

# Q REVIEW





THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

***Q Review 2023***

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**QUEST**

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## A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Another year has passed, with physical and emotional tests for some of us. I hope our literary and arts journal will lift your spirits, helping you to confront any challenges you may have faced.

I would like to thank our prose editor Donna Ramer, our poetry editors Art Spar and Judy Hampson, and our art editor Paul Adler for gathering and assembling our members' creative efforts. I am also grateful to our technical advisor Wayne Cotter for stepping in during the winter to organize this publication's layout.

My special thanks go to our authors and artists for enabling our past to enrich our present and for encouraging us to envision joy in our future. The entire *Q Review* staff appreciates your original ideas and expression, which help us to stay connected by seeing ourselves in each other.

Lastly, I hope you, the readers of this 2023 *Q Review*, will find it relatable and will feel encouraged to contribute to our 2024 edition.

– Ruth Ward

## IN MEMORIAM

It is with deep sorrow that we note the passing of Quest members **Steve Baker**, **Stuart Eisler** and **Caroline Thompson**, whom we lost during this past year. They are greatly missed.

We also express our continued gratitude to **Ken Leedom**, for his generous bequest to Quest. Ken and his long-time partner **Peter Cott** were active Quest members for many years. We have also been informed of a generous bequest by **Stuart Eisler** to Quest.

## 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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# TIME MACHINE

*Bob Reiss*

Look, I'm not a science fiction guy. I'd be the last one to believe a "time machine" could exist. What is a time machine, anyway? I looked it up on Wikipedia: "In a science fiction novella published by H. G. Wells in 1895, he popularized the concept of time travel by using a vehicle or device to travel purposely and selectively forward or backward through time."

Forward, no, but backward... maybe? The "maybe" is because I had an experience recently that, although a little unnerving, turned out to be quite enjoyable.

Google seems to know that I'm a long-time baseball fan. Moreover, its algorithms are probably aware that I was a rabid Brooklyn Dodger fan. A few days ago, YouTube (owned by Google) teased me with "1952 World Series, complete 7th game, Dodgers vs. Yankees." Now, how could I resist that? I turned off the live Mets game on TV and fired up my computer to watch a game played almost seventy years ago.

Now I'm sure I watched at least part of that game when it was played. Only part, because World Series games in that era were played during the day and I was in school until 2 or 3 p.m. Hearing the inning-by-inning scores over the P.A. system at Winthrop JHS in Brooklyn was barely satisfying, so I would race home after school to see the last few innings. This was only possible if Grandma Belle was not watching a soap on our only TV set (a B/W 12" model).

Even though I had not seen the whole game when it was played, I of course knew the result of the seventh and final game of the 1952 World Series. But that wouldn't detract from my excitement about watching this decisive contest again after all these years.

The video began with Gillette's familiar jingle; they *always* broadcast the Series and the All-Star game.

*To look sharp every time you shave,  
To feel sharp and be on the ball,  
To be sharp, use Gillette Blue Blades,  
It's the quickest, slickest shave of all!*

There's nothing like an old advertising jingle to evoke a certain era when it was played ad nauseum. I immediately started down my nostalgia path. The camera panned Ebbets Field where the game was played. This was the site where my friends and I worshipped our gods, Jackie Robinson, PeeWee Reese, Duke Snider, Roy Campanella and a dozen other Dodger stars. The pangs of nostalgia were deepening.

I began rooting hard for the Dodgers to beat the hated Yankees. A few innings in and the Dodgers rallied. Both Jackie and Duke *bunted* for base hits. Why, oh why, did they bunt? Yes, they *set the table* but for whom? For Gil Hodges! Ordinarily a good strategy but Gil was hitless, in the previous 6 games. Predictably, at least by me, Gil struck out with the bases loaded and the Dodgers didn't score. Oh no! Then I got really nervous — Mickey Mantle was up for the Yankees. Oh no again. Mickey hit a home run — I started feeling depressed.

Something overtook me. The fact that the result of this game has been known for seventy years never entered my mind. I was thirteen years old and praying that the Dodgers would come back and win. My Dell Windows 10 desktop had become a time machine.

Sadly, the Dodgers lost this game and the Series. The result hadn't changed after seven decades. But I enjoyed my time as a thirteen-year-old and plan to do it again with another game on YouTube.

• • •

## DAVE NOBLE

*Carole Cronig Abrahams*

to write about the past,  
write a memoir,  
says poet  
Billy Collins

Oh, the mystery novels  
I read when I was twelve  
mystify me now

back then, Dave Noble,  
paralyzed Dave Noble,  
lived across the hall

he read mysteries  
and passed them on to me

bedridden  
he never made it to a chair  
never went anywhere  
that I heard about  
(Well, doctors made house  
calls then)

this poem cannot be a memoir  
since the orchids,  
Agatha Christie,  
Monsieur... was it Pierrot?

blend together, mystery together,  
until I can't get them straight

all those clues  
all that detecting  
hasn't helped solve  
the mystery of bedridden  
Dave Noble

Dave Noble's room was across the upstairs hall from mine. I was used to sharing our home; while the airport was being built for the Army Air Force during World War II so part of our house had been converted into rooms and apartments for the workers. That was during the winters only because, in the summers, the big house became a small hotel and the family moved into temporary quarters behind our garage.

Dave was a different tenant. His legs had been paralyzed in an accident aboard a merchant ship. I only ever saw him lying face up in bed. Doctors made house calls then, and, in any case, the stairs had a steep right-angle turn, so he probably never went out.

Now, when I was twelve, he was sharing our home; his room was around a little jog in the wall across from the bathroom he shared with his caretaker sister, Olive, who had a large room with a kitchen the British would have called a bed-sit. They had a fair amount of privacy because I was the only one also sleeping upstairs and I had my own bathroom.

Dave's main activity was reading. The community kept him supplied with paperback mysteries — we had no bookstore on Martha's Vineyard then. After school I would visit and, in time, I became a mystery fan too. We both preferred the less-gory, less-violent stories with puzzles-resolving-into-neat-solutions. Now, almost ninety years later, the plots and detectives elide together. Some left traces, though.

Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe was strange, with his orchid raising and refusal to leave home. Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot's persona must have puzzled me, too: a mustache like his was unlike any we encountered. In a note from the future, the "Continental Op" and Sam Spade would later frequent our town with their author Dashiell Hammett, the lover of playwright Lillian Hellman, who owned a house on Vineyard Haven harbor.

Eventually, Olive found them a year-round arrangement in a widowed doctor's home. Dave's bed was in the large kitchen, where he had a short-wave radio suspended over his bed. He wasn't even interested in reading anymore, so I lost out on the book sharing. There was a bit of gossip in town about the unmarried Olive living in the same house as a single man, but that faded. I missed Dave.

• • •

## IF ONLY

*Nina Dioletis*

He had had a hard life and it had left its scars upon him. The war had deprived him of continuing his education, his bout with tuberculosis had deprived him of his health, and the death of his father had forced him, as custom demanded, to support the remaining members of his family before giving a thought to his own future.

In my eyes, he was an example of wasted hopes and talents. Once, years before I met him, he wrote sheets and sheets of music; he later locked them up in the cupboard with the music manuscript book I gave him but which he had never opened so it slowly disintegrated from lack of human touch, the poetry of its lyrics slowly dying from the lack of a voice to sing them. The guitar, which he had played so well, hung on a peg near his bed with years of dust on it. It probably had not been touched since I played it years ago. Many years ago, he had read extensively of the great authors of our times. When I knew him, he read a weekly periodical so simply written that even I, who had studied Greek for only a short period of time, could read it without difficulty.

He had become a shadow of his former self. His dreams trickled out of his soul with the sweat of his hard physical work. The voice, which had once sung the lyrics of his songs, turned to expressing his frustrations and bitterness in seeing things improve around him and his inability to better his own conditions.

"You see," he once said to me, "in America, you can buy new furniture, for example, whenever you want. Here, I have to make do with the things our great-grandfather brought from Albania more than one hundred years ago." He was a dying man, choking on his disappointment and frustrations.

But he wasn't dead yet. If he could no longer write music, he could still enjoy it. Whenever he heard a record or a song on the radio, he could not help but tap his foot, fingers drumming softly on the table, eyes half closed with a concentrated look on his face with his whole-body swaying to its rhythm. If he no longer had the patience or desire to read great literature, he could still weep as he lit the fire to burn the family's collection of Marx and Katsantakis books after the Junta

took over in 1967. Democracy had been murdered in Greece, and his fears and memories of similar fascists, the Nazis, forced him to light the match. If he had no pride in himself, he did have pride in his young American cousin who learned his language because she had always wanted to talk to him. He had pride and joy that she had the opportunity and desire to go to college. If he did not have the opportunity to get out of the confines of his small village, he traveled through the streets of New York, its museums and parks listening to his cousin's descriptions.

One of his songs, written in the early days of his recovery from tuberculosis, told of his happiness being alive; now in his letters he writes of his desire to be dead. He was thirty-eight years old, he once said to his uncle, and he could visualize his remaining years doing the same work, in the same village without any hopes of marriage and children of his own.

Perhaps had he been given a chance he would have become something great. It was surely an accident of nature that he was born in such a country in such times when it was impossible for anyone to advance himself. Perhaps had there been no war, he could have improved himself. If only.

• • •



## GRANDMA BROWN'S POSSESSIONS

*Jennifer Jolly*

My father's mother, my Grandma Brown, was fat and cheerful. She liked to tell stories and laughed a good deal as she did. When she expounded on some funny incident from the past, she laughed so much she had to put down her knitting and wipe the tears from her eyes. "Oh dear, fancy that, Jennifer," she'd say. It made me laugh just to watch her laughing and enjoying her own story.

Grandma had raised three boys and three girls. Life was difficult with six children and no indoor toilet or bathroom. But Grandma worked hard to make sure they were all well-fed and well-dressed. She was very proud of her six children and defended them through thick and thin. In fact, she did this with anything associated with her household even when the criticism was justified. In the 1920s, when her sons were in their teens and still living at home, she owned a little Yorkshire terrier that would nip at people's ankles and once bit the postman. Grandma strongly denied this despite evidence to the contrary and claimed her little Jimmy wouldn't hurt a fly. Meanwhile, the postman hated to deliver letters and would peer around cautiously to make sure the coast was clear before venturing up the garden path to the front door and putting the mail in the letter box. Visitors were extremely cautious about coming to the front door in case Jimmy got out. My Dad said that the dog was a bad-tempered little thing but, according to Grandma, Jimmy could do no wrong.

A crisis once occurred over Jimmy the dog when a neighbor said he would "kick that damned dog to kingdom come if it didn't stop yapping and attacking innocent folks." Grandma, incensed that someone would criticize Jimmy, was not afraid to confront her neighbors. "Fancy saying such a thing about my little Jimmy," she said and threatened to have one of her three sons "deal with the neighbor" if he dared to try such a trick.

The Brown clan hung together, and according to my dad, the neighbor who complained was a bit "crackers" anyway, because he not only complained about the dog, but would also hang around outside in the evening, waiting for my dad to come home from work, then bang hard on a metal dustbin (garbage can) lid. This happened even when

Dad came in late and it would continue for some time with yelling and cursing on both sides until Dad, probably egged on by Grandma, got really mad. He said he finally put a finish to some of “that bloomin’ nonsense.”

“I kicked in his damned fence,” he said, “and told him what I’d do to him if he didn’t stop it. That shut the bugger up. He didn’t do it again.”

All of this was a revelation to me. The Dad I knew always seemed so charming, gentlemanly and controlled. I couldn’t imagine him doing that. Later I learned that all of the Browns were charming but had tempers. Dad had learned to control his well in later life.

As for Grandma, she regularly gave the neighbors on the other side a piece of her mind if they did anything to offend her and my Grandpa Brown, who was small and very feisty. In fact, he seemed to find it all very amusing. He himself had always been ready for a fight when younger and was very rebellious, running away from home after his mother died and his father remarried. So, the Brown children followed suit and could be feisty. The rumpus and rough and tumble that sometimes took place in this big family was in sharp contrast to my mother’s more sheltered and cultured upbringing as an only child.

How Grandma came to be as she was, I don’t know. I never heard much about her background, but my mother said that my grandma came from a very large and poor family of eleven children in Birmingham. “That’s why your grandma says, ‘buzz’ when she means bus. It’s a Birmingham accent,” said Mum.

Among so many children, grandma probably had to fend for herself as she grew up. This probably accounted for her willingness to fight back and defend everything associated with her. Now that she had her children, her own home and possessions, she clung to them fiercely for the rest of her life.

• • •

## THE DAY OF OUR LIBERATION

*Stella Gold*

It was on June 10, 1944. We were liberated by soldiers of the American Army. Troops had landed on the coast of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, some 200 kilometers from Beauvoir, the village in which we were hiding. We were hidden in the open, as no one knew, or was supposed to know, that we were Jewish. It was a perfect spring day, made for miracles.

We had heard about D-Day listening to the BBC on a clandestine radio a few days earlier and were anxiously awaiting the latest developments. Rumors had reached the village. Excited men were arguing in the street. An unexpected volley of gunfire caused them to drop onto the pavement. A man arrived shouting, "*Les américains sont à la patte d'oie!*" (the Americans are at the crossroad!) about 300 meters from the village.

Suddenly, most of the villagers, including the curé and myself, were running in the direction of the main road, where a convoy of American troops was rolling toward the center of the country. Seeing our crowd, they stopped the trucks. We all wanted to thank them, to welcome them, but no one spoke English. I was overwhelmed with gratitude, close to tears, and could not say a word. It was the day of my thirteenth birthday, and I felt that I had been given a very special present. I was in a daze.

By late afternoon, I went to get milk, a daily routine, at a farm across the main road. The convoy had stopped again. The soldiers were eager to get some fresh food. I proudly tendered them my *bête à lait*. To my great satisfaction, it was returned empty.

I decided to follow the main road to the spot where it crossed the street where we lived. I stopped in horror. Three dead bodies had been thrown into the ditch, like dead animals. They were the bodies of three German soldiers who had been removing telephone wires that morning from the garden in back of our house. They had asked my mother for a glass of water, and she had given it to them.

Maman, strange as it seems, had no sense of danger. She was fearless. She spoke French with a strong foreign accent, but her German was perfect. She had lived in Germany until our arrival in France as refugees in 1933. Moved by pity, she told them that the Americans were not far away, and if they were overtaken, they should surrender. They replied

laughingly that they would leave without delay! I returned home in a somber mood.

That night a group of drunken men appeared at the door of our one-room house. They said they wanted to check to make sure we were not hiding German soldiers, because “the Americans came to deliver us, the French people, not foreigners like you!” They soon left but had managed to nauseate us.

Still, we knew how lucky we were, saved from constant fear, convinced that soon the war would be over. It took another year, but we were no longer in physical danger.

It happened seventy-eight years ago. Amazingly, I remember that day with as much emotion as if it had happened last year. My gratitude to the American soldiers who risked their lives to deliver us will always remain with me.

• • •

## MY FIRST DENTIST

*Frank Biebel*

“Open your mouth!” he said. I opened it and didn’t dare shut it until he said, “Close your mouth!”

Having my mother with me rather than in the next room might have been helpful. Or not. She regarded men in white coats — doctors and dentists — as priests of the medical profession for whom unquestioning gratitude to whatever they did or said was all.

He whipped around the room shuffling through sharply pointed instruments laid out in rows all the while muttering loudly. I was too young to be able to discern the difference between ordinary speech and ordinary speech enhanced by profanity but was already quite familiar with angry speech. In the chair, I tried to make myself small hoping that he wouldn’t notice me.

Then he was above me, instrument in hand, staring for a long moment. “You have a cavity!” he shouted down to me. I wanted to shoot back, “I didn’t put it there!” But, instead, I kept silent.

He was on me quickly drilling down until I howled out in pain. He then quit, and novocained me up.

Before long, I no longer knew where my face began or ended. Was it all, indeed, still mine?

When he again started mining in my mouth, I realized I had no idea of how deep or far he would go. And, what else he might do.

And, then he was suddenly done. It was over. Outside with my mother, he turned all smiles and charm while giving her some instructions. This delighted my mother while I was just happy to be out of the chair.

In a day or two I got my mouth back; it seemed OK. Everything then returned to normal. And candy tasted good again.

At least three years elapsed before I again had discomfort in my mouth. My mother then informed, “We will have to find a new dentist. The old one isn’t there anymore.” “Oh,” I said. And, when she looked away, I smiled.

My little sister then asked me, “Where did the dentist man go?” I had been reading “A Young Person’s Guide to Medieval Europe,” and said, “Someone poisoned him.”

• • •

## ROOSEVELT, GRANDMA, AND ME

*Rachel Shor*

Born just two months before Hitler annexed Austria, I was, as an American child, innocent about war, but did learn about President Roosevelt and his New Deal. I had even proudly seen him in 1944 when my mother and her mother, the only grandparent I knew, took me to a campaign motorcade in the Bronx where we lived. I had three much older cousins in the army: a high-ranking West Point graduate; a doctor who won two purple hearts; and a high school dropout who wrote fond letters to me, his little cousin. His sister married still another soldier whom she met at the USO.

I recall crawling under school desks and sitting with my parents and brother in our windowless foyer for air raid drills. I wore a dog tag, ate ration-stamp meals, and worried about enemy planes as the Washington Bridge searchlights lit up my bedroom windows.

A cherished post-war memory is of the day I won the school spelling bee against a boys' junior high with the word "caisson." Thanks to the music teacher, I then led my all-female schoolmates in marching out to the Army's adopted song, "The Caissons Go Rolling Along."

Even more vividly and sadly etched in my memory is the last spring of the war. My grandmother lived in an adjacent building with my Aunt Birdie, the only one of her five daughters who had not married. With her smiling face and white hair, Grandma sat in her rocker reading or doing embroidery, crocheting, and other handwork. Decades later, I learned she had left school at thirteen to be a sewing machine operator with one of her sisters when their mother died.

On April 11, 1945, my grandmother died. The next day, Momma took me, the youngest grandchild (four great granddaughters lived farther away) to say goodbye. Noticing the small basket on the kitchen table, I sensed that Grandma had never received the colorful Easter eggs I had decorated for her. At that moment, I understood the finality of her death, even before seeing her body. Then sent out to play in the street, I was further upset and confused by the older kids' attention to another death, not my grandmother's: FDR, our president, had died.

Only as an adult did I realize that my grandmother's life had been framed by war. Born in December 1864 near the end of the Civil War when her German-born father had not yet returned from the battlefield, she died in April 1945, a few months before World War II ended. Even when I consider President Roosevelt's place in history, I cannot mourn his passing as others do. I think of Grandma.

## MY FATHER'S WRITINGS

*Frieda Lipp*

My father was born in 1898 in the Polish shtetl Szrensk. He was a man with a philosophic bent who studied the Talmud his entire life. He came to America in 1923 following his siblings.

At first, he was a house painter and then, after World War II, a chicken farmer who would write at the kitchen table late at night when the day's work was done. After my parents died in the early 1990s, my brother was in possession of his various writings, all in Yiddish, resting in a drawer un-til recent months when he gave them all to me. My intent was to find a translator to help us to better discover who our father was. Long story short, her name is Barbara Ann, and I now have thirty pages of Papa's writings, translated to English, telling of his very early life. It stops at about the age of twelve and was written in 1980 when he was a man of eighty-three. The following are three brief excerpts. Bracketed words are Barbara's explanation of the preceding Yiddish.

In my parent's home, my meals consisted of a bun with half a glass of milk in the morning... for lunch, another piece of bread. If there was a piece of herring, I was lucky. Supper was a thin meat soup with potatoes in it, a little piece of meat attached to a bone... God rewarded me with a gift, which I thought none of my friends had: I had the kind of tateh [father] that if you had put ten tatehs together, they wouldn't have made such a tateh.

---

Now back to that miserable, hot summer afternoon when the sun was burning without mercy. I, a hungry little boy of the poor Szrensk khasn-shoykhet [cantor and ritual slaughterer], satu-rated with prayers from head to toe... After every meal, my mom saw to it that I would bentsh [recite grace]... And what stuck out the most, whether it was King David or another prophet, declares before the whole world that God will not abandon the children of the righteous lest they be hungry and have to beg for a piece of bread. How can it be possible that my good

father, who cannot even hurt a fly on the wall, who is beloved by the entire population... of course he is a tsaddik [righteous man], and if that is so, why am I walking around hungry without a piece of bread? I pick up a rock and go straight to the “hill” and aim directly at the Riboyne shel Oylem [Master of the Universe]. The rock immediately falls down past my head and face. I run back into the house full of fear and remorse...

---

Tateh was also occupied with reciting holiday prayers, writing music, and rehearsing a choir for the Days of Awe and other holidays. When my tateh rehearsed with the choir, many of the balebatim [important men] would attend the rehearsals, and many youngsters and adults would stand under the window in order to hear the singing. I myself was not satisfied by all the merriments. I walked around hungry for as long as I can remember, for the first ten to eleven years until my tateh died. Later I went to the Mlawa Yesheva, where my mother negotiated the best teg for me [reference to custom of better off Jews offering esn teg or eating days to poor students from out of town].

I once asked my aged father what the saddest day of his life was, although I have no recollection of the context of this question. Without a moment's hesitation, his answer was the day his father died. He also told that the night before his *tateh* suddenly became mortally ill, he danced with his daughters.

• • •





## WONDERING WHERE THANKSGIVING WENT

*Marian Friedmann*

I am sure Thanksgiving was in my life before November 1946, but that is the first one I remember. I was ten. Everyone looked forward to the big day. We didn't celebrate Halloween, Channukah, or Christmas. Passover was at Aunt Rachael's, and Thanksgiving was our family's turn, our event of the year.

My mother was in all her glory. The table was set with her best crystal, china, linen, and silver. We were twelve, fourteen, and maybe more. The kitchen was filled with the best food one could imagine. The dining-room table was overflowing. The aroma lingers in my memory to this day.

My mother and father, Betty and Sol, were in charge until one day Grandma Betty was alone. Sol had been a bigger help than she or we had known. The Thanksgiving baton was passed to me, and I continued in her footsteps.

I was in all my glory. The table was set with my best crystal, china, linen, and silver. We were twelve or fourteen, maybe more. Thanksgiving was wherever we were. We were with family, friends, friends of the family, and friends of friends. The kitchen was filled with the best food one could imagine. The dining-room table was overflowing. The aroma lingers in my memory to this day.

My husband Peter and I were in charge, until one day, providing the best of everything one could imagine was hard to do alone. He had been a bigger help than I had known.

The Thanksgiving baton was passed. My daughter Elizabeth was in all her glory. The table was set with her best crystal, china, linen, and silver. We were twelve, fourteen, and maybe more. The kitchen was filled with the best food one could imagine. The dining-room table was overflowing. The aroma lingers in my memory to this day.

Has Thanksgiving become too bothersome a day? Too many obligations, too many controversies, too many forbidden topics. Low fat, no fat, no sugar, no gluten, no meat, no dairy, no caffeine, no alcohol, no politics, no religion. It's a holiday with few decorations, no presents, and only one song. This day can't matter much anymore. Can it?

What happened to the best crystal, china, linen, and silver? Where are the twelve, fourteen, or maybe more friends? The kitchen is not filled with the best food one can imagine. The diningroom table is not overflowing. It is set for one or two or none. The aroma lingers in my memory to this day.

## COUSINS, COUSINS & MORE COUSINS

*Penelope Pi-Sunyer*

Cousins, cousins and more cousins. What a summer! Bursting out after three years of Covid's no travel, we were off to Madrid where my husband, Xavier, gave a talk on diabetes and obesity. After one whole day at the Prado, plus some days exploring the city, we set off for home to Xavier's Barcelona and Catalonia. We were greeted by one cousin and five lengthy and delicious lunches with six other cousins. We managed to wrest out some time for Roman walls and my favorite Gothic church, Maria del Mar, built by strong workmen to counter the Cathedral of dukes and nobility. Then more cousins, tapas and heated discussions about Catalan independence.

Then off to the family's summer retreat up the Mediterranean coast to a once quiet fishing village with a single floor house now expanded to six floors, another house and different cousins. To escape the hordes of French and German tourists, the cousins take to their boats farther up the rocky coast with swimming, a "picnic" of olives, patés, cold omelets, desert, wine, and more chatting. Yet more, across to Lisbon, where yet another cousin works and has a house in seaside Cascais. The Atlantic this time, with sun, rocks, strolling, fish, wine.

And then it's my turn, with an equal explosion of cousins. My sister, two brothers and I are now the oldies in our great-grandparent homes in New Hampshire. My six grandchildren mix with their first, second and even third generation cousins, all youth and energy itself, to swim, throw frisbees, climb mountains and gather with their elders for dinner for forty-two, organized and prepared by our daughters' generation. And now we oldies linger in the quiet. What a summer!

• • •

## THE HAPPIEST DAY OF MY WORKING LIFE

*Arlynn Greenbaum*

In 1991, after working in book publishing for twenty years, I started a lecture agency for authors, matching writers with groups that wanted speakers. I happily ran my agency for twenty-five years.

One of my best customers was Northern Trust Bank. To differentiate themselves from other banks and attract new customers, they had established literary societies in upscale locations like Palm Beach and Beverly Hills, and they hired well-known authors to speak at the societies' luncheons. The literary groups were run by marketing directors, who were happy to find in me someone both savvy about current authors and able to recommend people who were not only fine writers but also good speakers. I would book the authors I represented or co-broker with other agents for writers who were not on my roster. I arranged so many bookings for the bank that the business from them felt like an annuity.

For instance: Every month, The California Literary Society would fly in an author to speak at seven different luncheons in cities near each other. They wanted the biggest names they could get but didn't always have the budget for the high fees required by prominent authors. I suggested that each season they book one "Discovery" author — a writer who was not yet that well known and had a more reasonable fee. In the fall of 2009, the Discovery author I suggested was Elizabeth Strout. I had just read *Olive Kitteridge*, loved it, and quickly signed up Liz.

She was in the middle of her week of talks in California when I got a call from her agent. "Where is Liz?" she frantically asked. She was so emotional I thought someone had died. "Why?" I asked, "What's the problem?" Her agent yelled, "She just won the Pulitzer Prize for *Olive*!" I promptly called my contact at the bank to tell her the great news. She told Liz and announced it from the podium before Liz gave her next luncheon speech.

My client was thrilled, I felt like a genius, we doubled Liz's speaking fee, and everyone was on cloud nine. It was the happiest day of my working life.

When my Northern Trust contacts and I started reviewing authors for their next season, they asked me to tell them who was going to win the Pulitzer Prize the next year so they could book them early!

• • •

## WESTBETH #2

*Ze'eva Cohen*

My daughter, Keren, was born in May 1974, four years after my husband and I moved to the West Village's Westbeth Artist Housing, a nonprofit complex dedicated to providing affordable living and working space for artists. Now that I was a mother, the thought of resuming my highly demanding solo repertory dance performances became a source of trepidation. This difficult problem gave rise to several dilemmas: How could I find the motivation to share my love, time, energy, and focus with anything other than my newborn baby? Should I accept the invitation to perform at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park only three months after giving birth, when my body was biologically still getting back to its former self, was one such question?

Interacting with an artist living at Westbeth saved the day.

Rudy Perez, a postmodern-dance choreographer of note, lived on the fifth floor. I approached him shortly before Keren was born, with a request to learn his signature male solo Countdown. In performances of that piece, I was dressed in black, never moving from one spot, rising from a stool at center stage, smoking a cigarette, and painting my cheeks with thick, black stripes. It was all done in super slow motion without displaying a bit of emotion, and it used to make some people cry. Armed with the non-aerobic Countdown and Anna Sokolow's "Escape" (from "Rooms"), a solo I had performed many times, I accepted the invitation to dance at the Delacorte Theater in September 1974.

Ten years later, after a decade of touring with my one-woman show and going on the road with and without my child, a new problem arose: How do I keep my large solo repertory fresh and relevant became the challenge? I needed an outside eye and was looking for the right person with whom I could conduct a dialogue relating to the clarity and vitality of my performances. Luckily, I found that person in a neighbor, Ellen Marshall, a retired dancer also living at Westbeth. Our first meeting took place by chance in the laundry room. During a long discussion that evening, I learned of Ellen's work with Erick Hawkins' company and her deep involvement with dance improvisation and several somatic practices.

We rehearsed at the Nancy Meehan Dance Studio on the twelfth floor. After a few rehearsals, it became clear that my new friend's honest and sensitive feedback was just right. We kept working together for a couple of years, until I was ready to conclude the solo career and shift focus to my work as a choreographer.

• • •

## GOING BLIND

*Barbara P Gordon*

a black curtain hides me from my window  
a white screen invites me to the world

everyone is coming out of hiding  
but my eyes are growing dimmer  
and they barely see a shimmer

now and then the screen begins to swirl

I close my eyes to listen  
to hear the raindrops falling  
distant voices calling

I hope that when I open them  
the gray will disappear

that there will be moments  
when my writing will appear

I still can taste my dinner  
smell the roses in the garden

press the hands of friends and  
feel the sunlight on my face

if this will be my life now  
I will try not to complain  
but face it with humility and grace

• • •

## PARIS

*Dennis Sherman*

Even before the mid-years  
when looking back becomes fashionable,  
they came to Paris to remember  
and sit in cafes on the quays,  
as one is supposed to,  
with coffees thick to the tongue,  
watching sad boats  
lap the Seine's isles  
and dogs contented to strut  
on narrow sidewalks  
at their lover's feet.

Still showing off,  
he told her about a century earlier  
when dandies, perfectly suited, posed,  
flaneurs, canes in hand, strolled,  
and belles, in bare thighs, kicked,  
for those were the epoch days  
he had read about.

Years later, far from silvered Paris skies  
and the honeyed breath of baked bread,  
they wandered nights after days  
in their own three-room,  
windows barely cracked and  
shelves lined with browning paperbacks.

• • •

## CONVERSATION WITH MY DECEASED MOTHER

*Mary Ann Donnelly*

You'll be happy to know you're alive  
On my walls with your many still lifes  
Of roses and rivers, bananas and boats  
Maybe only a daughter could love.

Your jewelry still shines in my drawer  
With scarves still holding your scent  
Evoking so many moments  
Still so real in my head  
Memories only a daughter would know.

Seed pearls from China, a jade ring too  
Rhinestones and crystals, so fifties of you  
Your school ring's still there and broaches and pins  
Things only a daughter might want.

Your wedding band's not among them  
Lost in the ocean you loved  
Remember Daddy went back to find it  
Searching the sands as you waited  
Hoping the tide had returned it  
How many husbands would do that  
Only the one that you loved.

• • •

## CITY CITIZENS

*Rachel Shor*

I've never liked the  
city citizens called pigeons;  
flying rats, I call them.  
In childhood I drew a picture  
with a green/purple necklace on  
a sidewalk-strutting gray one.

Like squirrels, then also gray,  
now sometimes black or brown,  
pigeons come in many colors,  
black and beige, white and rust.

I'm still not fond of pigeons, or  
folks who feed them. Yet, one,  
not in a black and white tuxedo,  
or rare albino, but a sharp  
tan, beige, and white design,  
was a really pretty bird.

Have pigeons changed so much?  
Have I? Or am I seeking color,  
beauty, in the clouded city air  
of our darkening world?

• • •





## MY BODY

*Art Spar*

Life lives  
Deep in my body  
Below my brain  
My heart pumps

Emotions  
Like waves in the sea  
Calm  
Then stormy

My body unifies  
Ideas  
With the Spirit  
Of being human

I exercise my body  
To feel my heart beating  
Pumping oxygen through my lungs  
Warm, perpetual, almost eternal

My body is my muse  
Each morning  
My body speaks to me  
Emphatically

Care for me  
Days are numbered  
Greet each remaining sunrise  
As if your last

• • •

## CHERRIES

*Linda Rothstein*

The first thing I do  
when I see the sun in the window  
Is to open the fridge.

This morning a surprise.  
I had forgotten we bought  
some ripe red cherries  
first of the season.

We are so lucky we live here  
With a Whole Foods so near.  
That store is a cornucopia.  
Food oozes up and down the aisles  
Even hangs from the ceiling.

In the Ukraine there will be  
No harvest this year.  
They are sheltering in dark basements.  
And are no longer surprised  
When the sky rains bombs.

If they don't die  
they must lie  
in the dampness  
with the screams of the dying.

It's hard to have an appetite  
these days.

But I find I can eat my cherries  
if I do not turn on the news

• • •

# ON WRITING (AND REWRITING)

Wayne Cotter

Write in isolation  
Without boundaries  
Or walls  
Rapidly  
Instinctively  
Uncritically

Ignore all rules  
Embrace every whim  
Allow your demons  
To dance their dawdly  
dance

And let not the  
World's wayward ways  
Divert You

## *The Rewrite*

Rewrite  
Ruthlessly  
Mercilessly  
Relentlessly

Dust off those  
Rules and standards  
And be guided by  
Their wisdom  
Let not an author's  
pride

Dampen your appetite  
Taste each adjective  
Sample every verb  
And should a threat  
Emerge  
From some tasty  
darling  
Kill it! Before it  
spreads

Rewrite  
Over and over  
Till your eyes grow  
misty  
Your wrists grow  
weak

## *Gather Your Arrows*

Now the time is here  
Open your doors  
Switch on your lights

Collect your  
accolades  
Gather your arrows

*And rewrite once  
more*

• • •

## MY YELLOW STAR

*Stella Gold*

Mother told me to remember  
I had not done anything bad  
Anything to be ashamed of.  
Yet I still felt something was wrong  
Otherwise, would there be a law  
That I should wear a yellow star  
Sewn on my coat with the word "JUIF"  
Printed in black ink in the middle?  
A badge of shame for all to see.  
Making clear I did not belong  
With all the French children.  
Was there guilt in my family  
For some crime they never mentioned?  
But my parents were good people,  
Maybe the people in power  
Were the ones who were deceitful?

Going to school on the first day  
I wore my yellow star, I cried.  
When I went in  
My sensitive teacher kissed me  
In front of the whole class,  
A clear statement  
I was as good as anyone.  
Her gesture of kindness  
During the days of war  
Became a source of hope  
That the nightmare would end.

• • •

# THE DAY TWEETY ALONG WITH HECKLE AND JECKLE GAVE FRED FLINSTONE A RIGHTEOUS BUNGHOLE BEATDOWN

*Byrd*

A little black Phoenix  
Wings Fractured  
Spirit Intact  
Courageously Ventures  
Skyward  
Sunlight's Soulful Smooches  
    Rejuvenate his anatomy  
    And his thirst to Retaliatie  
    For all the caged birds  
    That never got a chance  
    To sing or shing-a-ling  
    He lets out  
    The Clarion call  
    And they respond  
    Woody Woodpecker  
    The Brothers Duck  
    Daffy and Donald  
    Woodstock, Road Runner  
    And Mordeci -while Foghorn  
    Leghorn and the Angry Birds  
    Bring up the rear  
    Like downhill racers  
    On a magic Merry-go-down  
    They rip the thyroids of  
    The two-legged sapiens  
    Who have molested and  
    Violated Mamma Terra  
    For centuries unknown  
    But never forgotten  
    From the blood  
    Ash and sludge  
    A Nouveau Holy  
    Boog-a-loo is  
    Being Reawakened

• • •

## COLLABORATION

*Ruth Ward*

Why is it good to do research alone?  
You can stay in your room in the still of the womb  
In the bosom of inaction  
As your mind zeroes in like the point of a pin,  
Permitting no distraction.

And if you want more and prefer to explore  
Fresh minted ways of believing  
You can use the resources of your inner forces  
That lead to new ways of conceiving.

But why is collaboration good?  
Does one plus one always make two?  
Or is there an uncanny alchemy  
That transforms both the me and the you?

The whole is much more than the sum of its parts  
So said and wrote Aristotle  
And so we may hope that superb things will flow  
From a double-mouthed India ink bottle.

Then what could be better than working alone?  
Sharing thoughts with another mind,  
Forgetting one's separate identity  
To leave isolation behind.

And though in the end you may have to upend  
Your idea of whose thought was whose  
The final shared piece will give you release  
From the individuality blues.

You'll realize your mind wave is part of a sea  
With which it will happily fuse,  
And your thinking as one will melt under the sun  
Of expansive and groundbreaking views.

• • •

## FOLLOWING FOOTSTEPS

*Leonard Leventon*

My grandmother always had a fresh steak  
Ready to take out from her fridge  
Grandpa's butcher shop was down the street  
And around the corner

My father followed in Grandpa's footsteps  
I would always joke Dad was a dentist  
He worked on patient's jaws the way  
His Pop worked on the side of a hanging cow

I was a kid when that somehow seemed  
Funny to me Butchers and Surgeons...

I never swung a scalpel or meat cleaver  
The way they did Never pulled any teeth  
With Dad's tools or trimmed dead meat  
From a bone like his Pop with his sharp blades

I have quite different sets of fine tools  
In my office to apply in my corner spaces  
I strike paper with pen  
A sharp point on the end  
With precision to descend

Trim the fat with my cleavers  
Pull some teeth from deceivers  
Free the truth from others' freezers

Following in my forefathers' footsteps  
With precision with my tools  
My implements of precision just as sharp  
Or deadly or life affirming as theirs were  
I apply my art and craft as firmly as they did

And now watch as my own two children  
March in their own shoes  
And apply their own arts and crafts  
With their own fine precision tools

Following footsteps Following their forefathers'  
And foremothers' footsteps

Down their own roads Their own  
Offices and places of work  
Down their streets And around the corners  
From their homes

Following footsteps

• • •

## A BEAUTIFUL DAY ON FIRST AVENUE

*Betty Farber*

I watch the world go by on First Avenue;  
Not just mothers and fathers pushing prams,  
But skaters, scooters, runners,  
A juggler magically moving a ball in the air,  
A couple carrying home sections  
Of a table they just bought,  
He with the legs, she with the tabletop.  
And crossing First Avenue, on a ninety-degree day  
All of the city in sweltering heat,  
A tall, handsome man, naked to the waist  
Wearing only a pair of khaki shorts  
On his beautiful brown body.  
We greeted each other. Strangers no more.  
I wished him "Good Morning!"  
"Hi Mama" he answered,  
And gave me a thumbs up.  
I said, "Beautiful Day!" and it **was**  
A beautiful day on First Avenue!

• • •



**THE MESSAGE FOR TODAY AND AL-  
WAYS: CHESS IS GOOD, BUT A GRAND-  
DAUGHTER'S HUG IS BEST**

*Roy Clary*

Chess pieces face off across a checkerboard field.  
Pawns soldier to attention.  
Knights stamp in anticipation  
Of Zig Zag forays.  
Steadfast Bishops pray for  
Blessings on diagonal thrusts.  
Rooks prepare their battlements.  
The Queen anticipates magnificent maneuvers  
That will ensure the life of His Majesty.

It begins:  
P-K4.  
P-K5 is the reply.  
Two familiars that lead to  
Questions followed by Answers,  
Answers followed by Questions.  
A soldier stumbles, armor is pierced,  
Staffs fall, a fortress is breached.  
The Queen rushes to defend Her Mate.

Suddenly, a horn sounds,  
A truce is called,  
An adjournment is declared.  
It's a message that sits well.

Chess is good, games are fun,  
Imagination rewards,  
But what I really love is a  
Wondrously wonderful HUG  
From the BEST granddaughter  
In the whole wide world.

• • •

## ALGAE ABOVE THE WATERFALL

*Judy Hampson*

Sunlight filters gently  
Between overhanging leaves  
Softening the greasy swirls  
Of algae, as it weaves

The tributary trickles  
Circling dollops of sea moss  
Bubbling onwards, carelessly  
Through swathes of pea-green sauce

Gathers speed towards the crevasse,  
The crack in the plateau  
Before inevitable tumble  
Into spume that foams below.

Cascading, gurgling, shimmering,  
The weeds pour in the river  
Spewing effervescing globules  
In the ever-widening fissure

Into peaks and troughs, they mingle  
Creating scum now milky green  
Flattening boulder-scattered shingle  
Deafening now, this roaring stream

• • •

## FAMILY PET

*Ellen Pober Rittberg*

Who doesn't have fond thoughts  
About their family pet?  
Twiggy the gun metal miniature poodle  
Whose snout was too long to compete  
so loving her tongue curled up my nostril  
when she licked my face  
not smart  
with a limited trick repertoire  
But peppy  
toenails clicking  
on kitchen floor  
whenever we entered.

When she returned from grooming  
she smelled like a cheap date  
with the world's worst perfume  
cloying, a combo of rose and some flower  
my mother's dog mostly  
Mom being a 60s housewife  
home all day &  
bearing her share of past and current woe  
whatever love she might have once had  
for my father long-gone  
seeped out  
a cracked oil drum  
our family's happiness  
a doomed ship.

How she loved that dog,  
Petting his snout softly  
as it lay content across her lap!

One day my father let the dog out  
unleashed,  
saying, "my friend does this."  
That day,  
someone brought Twiggy's lifeless body back.

Nothing changed.  
Mom had already retreated to her room  
most of the day most of the night  
as remote as the farthest star.

# ALL QUIET

*Steve Koenig*

## I

My friends are going.  
I'm going too. It's the manly  
thing to do. The ones behind  
are the weak, the way it will be  
on the field. Our teacher  
pushed me to go. "Paul," he said.  
"This will make a man of you,"  
and so with my high school buddies  
off we go to our destiny.

## II

Smoke is thick. So is this  
leg, bandaged so we can walk,  
stains betray your strength as  
your knees buckle.

I really can't see- we read  
Macbeth in school- Goethe's translation-  
and also Faust, but these stories are  
fantasies. The bombs are real.  
The mustard is real. Nothing is real.

• • •

## NOVEL

*Carole Cronig Abrahams*

the 2020 pandemic disease  
came out of the past

the parts wiggle around  
as if willfully seeking  
survival

yet it is doing what we do,  
accumulating tiny errors

this pandemic disease comes out of a history  
each small change is novel,  
but never fully new

as do we, as do we

• • •

## LILLIAN

*Frank Biebel*

Out there in the void  
Walker in front of her  
Tight-Lipped, moving forward inch-by-inch  
An aide nearby, only watching

Dressed for the occasion though  
All the other ladies and gentlemen are gone  
Nor for the show, but  
Just to say that she still can, and must.

It is lonely out there  
Perhaps to rest  
Death occasionally stops by, but  
“Take a hike!” says Lillian

• • •

## DENIAL

*Judy Winn*

I want to deny that I am getting old  
I don't want to think of diminishing years  
I want to believe that I have forever  
Days stretching before me with no deadly fears.

I want to think I will still smell the roses  
Never unable to get out of my bed  
I want to go dancing and sway with the music  
The notes of sweet songs going 'round in my head.

I want to hug loved ones who never forget me  
I don't want to hear of friends who pass on  
I want to celebrate all of my birthdays  
Not sorrowing over a year that has gone.

I want to keep laughing at the futile and silly  
I don't want to know what the next day will bring  
I want to keep living in total denial  
I want to hear when all the dead sing.

• • •

## MONTAUK

*Helen Saffran*

Early morning  
Sitting alone  
In the sand  
In the midst of seagulls  
One old bird sits near me  
Making eye contact  
Just two old birds  
Connecting

• • •

## DEPRESSION 1930s

*Carole Cronig Abrahams*

Weekly, a little girl walked  
beneath the many clotheslines  
in the grassy backyard,  
past rhubarb plants

Weekly, she turned between the bunkhouse  
and the hedges that bloomed white flowers in the Spring

Weekly, she went a few steps in the yard  
to the neighbor's back steps, to knock on the kitchen door

Weekly, Mrs. Entwhistle stepped across the room  
...surrounded by heat in a brown-sugar-smell haze,  
she seemed a storybook character,  
wide-bodied, in a patterned bib apron,  
as she reached into the oven of the big coal-fired stove  
for one New England brown pot brimming with baked beans

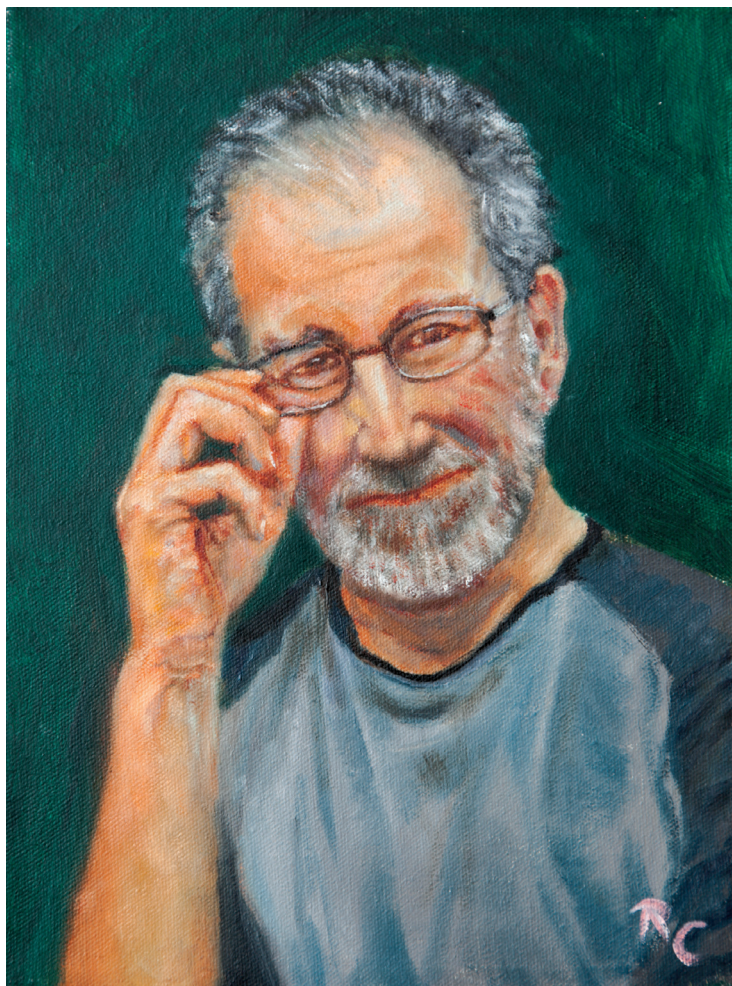
Weekly, Roman Catholic Mrs. Entwhistle baked beans to sell  
on Fridays, with chunks of forbidden pork  
left out for her Jewish neighbors

• • •



Ellen Shapiro, *Morocco*, Watercolor





Roy Clary, *Steven Spielberg*, Oil on Canvas



Frank Montaturo, *Cheaper by the Dozen*, Photograph



Paul Adler, *A Certain Look*, Acrylic on Masonite





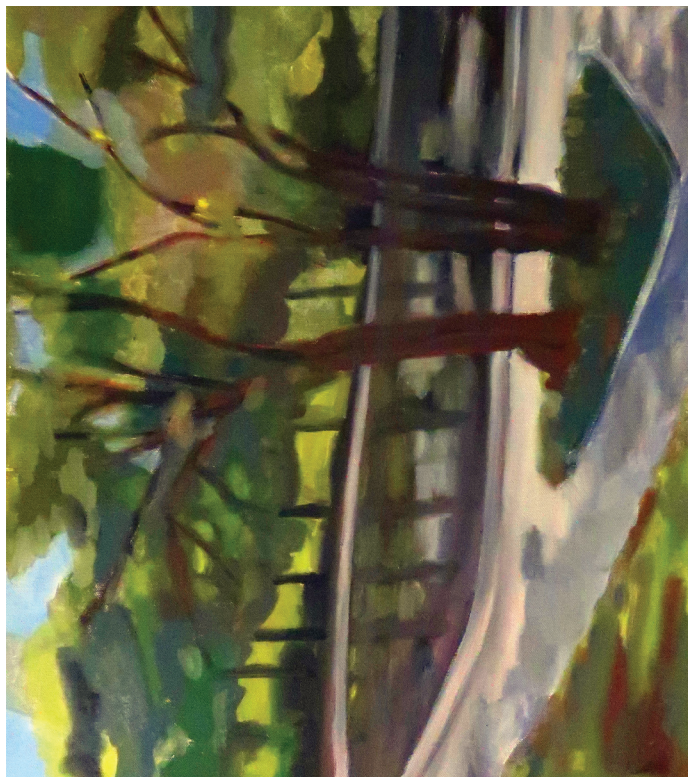
Rosalie Regal, *Colors*, Clay



Beth Callender, *Torso*, Sculpted Leather



Gil Santiago, *Village Tree*, Ceramic



Victor Brenner, *Central Park*, Oil on Canvas





Linda Rothstein, *Cheetah & Gazelles*, Digital Painting





Diane Figueroa, *Flower Power*, Porcelain, Silver, Glass Beads



Helen McMahon, *Autumn in New York*, Watercolor

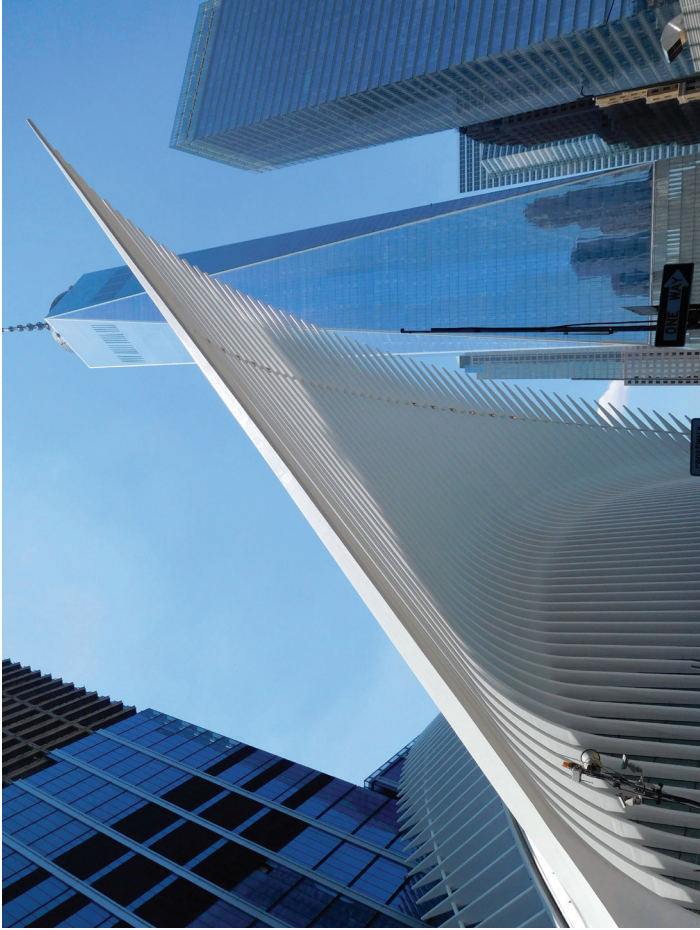


Gary Friedland, *Viva Matisse!*, Acrylic on Canvas





Yona Rogosin, *Dissonance*, Mixed Media Collage



Ruth Kovner, *Oculus*, Photograph



Pete Weis, *Myanmar Dawn*, Photograph





Marilyn Weiss, *The Muses*, Collage, Acrylic, Multimedia

## THE LILAC BUSH

*Judy Winn*

In the early bloom of my life  
I would glide in the scent of lilacs  
A lilac bush grew over the top  
Of the backyard face-to-face swing.

Cherished moments of solitude  
A respite from infant and toddler  
Who demanded my attention  
My babies had their own sweet smell.

The house with the swing long past  
Now a lilac bush grows nearby  
The blossoming lilacs in spring  
Bring back memories of my babies  
Who are now in their middle age.

How short the season for babies and lilacs!

• • •





## I SPEAK NOT OF LOVE

*Dennis Sherman*

from the kitchen  
down the hall,  
the gulf between us,  
as I slice the tomatoes,  
seeds oozing to the plate

nor when we sit again,  
thousands of days,  
by the ceiling-high windows  
and iron grills from times  
in gold-framed paintings,

but when I hand her the plate  
bone white and veined blue  
with hands not ready to let go  
today or the next  
I do use words urgent as a child's  
for the sweep of her greying hair.

• • •

## THE LOCKDOWN - A YEAR NO ONE ENVISIONED

*Linda Rothstein*

Outside on the street  
The fearful are careful  
To keep the correct distance from shadows

It is quiet  
A black and white kind of silence  
We wonder how long we can go on when  
Our very breath is suspect

It is a landscape of the silence  
Of white tombstones in the black night

What to do? Where to go?  
The only travel done now is time travel  
And the only question is when

## PRIDE AND PREJUDICE MEETS THE THREE STOOGES

After seeing Kate Hamill's play supposedly based on *Pride & Prejudice*  
*Betty Farber*

The life of a playwright or a bard  
Can be lonely, dull and hard,  
But I'd advise you (no offense)  
Think of those folks, your audience.  
You don't want to drug or bore 'em  
But can't we have some more decorum?

Bought seats for Austen nice and early,  
Not to laugh at Moe & Curly.  
Actors all, at any age  
Should not be chased around the stage.  
How could the playwright think it best  
That Liz hits Darcy in the chest?  
My Prejudice I cannot hide  
Nor can I here express my Pride.  
What can I do if I'm forsook?  
I'll sit and read Jane Austen's book.

• • •

## AN UNEXPECTED GIFT

*Stella Gold*

Near the kitchen window  
In a clay pot,  
A perfect orchid  
Purple and pink,  
Displays her elegance.

I discovered her  
Yesterday morning,  
Then today  
A sibling orchid appeared.

I was surprised to feel  
Like the proud mother  
Of two newborn children.

From the modest flower  
I bought at "Trader Joe's"  
And kept for months  
With little care,  
I received a gift  
Of pure loveliness.

During the darker days  
Of this COVID winter  
It seems that Lady Luck  
With a smile in her eyes  
Offered me a reward,  
While making no demand  
For perfect behavior

• • •

# SHEET MUSIC

*Byrd*

You

Love of my life

Stimuli Source

Pleasure Princess

I

Your Passion Prince

Duke of Your Desires

Your Sensually Servant

Long for your Loinlock

My Desire to be

Your Bicycle Seat

Generates Beyond Common Carnality

Love is the Impetus

Which Jumpstarts my Libido

My Urge to Marinate

And Make Your Inner Tongle

Is Adoration at its Most Max

FUNDamental

• • •

## NON-SCENTS

*Rachel Shor*

The well-dressed woman  
wore such strong scent  
my eyes teared, tightened.  
Her rose-tinged fragrance  
seeking love repelled me.

Another's lily of the valley,  
lush muguet,  
conveyed neither  
sweetness nor purity,  
but a bouquet of distress.

Even religious candles  
arousing feelings of faith  
freeze my face into  
rigidity, not belief.

Shaving cream's fragrance  
caught in a kiss  
creates my need  
to recede not reciprocate

Though I do love flowers.

• • •

## BETTY'S WORRY GENE

*Art Spar*

My genes are a jumble  
Assorted DNA from my parents  
Most good, some not

Mother Betty went from  
Power Player to Worried Woman  
When she got old

Dad went to the happy place  
Where his brain slowly  
Softened to perfection

Smiling and dancing  
His acorns squirreled away  
Playing, praying, and drifting away

Life got tough for Betty  
Caring for the smiling dancer  
And then he died

It was harder  
To worry about herself  
It killed her in nine months

I got Betty's worry gene  
It leads me to windmills  
That roil my dreams

Each morning I struggle  
To release the tremble  
And calm turbulent waters

• • •

## INTRIGUE

*Ruth Ward*

What is intriguing about my life?  
The mystery of the unknown?  
The whispering dread of what's coming tomorrow  
The fear that I'll reap what I've sown?

But what have I planted that could be so foul  
That, now ripened, it wants to defile me?  
A festering thought that grew into a word  
Toward a person who plans to revile me?

An off-hand remark, a joke dripping snark?  
Did I laugh at my colleague's expense?  
Did I tread on her sensibilities  
And throw our bond into past tense?

And, if that's the case, can I ever erase  
The bruises that now mark her rind  
With smoothing, not rubbing, with patting, not drubbing  
And what underneath might I find?

A fruit-sweet center, a path to enter  
Her fragile and sensitive core  
So, if past infractions allow interactions  
We'll both be open to more  
And now more aware of the life that is there  
We'll find healing in every pore.

• • •

# LONELINESS

*Judy Winn*

A street filled with people  
Walking past each other  
On their way to somewhere  
They will leave somewhere  
And go home to no one.

No one to greet them  
No one to touch  
No one to hold  
No one to fill the hollow  
In their souls.

Loneliness fills the hours  
When no one comes  
When the phone does not ring  
Friends on the TV screen  
Are all there is.

The emptiness is pervasive  
In all the nooks and crannies  
Of the day and night  
They say they are fine  
And go on hiding their plight.

No one sees their tears  
Shed in the secret spaces  
Inhabited by only one  
Living in isolation boxes  
Waiting.

• • •



## FRUSTRATING

*Judy Hampson*

There are times when it's frustrating  
To be searching for a word,  
In fact, it's aggravating,  
And at times, downright absurd.

Do they like to change location  
To the backside of my brain?  
Or maybe just go hibernating,  
Till I want that word again.

I'm not really implicating  
That at times I just forget  
But it is quite irritating  
And inclined to make me fret

When words start vacillating  
From the left side to the right  
And I feel my head rotating  
When I'm trying hard to write.

Till at last it starts abating  
As the words begin to grow  
It can be so fascinating  
Seeing the poem begin to flow.

These words so aggravating  
When they hide inside my head  
Are such a joy, so liberating  
As on this page they form a thread

• • •

## ISLAND BREEZE

Sun Beach, Negril, Jamaica

*Leonard Leventon*

Pelicans flying  
Sailing along  
Hurricanes blowing  
Day n night long

Sky is then clearing  
Fishing boats glow  
Pleasure cruise knowing  
Lobsters below

Good food is cooking  
Along the white shores  
Grilled or steamed snapper  
Shrimp n much more

Pelicans hunting  
For blue pilot fish  
Island breeze kissing  
Locals n tourists  
From their toes  
To their lips

• • •



# CHOICE

*Ruth Ward*

Pro-choice... pro-voice  
Are life affirming expressions  
And yet in the mind of some  
They are ungodly transgressions.

If “choice” is too heavy a concept,  
Too fraught with responsibility  
Then let’s pick a word more often heard  
That will give us more mental agility.

It’s a woman’s right to actively “pick”  
The course her life will take  
To decide if she’s willing to sacrifice  
For another being’s sake

And who but the woman should have the right  
To make this far-reaching decision?  
A self-important person who holds  
Her intelligence up for derision?

Would this woman not also have contact  
With her sense of the divine  
While a self-important person  
Might think, “Contact with God is exclusively mine.”

Who would dare think their connection with God  
Was their sole and exclusive skill?  
We can choose an inclusive perspective.  
If we only have the will.

• • •

## DINNER AT GROSSINGER'S

circa 1950

*Helen Saffran*

Enjoy  
Eating the  
Elegant adjectives.

Chilled Hawaiian Pineapple, Exotic;  
Frosted Vineland  
Sun-Ripened  
Tomato Juice;  
Hearts of Crisp  
Celery on Branch;  
Jellied Stuffed  
Fresh-Water Fish with  
Best Horseradish;  
Clear Broth in Tasse;  
Rolled Stuffed Cabbage  
Hongroise;  
Tokay Grape Ices.

---

Our impressive menu  
is printed on rare  
paper imported from  
Istanbul and includes  
the finest gold trim and a  
peacock-blue silk tassel.  
Printed in masterful  
calligraphic type,  
it is enhanced by a  
decorative scroll  
designed by a  
royal French  
scroll maker  
to King Louis XVI

• • •

## LOSS OF MY BROTHER LEN

*Art Spar*

There is a pain hidden deep in my soul  
Len was my older brother  
I asked Len for a job  
He didn't need me  
Then our worlds turned upside down  
Len got cancer  
He asked me if I still wanted a job  
I said yes  
My opportunity was premised on  
everything bad happening in Len's life  
He taught me  
He made me a better man  
He was counting on me  
He got the death sentence  
He went home to die  
I went to the pharmacy to fill the morphine prescription  
The pharmacist said it would kill him  
Len was terrified of suffocating to death  
as his lungs stopped functioning  
The pharmacist silently filled the prescription  
I was numb  
I've never loved another man like I loved Len  
Grief sits deep  
Loss takes a lifetime to comprehend

• • •

## REFLECTIONS

*Rachel Shor*

Waving to a friend facing  
north where the water widens  
I, in my red kayak, Geranium,  
aging along with me,  
turn toward the outlet  
thinking of past and future.

I pass cackling geese,  
flashing dragon flies,  
small-stacked turtles.  
A blue heron's  
long, regal neck  
nearly strokes me  
as it swoops low  
across the smooth water.

Heading south, slipping silently  
into the outlet's stillness, I escape  
the glaring, golden globe above  
as overhanging branches  
doubled in watery views  
offer cool comfort.

Drawn deeply into  
the outlet's quiet,  
I'm closed in by its  
butternut and birch,  
multiple maple and oak trees  
lining the narrow space,  
trunks extending into  
magical expansions  
of tall and taller trees  
with shapely clouds below,  
reversing nature.

After lingering long,  
I leave the outlet with  
my own reflections.

## CONVALESCENCE

*Ze'eva Cohen*

I walked to the Christopher Street Pier this evening with Avri and our Dutch friend, Jeroen.

Under the big overhead white umbrella like structure, tango music was playing and very few people were dancing.

Following Avri's encouragement, I too danced, with both of us mostly apart and sometimes together, improvising to our heart's content.

The hell with strict rules for couple dancing.

A bit later, an older French man who also spoke English, Yiddish, and some Hebrew, taught me the first 8 count basic step pattern of tango.

While I could not yet figure out where to place my hand on his leading arm, he was surprised at how fast I got it.

Later, I danced, improvising with a woman from Zurich who was such a graceful, natural dancer.

Not to worry, Sally, I danced gently and for short durations.

It was a beautiful evening.

The music and the fragrant breeze almost took my breath away.

Isn't it all wondrous?

I think I am ready to face my surgeon tomorrow and will report.

Good night my dear friend — Ze'eva

• • •

## LOOK NOT BACK IN ANGER

A Villanelle

*Judy Hampson*

Think not of pain, or slights from those you spurn  
As days flash by and love and friendships blur  
Instead, fulfill the dreams of which you yearn

It can be hard to trust, more facile to adjourn  
Than grasp the task, when chance may not recur.  
Think not of pain, or slights from those you spurn

At times we dwell on slights, or self-concern  
Obsessing now, reflecting on that slur  
Instead, fulfill the dreams of which you yearn

This may not be the time when you discern  
A slight, a contradiction, you abhor  
Think not of pain, or slights from those you spurn

When quite resentful, hearts indeed may burn  
And episodes of anger can occur  
Move on; fulfill the dreams of which you yearn

Our lives are shorter now, thus so we learn  
There is no time for you to waste, demur  
Fear not the hurts, the dread, the slights you spurn  
But march towards your dreams, those that you yearn

• • •



## MATTHEW, AGE 12

*Ellen Pober Rittberg*

"Give me a kiss,"  
I ask the kid  
small, tough, compressed  
Bessemer steel  
green eyes  
dark eyelashes  
such a child has power  
secrets  
he denies it with a horse's  
whinny.

"What's in it for me," he answers  
feinting  
hand cocked eyes narrowed  
cheek soft and inviting  
a newborn's.  
he allows me my daily quota:  
one kiss, only one  
I catch him fast and dry and on  
the wing.

sometimes, though  
I don't even approach him  
when he's lying  
on the bed  
hunched up  
buried under a wad of quilt covers.  
I sit beside him, silent  
feel his soles brush  
against me  
I am his mountain  
and he is fierce and kittenish.

each day he goes outside  
and plays in fields in cold breezes  
staying out for hours into  
the black and jagged night.  
for years now, he's been out  
playing  
the larger boys falling on him  
like supple oaks

when he comes inside  
his thousand cowlicks stand up  
he's my porcupine  
he smells strongly  
of the earth, wind.

three years ago,  
he pledged his devotion

and what if his wife objected?  
I asked,  
"I'd kick her out," he said  
and I can see the maneuver  
fast, military, clean.

he's all boy  
I must approach circle him  
a pilot  
scanning searching scanning for  
fewer and smaller  
and finally microscopic openings.

• • •

## NEVER SATISFIED

*Mary Ann Donnelly*

The weak winter sun fails to warm  
so I will myself into a  
“Still Life with Yellow Flowers”  
daydreaming of a host of daffodils  
a burst of forsythia.

My reverie continuing beyond  
to the sunflowers of summer  
the golden leaves of fall  
sheepishly longing  
for a black outline of London Plane trees  
silhouetted against a grey November sky  
and the first white flakes of winter

• • •



## TRUCKING

*Dennis Sherman*

In the summer of 1964, when I was twenty-three, I got a job driving a truck. I was living in Berkeley with one year left in law school. Each morning, I'd get into my Levi's, heavy brown work shirt, and steel-tipped boots and make the half-hour drive to Richmond, where one of my father's clients owned a factory that fabricated rolled, painted steel. I picked up the delivery orders then waited while workers used forklifts to put sheets of steel into the back of a truck. I'd secure the load with chains and spring hooks, make sure I had my maps, and drive out for the day's runs all over the San Francisco Bay area. In each small fabricating plant or supply store, I'd wait while someone used a forklift to unload their order or I'd unload the order myself by hand, sheet by sheet, piling them on to a wooden pallet next to the truck.

For lunch, I'd go to a restaurant that catered to truckers. Fully into the role despite my youth, my soft hands, my years of education, I'd order the appropriate fare, say chicken-fried steak with mashed potatoes or anything else that inevitably was smothered in thick brown gravy, follow by a slice of apple or peach pie a-la-mode and coffee, strong and black. Rarely, but sometimes, I nodded to some other driver as if I had years under my belt.

I loved it. I thought it was the best job I'd ever had. It was real work, nothing like searching for books at the university library or hashing in a sorority or running a slide rule in a white-collar office. I did not yet live with Pat, but a couple of times that summer I swung the truck by her place in Albany to show her two boys. Young, sweaty, almost cocky, I put on my work gloves before getting out of the cab. The boys were impressed. We all thought it was so manly. I'm not sure how impressed Pat was, but it brought in money that I used to help her.

Seamlessly, June bled into July and August. I knew that it was only a summer job, that it was only a temporary role I was playing. What I didn't know was that the next year would change me more than any other year: I would finish law school and never practice law; I would no longer be living single or alone; I would take on the role of being a husband and a father; I would get the dog I always wanted; I would leave the Bay Area and California for good.

I didn't know then that in following years and decades I'd learn about the French Revolution of 1789 and the one in 1830 and the one in 1848, that we would cross the Atlantic dozens of times, that I'd lecture in a blackened-walled circular auditorium in the heart of Paris built during the reign of Louis XIII on the Rue de l'École de Médecine,

I didn't know then that I would stand before thousands of students (maybe as full of themselves as I was driving that steel truck), that I would come to love the music of Bach's lesser-known son the calm J.C. better than the Beachboys or Beethoven, that there would be occasional days or hours I would think of a green island when my heart and mind were at peace and I would think that I was not quite but almost purely in love with life, that there would be so many days no longer as simple as driving a loaded truck but filled, if not with blackness, then with shifting shades of grey.

I did not know then that I would watch a pink-flowering crabapple planted in the park below our New York windows and years later see it fall from wind and old age, that a grandchild little bigger than two handfuls would grow into old photos, that I would never get as much love as I wanted and more than I expected, that I would bury our beloved Poochie Mushie O.B. Bisou Monty, that through loss I would know what I had taken for granted, that I would write thoughts — treasured and personal and embarrassing — in handfuls of small notebooks that decades later I would throw away with neither relief nor regret, that years would pass as full as the thick books that lined our living room shelves and eventually turn into mostly forgotten pages, that I would get used to so much and tire so, that I would not only forget most of that summer of '64 when I was twenty-three and drove a steel truck but accept that there was no harm in the forgetting.

• • •

## THE SAGA OF MY LITTLE BLUE BAG

*Michael Wellner*

In February 2022, my wife and I were invited to a wedding at the Ritz Carlton hotel in Laguna Niguel, California. Following that, we planned a vacation for a few days in Palm Springs, where we each have friends and relatives. So, on the day after the wedding, we got in our rental car for the two-hour drive to Palm Springs. So far so good.

Now, when I travel, I always take a small blue bag with a long cross body strap in which I put everything: wallet, keys, phone, credit and ID cards, and lots of personal items. Very convenient.

When we arrived at our hotel in downtown Palm Springs, we checked in, then took our luggage up to our room (no bellhop available), parked our car in the garage, and went directly from the garage to a Greek restaurant across the street. Again, so far so good.

Seated on a small patio outside the restaurant amid picture perfect weather, we enjoyed a simple but very pleasant lunch. When it came time to pay the bill, my little blue bag, with everything inside, was gone. I panicked, and immediately ran into the restaurant and asked the manager if anyone had turned in a little blue bag. Of course, the answer was no! Marva and I looked at each other: had we somehow left the bag in the car when we parked in the garage, or had we perhaps left it in the room when we first took our luggage up? A quick mad dash to the garage, where we searched the car to no avail, and then a rush up to the room to check there. Nothing! We called my cell phone but no one picked up. What to do? The bag contained all my IDs, which meant that I would have to try and fly home with no ID: no credit cards, no ATM card, no phone, etc. etc.

We walked back to the restaurant to ask the manager to check again, but no luck. So, we got the car, drove the short distance to the police department to report this as a theft, only to discover that they were *closed* for Presidents Day. Hard to believe but true! We did manage to obtain a telephone number, called and spoke to someone who instructed us to file a lost-property or theft report online. The someone assured me that the report would enable me to get through security at the Palm Springs airport.

Next stop, the Verizon store, where I disabled my phone, then back to the hotel to call my bank and every credit card issuer to cancel the old cards and get new ones. That turned out to be surprisingly easy, so I felt a bit better.

By now it was time for dinner. We walked to another nearby restaurant, where we were welcomed readily and asked for our proof of a Covid vaccination. Marva assured them they could see hers, but certainly not mine. “No problem,” they assured us, and we were seated directly and served a good dinner.

As we walked back to the hotel, I had a brainstorm. I had left my passport at home and just used my driver’s license at the airport for my ID. Luckily, I have a granddaughter living in the city, so I called and asked her to go to my apartment, get my passport from my desk, and overnight it to me, which she did. Now I had ID for the flight home and getting home on our scheduled flight was not a problem.

You might think this is the end of the tale, but you would be mistaken. Within a few days, the replacement credit cards and my new driver’s license arrived in the mail. Life was slowly returning to normal. Of course, I had to buy a new phone but, cost aside, that was a very easy process.

And then — a good two weeks after we got home later — my phone rang and on the phone was a male voice with what sounded like a Greek accent, who identified himself as “the manager” of the Greek restaurant where we had had lunch, saying, it looked like I had left my little blue bag behind, and then proceeded to describe the contents in detail. No question: it was my bag. I pleaded with him to take the bag to ship it back to me. And, of course, I’d pay the shipping cost and give him a reward as well, which is exactly what happened: the little blue bag arrived intact, not a thing missing or out of place.

So, the key question remains: what actually happened? Did I somehow lose it and someone at the restaurant found it, and put it “away” for safekeeping? Or did someone “steal” it, hoping to find cash (there was none) and was then satisfied with only a reward? We will never know. But I am much, much more attentive to my little blue bag whenever it is with me.

All’s well that ends well. 😊

• • •

## THE DEMON THAT STALKS ME

Wayne Cotter

Have a gambling problem? Call 1-800-GAMBLER. That's a load of horseshit. Have you seen all those radio and TV ads that tell you that you can win \$1,000 on your first bet even if you lose that bet? Enticing right? Yes, until you read the small print.

Those online sports betting sites have figured out a million different ways to screw the compulsive gambler and entice the newcomer. They are no better than drug dealers in my book.

Instead of including a perfunctory warning about gambling addiction, the announcer at the end of those ads should say: "Remember, over 98% of gamblers lose money when they bet. It's a sucker's game."

I know. I've been a problem gambler for years, but at least in the old days I had to leave my house to indulge my addiction.

These days, I can sit comfortably on my sofa betting on every pitch of a baseball game. I can bet on the flip of the coin that begins every football game. I can even wager on how long it will take a singer to belt out the Star-Spangled Banner at the Super Bowl.

And all from the comfort of my home, a home I may very well lose if I can't control this addiction.

Imagine an alcoholic with a neighborhood bar in his basement or a food addict with a delicatessen in his dining room. I feel like I have a casino in my hand.

The state is a party to my misery as well. I used to drive to the local gas station to pick up my lottery tickets. Now I can just buy them on my phone.

Gambling has robbed me of my dignity and self-respect. I no longer root for my favorite teams. I just root for the teams and players I bet on. Gambling has stolen the joy from my life.

The other night I was watching the Mets game, placing small bets while enjoying a beer or two. Before I knew it, I was down \$500. When I woke up the next morning, bleary eyed in my recliner, my losses totaled \$1,000. *I don't even remember making those additional losing bets!*

Why do I continue to gamble? Am I trying to recapture that euphoric feeling of winning a bet, a feeling I experienced a few times early in my

gambling life? Am I trying to offset all my past losses? Deep down I know that's a fool's errand. The sad truth is: *I don't know why I gamble.*

My wife and family have no clue how far I've fallen. I handle all the family finances so I can hide my losses for a long, long time.

And I can't help but wonder how many more gambling addicts will emerge as a result of legalized sports betting. How many will be sacrificing their families and futures to this horrible demon?

Online betting has provided states with an irresistible alternative revenue stream. No need to raise taxes, just legalize sports gambling and wait for the dollars to flow in. But at what cost to the residents of these states?

For me, gambling has become a form of self-abuse. I'm also hurting my wife and my family. I'm jeopardizing my job and my children's future. I need to stop.

Tomorrow.

*The author notes that this piece is a work of fiction. It is not based on the experiences of the author or anyone associated with him.*

• • •



## PLANS

Ruth Ward

Lisa glared at her wife across the kitchen table. “I’m as strong as my mom was at 8 months,” she proclaimed, “so why shouldn’t I return to my classes after a two-week maternity leave?” Margaret, a swing shift pediatric nurse at Brooklyn Hospital, had agreed, after relentless persuasion, that they could tag-team the newborn’s care. “With my masters in Educational Admin, I’m a shoo-in for the Brooklyn Tech position opening this fall.” Lisa could feel Margaret’s jaw muscles tighten. “The pregnancy has gone flawlessly and there’s no reason to change my plans.”

“Margaret and I are a study in opposites,” Lisa later confided to her belly. “Politically, we’re aligned, but she’s a beautiful suburban bleeding heart; my tough skin was forged in the blast furnace of inner-city public education.”

But as Lisa’s due date approached, her body grew rounder and her personality softer to the point where Margaret suggested she extend her maternity leave to a month. “No need,” trumpeted Lisa. “I’ll be a supermom from my first day back in my English classroom.” Margaret imagined her disciplined, armor-clad partner riding into the battle of Azincourt, lance point gleaming silver and eyes flashing bloodshot red.

Margaret was a reader. Whenever possible she read widely and voraciously. She would have liked to see Lisa correct fewer essays and read more books. The next day, she brought home from the Brooklyn Public Library a novel about a slave girl’s early separation from her family. She didn’t know why she had picked it, but she urged Lisa, “Read it tonight.” That night Lisa read,

*Mima unleashed a piercing scream as the slave auctioneer tried to rip her baby from her arms. Even as a lash cut her back, she refused to put her baby down and climb atop the auction block.*

*Mima pleaded for God’s mercy. The acrid odor of the auctioneer’s body penetrated her nostrils as he dragged her onto the block. “This one will make you a hard worker — in your house or in your field.”*

*Several buyers poked, pinched, and fondled her, opened her mouth and inspected her teeth. Staring straight ahead, she absorbed the hatred of the onlookers: the hardened hostility of the slavers’ wives and the raw indifference of their children. She felt sweat pooling on her brow on its way down toward her eyes.*

*She clutched her baby to her breast with feral determination. ‘Leave ma’ baby; ah’ kin work extra hard if she be wit’ me. Leave*

*ma' baby.' The infant gave out heart-rending shrieks under the enraged stare of the auctioneer.*

*A besieged Mima barely heard the other auctioneers shouting their strident bid calls amidst the chatter of potential buyers, the rattling of chains, and the distant hubbub of the town center.*

*From the next auction block, she took in the sounds of panic-stricken slaves, their hair-raising cries nearly obliterated by the bitter oaths and cruel lashes of their master. After an excruciating time, she heard the ever louder shrieks of mothers who had been separated from their children.*

*Clutching her baby more tightly, Mima felt light-headed. Every day since the birth, she had lived in terror of being sold away from little Hannah, just as she had, as a frail eight-year-old, been sold away from her own mother.*

*She remembered how she would often slip away to commune with a tall oak tree. She would wrap her arms around its wide trunk and cry. Its shade helped her recall the names and faces of her family members sold away. It helped her grieve the past and find respite from her sorrow.*

*She recalled her only slave friend Sally, so beloved by the mistress that she had never been sold away. Sally had told her, "Dey was offer'd \$600 but ma' mistr'ss cried so much dat mass'er din't sell me." Dear, sweet Sally.*

Lisa was shocked to feel hot tears barreling down her cheeks. For the first time in her life, she felt utterly alone in the world. She heard herself declare, "How absurd. Margaret will be coming home soon and tomorrow morning I'll see my colleagues at work."

The clock on the kitchen wall loudly ticked its leaden progress, pounding out the minutes on Lisa's swollen chest. Eons later, when a scrub-clad Margaret came through the door, Lisa threw her arms around her crying, "Finally, finally you're here!" Margaret's jaw dropped half-way open and fell the rest of the way when Lisa announced she planned to request a maternity leave of three full months.

"What's this about?" asked Margaret, reluctant to look a gift horse in the mouth.

"I don't want to sell baby Meg short."

"Baby Meg. Nice name." Margaret gently embraced her partner, as Lisa savored the cool, restorative sensation that was spreading through her body.

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## ETERNITY

*Donna K. Ramer*

She wasn't sure where she was when consciousness returned. She wasn't feeling ill or in pain as she tried to remember what happened. Her mind was working in slow motion, but, fortunately, her memory seemed intact; in fact, clearer, more precise, than it had been for a long time. She needed to put things into perspective, so she concentrated on that night when the darkness was deepest and most menacing and giving her Pandora's box of fears and trepidations an opening to rush from the shadows of her mind to beat her into submission and paralyze her emotionally.

She saw — no, didn't see, felt? — herself running on the path along the narrow river, slipping on wet stones, tumbling into the warm water that roughly carried her farther and farther from home, pushing her into rocks and branches until she no longer feared the life now left behind.

She seemed to have become an intuitive creature. She understood, knew, she was dead, deceased, departed from her personal mortal coil, yet some of her senses were vibrant, others dysfunctional. She felt her arms and legs and breasts and buttocks that weren't there but were channeling familiar sensations; her long hair tickled the nape of her neck, but she had no hair; her fingerless fingers reached out to determine the boundaries of her new existence. But she could see nothing, smell nothing, taste nothing, hear nothing; she could not say anything, or could she? She had no sense of time or place. Was her mind playing tricks on her when she believed her words were spoken aloud. If a tree falls in the forest...

She wished — wished? Could she still wish? — she had her eyes. Her second husband, Arthur, always said, "Donate all my parts but not my eyes. I might need them." Did he know something others didn't? She wondered if she should have been buried, intact, with all her parts still working.

She knew she was alone yet felt the presence of others. Did she actually know this? Did she actually feel their presence? She struggled for words to understand and found her language limiting and her attempt at neologisms fell short.

After what seemed like an eternity — may actually have been one — there was a sensation, a movement. Was there a trickster about? No, she felt it again, and there it was again, over and over, and with each movement her memories faded just a bit more.

For the first time, she was frightened and fruitlessly grasped to keep her memories far from the deepest shadows of her mind. But with the fading memories, there was a little less darkness, a little more light, and the movement hurt, hurt, hurt.

All memories were gone as the light became hurt and she opened her mouth and the sound that came forth assaulted her ears, frightening her even more until she felt wrapped in the warmth of something vaguely familiar and comforting, with a new consciousness and the pain stopped.

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## THOUGHTS ABOUT VIETNAM

*Vincent Grosso*

It's hard to write about my past; now, years later, when I know how events turned out.

When young men turned eighteen in 1965, we had to register for the draft. The war in Vietnam was beginning to heat up. A few months earlier, my high school history teacher had talked about Vietnam. Before that, I had literally never heard of the country. Who knew it would change my life.

I took the subway to the Whitehall Street induction center, not far from 25 Broadway. After taking a physical, I was classified 1A, eligible for military service. That day a sergeant said, and I quote, "write down your next of kin so we know where to send your body." I knew then I didn't want to die in Vietnam. It's one thing to contemplate death at seventy-five; it's another matter at age eighteen.

I didn't have the kind of relationship with my parents where we spoke about personal matters. Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where I grew up, was a working-class area, and the guys in the street were the people I talked to, the place where I learned about life. Children in the neighborhood did not go to summer camp. We spent most days playing ball, fighting and hanging together from morning until night. Many of us got our first part-time jobs when we were twelve years old. My friends were mostly immigrants and they had no plans to go to college. These are the friends whose funerals I went to just a few years later.

I met Anthony Mancuso in kindergarten. He was the best left-handed pitcher in the Little League. You didn't want to get hit by his baseball or his snowball. We spoke on the night he was leaving to go to Nam. He was extremely nervous and fearful of going. I tried to say things will be OK, but I was also afraid that I wouldn't see him again alive. He died when his base was bombed on June 25, 1968.

John Giacone and I would often have a beer and talk about girls. I remember telling him one night about my broken heart. He turned to me and said, "Don't worry, this too shall pass." It was the first time I had heard that phrase. John died in battle on October 9, 1968.

William Kuhne, always called Billy, was a quiet young man. He would listen patiently to my problems; his understanding of life was

well beyond his age. He had a calm manner and would try to calm me down when I was upset. Billy died in battle on March 14, 1967. Anthony, John and Billy were all kids who never saw their twenty-first birthdays.

As for me, I was getting increasingly desperate. I tried to join the National Guard and was told there was a ten-year wait list. There was a rumor that if you said you were gay it would keep you from being drafted. I thought about doing this, but I was afraid it could come back to haunt me. Homosexuality was still illegal in many parts of the U.S.

Then I got word that the Navy Reserve was recruiting in Brooklyn. If I passed the written and physical tests, I might get in. My dad had served in the Army during World War II; he once told me that the best branch of the armed services was the Navy. He thought the food was better and you got to sleep on a bed.

I was accepted in the Navy Reserve in November 1966. They let me finish college before two years of active duty. I was stationed on a top-secret base where the main purpose was tracking Russian nuclear submarines. The base was in Coos Bay, Oregon, an isolated small town on the Pacific, surrounded by forests; very different from Brooklyn and even more different from Vietnam.

That sergeant on Whitehall Street saved my life.

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## SUNDAY MORNING

*Art Spar*

*Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,  
Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams  
And our desires.*

—Wallace Stevens

It had been hot for days. The late July sun seared everything it touched. My waking eyes opened. Light entered the house from the eastern horizon. It was early, and the air held onto a slight night-time chill. It wouldn't last, but it was cool enough to put on long sleeves to work out on the deck.

My friend Bill and I had clammed, oystered, and shared stories for years. He taught me the fine points of shellfishing, carpentry and devices for smoking marijuana. We had both been teachers at one time or another. He was a shop teacher. He could build anything. Bill died two years ago. We invited his wife Diana for dinner and I wanted to make clams oreganata in her husband's honor. I checked the tide table. It was 7:45 AM and time to go.

With my Wellfleet shellfish license pinned over the big red "B" on my Red Sox cap, I brought out the tools of my trade: gloves, trowel, pail, float and rake. Walking the short distance to the water, I passed a dozen cars and pickup trucks parked catty corner around the entrance to Indian Neck Beach. I'm not the only one in town with a hunger for the taste of the sea today, I thought. Shellfishing is the biggest show in town after tourism. Those of us who don't make our living from the sea only get to shellfish on this beach, but oh what a beach. Bill knew every shoal, and he showed me its secrets.

Little Neck clams are so tender when seared in olive oil, and I found the sweet spot for harvesting them. Bill would have been proud. My rake pulled them up three at a time. Today Mother Ocean is the bearer of gifts, I thought. I bowed deeply in gratitude. Life is given, and life is taken away. Thank you for teaching me, Bill. The weight of my rapidly filling pail reminded me I had enough.

I paused to look around. The beating pulse of the hunter in me subsided. I stood knee deep in water fifty yards from shore. Blue overwhelmed me. Only the Islands and peninsulas broke the continuum of aquamarine water and azure sky. The sea offered a breeze that buffered the sun's rays. Cool water pampered my feet. I breathed deeply of the fresh sea air.

My thoughts wandered forward to the setting sun, when the heat of the day gives way to lengthening shadows, and when we'd dine on succulent clams. I will describe how the early morning light glistened off the surface of the water. I lowered my gaze and turned back to shore.

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## A YEAR OF REALISTIC THINKING

*Sandy Gordon*

When Joan Didion's book "A Year of Magical Thinking" was published to acclaim, I planned to read it. I knew that her husband had suddenly suffered a heart attack, and this book was extraordinary in its examination of the grieving process on an intimate level. But, in 2005, my husband and I were swept up in life; in living a satisfying, exciting and totally involved retirement. Somehow, the attraction to what would be a sad reveal of an accomplished writer's grief lost its appeal, no matter how brilliant or insightful.

Ten years later, the period of shared euphoria was abruptly ended and we were facing a new reality, one that would necessitate a total change in location — from New York back to home in New Jersey — and health threats we both knew would have finality. A friend suggested I read "A Year of Magical Thinking" but, during that period, my thoughts and time were totally involved with our new challenge to cope with this advancing disease. It was not the time for "magical thinking."

In July of 2020, my husband succumbed to a body now tired of fighting, surrounded with dignity and love. Again, I was told to read "A Year of Magical Thinking." But now my time was filled with organizing documents, decisions, responsibilities, and the ever-present void in the quiet moments. So, the trick was to fill the quiet moments while fulfilling the needs of the moment, and while attempting to reconstruct the "me" that was.

It is now almost three years after the shock of loss. Yes, even after five years of knowing the end was coming, there is the shock of the actuality of that end. I thought, now, the read! I have completed that which had to be accomplished, I have structured a satisfying daily involvement with that which is important to me, and those I hold dearest have been loving and nurturing. Yes, now I will read, "A Year of Magical Thinking."

As soon as I began reading, I realized there were some similarities in our shared grief and memory, but more so a vast difference. Of course, as I read, my tears were copious and memories vivid. Joan Didion's loss was instant and a shock. Her husband suffered a massive heart attack while

she was preparing dinner. I had a five-year period to continue sharing, loving and creating joyous memories and moments. We were able to express our feelings to one another throughout this challenging period of decline; Didion had been thrust into oblivion without warning! Acceptance of the reality was not comparable. And so Didion calls her memory of that period, a period of magical thinking, where the hope of the return of this man, with whom she had shared her being, would somehow “magically” occur. I was more fortunate. I could accept this finality as a more natural end of life. My “book” title would be “A Year of Realistic Thinking!”

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## ELVIS

*Helen Saffran*

Last night, after seeing Elvis, the new movie, I stayed up for seven hours looking up on my iPad every review of the movie.

There was a lot of controversy about whether the movie was just a rehash of old facts about Elvis, whether it was too garish, whether the actor who played Elvis channeled him. I read about the real Colonel Parker and how he was portrayed in the movie. I read how Elvis' wife Priscilla and his daughter, Lisa Marie, responded to the movie.

After all this reading, I was very confused about who Elvis really was and what I felt about him.

And then it happened. He was there, sitting on a chair in my living room. I had summoned him.

He was very quiet and quite still considering how active he was on stage. He looked like he did when he was in his prime in the 1950s. But then he changed; he became much older, more like when he neared the end of his life, like when he was in the car at the end of the movie and Priscilla was crying and asking him to get help.

I asked him if he would like a glass of cold water, which was all I had to offer. He didn't say "thank you, thank you very much" but he did say "no ma'am, no thank you ma'am." I told him to call me Helen and said I would call him Elvis.

It was a little awkward at first but I broke the ice by telling him my friends and I were teenagers in the 1950s and we were very excited when a new 45 record of his came out. I remember rushing to the record store to buy "Love Me Tender," which I bought for \$1.

He politely said that was a nice nostalgic story and thanked me for telling him. And then he seemed to get thoughtful and I asked him if there was something on his mind.

Just like in the movie, he said he was almost forty, had nothing to show for it and didn't think he'd be remembered. My heart went out to him; I took his hand and assured him that maybe he had made mistakes not being around much for his wife and his daughter, but people did remember him and just the night before, I'd seen the new movie, *Elvis*. I said, "I know for a fact that Lisa Marie cried all the way through the movie and Priscilla said it captured your sensitivity." He

seemed uplifted by this and said he felt so much better talking with me, but he had to go.

I asked him if he would sing “Love Me Tender” for me before he left. He looked into my eyes as he sang in his deep, soft voice. It was thrilling. I will never forget the very sweet kiss he gave me before he left.

I thought he was a little like the Ancient Mariner, still feeling guilty about how he chose his fans over his wife and daughter. I told myself that I probably was being too melodramatic but, then again, he did drug himself and eat himself to death.

I hope all these Elvis sightings don’t mean he can’t die and has to go around forever regretting the things he did and telling his story to others as a cautionary tale.

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## MONDAY IN THE PARK

*Hilda Feinstein*

I first met lovely Isabella yesterday in the park. The warm pre-summer day foretold all the promising tomorrows available for this beautiful glowing baby.

My good friend, Maureen, died several months ago at Isabella Geriatric Center. I made the name connection and decided to write something juxtaposing my memory of Maureen with the two Isabellas: one nine months old, full of grace readying for all the joys of life ahead, and Maureen, finishing seventy years of life at Isabella Center, and passing on.

Lively, little, babbling Isabella is a gem, eyes sparkling — deep blue pools blending into a clear and cloudless sky. Cita, her loving, wise and competent caretaker, holds young Isabella in her strong arms. Just the right degree of tension in her grasp to create a balance between safety and the urge to explore. Nine months of testing the world behind her, many years to follow.

Little Isabella, full of the nourishment of mother's milk and pluck, reaches out eagerly toward tomorrow's stars. Maureen, also plucky and curious, somewhat "Isabellish" in her own life's quest, one that carried her across oceans and time, keen to experience a new world, amorphous and unknown.

Almost a year has passed since Maureen's passing, after a lengthy stay at Isabella Center. I visualize her now dancing near the Scottish moors, home at last, pain free, at peace — where I hope all is "duckie."

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## BED-STUY GET-DOWN A MACON STREET SERENADE

*Byrd*

**Him:** Funny how it all began with p-chips and root beer.

**Her:** Don't forget how we ascended to cornbread, chicken wings and thangs.

**Him:** I feel Campbell coming down on me. Is the fever soup yet mammytapper? Are you ready to mudkick?

**Her:** Remember our Kisseltoe encounters of the one plus one kind! Our merry carpet ride on cloud five plus four.

**Him:** How torrid the doublegether. Sharing lickapoo ecstasy nectar, swimming in one another's perspiration, while riding cloud three times three.

**Her:** Recall do I our honey coated sojourn through the land of misty mellowness.

**Him:** My luscious syrupy mistress of the Hipnotic Houdini Hump , my H.G.H. has hit overdrive Maximus. Campbell has overtaken me. Has the fever morpmetered into soup yet mammytapper? Shall we now commence to mudkick!

**Her:** I too am overcome by Hominy Grit Hornies! It is soup! Prepare your spoon! Do it to me!

**Narrator:** Fifty years ago this story was told to me. It is a Sweet Honey In the Rock Cool Comfort Farm Love Saga. A tale about a love which makes you tingle and twitch, while tickling your gizzards. Their Fun of a Kind Love Affair became the blueprint for the all the way live lovers, and the lovers yet to be spawned. This my dear grandchildren is the saga of your great-great grandparents love for all seasons. Word around the firecamp is that their skeletons were found in a serious loin lock. While "Let's Make It Last" by Funkadelic played in the background.

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# THE GOOD EGG

*Linda Rothstein*

Where will it end? In 2022, the Supreme Court ruled against abortion, in effect characterizing a fetus as a person. The following year, the embryo, frozen or not, was ruled to be a person. Last week, just as the first spaceship of Martian tourists landed at Florida's Disneyworld, the Supreme Court ruled that life starts with the ovum. That means a woman's egg is now a person in the eyes of the law.

My assignment was to interview a typical egg to find out how she likes her new status, but it was difficult to come face to face with the elusive egg. They only come out of the follicle once a month, and after their long journey, they are inclined to be bitchy.

The only eggs who would speak to me were the big, brassy hen eggs, the ones who sold their bodies at the corner store.

It turned out they were rather nice. They didn't seem to mind that they were advertised and they didn't seem to mind that they were on sale. They seemed glad to have someone who talked nice to them. I imagine most people just grab them.

I asked if they had names. They said no because we all look alike, except some of us have white shells and others brown. "Inside, we are all the same," they assured me. They told me there was no such thing as evolution. The egg definitely came first. But, they cautioned me, don't ask the eggs that have been cooked about anything... their brains get scrambled. "The poached egg is a real doozy," they added...

The poached egg's happy  
With the brain she's got  
So let her go on believing creation began  
When the water got hot

When asked about science, the eggs rose from the carton and chanted:

We eggs believe the earth is flat  
Not round, but flat and stable  
Why else would it be that  
Eggs don't roll off the table?

Despite the widely held view that anyone composed primarily of albumin couldn't possibly understand finance, these eggs were right on top of the subject:

Eggs should be taxed  
At a lower rate  
We create jobs  
When we stick to the plate

I asked one egg about children. She said she was too old and added, "Look at my date stamp: I'm expired."

I'd like to have a little egg  
That I could call all mine  
But my biological clock  
Ran out of daylight savings time

All these eggs so far from home, their fate to be broken, to become empty shells, or even worse, to lose their identity in a cake mix.

Hopefully, a Supreme Court ruling will bring justice to these wonderful gals. They've sat sunny side up on the plate and smiled at us morning after morning. Time they got a break. Whoops, delete the word "break."

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# THE NEIGHBORHOOD PHARMACIST

*Yona Rogosin*

Grandparents share special places in our lives. My paternal grandfather's influence on me stemmed more from his passion for his work than from our relationship, but my memories of him are no less cherished.

Granddad was a highly regarded pharmacist in a bygone era, opening a neighborhood pharmacy in Philadelphia in 1921 and running it until he had a heart attack in 1955.

As a child, I especially loved visiting him. He was always in the pharmacy and, while he worked, I would sit at the long, marble-top soda and ice cream counter and order whatever I wanted. At times, my Grandfather would let me use the milkshake machine and I would pack as much chocolate ice cream as I could in the silver container. The machine would spin for only a few seconds before stopping and produce the thickest and best milkshakes ever!

Sometimes I helped by sorting and displaying the newest comic books and movie star magazines; that was fun! I was able to peruse them before my friends did and get the latest on Archie and Veronica, James Dean, Sal Mineo, and other favorites.

Granddad, who was born in 1889 and graduated from Pharmacy College in 1910, was the quintessential pharmacist. He loved his work and his customers. He was caring, kind and warm. His customers revered him and the sense of community he created. He knew all the doctors in the neighborhood, the names of his customers' family members, and their health concerns. Often his customers looked to him for advice as a first line of inquiry before seeing their physicians and even as a substitute for them.

Granddad's pharmacy was always busy and the phone was constantly in use. Either customers or doctors were calling in prescriptions, or asking questions, or my grandfather was phoning customers to check whether they had an adverse reaction to their new medications. No computerized directions. No spam.

On occasion, when the delivery boy was out and I happened to be in the store, Granddad would ask me to deliver a prescription to a nearby customer or two. When they realized who I was, they always said something complimentary about him.

Most meaningful was watching Granddad make many of the medicines that today are produced in automated, assembly-line fashion. My favorite experience was when he made ointments. First, he grabbed a round tin or a white ceramic jar from the wood and glass cabinet behind the pharmacy counter. After rereading the prescription, he took out several jars of ointments and creams from a huge drawer. I was fascinated by the way he knew which ingredients to use and how much of each to scrape off from their containers with a palette knife and put in a mortar. I would have loved to have mixed the gooey substances with the pestle but knew he would say no if I asked.

Using another palette knife, he transferred the ointment from the mortar to the jar and patted it down. He then used an old Smith Corona to type a label. When finished, the prescription was stacked in the order in which it was filled. At the end of the day, all of the filled prescriptions were placed in a notebook and the day's date entered. No computers. No scanners.

Another source of wonder for me was watching Granddad fill capsules. He poured powder on a piece of paper placed on one side of a brass apothecary scale to measure and weigh the powder for the prescribed amount. He then folded a piece of white paper accordion style and carefully poured the powder on the rows of folds.

After pulling apart empty, clear capsules, he used the shorter end of each capsule to push the powder into the longer end, and then placed the filled capsule on another paper. When all of the powder was used, he counted the pills by rows, poured them into a container and made a label. All of this was done within a few minutes!! No premade pills. No pill counter machines.

As wonderful as were these experiences, pharmacy was not my calling. But today, as often as I can, I use independent pharmacies because of their service quality. Sadly, most are being financially squeezed by intense competition from big box stores, low reimbursement rates and benefit managers, pressures my grandfather did not have. Nevertheless, the way in which he ran his pharmacy has influenced me to value healthcare providers who deliver personal, caring service and to appreciate the importance of creating and sustaining community in these technology-driven, impersonal times.

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