world.

Shrugging at almighty themes
I relish an orange carefully peeled
the bleeding of an egg yoke
the dog close-eyed on the couch
and the fall into book and bed.
At hand are bills in drawers
aging apples in the fridge
and bottles of pills behind the books.
Out goes the candle
as night, the same old the same old
comes to cover the world.

• • •

APRIL MOONTIDE

Art Spar

When water is sucked out
By the full moon's pull
The harbor lays naked
Revealing a moonscape

Woken by raindrops at six
Morning chill dips below 50
Dead low at seven fifteen
The clam flats beckon

Knee boots
Raincoat
Shellfish license
Rake and pail

The harbor exposes her privates
A living wilderness
Mesmerizing
A vision from beyond

This is the only time
It will be just like this
The rain pauses
This is a tide to remember

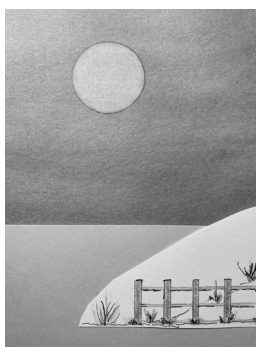
Radiant oysters
Repose unaware
Eager fingers surprise and pluck
The voluptuous delicacies

Raking, listening, feeling
The scratch of metal against
The shell of a quahog
Buried beneath the sand

The pail fills
The back aches
The tide turns
The sky darkens

Home
Rain pelts the windows
While I shuck clams
For chowder

• • •



DEAR NEIGHBORS

Ze'eva Cohen

The pie was so tasty and delicious.
We sat by the river looking at the water,
breathing the fresh air
feeling the sun on our skin
as we ate it and drank Earl Gray tea
from the thermos I brought along.

It reminded me of Jewish dishes
with raisins, cinnamon, apples and apricots.
It was a perfect Spring pie.
I would say Passover pie, but — OY,
it is made of Chamets, wheat flour,
a no-no during the eight days of Passover.

When the Corona will pass over
And we will come out of it whole
Life will taste like this pie.

Hoping you are enjoying my carrot salad.

Good night
Ze'eva

• • •

ON REMARRYING

Marc Kouffman

I was a horse who threw his rider
Snorting and bucking, not contrite
Both my foals lay down beside her
They watched me sidle off a night
It's fifteen years since I departed
By my reckoning the costs were high
Because a father lost a daughter
And this did often make him cry
I had always been in the center
Of an open doorway I feared to enter
Until being certain she was not why
I'd shut the door on my family and I
Long devoid of a homing instinct
I have thought of many a reason
Building nests belongs to others
Marriage to me is out of season
Yet life unshared can be exceedingly cold
For one who's becoming increasingly old
So it makes good sense it would seem
To put under contract a winning team
Married friends say sex will go
I concede this might be so
What's also important, hard to define
Like glee in a child or fruit on the vine
Is the deep knowledge after so many years
That love has ripened and conquered fears
So tonight before going to sleep
I'm fully ready to take this leap.

• • •

THE COLOR OF ENVY

Mary Ann Donnelly

*...the life of fastidious aloofness and refinement
in which every detail should have the finish of a jewel*
— Edith Wharton from “*The House of Mirth*”

At times I crave like Lily Bart
The best of everything and everything the best
A classic six on Park
Sunlight streaming through French doors
Making an entrance in white velvet
With timeless ease
On plum shaded peau de soie pumps

If green is the color of envy
What is the color of shame
My aching for affluence
While others yearn to breathe free

• • •

YELLOW ORGANDY PARTY DRESS

Helen Saffran

My mother proudly taking
My yellow organdy party dress
Which she had ironed to
Perfection
Off of the ironing board
The puffed sleeves, the Peter Pan Collar, the sash
I wore it to every birthday party
For years
It was my only party dress
“I have to say that I’m an excellent ironer,” she said
Examining the dress
As she gave it to me
To hang up in my close

DISTORTION

Judy Winn

When my father was very old
I asked him if he remembered
Taking me to see the circus trains
Coming into town. He said yes.
And you paid someone to
Bring out an elephant
I rode on the elephant's back
He said that part never happened.

I reach back into my memory bin
Where all the moments of my life
Are waiting for me to look for them
Threads stacked and intertwined
That make a whole of a life
What would I be without them?
A living creature with no soul.

When I bring out the oldest ones
There is no one left to fact check
Later ones layered with emotions
Sadness or joy or comfort or pain
Did any of those wires get crossed
Mixing my memories together
Like a little girl on an elephant's back?

• • •

SUM OF MY MEMORIES

Mary Ann Donnelly

What you remember saves you

— W. S. Merwin

My grandmother loved me
Unconditionally
For others there were strings attached
She was there at my birth
Traveling by train from
Brooklyn to Kansas
Was it love at first sight
I prefer to think so
My grandfather adored me
Unreservedly, unstintingly
Since I arrived from Kansas
Like a bouquet of sunflowers
Or so he always said
His smiles assured me I was beautiful
Lovable even

Some rely on God's love
To get through the day
I rely on sweet memories
My hippocampus assures me are true

• • •

MOTHER'S DAY

Donna K. Ramer

she dresses quickly after
slowly drying
her aging body
from the hot water that soothes the ache
in her back
lifting each sagging
breast into its proper slot in
a bra too old to support and covers
them with a sweatshirt that
gives her no form
stepping into
blue sweatpants to cover the graying white
cotton panties
running a comb through thinning
hair while walking to the kitchen for a cup of
coffee to help stem the hunger while
awaiting the French toast
salty butter
sweet syrup
her children ordered to honor her on
the mother's day she spends alone
again

. . .

HEARING & HEEDING

Donna K. Ramer

somewhere
beneath the sounds
of the city
carried by the summer breeze
are bells calling
to someone's need
to join the early morning
worshippers in a church in
the caverns of the cityscape

SMILE AND LOOK AT THE MOON

Rachel Shor

“Smile and look at the moon,”
the multi-ringed teacher of
qi gong, tai chi, and yoga
invites our bending bodies,
covered faces, separated spaces
mornings in a local park,
her senses seeing through
our masks.

I do more than smile; I laugh
as my hands curl into claws,
my oft injured knee pouncing like
a tiger in the park’s sunlight.

We fly and float like
flocks of birds circling
the sky heading south
or balance like the spotted hawk
perching on a nearby branch,
a captive squirrel dangling
from its beak.

• • •

MOON MOODS

Rachel Shor

A rare sight, the half moon
lay on her side in a bed of clouds.
Now, above slim branches
reaching into the darkened sky,
a full moon rests on a single cloud.

Tucked into my own bed
beneath a soft, blue blanket, I
listen to the wind’s murmurs
rise to roars ‘til the moon
retires in morning light.

THE SURVIVOR

Stella Gold

Lonely as a child
Whose mother is gone,
Doomed as a kitten
Whose fate was set
To be drowned in a ditch
On the side of the road.

He keeps on walking
With the unwanted,
The rejected ones.
For marching may lead
To a softer land
Or a welcoming hand.

He still reaches for hope.
During time of despair
With no light to follow
Sometimes a miracle occurs.
A stranger may open his door
With eyes offering shelter.

• • •

VINEYARD HAVEN HARBOR, 2021

Carole Cronig Abrahams

tepid wavelets swirled
toward shore,
toward me
and the minnows
gliding
under the dock

their minnow schools
still in session

as soothing, gentle, salt-water water
bathed me
above those rocky shallows
now no thrilling chill,
no belly shrinking in,
no sparkling, cool splashes

the little fish
still tickled my wading legs
In soothing, gentle, salty water

but this ocean was getting too damn hot,
for sea creatures and me

• • •

BEACHED

Linda Rothstein

What made you do it
What made you abandon
The buoyancy of the sea

Why have you hurled yourself
Up onto the beach
Where a whale collapses from its own weight
Ribbs buckling under the tonnage of blubber

Is it because of your oceans
Is it how acid they've become
With the runoff of our chemicals
Is it because of the undersea sounds
Our sonar
The sounds of our submarines

Or was it a voice from deep within
A voice that said time to die
Time to bake your bones on a beach
Time to become a giant teardrop in our eye

• • •

NOTES ON RACISM (AMERIKKKA'S ENDEMIC PANDEMIC)

Byrd

How Long Will The Vulture
Hover
A Specter of Damocles
Lurking
Another Nightmare Brought In
Dying
Color From The Killing
Fields
How Many Centuries Will Our
Blood
Be The Soup Du Jour/ The
Brûlée
Quenching The Rapacious Appetites Of The
Patrons
Who Twist The Night Away At The Lucifer
Lounge

Meanwhile
Those Who Dwell On The Feel Side Of The Sewer
Now Put The World On Notice
There Will Be No More SILENCED KNIGHTS
FULL WELL
THEY KNOW
OUR DAY WILL COME
when
LIGHTING WILL STRIKE
BLACK
4-17-2021 5:05 P.M.

• • •

NOW WE CAN GO OUT AND PLAY

Barbara P Gordon

the trees are in bloom
the grass is so green
restaurants are open
sidewalks are clean

just one more chapter
I can't put it down
will she be forgiven
will he come around

I take out my spring clothes
trade boots for my sneakers
take a brief walk
enjoying the breezes

yet something is drawing me
from the spring air
it's not my apartment
don't want to be there

it's just that I've lived
in these fictional pages
known all these people
for ages and ages

now that we can
go out and play
it's reading my novel
that makes me stay

• • •

ALIVE

Judy Hampson

Take pleasure in each moment,
And meander through each day.
Treasure every single friendship,
Especially those from far away.

Notice delicate spring flowers,
Thrusting fiercely through the dirt.
Flaunting all their brilliant colors,
Gorgeous dancing extroverts.

Listen closely to the birdsong,
As they chirp so sweet and true,
Bustling in and out of hedgerows
Serenading me and you.

Watch the sunset in the evening
As horizon meets the sky
Note the softly beating flutters
Of a passing butterfly.

Take the time to stop and wonder,
Let each precious moment last,
For our lives are all too fleeting,
If we hurry them too fast.

• • •

AT THE COLLEGE MODERNE DE JEUNES FILLES

Stella Gold

After our liberation in June 1944 by the American army, we didn't have to hide any more. I could now attend high school, and in early fall my mother registered me as a boarding school student at the College Moderne de Jeunes Filles of Mamers. Mamers, seven kilometers from Beauvoir, the village where we lived during the war, was the main town in the area. It was a "sous-prefecture." My brother, Jean, became a student at the College Moderne de Garçons, and my mother went back to Paris.

The first week of school, during recess, four thirteen-year-old girls were discussing the physical attributes of students in our class. "You, Stella, you have the eyes of a calf," decreed Jacqueline, the sharpest of the group. I was just standing numb, not attuned to the subculture of the school.

I used to believe that my eyes were my most appealing asset. I was mortified, but I had been taken by surprise and was not ready to respond with a smart remark. This was my first encounter with Jacqueline, "la petite Houet." She was a small thin girl about my age. Her long pale face, endowed with globular eyes and thin lips, was framed by limp blond hair. Her placid appearance hid a sharp tongue and a quick wit.

At this time, I did not suspect that we would become good friends. Everything about us was different. I was a foreigner, a Jewish girl from Paris, while Jacqueline had strong local roots. She was the product of generations of country schoolteachers. Both her parents taught in a village near Mamers. Her sister had graduated the previous June from the College Moderne and was now attending the teachers' seminary in Le Mans. Jacqueline's future appeared as predictable as mine was unclear and unknown.

We were both good students, but she was far lazier than I. I remember someone asking her how she could produce such good papers in so little time, to which she answered, "The faster it's done, the livelier it is."

I do not remember how we became friends. It may have been our common frustration with the dullness of boarding school life. So many rules and so little fun. We started talking. During the second semester Daniele, a new "interne," joined the class. She was short, with a round

continued

face, and frizzy hair. Beneath her sloppy appearance and a seemingly permanent state of confusion she possessed a vivacious mind. Another Jewish girl, even though not as secretive as I, she did not blend either into the school's general population.

The three of us became what Mlle Chaumeix, our unkind teacher of French literature, dubbed "The three heads under the same bonnet." We used to laugh together, and it infuriated her. I believe she did not approve either of Jacqueline, the scion of a respectable line of teachers, befriending two rootless newcomers.



Life at the College Moderne, in spite of its name, was rather spartan and primitive. We all slept, about forty of us, in a long dormitory with four rows of beds. There was no heat, and the winter months were harsh. Most of us had chilblains on our toes and cracked skin on our hands. There was no hot water and no shower. The toilet facilities included two ranks of mini-sinks with a cold-water faucet each. Boarding school students were expected to get clean when going home, twice a month. Those of us who couldn't go home remained dirty.

The classrooms were heated with wood-burning stoves. For a while it was my job to light two of these before breakfast, which I never succeeded finishing in time. The process was sheer misery. To start the fire, I had first to split wood into kindling in the basement.

Toward the end of the war the school had been used by the Germans as a prison for Russian women. Two small wooden cells built in the basement were left untouched after the building became a school again. Every morning I was confronted with the thoughts of what had happened there, and every morning I was reprimanded for being late at breakfast; it left me angry and resentful. I never mentioned my feelings about the cells. I was no expert, either, at starting those two stoves.

It does seem gloomy, yet not everything was miserable at the school. Once, during the winter, the principal, a tall, elegant, rather pleasant woman who lived in one of the wings of the school with her husband, decided to teach us the Lancers' Quadrille. After supper we would assemble in the main hall, and Madame (that's what we called her) would put a record on an old phonograph and teach us to dance. We were gauche, eager, and bursting with pleasure.

• • •

MY COLD WAR GHOSTS

Charlotte Chase

In December 1981, I journeyed from Vienna to a village in south-eastern Poland at Christmas time. I peered through a dirty windshield seeking the main highway. A rising moon provided barely enough light to see an endless procession of military tanks moving north in the direction of Poland. Soviets must have rounded up their Hungarian and Czech “allies” to teach the Poles a lesson like that taught to the Hungarians in 1956 and the Czechs in 1968. During those uncertain days, approximately two-hundred-thousand Poles had jumped on Vienna-bound trains without premeditation or a plan.

I was still upset about a shocking incident I’d experienced the day before at a pre-Mass gathering in the courtyard of Vienna’s Polish Catholic Church. While I perused books on a makeshift table, several hefty men suddenly lunged across it and grabbed the man standing next to me by the throat. The victim was pitched to the ground, eyes wide with fear. The assailants threatened him with loud accusations of his having collaborated with the Polish SB (Secret Police), and by extension, the Soviet KGB.

My journey had begun early the following morning when I arose from under a snug, warm eiderdown at my sister’s log cabin in the forest west of Vienna. I was anxious to get an early start, as I hoped to reach the village before dark.

I knew there was no predicting how long it would take to transit two Czech borders, for I’d had years of experience covering that short three-hundred-kilometer trip. The length of such waits had been prolonged since Soviet soldiers (easily recognized by red stars on their collars) had first been assigned to these posts in 1968 when invading Soviet forces came to crush a Czech bid for independence.

The day began with a strong cup of coffee and the decision to use a nearby border crossing into Czechoslovakia, as I had been unable to access the newly constructed highway between Austria and Poland.

The approaching dusk made it increasingly difficult to see detour signs diverting traffic from the main highway onto nearby dirt roads. Poor light made it almost impossible to see the road itself. I searched for familiar landmarks: a curving road around a church and adjoining

graveyard, or castle ruins confiscated from landed gentry before World War II. I'd memorized these landmarks during earlier trips when the new highway was under construction.

The winter air had been crisp and fresh in those days, in sharp contrast to the polluted air of recent years. I felt suffocated when trapped behind heavy coal trucks spewing their polluting black smoke.

Villagers believed the Soviets had deliberately imposed this ecological disaster as punishment for their rebellion a decade earlier. Heavy arms factories had been constructed on pristine farmland. I loved the old, sheltered farmsteads behind high fences and accessed through beautifully carved wooden gates.

My fear grew as it began to snow. I hoped my little green car and I would be recognized by Polish guards related to farmers from "my" village. I became numb with cold and fear while waiting in that long line of vehicles at the Czech border; running the trusty heater of my Deux Chevaux was forbidden. Cold crept through the canvas roof suitable for summer but far from ideal in winter. I eventually approached the toll booth where a guard jerked his thumb, indicating that I was to enter a woodshed to have my visa stamped. An hour later I returned to my car. Fortunately, it started, and the heater worked. I drove the short distance to the border crossing into Poland.

The snow was falling thickly, accumulating rapidly. There were still another hundred kilometers to my destination. A guard approached, motioning me to lower the car window. He promised to expedite border formalities in exchange for a lift to his village. I knew it well, for I'd rejected it as a possible study site on the advice of my academic mentors, who believed high mountain culture was unwelcoming to strangers. If I took him home, my journey would be prolonged by many hours; I was uncertain if I'd make it that night.

Eventually, and miraculously, I arrived at my destination — perhaps out of sheer luck or the Pope's blessing — as our detour had taken us through his own childhood village.

I crawled up to my attic room and into my sleeping bag for a well-deserved rest. Later that morning, I learned Martial Law had been declared and enforced by the much feared and reputedly drugged militia known as ZOMO. The Polish Communist Party leadership had clearly received the threatening message brought by the tanks I'd seen the day before, and their Soviet masters.

THE WATERFALL

Judy Hampson



There is a waterfall near where I live, that I walk to most days, sometimes several times. On calm days, the river above the falls is like a silken glaze, reflecting the colors of the ever-changing trees that line its banks. As clouds skud across the vast expanse of sky, they alter the shades and texture of the water flowing constantly below. In an inlet under my window, turtles warm themselves on sunny days, and ducks paddle languorously in the spring.

After a storm flood water hurls itself over the precipice, pounding whatever gets in its way, spraying mist into miniscule rainbows. A little brackish, carrying the scent of woodland and moldy leaves swallowed on its journey, the water froths, a chilly cappuccino beneath the sturdy rail where I hover. My gaze follows the bubbles as they disappear around a bend in the river.

Gushing, spouting, oozing as its mood changes, like an unpredictable friend who sometimes greets me cheerfully, or scowls. At dusk, pale grey rocks loom, solid, and I imagine leaping over the barrier to crouch on their surface, surrounded by the hissing, swishing, bouncing waves forging onwards. As gloom menaces, I visualize being sucked into the murky depths, unable to scramble up the jagged sides where machines dug into the rock to create a fissure.

Why do our minds test us with impossible challenges? Nature, at times so embracing and warm, can threaten us in unexpected ways. I know

I am safe behind the green iron railings, yet there is always that frisson of fear, that need to explore “What if?”

Before grandchildren erupted into my life, I thought I would retire to the ocean, in a cottage on a beach where I could walk barefoot every morning and wriggle my toes to connect with the earth, feeling its vibrations coursing through me. I would walk along the edge where the gentle waves washed around my ankles, watching them form into mounds that curled then crashed before bubbling around my feet. Drawing a lungful of salty air into my chest, I would stretch and be thankful for another glorious day.

The river will do. This breath of damp air, its sound of constant whooshing; trickling as each drop is replaced by another. The waterfall releases something in my body, as if the water is flowing through and around me, carrying me along its rocky path towards the ocean, and total freedom.

• • •

KAK'S CRADLE

Donna K. Ramer

The Great God Kak was having a different experience from her other 927 pregnancies: she was feeling quite ill and knew something was wrong. The seedling inside her, which she swallowed from her sacred Pond of Seeds, was agitated and its screams kept her from resting when the light from the stars went dim.

Kak was the ruler of the Universe of Universes, but she called home the planet Choaia (Cathena, Hestia, Oshun, Inanna and Aphrodite were to be named for this planet). As with all the other worlds under her rule, Choaia embraced peace; there was persistent prosperity and an abundance of resources so no one was homeless, no one was hungry, no one was friendless. And there were no genetically impure xy souls in the Universe of Universes; all were xx.

But the Universe of Adverses was close, and Kak could often hear anger, conflict, disagreements, even the slaughter of others. All the souls in the Universe of Adverses were impure; all were xy.

The light from the stars was growing bright when the indignant seedling burst forth from Kak, with an angry scowl on its purple face, a shriek from its large facial opening and clawing to be free from any who tried to comfort it. And while it was unlike any other seedling on Choaia, Kak was most distressed to realize that the Pond of Seeds had been adulterated: this seedling was an xy soul; it had a rod protruding from between its legs.

The Great God called together her advice-givers; unanimously, they demanded that the xy soul be removed from Choaia at once. After careful thought, Kak agreed and requested they find a world where the seedling would not be a curiosity or pollute other souls. As a benevolent dictator, Kak did not want the seedling to be alone, so she asked her advice-givers to sacrifice a young xx soul to be with the seedling. After much deliberation, the advice-givers chose Kak's 912th seedling, young Princess Damm (for whom Demeter, Akna, Mesenet and Min gods were to be named), who was wise, strong and schooled in cross-pollination and seedling fertilization.

But the advice-givers could not find a world nearby that would accept the seedling and Princess Damm (all the worlds were full), and Kak

had to use her many powers to feel in her heart and see in her mind a world far from Choaia. She found one; it had a sun for warmth and a moon for stability but needed to be nurtured and nourished. So with a roar she launched the pod with the seedling, the emboldened Princess Damm and a sachet of seeds from the now adulterated Pond of Seeds. She then turned to find the traitor who defiled the Pond and found it was her 721st seedling, Princess Icarus, who was bored and wanted an impure soul for as a playmate, for fun. Her heart broken, Kak banished Princess Icarus to one of the moons of the Universe of Adverse.

Meanwhile, the seedling and Princess Damm explored their new world, leaving their xx and xy seeds wherever they roamed. Kak used her powers to reward Princess Damm by giving life to the earth with an abundance of trees and great seas, fruits and nuts, vegetables, and animals in the sea and on the land. In time, there were many, many new seedlings, but not all were pure in soul; some were xx and others xy. From the very beginning of creation, they were too often in conflict and, unfortunately, still are.

• • •

NOTES ON THE DEMISE OF WANE JOHNS (A.K.A. THE MAJOR AS A MINOR)

Richard Byrd

Dateline, June 6/66, Hollyplastic California. He was born Marion Michelle but was known to his adoring fans as Wane Johns. Six foot four inches of pax-amerikkkana, uncle-sham's epitome of manhood par-excellence. Over the past two decades, he had won two world wars, tamed the west, and kept the commies at bay without getting his hair mussed. His films, no matter the genre, had one recurring theme. He always saved the day and got the girl. His latest film, *The Blue Bonetes*, a story about an elite commando unit that was single handedly winning the Vietnam War. Today's shoot had been more exhausting than usual. He was now sixty years old. The facade was becoming a tad more difficult to maintain. During those two decades as an amerikkkan icon, while many of his fellow actors served their nation, he had successfully avoided military service. However, the years were starting to catch up with him. He had three heart surgeries in the last two years. After his most recent surgery, they had used a sow's heart to replace his own. The biggest secret about him, and there were many, is that he only had one testicle. Many starlets who allowed him to share their boudoir related tales of being extremely disappointed in his skills between the sheets, or more appropriately lack thereof. He was addressed by many of them as the ball-less one or one ball for short, which was also used to describe his member and the duration of a close encounter of the one plus one kind.

He prepared for bed. His ritual began as always with the removing of his toupee, then his contact lenses, hearing aid and false teeth. Next came the shoulder pads and girdle, and finally the boots, the last part of the illusion. They had been specially made with six-inch lifts. They gave the appearance of him being six-feet-four-inches tall, as opposed to his natural height of five-feet-ten inches. Slowly he drifted off to sleep. For some reason he thought of his beautiful young Mexican wife. He had a contempt for those spics whose intensity was matched only by his feelings for chinks, gooks, and colored people. However, he had a weakness for their, spics that is, women, What the hell he thought. She was probably off screwing the pool boy or chef, or both.

There had been one argument between them. While going over the family finances, he had complained that if she would learn how to drive, they could dismiss the chauffeur. She retorted if he learned how to screw, they could dismiss the chef, gardener, and the pool boy. After that the subject was never broached again. He thought to himself, less work for him, even when others giggled about how non-anglo his kids looked, and how dark their complexions were, he shrugged it off. He finally dozed off to sleep. The sleep that enveloped him was like a tsunami on steroids. He was laying flat on his back spread eagled. His hands and feet were tightly bound. There stood above him a Ninja Gladiator, flanked on his left and right sides by a Lakota Warrior, and a Maasai Guerrilla. They pull out their machetes and commence to slicing from throat to testicle'

The Next Day

News from the Hollyplastic Journal: We regret to inform our viewers an amerikkkan icon has passed away. Hollyplastic actor Wane Johns died in his sleep last night. His Japanese houseboy heard screams of agony coming from his bedroom and rushed in to see what the trouble could be, only to find him slumped on the floor. According to his negro cook, Wane had his favorite meal of fried rattlesnake, cornbread, okra, and a tall glass of brandy. He then went up to his bedroom to retire. Little did anyone know it would be his last meal, or that his retirement would be permanent. God Bless and Good Night.

• • •

AUNT GERTIE'S BIRD'S NEST

Linda Rothstein

Aunt Gertie is frail and she lives frugally in a small apartment with one window. In that window are some floor-to-ceiling houseplants. Then there are others, smaller ones, that sit prettily on the windowsill. That was the kind I liked best.

"I'll make you your own Bird's Nest if you wish," Aunt Gertie said. When I looked at her quizzically, she explained that the plant I wanted was a kind of a fern," and she added, "they send out runners like spider plants. I'll clip off one ready to take root and pot it for you.

Then she motioned me to come closer so she could whisper in my ear: "It's called a spleenwort in the old country, but doesn't that sound like something you get if you touch a toad?"

Such a weird name for a plant. It only made me want one more, and my aunt did bring one over. It had a sweet little rosette, the tiny fronds all balled up in a way that made them look like eggs in a nest. I cherished my bird's nest and pampered it with my watering can. Every day I bathed it in hopes it would grow up to send out shoots of its own. I watered and watered, not noticing the poor thing was soaked and rotting away at the roots.

Before I could tell Gertie I needed her help, she gave me even worse news of her own. She lifted one eyelid with her finger to show me how the iris of her eye, the part that once was bright blue, was turning into a dull, reddish-brown color. Of course I wanted to know what was wrong. "A blood vessel burst, but I don't want to make a big thing of it, so hush," she said. After a silent moment, she asked, "How is that bird's nest I gave you?"

It didn't seem right to tell her my plant was ailing, not after what she told me. "I've covered it and put it to sleep for the night."

Aunt Gertie's finger wagged as if she were scolding. "Asleep already!? What did you do to tire my plant?" she joked.

"Okay, I can't lie to my aunt," I said. "The plant is not feeling well. I will take it to the nursery in the morning."

"If you wish it to get better, bring it to me," she said.

I brought the plant to her, cradling my potted fern in my arms as if it were a sick child.

It was then I noticed there was more wrong with Gertie's eye than a blood clot. Both eyes had gone milky; they had a dim glow that reminded me of a parchment lampshade.

Aunt Gertie studied the bird's nest from every angle, then her dim eyes came to rest on the rot that had turned reddish brown. I wanted to cry for the plant I had drowned; I was so ashamed. Gertie waved her palms over that plant like a magician going "hocus-pocus." She made circular motions over the sweet little rosette. Around and around she went, until the bird's nest fern was once more green and turgid with sap. What I saw was the sheen of a verdant green, a healthy fern with the promise of growing and loving and making little runners that would take root in time and make more plants of its own.

When she had finished, Aunt Gertie turned to me and said, "Okay that is the second of your three wishes. What will be your third?"

"Can you give me time to think?" I asked her.

She said sure and I'm still thinking, and Aunt Gertie is still breathing, and I am very careful now about what I wish for.

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A SATURDAY AFTERNOON IN NEW YORK

Wayne Cotter

It was mid-afternoon on a wonderfully snowy Saturday in 1977. I was in my late twenties and living in midtown Manhattan. My husband, Brad, was working this particular afternoon and I was in a mood to explore.

I headed south, thankful for my faux fur Scandinavian boots. As I walked through Union Square, the storm intensified, the street signs and stop lights a snowy blur.

Soon I was standing in front of a strange, unfamiliar bookstore. Where was I? I wasn't sure, but the warm glow from the shop's window drew me in.

A gold bell affixed to the door's interior gently announced my entrance. The place was darkly lit and musty. Most of the books were decades old; magnificent hardbound copies by some of my favorite authors, Dickens, Dostoevsky, and the Brontë sisters.

From the corner of my eye, I saw an old gentleman standing nearby who appeared to be the owner. "Do you just sell old books here?" I asked. "Oh no, we carry the old and the new, just look around," he said and shuffled back to the counter.

I soon uncovered a pristine first edition of *Huckleberry Finn*. The price was just \$30. I turned to the title page and gasped. There was Mark Twain's signature. I asked the owner if this signed copy was authentic. "It sure is," he said, "got that one myself."

I laughed at his little joke but asked why the book was so cheap. "Well," he said, "I'm getting out of the business soon and I need to clear stock. I just hope these treasures fall into the hands of people who appreciate them. People like you."

"Well, I must have *this* book," I said, reaching into my coat pocket but coming up empty. "Oh dear," I said "I forgot my wallet. Can you hold the book? I can come back."

"Well, we're closing early today on account of the storm, but here's my card. We're not open Sundays so I guess I'll see you Monday."

The card read: *Mosk's Book Store*. "So are you Mr. Mosk?" I asked. "Yes, ma'am. Mr. Julius Mosk at your service," he said as he clicked his heels and saluted. "And who do I have the pleasure of addressing?"

"My name is Pam," I said, "pleased to meet you."

When I left the store, the storm was still raging. When I finally arrived home, Brad was on the couch, engrossed in a book. "You'll never guess what I found today." His shrug signaled he was in no mood for guessing games.

"An old book shop with some incredible bargains," I said. "I found a signed first edition of *Huckleberry Finn* for \$30!"

"No way!" he said, as he jumped off the couch. "Let me see."

"Well," I said sheepishly, "the book's on hold, but I'm picking it up Monday. I have a business card right here." I dug into my coat pockets and came up empty. Had I lost it in the snow?

"It was called Morse's or Moss's or something with an M," I said. "I'm not sure. I think it's south of Union Square. Can we try to find it tomorrow even though it's closed?"

"Sure," Brad said. "I gotta see this place selling signed first editions for 30 bucks."

Sunday arrived sunny and cold. Brad and I headed out early for Union Square and then confusion set in. We walked south, east and west, but found nothing. Brad asked if I had noticed any stores or landmarks near the book shop, but I could recall none.

That night we checked the Yellow Pages for every bookstore in Manhattan. There were no Morse's or Moss's or any bookstore starting with the letter M. On Monday, I gave it another shot. I walked to Union Square, headed south a few blocks and began asking neighborhood people about local book shops. I came up empty.

I went home wondering what happened that Saturday afternoon. Was I hallucinating? Brad was also mystified, but for months teased me about the incident. Whenever I was searching for a hard-to-find book, he'd say "What about Morse's? I bet old man Morse has it."

The joke eventually grew stale and we forgot about the "vanishing bookstore."

And then one afternoon last March, I bought a book featuring old New York photos, hoping it would distract me from the depressing COVID news.

That night, wrapped in a thick wool blanket, I sat in my kitchen casually thumbing through my new purchase. It was then that I saw "*The Photograph*."

continued



I froze for a moment before shrieking: “It’s Mosk’s Book Store!” Brad charged in from the living room. “This is the store,” I stammered.

“What store?” said Brad.

“Don’t you remember? The *vanishing bookstore*. It was called Mosk’s.”

“Bookstore?” said Brad, “Mosk’s? What are you talking about?”

Finally, he put it together. “You mean that old book shop you thought you saw years ago?” I nodded and he grabbed the book from my trembling hands.

“Pam,” he said, “According to this book, Mosk’s Book Store closed during the 1930s. The owner, Julius, died a few years later. You were never in that store.”

I closed my eyes. Where the hell was I that snowy Saturday afternoon? I’ve been asking myself that same question every day since I found that photo. And whenever it snows, I find myself south of Union Square — just walking and thinking — with \$30 tucked deeply in my pocket.

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A VILLAGE AND AN OLIVE TREE

Nina Dioletis

The horrendous fires in Greece, particularly on the island of Evia, were in the news this past summer, and you may recall seeing the picture of the village of Limni in the August 24th edition of *Time Magazine*. Limni is the village of my father's birth, the village I have visited frequently and learned to love.

The once-lush pine forests on the twisty, narrow mountain road from Evia's provincial capital are now gone, charred ghosts smelling of smoke rather than pine. My cousin once gave me a jar of local honey with a faint taste of pine; the pleasant taste is gone now, replaced by the bitter taste of ashes.

After passing through a half dozen dusty villages whose populations dwindled with decreasing opportunities, the road gently descends the mountains and hugs the coast of the Evian gulf, the body of water separating Evia from the mainland. The road makes a last gentle turn, and you've arrived.

You don't get a sense of the scope of the village until you reach the coast. Limni is constructed like an amphitheater with houses built up into the once green but now charred hillsides. The farmers used to descend them with their loaded donkeys, singing the quality and prices of their fresh produce. How I used to love hearing this morning symphony!

About seven miles down the road from Limni, along the coast, was a 2,500-year-old olive tree. It flourished during the age of Pericles, the building of Stonehenge, the Italian Renaissance, and Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. But it could not defend itself against the arsonist who lit the match destroying this ancient treasure.

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JOY, HAPPINESS, AND WELL-BEING

Sandy Frank

What does the word “joy” really mean? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as “the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires ... the expression or exhibition of such emotion ... a state of happiness.” The world’s definition of joy is often synonymous with its definition of happiness, for both of these emotions are dependent on what does or what will happen.

Joy may be thought of as the emotional dimension of “the good life,” one that is both going well and is being well lived. Some might argue that living the good life means behaving in a way that fulfills you, that adds a sense of purpose, and thus happiness or joy to your life. So I guess we can agree that the word “joy” evokes feelings of happiness and well-being.

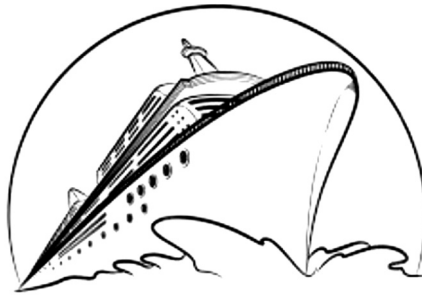
When I was contemplating an early retirement I needed to define what I wanted, though God often may laugh, out of the remainder of my life. I knew I wanted to travel, to experience new places, people and cultures. I wanted to grow and learn, to expand my horizons, to read both the classics and my beloved mysteries and thrillers. I wanted to become a better cook and baker. I wanted to stay active — I love long walks, swimming, antiquing and bargain hunting (my husband calls my acquisition seeking “the thrill of the hunt”). I wanted to declutter my apartment, and the list continues ...

I have several good friends who have said that the Covid-19 period has been a wasted time. They say, “I didn’t get to do what I wanted.” I would agree that there were restrictions on my movements and personal interactions, but “wasted” doesn’t enter my thoughts. I didn’t get to travel, but I became an armchair traveler. I saved a fortune on not being able to experience “the thrill of the hunt,” and thankfully Amazon and on-line shopping really helped. I hadn’t gone swimming and my body did complain of this loss, and I wasn’t able to visit in person with friends and family who I really wanted to hug and hold near.

However, I prepared, cooked and we really enjoyed the meals I made, although I truly dislike the clean-up part of meal preparation. I would much rather have frequented our favorite restaurants, but unfortunately many were closed or out of business ...

Fyodor Dostoevsky said: “Man only likes to count his troubles, but he does not count his joys.” Life holds so many opportunities that we can seek out and enjoy. I am so grateful for the very many wonderful things in my life. I am grateful for my soulmate and best friend, my friends and family, my ability to learn and grow, to take long walks, and to have Quest stimulate those intellectually curious members among us who want to expand our horizons. But I have to admit that I am still longing for that world cruise!

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TANTALUS NO MORE

Ruth Ward

So, I finally decided to join some dear Quest friends for two weeks at Chautauqua, a summer adult learning program in southwestern New York. I had longed to become a Chautauquan, but life continued to throw obstacles in my path. Finally, after three years of pining for this forested haven, I got to make my move.

On day one, I wended my way to Chautauqua's Hurlbut building for my early morning meditation class. Such a grey sky, threatening to storm, as it had for the past three days. Depressing, but my objective was to remain cheerful.

I sat in a classroom with a dozen other seniors. Now my goal was to think of nothing. However, despite my efforts, a memory took shape in my mind. I was walking with a group of five-year-olds in the Macy's Day Parade, all holding a rope to keep us aligned. Happily sandwiched between Katy and Mary, I felt the band music well up in my chest. "What joy!" I thought, as I peered at the turkey blimp floating in a bright blue sky. Just then my little club was overtaken by the First Thanksgiving Float, the most spectacular sight I'd ever seen. There were children seated on bales of straw in Pilgrim hats and indigenous headdresses, and a girl my age was costumed as an Indian princess I later learned was Pocahontas. My chest throbbed its desire to be that girl. Po-ca-hon-tas! A dark wind whispered it would never happen.

As my breath quickened, I realized I was still in my meditation class. With still closed eyes, I saw a squad of high school cheerleaders shouting and kicking rhythmically, in uniform and in unison. How I wanted to join them! They were yelling cheers without worrying about modulating the volume from soft to loud, and they were thrusting their legs as high as they could without a concern for sustaining the high point. These girls were always in the mainstream, in the midst of athletic competence. They were not hyper-emotional and moody like me; no, they were too busy leading cheers. I approached the group in the hopes of joining, but they just continued their routine. As tears assembled in the outer corners of my eyes, the image dissolved and I was again sitting on a folding chair in the meditation room.

Keeping my eyes tight shut, I watched my breath decelerate. Soon my childhood friend Myrna appeared, nursing her infant son Howard. She was surrounded by baby furniture: a bassinet, a crib, a mobile, a car seat. Interspersed were baby clothes, bibs, blankets, and toys. “Myrna,” I cried, “how did you do this so quickly? Sydney and I have been trying for years — calendar scrutiny, regular weight maintenance, coitus before, during, and after ovulation, fertility shots, everything, but to no avail.” “I did nothing special,” she said, unaware of her comment’s sting. “When it’s your time it will happen.” As she smiled down on her nursling, I tried hard to believe her prediction.

When her image disappeared, I gave up trying to think of nothing and I let myself reflect on the scenes I had just witnessed. Wanting to be Pocahontas, to join the cheerleading squad, to have a baby, these reflected desires whose fulfillment had always been out of reach. This reminded me of Tantalus, a Greek mythological figure who was the rich but wicked king of Sipylus. For attempting to serve his own son at a feast with the gods, he was punished by Zeus to forever go thirsty and hungry in Hades despite being stood in a pool of water and almost within reach of a fruit tree.

I was neither rich nor wicked, nor did I have a child to serve up to anyone, but I could relate to desiring things that were always just out of reach. The irony was that over time, my life had radically improved. I now dress up as Pocahontas every Halloween, and cheer “Go Giants!” at football games at the Met Life Stadium in East Rutherford . . . in the company of my two adult sons.

The meditation bell rang the end of the session, and I stood up to go home. Trekking back, I realized that what had been so painful to me was not knowing whether my desires would ever be satisfied. Had I known, I could have waited longer with much greater patience and calm.

Raindrops on my nose made me look up to the skies, where a timid sun was trying to pierce several ominous clouds. I had forgotten my umbrella, but why fret? Uncertainty was now my watchword, although I was hoping for the best. After all, if the best didn’t materialize, I’d still have quite a track record for which to be grateful.

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WESTBETH I

Zé'eva Cohen

The early 1970s were a turning point in my life and moving to Westbeth Artists Housing with my former husband, Peter Ludwig, was central. My good luck struck twice: In addition to moving to my dream home to live among fellow artists in the bohemian West Village at a price we could afford, out of the blue I was hired by Joe Papp, founder and artistic director of the Public Theater, to choreograph the play *Mod Donna*, a women's lib musical he was directing. That the budding of my professional career and finding the ideal place to live coincided felt like a miracle.

We were on the ground floor in a studio apartment next to our neighbors, Bruce and Francia Tobacman-Smith on one side, and Jon D'Orazio on the other, all of whom are still living at Westbeth. We were young artists from different disciplines, and it has been a pleasure to witness how each of us has grown and developed as professionals over the years.

Westbeth, which had been converted from being the home of the Bell Laboratories to a nonprofit living and working place for artists, was still not fully inhabited. There were a lot of half-built cavernous spaces, some of which became preferred spots for wild parties as well as refuges for wild critters. I remember, when we first moved to Westbeth, knocking on Bruce and Francia's door to inquire if they were experiencing mice traversing their home and to ask what to do about it. The upshot was that Peter went to get the cat from his parents' Brooklyn home. But when the cat saw the mice, he went into hiding.

One day, after an early performance of Westbeth dancers at the not-fully-constructed Cunningham Studio on the eleventh floor, I was approached by a volunteer lawyer for the arts. For over two years he helped me incorporate and become a not-for-profit organization. That made it possible to obtain grants from the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts, without which my one woman shows of the 1970s and 1980s would not have been possible.

My long and satisfying career as a dance artist was thus launched.

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WALKER IN THE CITY

Joan Haladay

Walking is part of my identity. I've been a grand, glorious, joyous, serendipitous walker. Taken the longest route to anywhere and nowhere. Could never resist a detour. Every artery beckoned, so I walked parks, avenues, trails, step streets, alleyways, corridors, even rooms. My favorite apartment was a Buffalo sublet with an empty room for strolling.

Walking also has identities. Some of them mutate; now I walk accompanied by a wheeled vehicle. It keeps me upright but changes walk tempo and length. Once I joined Shorewalkers' 32-miles-or-so-perimeter-of-Manhattan saunter, but now twenty blocks feels like an expedition. Nevertheless, I still walk with mind, eyes, ears, imagination, and memories as much as with my feet. While walking is motion and distance covered, it's also a stance, a way of looking out and relating to the world; a series of perceptions.

Walker use can be a story collect. Walkers function like babies, dogs, and rain. They remove barriers and people approach to advise and speculate. Solicitations to join religious gatherings proliferate. Fourteenth Street and Eighth Avenue has been a pivotal advice spot:

"Gimme your address and I'll run over with some tennis balls for your walker."

Once, a voice called out, "This does not detract from your beauty." The gentleman waved theatrically at the walker and narrowly escaped collision with a tree.

Later, a dancing street entertainer opined: "I know what happened. Rough sex."

I cracked up as a passerby snickered and the street entertainer added: "Hey, could be wrong. But this is New York."

Walkers also provoke nostalgia about prior "vehicles." In a grittier 1970s city, I briefly shared car ownership. This included hood-and-roof footprints, slashed tires, broken windows, and rifled glove compartments. Then the license plate was gone.

While waiting at the DMV, there was time to imagine car tales. When my turn came, the clerk was skeptical:

"So is it really worth owning a car in the City?"

"I don't even drive."

continued

"Then, why the car?"

"It's very American. I'm secure when I look out the window and see it."

Improvised and alternative vehicles were prevalent. A silver-haired jock arrived everywhere on roller skates, never removed them, and performed calisthenics during political meetings. A disabled man half swam/half arm walked on a homemade body board. A multitasking Riverside jogger pushed a stroller with an open newspaper on the handles and a dog tied on. A trio of fluff ball cats posed on a decreasing-in-size tricycle train.

Subway elevators have particular quirks and egalitarianism: Carriages bearing babies, toddlers, and dogs dominate.

"Whadja do to yuh leg?" kids ask while inspecting the walker.

Load pushers with beverage supplies, oversize purchases, musical instruments, luggage, and bikes enter helter-skelter or like professional packers, directing people and objects into maximum-fit format.

Elevator life can produce quick intimacies. I enter with a man and another woman who start talking.

"Ah, now, I have two girlfriends."

"Can I ask a question?"

"Sure."

"Can you spare some change?"

"Sorry lady, I'm going to the shelter."

She turned toward me.

"Aw, fuhgeddaboudit."

Then, back to him.

"I guess she's goin' with you."

Another day, a waiting Latina glowed.

"I comin' from hospital. Three weeks in coma."

"A coma?"

"My boyfriend ... I don't wanna have sex with no more. So he beat me up."

"No!"

She tossed her hair coquettishly and radiated a triumphant smile.

"My birthday today. I sixty."

She skipped out the door and made my day.

Returning home, a limping man pushed a cart tower of empty cans. We chatted.

"You a poet?" he asked.

“When I was younger. Why? Are you?”

“Nah. You just seem like a poet.”

He started up Broadway toward recycling machines and made my night.

The A express train often turns into a performance stage for dance, music, poetry, and homelessness narratives. Sometimes, there are other dramas.

A woman joined me. Aqua eye shadow accented already intense eyes.

“I know what it’s like. I used one too. Domestic abuse. Can I give you a hug? I’ve learned to ask first.”

She returned to a companion but emerged at my station to wave goodbye. A moment of solidarity on her side, vigilance against further abuse of self or other.

When passersby opine, I sometimes ask: Are you an inventor? Do you know one? A winged walker would be appreciated. I tell doctors too: If you can’t give me good feet, I’ll take wings.

“Treat it like an accessory” my dentist’s assistant counselled more pragmatically. “Give it a facelift. Paint it. Add flowers.”

Fantasy walkers rise above needs and the city. Enter realms of flying carpets and sky walking. While my inner walker is purple or spotted, I’ve left the outer one au naturel except for a light. Though I still imagine my winged, royal purple, glow-in-the-dark walker bridging the gap between function and imagination.

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COMPUTER BLUES

Betty Farber

After visiting twins who grow cuter and cuter,
I come home to the messages on my computer.
Looking for news, returning from travel,
I'm panning for gold, and just finding gravel:
Promotions, investments, increasing your wealth,
Exercise programs for physical health,
Opera, theater, concerts and dance
I delete at random, with hardly a glance.
Disappointed with emails, I continue deleting.
What's this one? "Dear Grandma," I then keep on reading.
No increase of riches, but it can be told
With this email message, I now have struck gold.

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THE SUNFLOWER

Mary Ann Donnelly

Grows on the plains of Kansas
Thrives in the backyards of Brooklyn
Sturdy limbed rough leaved
Showy but sensible, pretty yet practical
Turning its face to the sun
Following its every movement
East in the morning
West at dusk
Ever smiling
Ever approving
Like a rapt audience
Standing tall in Van Gogh gold

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