

Q REVIEW



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THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

Q Review 2024

Volume 29

QUEST

25 Broadway, Seventh Floor

New York, NY 10004-1010

212-925-6625 ext. 229

www.questlifelong.org

Email: questlifelonginfo@gmail.com

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

This year has seen a surge of membership at Quest, thanks to an energetic advertising campaign and enthusiastic word of mouth invitations from members. We hope this publication will be uplifting for all of you as you continue to enjoy what Quest has to offer.

A wholehearted thank you goes to *Q Review* poetry editors Judy Hampson and Art Spar, prose editor Judith Hill, and art editor Paul Adler, all of whom have fostered our creative efforts. We are grateful to our technical advisor, Wayne Cotter, who has assisted with the challenges of producing a digital publication.

And our deep appreciation goes to you, our authors and artists, who, in recalling our distant and immediate past, have helped us come to terms with our challenging present. Your poetry, prose, and artwork continue to inspire us with your original ideas and expression, helping us to empathize with each other and to cherish our common humanity.

We hope you, our valued readers, will enjoy this publication and will consider contributing to our 2025 edition.

— *Ruth Ward*

IN MEMORIAM

It is with deep sorrow that we note the passing of Quest members **Marcia Friedland**, **Phill Gisser**, **Bobbie Gold**, and **Eva Shatkin**, whom we lost during this past year. While they will all be greatly missed, a special tribute to Eva ends our publication. She has made a generous donation to Quest, and we dedicate this issue to her.

We also express our continued gratitude to **Ken Leedom** for his generous bequest to Quest. Ken and his long-time partner, Peter Cott, were active Quest members for many years.

NOTE

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



Q REVIEW

THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

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Cover Art:

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Watercolor

Helen McMahon

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MOTHER

Carole Cronig Abrahams

My mother, Malka Rudacevsky, was born in 1897 in Malat, which was part of Russia then. Her father purchased cows from nearby farms for slaughter according to Jewish ritual. When he died, her mother had to run the business to support the family. She traveled often, and when neighbors complained that her two youngest children, Malka and Gittle, were “running loose in the neighborhood,” she sent the girls to live with relatives in Wales. The sisters lived with different families in different towns in Glamorgan County. Malka’s name became May (later Mae) Weiner, after the family she was living with, and Gittle became Grace Norvick. When they became adults, they both emigrated to the United States.

My mother rarely spoke about the past, but she did always say that the family in Wales treated her well, though she had to stop going to school after the third grade because she was needed at home.

In the United States, she stayed with relatives in Brooklyn and worked as a cashier. She met Henry Cronig at a holiday gathering, and in 1922 they were married on Christmas Day in a double ceremony with Henry’s brother Tebby.

They settled on Martha’s Vineyard, in Massachusetts, where Henry’s brother Sam had worked on a farm. Henry opened a grocery store with his three brothers, and he and Mae raised three children. Mae became an active part of the community, mainly through the Girl Scouts and a World War II support group that rolled bandages. She and Henry were core founders of the first Jewish institution on the island, the Martha’s Vineyard Hebrew Center.

When my two older sisters were young, and I was yet to be born, Mae established the Green Lantern tearoom in their home. She served ice cream, tea, and pastries. Her sister Grace lived in New York City and worked at Schrafft’s for a while to observe the business so she could help Mae learn how to order the things she needed. That tearoom came to an end when the house burned down in 1933. The family moved to a larger home, where Mae gradually established the Gosnold, a small hotel.

The hotel thrived. In addition to rooms in our own home, bedrooms were rented all around our neighborhood, and Mae and one cook served three meals a day to as many as sixty guests plus the family and staff.

After the war, Mae longed to visit Wales. She decided to sell her hotel to raise money and to get rid of the responsibility of running a business.

She found the ideal buyers, a married couple who owned and operated a restaurant. They were a perfect tea — they could cook and run a business. The purchase was planned and hands were shaken. Then, the husband ran away with a waitress! Finally a new buyer was found, and Mae was able to enjoy a wonderful trip.

Although Mae's formal education ended after the third grade, she never stopped learning and was always alert to new opportunities. She created a mayonnaise-like salad dressing, Cromay, a combination of her names. However, her recipe used mineral oil, which the government then banned in non-laxatives. She already had bought jars and labels for distribution.

Her next attempt to branch out came after the invention of Velcro, which she used to create sheets with easy-to-tuck corners. She invested time and money in prototypes. Just after she had those made, bottom sheets fitted with elastic appeared on the market. Her eldest grandson still remembers sleeping for years on sheets with Velcro.

Along with everything else, Mae learned to type, write business letters, and keep financial records. She was an excellent cook and baker. When I was in the Girl Scouts, she ran a springtime fund-raising luncheon. Her menu had salads made with hard-boiled eggs that had been dyed in pastel food coloring, sliced neatly, and splayed out over the greens. They were a big hit.

Later, when a local woman was compiling a calendar of notable local women, mother was selected for the February page, illustrated by the drawing of her shown here. For many reasons, Mae deserved to be celebrated with a month on the calendar.

• • •



LIFE WENT ON AT THE COLLÈGE MODERNE

Stella Gold

Seen from the façade, the *Collège Moderne de Jeunes Filles*, the boarding school I went to, was an austere, gray structure, shaped like a “U” and separated from the street by a high iron fence. Behind a gravel front yard stood the main building. At its center, a hall lined with coat hooks opened onto a paved terrace. From there a flight of stairs descended into the recreation yard, which was enclosed by a low stone wall. Beyond that lay a neglected vegetable garden, invaded by weeds and wildflowers in the spring. Further down was a large field in which would occasionally appear a couple of melancholic cows or an old horse. On warm days, after the sun had heated its stones, the wall was an ideal place to lie down and day-dream or talk with friends during free time. I remember the minuscule, blue flowers growing through the crevices between the stones. It was a peaceful, almost bucolic spot.

All was not quite so pleasant inside the school. When it reopened after the liberation, there were no pots or pans left in the decrepit kitchen. There was no cook either. Lunch and dinner were served in the *Salle des Fêtes* of the town. This was a large public hall where the boys from the *College Moderne de Garçons* also took their meals. It was a chance for me to see my brother, Jean, and sometimes talk with him.

Once a month or so, I went to Beauvoir, the village where we had hidden during the war, to visit Mlle Lépinay. She had been our landlady and became a dear friend. There was no public transportation. If the weather was bad, the seven-kilometer walk became a challenge, but it was my chance to spend a day with her, have a home-cooked meal, and get washed in a large tub of warm water. I was always glad to get on the road with a small bundle of dirty laundry in my school bag. I'd come back on Sunday afternoon clean, with fresh underwear and a small block of butter to spread on the dry piece of bread that, with a bowl of ersatz café au lait, was our breakfast.

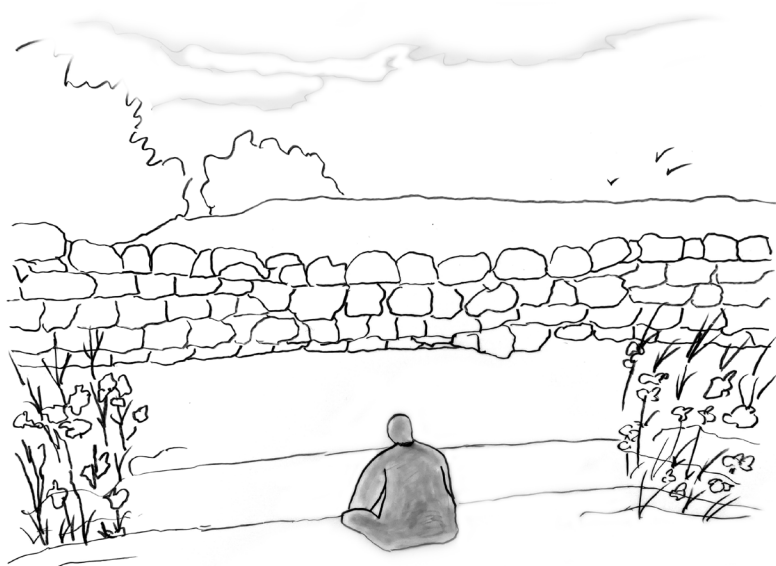
After the liberation in June 1944, it took almost a year until Germany surrendered. In spite of the new accounts of what had happened in the concentration camps, I was expecting my father to return. A few of the boarding-school students had fathers who were prisoners of war. When their fathers came back, students were called to Madame's office. They

would return with beaming faces and pack their bags to join their families. I had a detailed fantasy of my father coming to the school. He would tell the principal that he had come to get me. Everyone would see how wonderful he was. I would be called to the office feeling very proud.

Months went by. My father did not return. I felt it was my fault for having “bad thoughts.” I made promises to God, bargaining with Him. It didn’t work. I wasn’t good enough.

After Germany surrendered, it was official. The war was over, and the municipality organized the celebration. The *sous-préfet* made a speech; school children marched. We attended a ceremony at the monument to the soldiers who died for France. I didn’t feel included. The war was not over for me.

• • •



REMEMBRANCES OF MY DAD

Bob Gottfried

My dad, Bernie Gottfried, was thirty years old when I was born. His life up to that point had been extremely difficult. He was born in Cologne, Germany, on June 13, 1920, and was thirteen years old when Hitler came to power. As a Jew in Nazi Germany, life was very difficult. He was not allowed to go to high school, his father's business was confiscated, and in 1938 his father, my grandfather, Josef Gottfried, was deported to Poland. In July 1939, my dad left Germany with his sisters, Ruth (sixteen) and Ingrid (thirteen). His mother, who was permitted to remain in Germany until her children departed, self-deported to Poland to join her husband. My dad never saw his parents again. They were killed at an unknown location by the Nazis.

In the U.S., he was immediately separated from his sisters and had to find a job. His lack of knowledge of English made that difficult. Life did not get easier for him after the U.S. entered World War II and he was drafted into the American Army. He served as a medic in the army and contracted malaria and amebic dysentery while fighting in the jungles of the Philippines. He was on a troop ship on the way to Japan when the U.S. dropped two atom bombs on Japan and the war ended. As one of the first troops to arrive in Japan, he was exposed to radiation, which I believe led to his death of a brain tumor years later. My dad came home a sick man, and in retrospect I realize he suffered from an extreme case of post-traumatic-stress disorder.

My earliest memories of my dad were of a father who was distant from me. He never talked about his life in Germany, his war experiences, or anything else. He had a very bad temper and would scream loudly when upset. I was afraid of him when he yelled. He never hit me or my mother, but my brother Jeff did get hit. My dad was not very involved in my upbringing when I was a young child. My mother taught me how to ride a bicycle and how to swim. When my dad came home from work, he was tired and usually fell asleep on the couch in our living room while watching television after dinner. Watching TV together was the only recreational activity we shared when I was a young child. I loved my dad and felt bad about all the painful things he had experienced in his life.

My parents were friends with some couples, and my dad had at least one friend who he had known in Germany, but I do not think he

ever opened up to any of them. He was a devoted brother, and the places we visited most often were the homes of his sisters. Life changed dramatically for our family when my dad was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 1965, when I was fourteen. The operation was not a success, as the doctor could not find the tumor and changed his diagnosis to my dad having an abscess. After undergoing extensive radiation, my dad became totally disabled. Prior to the surgery, he worked as a cabinet-maker building beautiful furniture. He worked in our backyard in a four-car garage at our home in Valley Stream, Long Island. Some of my happiest memories of my dad were of joining him in his shop after school. He would stop working and ask me about my day.

His personality changed dramatically after the brain surgery. From being a person who yelled and had a bad temper, he then became a quiet man who never raised his voice. He lived with the tumor from 1965 until his death on April 25, 1979, at the age of fifty-eight. My dad was much more involved with me as a teenager than he was when I was younger. We played Scrabble and pinochle (a card game), and he even went to the movies with me occasionally. I remember he took me to see the movie *Help* starring the Beatles and shouted at the girls in the front row who were screaming as if the Beatles could hear them. After he yelled “shut up” very loudly from near the rear of the theater, everyone got to enjoy the film. Some of the other happy memories I have of my dad are from vacations. Having very little money, our vacations were restricted to car trips in New York State to camp at state parks or to stay with friends who had rented a cottage.

I miss my dad. I wish he were able to share more of his life with me, but I know that was not his fault and that he loved me.

• • •

CONVERSATION WITH A SMOKER

Roy Clary

Smoker: (taking out a pack of cigarettes) Yeah, I think I always wanted to smoke. I certainly did from the time I met Uncle Lloyd Clark. He was a smoker. My family did not approve of smoking, but my Dad did not want to interfere, because Uncle Lloyd was married to my Dad's sister and my Dad did not want to start a family argument. Anyway, like I said, Uncle Lloyd was a smoker. And not just any smoker. Not a run of the mill smoker. No way. What I mean is that when he inhaled, he took the smoke in deep just the way you're supposed to do. He not only enjoyed, he relished that smoke. He let it flow through his body. After what seemed like minutes, he slowly exhaled, and I would sit and watch the smoke comes out of both his mouth and nose... usually at the same time. He could also blow magnificent smoke rings: blue-grey circles that wafted up over my head and slowly disappeared. I was six years old, and I was hooked. I remember thinking that, when I grew up, I was going to do that. And I did. I think I may even be better than Uncle Lloyd, but whether I am or not doesn't matter. He was my mentor. And a mighty good one. I was sorry when he died. They found him collapsed in his garage. A lot of cigarette butts were on the floor. I guess he enjoyed life to the very end. Good for him.

Do I still smoke? Yeah, but maybe I'll quit. I still enjoy it, but they say it's bad for you, and it's really expensive now. Around \$12 a pack. Not like the old days when a pack only cost 25¢. Hell, I can remember when a gallon of gas only cost a dime. Can you believe it?

• • •

EARLIEST MEMORIES OF MY FATHER

Helen Saffran

I have few memories of my father because I was five when he died. As I grew up, I was acutely aware that my friends had fathers and I didn't.

I remember lying in bed beside my father with my arm under his head. After a while, my arm began to feel like pins and needles because of the heaviness of his head. I remember not moving my arm, because I didn't want to disturb him.

I remember sitting on my father's lap when I was about three or four and proudly reciting the Lucky Strike commercial—LSMFT Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco. He was a pipe smoker, and I was soon to lose him to cancer.

Recently, my sister and I were looking at old photos. I discovered one from when I was a year old. My father, squatting, had his arm around me, and he was smiling broadly, and I was standing and beaming. That photo made me feel I had a father, and he loved me.

• • •

EARLIEST MEMORIES OF MY MOTHER

Helen Saffran

My mother came every evening to say goodnight to me in my crib bed. She would take my blanket and would fold up the bottom first and then wrap the sides of the blanket so that I was snugly tucked in, and then she would call me her little papoose. I still wrap myself up in my blankets when I want to feel "papoosed" — warm, safe, and completely tucked in.

I remember a night after my father died when my mother was alone on the couch in the dining room reading by a lamp. In a state of high agitation, I ran in to tell her, "There's a horse in my room." I have always had a fear of horses because of their large teeth. Practical woman that she was, she said, "A horse couldn't fit in your room." I was determined and said, "Then it's half a horse."

As I sat close to my mother in the grass one afternoon when I was very young, a caterpillar climbed onto my leg. I screamed and jumped up. My mother gently took the caterpillar and let it climb on her arm. Then, she laughed as she put the caterpillar on her hand and said, "See, it's just a little caterpillar; here, you hold it." My fear dissolved as she put the sweet caterpillar on my own hand.

In the same gentle way, she familiarized me with the cows on my uncle's dairy farm. I have a photo on my bookcase of the two of us sitting next to each other in a field. She is reaching out to pet a cow standing nearby.

• • •

ALL AMERICAN

Nancy Jones

It is 1944. I am no more than seven; my younger sister is five, soon to turn six. We are at our wooden roll-top desks, children's replicas of the real adult ones popular in the '40s. We love our desks because we love our father. In fact, we adore him. We want to be just like him. We have visited his small factory on Union Street in Worcester, Massachusetts, many times, and although we have never seen him actually sitting at a desk (he is always under a huge piece of machinery "fixing something"), we like the appearance of his pristine office, and it stimulates our imaginations.

We play at "Business." My sister is Mr. Marvel, and I am Mr. Haven. She calls me on her pretend telephone and places an order. I tell her the price of the bolts and screws she is ordering. I fill out an official-looking order form, taken from our father's office. We love this game, and we play it for hours. Our dolls lie on our beds untouched. Mr. Marvel and Mr. Haven are attending to more important matters.

The names we have chosen to give ourselves interest me even now as I recall this childhood game. Mr. Marvel and Mr. Haven are more than symbols; they really exist for us. They represent the status of an upper class in society. We do not choose names like Mr. Mantopolos, Mr. Jorjorian, Mr. Callaro, or Mr. Levine, because they are not true New Englanders. The names must reflect the prevalent Yankees who are at the top of the heap — Boston Brahmins with names like Lodge, Adams, Saltonstall, and Warren.

Our parents have not bothered to teach us Italian even though our father emigrated from Italy in 1911 when he was two, and even though our grandmother who lives with us speaks only Italian. Somehow, they and we have absorbed the all-important lesson of New England at that time. Better to forget Italian. The struggle up the ladder should be the focus. Do not tarry or remember life on the lower rungs.

Our parents never tell us to forget our heritage; rather we are never reminded of it. After all, we live on a street full of real Americans. They are the Ingrahams, the Driscolls, the Gustafsons, the Meanors, and the Davidsons. We are too young to know that their names too are foreign with interesting stories behind them. We are conscious only of our

different heritage. We have just left a predominantly Italian neighborhood to move into the better section of town, upper Burncoat Street. Furthermore, we lived at 5 Hastings Road in the last new house on a very respectable middle-class block. The war is still going on, and foreigners with funny Italian names don't really belong on this street. Their loyalty is suspect. The country is still at war with Italy.

Much later in life, we find out that our young father was not drafted into the American army because his factory of forty employees was busy fulfilling defense contracts. A mechanical genius who reportedly could fix any machine and do the work of five men, he dies in 1948 at the age of thirty-eight. His beloved younger brother Arthur, drafted four years earlier, is dead in six months at the Battle of the Bulge. Returned with Arthur's body is a photo of me and my sister sitting on our father's lap.

The inscription on the back of the photo reads "To Art with Love." Just visible in the bottom right-hand corner of the photo is a bloody fingerprint.

So we play our game, my sister and I. Mr. Marvel and Mr. Haven play at losing their real identity.

• • •

THE TRUTH

Nancy Dobi

It was a sunny, chilly April morning when I was ten, and my brother Jimmy and I were headed for the school bus stop. We had to cross a two-lane road. There wasn't usually a lot of traffic, but there was a blind side, and the road had a slight tilt toward our front yard. We were halfway to the road when I realized I had forgotten a schoolbook and ran back to the house to get it.

When I came out, Jimmy was just about to reach the middle of the road when a car came shooting from around the blind corner. Jimmy saw that it was coming too fast and ran back to our yard. The driver saw him and thought Jimmy would continue crossing to the other side, and the driver swerved into our yard to avoid hitting Jimmy. But Jimmy didn't cross, and the driver plowed right into him. Jimmy screamed and flew way up in the air and landed on our property. I began screaming and screaming.

Everyone came running. Jimmy was conscious but obviously dazed. I didn't see blood. Mom made me continue to the bus stop. I was a wreck, but she needed me out of the way so everyone could focus on Jimmy. It was the right thing to do. Later on, police would come to the school to let me know Jimmy was not severely injured and would be fine.

While the accident was traumatic in itself, what happened next was really upsetting. I was questioned by my family and the police as to the details. I may have been in fifth grade, but I knew what I saw. The driver lied about where Jimmy was hit, and where he was hit was crucial for insurance purposes—in the middle of the road or on our property? While the car's skid marks showed she came into our yard, it was my word against hers about where Jimmy was standing when hit. It was Timmy's mother who hit Jimmy. Timmy was in our class.

Several days went by, and people were beginning to doubt the "kid." Finally, Timmy's mother broke and told the truth. I couldn't believe an adult would lie like that, and I was ashamed for her. She explained that she had dropped her husband off at the steel mill for the 7:00 a.m. shift and was racing to get back home to get the kids off to school.

I never hated her for lying. It was just that she was Timmy's mom, and moms don't lie.

• • •

MY COUSIN LUBA

Frieda Lipp

I never asked my mother, Masha, how she found her niece Luba, her only relative who survived World War II. I have now discovered the answer, and it's a story I want to tell.

My mother came to this country in 1929 to join my father, Benjamin, whom she had married two years earlier in 1927. They first met in 1922 when his Polish Army regiment was bivouacked in my mother's Belarus shtetle, Soshna. They fell in love, but soon afterwards he went to America.

She waited for him for five years, and when he returned to Europe for his mother's funeral, they married. But it was another two years before she finally joined him in America.

She left behind her entire family — her mother, one brother, and four sisters. In the ensuing years, her mother died of natural causes and her siblings all married and had children.

In the eighties, Luba and her family came to New York, lived in Brooklyn for about eight years, and then resettled in Minneapolis. In the mid-nineties, my older brother, Leon, his wife Beverly, and I drove out to visit them. After that we lost touch until a few months ago.

My nephew Michael and I were visiting my brother and his wife in New Jersey. We were sitting around the table after lunch talking. From time to time, I had rued the fact that I had never talked to my mother about what it was like for her to reunite with Luba. She had last seen Luba in 1929 when she was a child; the next time, she was a grandmother. Imagine!

As we sat around contemplating, my nephew suggested we try to locate them. It had now been thirty years since our last visit. Luba was long gone as was my mother. My brother could just barely recall one name. A single Google search later, we were stunned as Michael's cell phone showed us the Minneapolis telephone number of that one remembered person.

Long story short, after excited conversations, letters, and exchanges of pictures, our families are somewhat reunited. I am on the phone talking to Luba's granddaughter, Jenny, and she tells me how it all began: Luba survived the war because she was in the Russian army. When the war ended, she returned to her shtetl. She went to the post office where she found mounds of unclaimed letters addressed to all sorts of folks. Among them was a letter from my mother. That was the beginning.

• • •

MOTHER AND HER SISTERS

Art Spar

Whether she was dirt poor or flush rich, my mother, Betty Zager Spar, watched every penny. She was a tough negotiator, always coming out ahead. My father kept Betty on a tight allowance to run the house, yet over fifty years she managed to salt away a few hundred thousand dollars. She shopped at multiple stores, sales circulars in hand, to get the lowest price on every item. When I bought my first car, she walked me back to the dealership to get the price lowered. When my brother Bob and I clandestinely began giving away my father's money to the family while he was still alive, we had to buy her silence with a hefty payoff.

Despite her frugal ways, she took me to expensive Park Avenue doctors when local doctors failed to cure my chronic infections, and she hired tutors when I was failing a class. Though managing a large family, she always made time for me. I remember her reading me bedtime stories when I was young and driving me to high school when I overslept. She wasn't parsimonious with love.

Her sister, my Aunt Dotty, read me like a book. I remember driving her somewhere and seeing a homeless person at a stoplight with his hand out for money. She saw me notice him and look for coins. When the light changed, I decided to drive on. "You were thinking about giving him some money, weren't you?" she challenged me. "Do it! When you have a good impulse, follow through."

Another sister, my Aunt Ruthie, was a character. She was loud, said outrageous things, smoked like a chimney, and played poker for big money. She also loved me as if I were her own child. Nobody hugged like Aunt Ruthie. She always kvelled in her gravelly smoker's voice how handsome and smart I was. Visiting Aunt Ruthie was always a treat. She worked in a bakery and brought home tons of desserts, and I loved cake and cookies almost as much as Aunt Ruthie's hugs.

So what did I learn from these wonderful Zager women? To this day, I try to be careful with money but don't hesitate to spend on something that will benefit my family. When it comes to aiding those less fortunate, Aunt Dotty is always sitting on my shoulder. These women also helped me to appreciate the importance of family. What Aunt Ruthie and all the Zager women did best was to love their children. There's always been a special place in my heart for my Zager cousins. I have my mother and her sisters to thank for making my family priority number one.

• • •

MY MOTHER AND 9/11

Arlynn Greenbaum

My mother, who lives in Florida, enjoys coming to New York to go to shows, museums, and other cultural attractions. I invited her to come on September 20, 2011 for a New York Is Book Country author event. Then came the horrendous 9/11 attacks. I called her and said I didn't think it would be a good idea to visit. I wasn't even certain the author event would take place, because of security concerns. And wasn't she nervous about flying? Nope, not my mother. She told me, "I'm not letting Osama bin Laden ruin my weekend in New York."

So she flew in, practically the only passenger on the airplane. I was happy to see her and proud of her chutzpah. As expected, the author event was cancelled, and we had to find another activity. I needed something upbeat, so we decided to see a matinee of *42nd Street*. Broadway had just reopened, and I was a little nervous about going to a show. We went out for lunch and walked to the theater, the air still acrid from the attacks. We took our seats and got ready to be entertained. Before the performance began, the cast came on stage and sang "God Bless America." It was cathartic for me, and I started to cry. My mother, although not as choked up as I was, reached for my hand. At that moment, I realized everything would be okay, and life would go on. I was glad Osama bin Laden didn't ruin my weekend either.

• • •

MY LIFE (UNTIL AGE 14) IN SPORTS

Bob Reiss

In 1948 and '49, when I was nine and ten, roller derby was very popular on television. It was a coed game with many well-known female stars like Midge "Toughie" (I'm not making this up), Brasuhn of the Brooklyn Red Devils, and Gerry Murray of the New York Chiefs. Ken Monte, a male star, was married to Toughie. We kids in our Brooklyn neighborhood had a street version without roller skates. Our enthusiasm for this game waned after my best friend, Lewis Lipsitz (now a retired professor at UNC), broke his arm in a roller derbiesque melee.

Baseball had just begun to be televised in 1948, although few people had TV sets yet. We were lucky. My Uncle Leon was a radio ham (W2ACG) and electronic hobbyist. He built his first TV set with a seven-inch screen from a kit in 1946. The first thing I saw on Uncle Leon's TV was the 1946 Army-Navy football game, which was a big deal in those days. Army had Doc Blanchard (Mr. Inside) and Glenn Davis (Mr. Outside), both All-Americans.

Our first set was an RCA ten-inch model, (black and white of course), which we got in 1948. As I recall, all the Brooklyn Dodger home games were televised on Channel 9, while the New York Giant games were on Channel 11, and the Yankee games on Channel 5. I was limited as to how much baseball I could watch. On weeknights, TV programs were Grandma Belle's prerogative (we had only one set), and anyway, my bedtime was 9 p.m. Baseball games started at 8 p.m., just like Broadway shows. So mostly I watched weekend day games when nothing much else was on. By today's standards, coverage was crude, maybe two cameras, and no replay of course. A big advance was the "split screen," where you saw the pitcher and batter on half the screen and the first-base runner on the other half. This technical achievement was developed mostly to keep track of Jackie Robinson and his base-stealing exploits.

Before every Dodger game, Happy Felton's Knothole Gang would have three aspiring kids in the bullpen on the right- or left-field lines, where one of the Dodgers would be giving them tips. For example, Pee Wee Reese would instruct on bunting. "Try to catch the ball with the bat," he would say. (PeeWee was a great bunter.) Jackie Robinson would give base-running tips. If the kids were pitchers, one of the Dodgers' beleaguered staff like Ralph Branca or Preacher Roe would give advice, although most of them

needed the advice themselves. I don't remember whether Preacher taught them a "spitball," for which he was infamous.

When I couldn't watch them on TV, I followed Dodger games on radio station WHN. Announcers were the legendary Red Barber along with Connie Desmond and a very young Vince Scully. Marty Glickman did the pre-game commentary. I only found out his heartbreaking story when I was an adult: Marty, who was Jewish, had qualified as a member of the U.S. track team for the '36 Olympics in Berlin. He was slated for the 400-meter relay, but the American coach kept him out for fear of antagonizing Hitler.

Since radio silence had to be observed after 9 pm, I would listen for the cheers of the crowd, which we could hear from Ebbets Field, seven blocks to our west. Eventually, I got skilled at assessing what happened by the characteristic of the cheers (or jeers). When a roar came through the window, I surreptitiously turned on the radio.

A lot has been written about how during broadcasts of road games, an announcer back at the station would read the teletype and make up the whole game, including fake crowd noise and imaginary visits to the pitcher's mound, when no such info was coming from the teletype machine.

During the summer, when we were outside until 9 or 9:30 (playing slapball, no doubt), we could hear the game broadcasts from portable radios that neighbors had on their porches.

In those days, Brooklyn was the Dodgers and the Dodgers were Brooklyn.

• • •

GOIN' WEST TALES

{Part 1 of 4, each also a standalone entity}

Frank Biebel

Pete, from Australia, Red from Brooklyn, and I were driving someone else's car from New York to San Francisco. The road trip came about because I had wanted to see some of our country and it would end in California where I planned to stay for some time. Being together, strangers all, was a matter of convenience. I needed someone to share the driving and cost, not to mention wanting to enjoy some company along the way. We were allotted a full tank of gas and seven to nine days to get to our destination.

Our first stop was Des Moines. We entered a bar with trepidation. It was the mad, flamboyant '60s, sometimes violent in keeping with the spirit of the ongoing war, with traditional society under heavy pressure. Pleasantly surprised, two old duffers, over a beer, were anxious to hear about New York and Australia.

Red, who wanted to join a commune in Northern California, possessed a countrywide list of hosts, each of whom could accommodate us for a night. The couple we stayed with in Des Moines told us that Janis Joplin had just died. A bottle and glasses were found, and we drank a sad toast to her.

Back on the road. Perhaps it was the next day or maybe the day after — time seemed almost meaningless. We had been driving for hours and hours, largely in silence, over a flat, almost cloudless, sunny expanse. I could see ahead for what seemed an endless distance. Growing up in a city, distances are short. One can only see farther if one can imagine that something in the way is not there. It was a heady feeling to realize that I was now seeing farther ahead than ever before. I began to imagine that I might be able to see San Francisco. Yes! If I could just squint a little harder, that city would surely come into view.

Red suddenly yelled out, "A hill, goddammit, give me a hill. I'll take anything. Everything's the same out there. I'm bored out of my skull. Anything. A pimple. Give me a big pimple of a hill." Neither Pete nor I said anything although Pete looked at Red in a kind of funny way. After raging on a bit, he slowly lapsed into a mumble, then back again into complete silence.

Riding along. Far off, I saw what seemed a black plastic bag swirling about our roadway. As we sailed closer, it became a small black cloud,

almost the lone cloud in the sky. Approaching, it looked like water was leaking from her. It had its own environment, one not influenced by the vast sunny landscape surrounding her. It would be itself, however dark that nature might be. And it would not be thwarted from displaying it. Suddenly, day turned into night. Rain hammered thunderously as it beat upon the roof. The side windows were walls of cascading water. Window wipers flopped furiously back and forth, yet we barely could see out. The automobile shook from the onslaught. A raging minute or two went by. Keep the steering wheel steady!

Then, we burst out, spanking wet into the sunlight. "Wow," exclaimed Red. A bit dazed, I turned to look back. The black cloud still hung above the roadway. Waiting.

• • •



OUTDOOR LIFE

Vincent Grosso

When I was in the Navy, stationed in Coos Bay, Oregon, I found myself in an entirely different world, a land of mountains, lakes, rivers, and forests. I had no experience at all in how to live in that environment.

I remember looking at night skies and tracing constellations I had seen only in science textbooks. There were no artificial lights anywhere within fifty miles.

As we all know, sometimes you get lucky in life. In these new surroundings, I met people who helped change my life.

My Navy roommate, George, was one of these people. We enjoyed talking about life, where we went to college, our childhoods. Although George had grown up in the Bronx, his father taught him about camping, fishing, and hunting when he was a child. He was a nice, patient guy. Slowly he began to teach me about how to enjoy nature and how to survive in the wilderness.

I'm sure it sounds ignorant to not know about goose-down clothing and sleeping bags, but I had to learn one of the most basic lessons of camping the hard way. On my first overnight camping trip, I woke up freezing due to my lack of knowledge about proper clothing. I had never experienced my body trembling and shaking uncontrollably like that before. I could not get the shivering to stop.

George immediately recognized the seriousness of the situation. I was in the first stage of hypothermia. He put a small tree limb into the gas tank of his motorcycle and started a fire. I got as close to the fire as possible and stayed there the entire night.

We also went on freshwater fishing trips for small mouth bass. We would cast the fishing line in front of the fish and try to entice it to bite the lure. I learned to gut and fillet the fish for dinner.

Then there was deer hunting.

I bought a hunting bow and began practicing compulsively. I would shoot at targets and improve my "shot making." George told me stories of guys who would freeze up when trying to kill a deer. Slowly, I became a good shot.

I went on hunting trips with guys who had learned hunting as kids. Sometimes one of the group would kill a deer and take it back to the

base. I watched as they butchered the animal and prepared it for dinner. I soon knew that killing and eating deer was very distasteful to me.

Nevertheless, I kept going out, mostly because I wanted to fit in with the guys on the base. I learned to track a deer and how to stay upwind so that it couldn't smell you. The time of day was also important. Deer wake up and move to feed around sun-up. They move back to their sleeping areas around sundown.

I continued to hunt. Then one day while hunting with George, we spotted a deer below us. He whispered that I should take the shot. I did, but the arrow missed.

To this day, I'm glad I missed. It was one thing to kill and eat a fish, quite another to kill and eat a deer. I never did take another shot. Thinking about that kind of makes me happy. I still enjoy the outdoors, but hunting is not for me.

• • •

THE YIDDISH FESTIVAL

Ze'eva Cohen

I am in Amsterdam, and it is autumn 1996. The venue for my evening performance is the second International Yiddish Festival taking place at the Bellevue Theater. My dance, which I choreographed to traditional Yiddish songs and Klezmer music is to be premiered alongside other solo dances and duets from my ongoing repertory. As an Israeli American dance artist coming from a Jewish Yemenite heritage, I hardly fit in, and I feel somewhat out of place. I do not speak Yiddish.

My grandparents, like other Jews who immigrated from the Middle East and North Africa, did not know Yiddish, and most Israeli-born children considered it to be a language of the oppressive diaspora. We spoke Modern Hebrew, which was mandated as the national language that united us all.

It was my Dutch friend, Mira Rafalowicz, artistic director of the Yiddish festival, who challenged me to create a dance employing Yiddish. If I wished my show to be included in her festival, she said, I ought to have at least one dance that employs the Yiddish language and Yiddish music. What a challenge.

To my surprise, creating and performing the new dance—made for myself in the role of an immigrant, Yiddish-speaking mama and Jill Sigman portraying my American-born daughter attempting to break away from her mother's culture—was a delight. I called that dance *If Eve Had a Daughter: Mother's Tongue, I Love You*. That I had never choreographed a semi-comedic dance before added to the challenge, but it helped a lot that Jill brought to the first rehearsal her grandmother's kitchen utensils, with which we improvised. These utensils were later included in the final climactic kitchen scene of the dance.

Despite Mira's assurance that it would be fine for the program to also include my contemporary and Middle Eastern-inspired work, I was worried. Did I fit in? Would the audience relate to my Mothers of Israel, another dance in my show that portrayed the four Biblical Hebrew Matriarchs and was choreographed to Arabic songs? What a boost it was to have in the audience, third row center, three neighbors and close friends from New York, cheering us along. It felt like my family was there.

After taking our bows, I invited the amazing Yiddish singer Adrienne Cooper, whose singing was featured in the dance's soundtrack and who was in the audience, to join us on stage and sing my favorite Yiddish art song that inspired me to create the Yiddishkeit dance. My stage daughter and I stood by Adrienne's piano, listening to her perform and applauding her. It was a magical moment. The appreciation and pleasure we felt toward Adrienne's singing echoed the audience response to my Middle Eastern-based dances. We are one people after all, and I did fit in.

• • •

ARS EN VITAE

Linda Downs

One artwork that daily gives me pleasure is a large painting that hangs opposite my favorite corner of the couch in the living room. When people see it for the first time, they are sometimes puzzled and ask, “What is it?”

Title: Untitled.

Date: 1967, when Vietnam and Detroit were in flames.

Artist: Douglas James — Wayne State University, BA; Yale University, MA. Member of the Cass Corridor Movement in Detroit that exhibited at the Willis Gallery near the WSU campus; my neighbor in the Detroit Palmer Park Town Houses; we shared a wall and two gardens, flowers in the front and vegetables in the back; we worked on the Palmer Park Citizens Action Council to improve city services and enhance the neighborhood with a newsletter, better lighting, surveillance, sidewalks, and a pool. In 1970 the artist and his wife moved to New York City to build a SoHo studio loft and regularly showed and sold his work there; they divorced soon after due to what I believe was “sewing fatigue” on the part of his wife (see description below); she then married a dentist and moved back to the Midwest; he now lives in Upstate New York, and we are still friends.

Dimensions: 59¼" x 90½", a size that does not fit into conventional, or most freight, elevators, prompting long walks up narrow stairs and acrobatic positions causing great physical strain.

Media: Raw canvas stained with oil paint, cut into 1,000 5" x 7" squares, sewn together, stretched, and framed. James painted and cut the canvas, and his wife sewed the 1,000 squares.

Exhibition History: 1967 at the Willis Gallery, Detroit, near the site of the 1967 riot; 1968 at the Rental Gallery (rent-to-buy) at the Detroit Institute of Arts; rented by me in 1969, purchased in 1970, hung in our Palmer Park townhouse until 1970; in our first Cape Cod house on the east side of Detroit until 1980; in our spacious east-side house with handcrafted Pewabic-tiled bathrooms and a recreation room until 1989; in our cozy Bethesda, Maryland, dining room until 2001; in my spacious ranch-style house overlooking the Mississippi in Davenport, Iowa, until 2004; in a Brooklyn, brownstone apartment until 2015; in a pink-adobe,

Tucson, Arizona, house until 2018; in an Upper West Side, New York City, apartment since 2018.

Condition: 1971 unsuccessful attempt to remove tiny spot of “bubbly” that landed on the lower edge on New Year’s Eve; 2018 slight fading due to intense Arizona sun and accumulation of desert sand in unfinished seams on verso; 2018 dents in frame as the painting was carried by hand up several winding stairs.

Description: In 1967 Douglas James was inspired by the idea of randomness that originated with the Dadaists, who relied on chance in the creation of art works. He made six different versions using the same technique.

In the 1970s this work represented a wild beauty and freedom. It broke the standard academic approach to making paintings by avoiding the traditional preparation of the canvas with gesso. It literally cut the smooth picture plane into pieces. Instead of a carefully constructed composition it relied on an arbitrary arrangement of pieces sewn together at random. It simulated a handcrafted quilt then elevated it by placing a frame around it as a traditional work of art. It reflected our “Dadaized” world at that time: the Beats, Amiri Baraka, the crazy rabbits of *Watership Down*. And the music of John Cage, Miles Davis, and the MC5s blaring out of our tiny townhouses.

In 2023 this work creates the illusion of stacked unpainted ovals in the center surrounded by soft, varied-colored rectangles from aquamarine to peach and pink. The colors make the surface move. Lighter colors come forward in front of the picture plane, and darker colors sit back behind it to create an active undulating surface. The random shapes converge then disperse depending on the way the eye travels across the picture plane. The work is complex, pleasing, and calming. Some days it goes with Chopin or Songs of the Auvergne. Other days with Ligeti or Richter.

Instead of describing all the art historical information when people ask about this work, I now simply say that it creates the same feeling that I had when I sat on my grandmother’s front porch as a child, identifying animals in the clouds and making dolls out of hollyhocks and tooth-picks. Then they sit back, sip their wine, and enjoy the art.

• • •

MY NEXT LIFE

Mary Ann Donnelly

In my next life
it won't be the 2 train
taking me through life.

In the next life
I'll be strapped to a Harley,
helmetless,
wind in my hair,
hands on the bars
following blue highways
to wherever they take me.

• • •

HISTORY LESSON

Stella Gold

In first grade
In Paris
I learned my ancestors
Were called the "Gauls."
Later I found out
It wasn't so.
My ancestors,
The Jewish People,
Had been alive
Long before.

• • •

SECRETS

Judy Winn

Secrets molder away in deep recesses
Part of the debris in the brain
Always the possibility of resurrection
At an unexpected place or time
Crossing a street or waking from sleep
Wishes to be forgotten unheeded.

Why have they risen now
No understandable reason for the visit
Pictures so clear it might be yesterday
Not decades of energy spent to bury them
Reminders that nothing is ever gone
All lies within the life of the present.

Buried secrets will go to the grave
A brief smile as leave is taken
Knowing that speakers at the funeral
Will share their own memories
Not knowing the missing parts.

• • •

WHAT TROUBLES ME

Ruth Ward

There are so many issues that trouble me,
Like raising the minimum wage,
Providing good childcare for working moms
And their offspring of tender age.

And conferring relief on all students with loans
Now crushed by the weight of their debt
Or increasing gun safety for all of us
Because it is such a grave threat.

And what of slowing down climate change,
Which threatens the lives of our young,
Whose feats in a glorious future
May forever remain unsung?

Protecting our democracy,
Expanding voting rights
So those who are low on the ladder of power
Can at least envision the heights

These are matters that rob me of sleep
As I don't know how to address them
Though I've written them here in a partial list
And asked Providence to bless them.

Do you think we could foster the common good
By embracing folks unlike ourselves,
Creating a spirit of "How can I help"
In a world of bloody farewells?

• • •

WHAT IT WAS LIKE DURING LOCKDOWN

Linda Rothstein

We have been hunkered down
So long we are
Like the fuzz balls that accumulate
In the dark creases
Of worn upholstery

I am ashamed
I think I have succumbed to dry rot
And you, my dear, who once had bounce –
It's sad to say that now your springs squeal

The crime of it all
Is that nothing is happening.
We go day after day in our new routine
as if time is a capsule.

Don't you think that
while life is on hiatus
it would be only fair
if the clock took a vacation?

I don't want to keep getting older
even if I do it with you.

• • •

WE WERE ALL SO BEAUTIFUL

Zandra Cooper

We were all so beautiful

Collectively rebirthing ourselves
Cords cut
Bodies naked

Free of shame
Free of will

Craving and sating
Marching
Shimmying
Twisting

Monkeying around
Under the disco ball
All in our full radiance

Cohorts commingling
Bodies and minds

Scores of lovers
Decades ago

We were all so beautiful

• • •

I KNOW..., BUT....

Richard Elrauch

I know
the dry scrabbling sound from outside
on the ledge under the air conditioner
is sparrows.

The chirps are nice.,

but the scrabbling...

I know...
I know it's sparrows
but it unsettles
and tingles the long-gone hackle roots
and gives mild creeps
and ticks the muscles
that would perk the ears
if they still could,

which shows we really are another species
on the tree,
but so far out on a limb
that scrabbling sparrows
make us glad for the room we're in.

• • •

THE SALT-FREE DIET

Phil Gisser

The doctor tells me
Loud and clear
The salt in foods
Should make me fear

“Some foods I savor
I like to dine
I need that flavor
To go with wine.”

The Doctor spoke,
His words came easy
“Wine too is out,
It makes you weasy”

“Forget that shaker
No salt for you”
I listen closely
What else to do

I now do shun salt
And read each label
But there's no pleasure
At the dinner table.

• • •

A CRICKET

Roy Clary

Walking to my car this morning
Through the underground garage
I heard a cricket loudly chirping.

His was a steady beat
Set off by a staccato punctuation
That struck me as a special feat.

I mused he was a retired musician
One who once had played for kings and queens,
But now was simply having fun.

Yet what was he doing in my garage?
After all, a garage is not a friendly place
For anyone, let alone a cricket, to lodge.

Why did he chirp so insistently?
Was he homeless? Was he away
From his love and little ones wee?

Then his music took a sudden turn forlorn
And I felt a symbiotic sympathy.
Perhaps he too was seeking his Lenore.

I stood awhile and cried.
Cried for all the lonely and the lost.
Cried for me and everyone who ever cried

• • •

PROUD BIRD

Hilda Feinstein

Where were you
Brown, speckled
Sturdy little bird?

Where were you
Over the fierce winter
Newly passed?

Did you travel far?
How were you cared for?
How did you ever find the
route home?

Through January storms
Frigid February
Ranting March rains
And nature's other pains,
How did you ever survive?

Returning during springtime's
thaw
Appearing to have thrived
Looking strong and healthy
Despite a harsh and
treacherous season.
I first noticed you last year
On a sunny, temperate day
As I relaxed with a book
In the park.

You looked proud
In your spring coat —
Head held high
Foraging for food.

I didn't have anything
To share with you
But watched with awe
As you navigated your world.

You were an unusual sight
Unlike the other birds
For where your feet
And prehensile toes

Should have been
Only stubs emerged
You could not grasp —
You could not hold —

Handicapped
But not crippled
Able and capable
Little bird
I admired your confidence
You hobbled and bobbled
However
Undaunted,
Searching for sustenance
In competition
With multitudes
Of the able bodied.

I was truly amazed
To see you again
Today,
And I recognized you easily —

Happy that you made it
Safely
Into the arms
Of the warmth of spring.

The lesson of your courage
Brave bird
May well be taken
And absorbed by those
Who, too, have traversed long,
cold winters.

I hope to see you again soon
To contemplate
To congratulate
The possible impossible.

Stay strong,
Stay brave,
Stay proud!

• • •

THE LAST DAY OF SUMMER

Art Spar

Deep dark green
Tree leaves manufacture
 nutrients
To feed the hunger
Of the cold season to come

Local birds share branches
With transient eco-tourists
Migrating to distant lands
Living an endless summer

Chilly morning dew
Evaporates into midday heat
Ripening hardy berries
Fill the commissary for
 migrants

The receding sun
Plays new angles of reflection
Glimmering the watcher's eyes
With crystals shooting off the
 water

Darkness swallows the day
An insatiable appetite
To close the engine of growth
Into the long sleep of winter

I am like the tree
Each year I grow new leaves
Which are the pages of my life
Remembering the seasons

I am also the leaf
With a season in the sun
Part of something greater
Then I color and die

• • •

HE IS WALKING WIDER

Ellen Rittberg

He is walking wider and wider arcs
have you seen him,
my son, the biggest one
striding, alone
on the highway overpass
straddling the horizon
above heaving trucks,
the world passing furiously?

He marks his way steadily
across our broad town
an ocean wave at low tide.
He watches the geese on their course,
the merchants closing their stores.
Perhaps he wonders where he fits.

He journeys far.

Still, I must let him
and when darkness spills
on the Malaga-wine sky
and he returns home,
I must enjoy his levelness
and his curls
wending down his neck,
goats down a mountain.
I must praise him
and remember to pat
his manly shoulders.
This child will cut through the world,
will make smooth sharp grooves
and sometimes may even lead me.

• • •

TO A SMALL BOY

Judy Hampson

Hands off!
Leave that peanut jar alone!
Don't think I didn't notice,
Just 'cos I'm on the phone.
Hands open,
Let me see,
What's hiding in your left hand?
Give it to me.
Hands fisted,
Never a good sign,
What have you done now?
Where did I put my wine?
Hands clasped,
I know you're sorry,
I really love you,
Though you make me worry.
Hands stretching,
Come, give me a hug,
Let's play monopoly,
Down here on the rug.
Hands gentle,
I stroke your hair,
Absorb your fragility,
Feeling my heart tear.

• • •

LOVE POEM DEDICATED TO MY HUSBAND

Lillian Hood

Imagine there's no future
Imagine there was no past
What if there is just now
And each moment did not last

I'd need declare my love
for you
Over and over, again and again
Forget that I once told you
Back I can't remember when

The forms of this expression
Would have to be unique
'Cause repeatedly said
"I love you"
Can begin to sound oblique.

So... I would share my feelings
With you constantly
I'd never clutter up our lives
With gross dishonesty

I would exhibit power
In standing by my word
You could stake your life on me
On every promise heard

Whatever you did or didn't
As the case may be
Would make absolute sense
given where you are
And would be okay with me.

Trusting that you love me
And having you trust me
Our lives would blend together
In perfect harmony.
You doing your dance
And me doing mine
One consciousness between
two souls
Forever joined in time.

• • •

LOVE AFFAIR AT 197.2 DEGREES FAHRENHEIT

Byrd

I encounter you
You open your Golden Gate
Viaduct I rendezvous with myself
Anew-Rejuvenated As Your
Primrose Jasmines Enwrap
Me from cervix to umbilicus
Fingertips now linked we
Quiver in synch palpitating
Doubletogether at our exclusive
Pleasure Palace Our tonsils in
Harmony build the Bridge Where
Off-track Lovers rediscover one another
Madame serendipity allows them
To submerge themselves in her
Honeydew caverns
When I awaken after
A max blissful night of
Your pumping a lot of liver loving
Over me-collard greening a lot
Of porgy pleasure under me
I appreciate luxuriating in your dampness
As you devour my saliva
Our skeletons in
Concert perpetually
And beyond are the overpass linking the good to the better
As we melt into pumpkin pie euphoria

• • •

TAO

Helen Saffran

Dear Tao
A brilliant red
Parrot who
Ate only fruit and
Was perfumed
By it

Tao's giggly laugh
Her clicks
Her songs
Her sudden shriek
That we called her bong
Her talking
Her inflections
Her joy and love
Amused and
Touched us

She bonded
With Michael
But we had an
Intimacy
One day she licked
My eyelashes
With her
tubular tongue

Sometimes Michael
Had Tao talk to me
On the telephone
When I finally
Left Michael
He called one day and
Put Tao on the phone
Tao said every single
Phrase she knew
In her
Poignant
Goodbye

• • •



Victor Brener, *Man With A White Hat*, Oil on Canvas



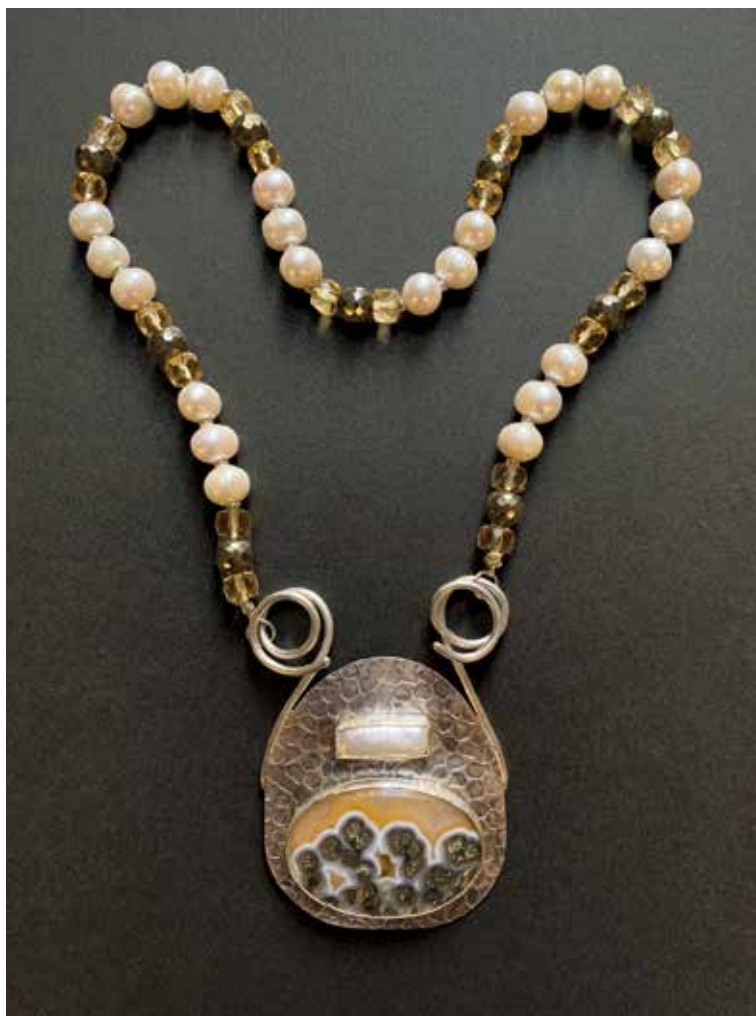
Beth Callender, *Gargoyles*, Sculpted Clay Beads



Rosalie Regal, *Trepidation*, Clay



Pete Weis, *Farmer*, Photograph



Diane Figueroa, *A Burst of Agate*, Agate/Silver/Citrine/Pearls



Ellen Shapiro, *Renna*, Watercolor



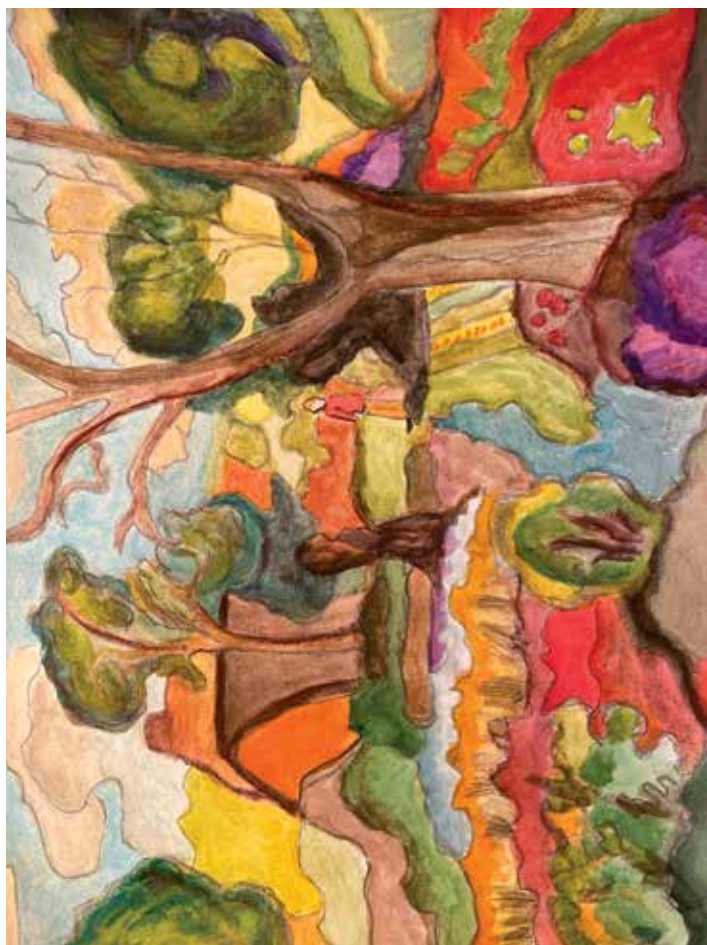
Linda Rothstein, *Pandas*, Digital Painting



Ellen Rirtberg, *Nature's Colors*, Watercolor



Marilyn Weiss, *Four For One*, Acrylic/Multi-media Collage



Paul Adler, *Feels Like Summer*, Watercolor/ Graphite



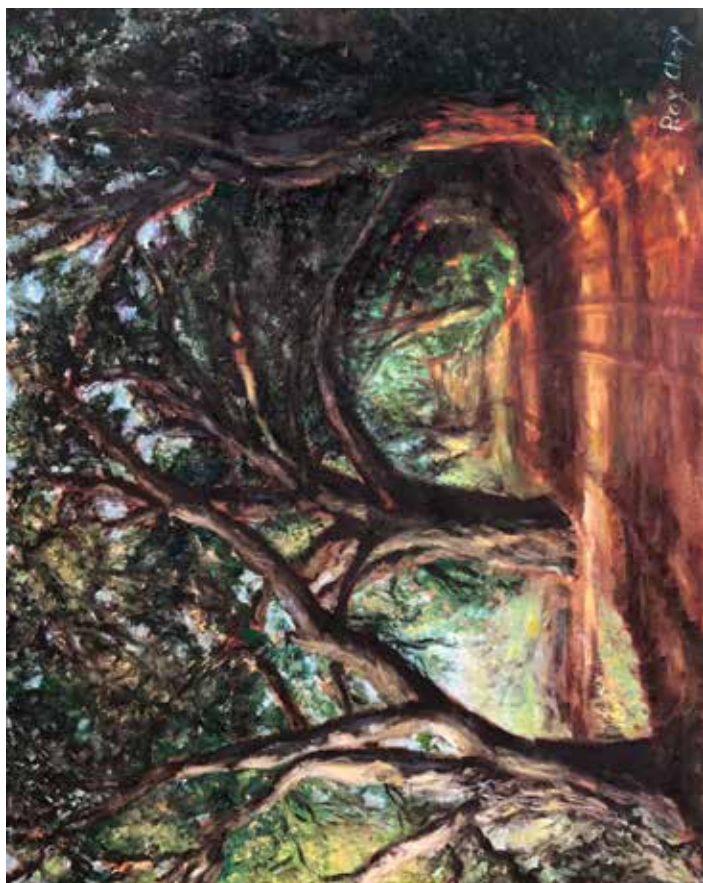
Carole Cronig Abrahams, *By The Sea*, Ceramic Tiles



Gary Friedland, *Lauren*, Acrylic on Canvas



Frank Montaturo, *Il Festino di Santa Rosalia, Palermo*, Photograph



Roy Clary, *A Shaded Lane*, Oil on Canvas



Yona Rogosin, *Yin & Yang of Friendship*, Paper Collage



Lorraine Weberg, *Home Before Dark*, Watercolor

WHEN I LIVED IN MALIBU

Linda Rothstein

Our two cats were Siamese — seal points,
Markings of indigo on their ears.
As kittens they were cuddly,
The softness giving way
To the menace of eyes slanted with malice.

The Siamese offered me little in comfort
When he trundled down the road after supper
To join the boys at the bar
That overlooked the rocky cliffs.
The thought of the seawater slapping at pilings
Wore me down.

He insisted I let the cats out in the mornings
And so I did,
Watching them hurdle the fence
To hunt in the canyons.
The dog was left behind, looking sad in the yard.

The cats soon went feral,
Came in late each night
When the mountain lions and coyotes
Crept out of their lairs.

The cats turned up their whiskers
At the food I put before them.
They'd had their fill, I could tell,
By the fine white bones
Of frogs and salamanders
Picked clean and left on the lawn.

• • •

BACK TO THE SEA

Leonard Leventon

From out of the depths we rose
Grew fins, legs, then toes
Stood tall up on the shore
Looked back; then walked inland more

Scaled rocks, cliffs, n bluffs
Grabbed roots, twigs, n brush
Cleared ground for farms, ranches, n towns
But kept an eye to the sea, n an ear to its sounds

Ventured back now n then to see
Returning whales, dolphins, manatees
Ocean breeze drew us more to explore
Build boats, rafts, sail its surface
taste its mists as before

Back — Back to the sea — to our roots
To the tides, to the streams of our youth

Back to the sea — Back to the sea
Back — On our search for the eternal truth

• • •

THIS YEAR, GERANIUM

Rachel Shor

Last night
I spoke to Geranium,
my large red kayak,
we will remain
in the living room,
her winter residence,
when we want to
be out on the lake
gliding in calm water,
slipping smoothly,
peacefully
into the narrow outlet
lined by towering trees
and their reverse
reflections.

I know it's hard on us,
Geranium,
as we both age,
but this year,
for the first time,
there's no beach rack
where you can rest.

Yet, along with our
red paddle,
we are still together
at home.

• • •

AFTER ALL

Dennis Sherman

Without a word
I bid farewell

to a woman who screamed
from the kitchen and back door,
who died a half lifetime later
without the soothing drip of
morphine

I tried to give her,
Eva, that I knew only as mother,

to him, Dad, so unfairly
condemned to two lines
who wore responsibility as a shield
against love,

to flicker memories of first nights
in the mundane back seat of a car
with one
and the mundane first motel room
with another
so important
but no more, not for years,
decades,
except when I remember the thick
scent of those nights,

to those who were once children
ours long ago then theirs
snarling, laughing, longing,
leaving
still important if mundane
but now condensed into occasional
words and losses,

to the middle years when we knew
each other so well, saw everything
between us through windowpanes
that kept out the heat and cold,
glimpses and pools of sex,
outliving the dog, the next, the
next,
mid-sentence pauses, mid-life
compromises
fading into a grey forest of
pre-dying years
overly anticipated and irony filled,

to this year's, only this year's
yellowing leaves in Riverside Park
and all those I have yet to and
will not
see touch taste lament
ever and again in this world of
false silences
and homes, hands, hearts that
once were,

• • •

TO "THAT GREAT AMERICAN POET RALPH WALNUT EMERSON"

Carole Cronig Abrahams

Long ago
Laughter tickled around

At the radio, giggles and chortles,
as Jack Benny, staying 39, never aged

At the grocery store, soft laughter as the butcher uncle
leaned over to give a small niece
a slice of baloney

At our house
after salt went in the baking instead of sugar,
to see fun inside our first pomegranate,
and to try to figure out how to smoke a hookah

It was hilarious to watch a tiny boy peer into a
garden hose,
then get a little splash as the hose was unbent

Flow water, flow laughter

• • •

STIGMATA

Linda Downs

Small pools on a hot day
erupt in crazed clouds
of stingers on wings.
Flesh pierced,
blood siphoned,
fetid saliva injected.
Aching aureoles dot
the wounded.

• • •

THE POEM

Anita Hunter

"I'd like to write a poem," she said.

"So, write a poem," he said.

"I don't know how," she said.

"Well, write a sentence," he said.

"OK," she said.

And she did.

"OK," he said. "Now write another."

And she did.

"And another," he said.

And she did.

And before you could say it —

There was a poem.

"How do you know it's a poem?" she said.

And he said, "It is!"

And it was.

• • •

THE YEAR I WAS TEN

Judy Winn

The ghost building stood a
long time
A lingering smell of charred
wood
My classmate gone in shooting
flames.
Our teacher taking role on
Monday
Asked who knew why he was
absent
A boy cried out "killed in a fire"
Mrs. Roth stood horror-stricken
Sobbed and ran from the room
We stayed at our desks in silence.
I had learned about fire.

In May when my birthday came
My mother said I could invite
friends
To come for birthday cake after
school
A small group followed my
mother home.

She came running after us calling
I know why you didn't invite me
It's because I am black.
Black people only worked in our
house.
Struck by the unfairness of it
I had learned about race.

We left the city heat with
summer
A big rental house at the beach
There was a boy my age next
door
On sunny days we made sand
castles
Endless monopoly when rains
came
Protected by the covered porch.
The last day when we said
goodbye
Tears ran down both of our faces.
I had learned about love

• • •

REFLECTIONS

Mary Ann Donnelly

Hips getting hipper
Lips getting skimpier
Eyebrows near extinction
Words getting scarier
Memory airier
But all things considered
All things being equal
Can't complain
Who'd listen
Not the young
Who'd say you're old
Not the old
Who'd say me too
Not the migrants at the wall
Not the hungry at the gate
Not the boys in orange jumpsuits
Time to shut up listen
Let the news be your muse
Look out not in.
BUT OH MY GOD
IN JUST ONE DAY
The trump trump trump of endless stress
Drones in the air
Droning on the air

CLICK!

AUM!

I AM THAT I AM!

HOLY MARY MOTHER OF GOD

PRAY FOR US!

• • •

TODAY, PERHAPS
(Reflections on Election Day, 2022)
Wayne Cotter

As our majestic
Glaciers
Melt
Impreceptibly
Into the sea

Drip, Drip

Is
Democracy too
Destined to shrink,
Shrivel,
And sink?

Drip, Drip

"American Carnage"
"I alone Can Fix It"

Drip

"Alternate Facts"
"Lock Her Up!"

Drip

"Stand Down"
"Stand By"

Drip, Drip

"Enemies of the People"
"Where's My Roy Cohn?"

Drip, Drip

"Just Find Me the Votes"
The Big Lie

Drip, Drip, Drip

But today, perhaps
The spigots of hate
Began to close

Today, perhaps
The river of lies
Flows less forcefully

Today, perhaps
We can all
Take a breath

...Perhaps

• • •

WOMANHOOD

Judy Hampson

So many versions of myself.
What does it mean, to be a
woman?

To be flirtatious,
Enjoy attracting men.
To be a wife,
Loyal and submissive.
A loving mother,
Besotted with her children.
A teacher, trembling at the
burden,
Of young minds, so malleable.

A friend, not always kind.
A lover, not always faithful.

A daughter, sometimes hurtful.
An ear, not always listening.

Looking inward can be painful,
Viewing a distorted mirror
Misshapen, amorphous,
Becoming unlovable.

We castigate ourselves,
We women,
For not being whom we should
be.
Age mellows our disapprobation,
Softening and molding it into
forgiveness
For being ourselves,
Warts and all.

• • •

RESILIENCE

Hilda Feinstein

Ball bounces
Strikes a crack
Hits a rock
Redirects
Ball bounces back
Rubber floats
Does not sink
Moves about
And does not wrinkle

Grass dances
With grace and ease
Through whoosh or gentleness of
breeze
Never ever glancing back
To summer's blaze or winter's
freeze
Unburdened, free
Lithe and wild
Reminiscent of a curious child —
With bare feet

Lounging puffy clouds
Ever changing form
Buoyant, drifting, floating
Through calm or savage storm

Ambling through the blue
With paths unthought, unplanned
Drifting quite unhurriedly
Much like shifting sand

The resilient brave
Are numbered few
Not standing out nor in long
line cue
No puffed out chests nor blusters
loud
Somewhat like the above named
cloud
Valued through time's embrace
Do not leave a dent nor trace
Honor bound
Despite fear or dread
Resigned and proud
To ethics wed

Resilience can't be sold nor bought
Highly prized and
Dearly sought
Within one's self
Simply found
Possessing mettle
Without a sound

• • •

BUBBIE

Zandra Cooper

Surrounded by natural wonders
Petrified wood, a giant sea shell, butterflies under glass, fossilized ferns
and trilobites
All within my Yiddishe bubbie's living room
On her Art Deco sofa we sat
Bubbie's eyes fixed on the tiny, antenna eared, black and white box
She with a frozen gaze upon two men with thick gloves in a large playpen
brutalizing one another
My eyes fixed on bubbie as she peeled an apple flawlessly while never
looking down
My thoughts were on the giant seashell at my ear
Wonder at listening, to what I was told, and wanted to believe was the
sound of the ocean
The ocean sounds right here in bubbie's living room!
But the biggest and most puzzling wonder was bubbie's rapturous
enjoyment of the brutality
she watched
Slowly, I learned
The visits to the cemeteries
Followed by the trunk of a 1955 Chevy popped open
Glasses of schnapps passed around
Yahrzeit candles burned to remember the lost
And when I sat in Zadeh's chair, or machiah, as he called it, and looked
through an old photo album
Screams would come from my bubbie's depths
As I asked, who is this beautiful lady and who are these children

• • •

FAMILY PHOTO

Richard Elrauch

My infant father seems frail
in his little white dress,
perched on his bearded papa's knee.
The black garbed papa looks serene
holding this blessing his son.
His hands are big around his son.

Wife and daughters stand behind
and to the sides.

The baby's eyes are big
with wonder.

*I'd watch my father
reading at night
seated at the kitchen table
on the hard kitchen chair
under the harsh light,
illuminated,
surrounded by darkness.*

*Mother was upstairs
in bed
watching TV.*

*My father never talked of the book
he was reading.*

I never asked him about his book.

I want to sit, knees together
and take this infant my father
and lay him in my lap
and lean over
fold myself over him
so his roof would be my heart
my arms on either side
touching all his tiny length
his little head cupped by my laced
fingers,
the whole of him wrapped in my
flesh
and rock and kiss
and kiss his face and eyes
and croon and whisper there there
hush, shhh...

• • •

BLACKBERRIES

(Brooklyn Routes #17)

Steven Koenig after Li-Young Lee

I walk up Schenectady Avenue
on my way to the Library on
Eastern Parkway
the first time Mom let me walk
alone

Passing Crown, then President
Street
halfway up the block purple
magic
squoooshed on concrete steps lead
me

Up an alleyway with more purple
bushes
I'm afraid to pop a blackberry
into my mouth
not because I might be poisoned
by the royal fruit

If I pick from the wrong bush
but for fear of being chased,
yelled at
like the woman who last week

Chased us out of her alleyway —
we were
eight-year old Columbuses —
exploring
the yet unknown archipelagos of
our neighborhood

When playing lustily in an alley
between a pair of brick
two-stories, an old woman
looking out her window
poured scalding water on us grin-
ning, satisfied in her deed.
But now walking up these
concrete stairs

I look in all directions for danger
the way we were trained to scan
for cars

When crossing streets without
without traffic lights
with or without STOP signs and
coast clear

I palm a handful of berries,
squooosh them into my maw

My tongue a press processing
their juices
Debating whether to spit out the
seeds
but it's getting late and when I get
there

The librarian makes me wash the
royal color
from my mouth and my hands
before I can scout
and read books without dye
transfer

And I gather books about
mushrooms and decide
to become a mycologist or
pomologist of berries
as the forbidden juice has stained
my hand

And rushed down my gullet to
my brain's satisfaction
and I wonder what fruits I'll
gather
on my pilgrimage to the Library
next week

• • •

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

Stella Gold

A small serious toddler
Looks at her new costume
Then puzzled looks at her parents
To help her understand
Why she is dressed today
In an unusual way,
Not her regular outfit
Of soft colored woolens
But a bright red apron
And a short crimson cape.
Most intriguing
Is the plastic basket
Maman hung on her arm.

T'was 1962
Purim in Israel,
Times were peaceful.
Little Red Riding Hood
With large dark eyes
Was our first born
At eighteen months.
Today the same large eyes
Adorn the face
Of the thoughtful woman
The small girl became
But in the Land of Israel.
There is no Peace.

• • •



PREVAILING WINDS

Leonard Leventon

Coming from the south
Or is it the west
Blowing through our town
Committing unrest

Howling from the east
Bending northwest
Twisting swirling winds
Whipping up all nests

Stirring up a storm
Of buzzards birds n bees
Bringing down all beasts
Bowed unto their knees

Prevailing winds
Shaking trees n limbs
Prevailing winds
Cleansing all our sins

Prevailing winds
Cleaning up the streets
Prevailing winds
Settling all things sweet

• • •

LAZING IN THE PARK

Ruth Ward

I was lazing in the park one day
In the “Let’s lunch outside” month of May
When I nearly dropped my quiche
As a dog without a leash
Rushed me in a brisk raptorial ballet.

But I couldn’t waste what I had made
So I warned him in a harsh tirade
That all canines should respect
Every human’s intellect
And not cause a girl to be afraid.

When the dachshund heard what I had said,
He shied away in mortal dread,
But I thought I caught his eye
On my egg and feta pie
So I caterwauled, “You’re overfed!”

Well at this the puppy looked abashed
As his fondest hopes I’d fiercely dashed
He slowly looked me up and down,
Sneered and made a doggie frown
’Til my upbeat mood lost altitude and crashed.

Now if you’re ever in the park in May
And you want to keep bad luck at bay
Then let every creature live
And its petty faults forgive
— Even humans, yes, that’s what I say.

• • •

BRIDGES

Rachel Shor

My Bronx neighbor, Marty,
and I grew
from childhood games
to teenage exploring.
Every year we went together
to Ladies' Day
at the Yankee Stadium
for her
and downtown to the ballet
for me.

We often walked
Quiet trails in the
Botanical Gardens' woods

And once I went barefoot
Across the Washington Bridge.

Now, in my terms,
I'm a senior senior;
Sense of direction diminishing,
Fluency failing,
Memory missing

While the pillars of aging
Increase my pace
On this hardest bridge
to cross.

• • •

LAST MONDAY

Ze'eva Cohen



Last Monday

Surgery took place last Monday

Couple of days before I went in
I thanked my knee for serving me so well
For so many years.

I told her that an artificial one
Will take her place
So
That I will be able to continue moving
freely in the world
and feel safe

You were with me through hot and cold weather
You were with me through rough and smooth surface
You were with me as I soared over roof tops and trees
You were there as an, in case, a defense tool
Secondary to your right twin sister

Titanium has now replaced bone.
Am I now a bionic woman?

• • •

KNOT

Art Spar

Knot Not Not
Ka Not
Not Ka Not
Knot is Not Ka Not

Melancholy
Eating Melon
Petting Collie
Cures Melancholy

Knots abound
Knots compound
Knots confound
Knots astound

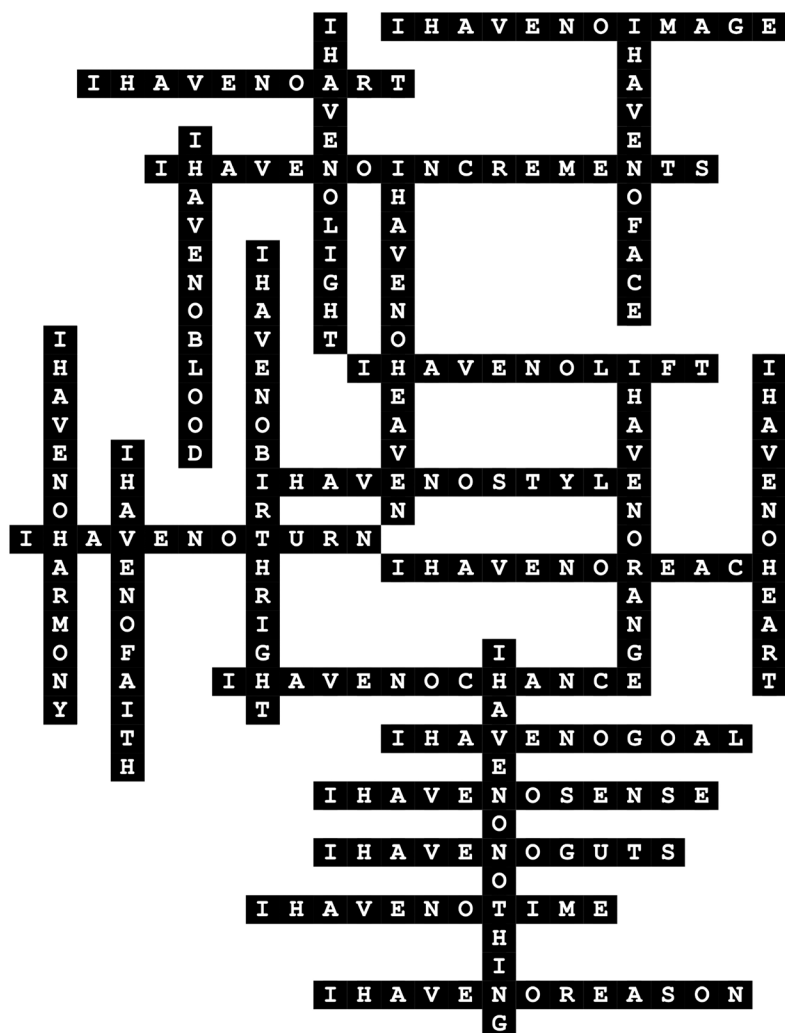
It is Not
It is So
Untie your Knot
Unwind your bow

Life is Not negation
Live life with full elation
Life with too many Nots
Ties your brain in Knots

• • •

I HAVE NO

Len Neufeld



...

SUMMER EXPECTATION BEFORE COVID-19

Carole Cronig Abrahams

Summer meant
seaweed and minnows
tickling my calves
as I stood, warmed above,
cool below

Summer meant
day-trippers in t-shirt shops
ice-cream drippers
window-shoppers

Summer meant
family hugging,
partying, eating
washing dishes

Summer meant
sweeping out sand
wet bathing suits
towels drying
on the deck rail

Summer meant
boats, breezes
bait on fish hooks
lunch on docks

Summer meant
floating in an inner tube
(anchored with rope, of course)
creating sand castles

parties
hugs

• • •

AMELIORATION

Dennis Sherman

On that morning bound for stillness

I heard voices that wavered
speaking of amelioration, consolation,
essence, and all that is leaving the world.

I thought of forests dying before night,
impassive oceans in hard storms,
animals we never saw,
loves gone into words
remembered again and again
into routines of amelioration.

I feared the pleasures of anticipation
decomposing into acceptance,
the disappearance of the dog on the couch,
the charity of strangers
and of how the hare is as ruthless as the hawk.

I know the story to control,
that of what has and hasn't been,
of the sun, leaves, steps on this late fall day
that will surely end with a shrug.

There is much to be said
but silence is not the worst.

• • •

AVEC LE TEMPS QUI PASSE

Celle qui fut belle
Dans sa jeunesse
S'étonne en feuilletant
Le vieil album
De photos familiales
De décourir
La fraîcheur qui fut la sienne
En ce temps là.
Plaisir ou nostalgie ?
Les deux certainement
Mais aussi un curieuse fierté
De retrouver dans ces images
Les échelons
De sa vie antérieure
Estampés par les ans.
Aujourd'hui elle accepte
Avec quelques regrets
La réflexion en son miroir
De son visage de femme âgée.

• • •

AS TIME GOE BY *Stella Gold*

She who was beautiful
In her youth
Is shocked
While flipping the leaves
Of the old family album
To discover
How fair she had been
In those days.
Pleasure or nostalgia?
Both, for sure.
But also a degree of pride
At finding in those pictures
The stages
Of her previous life
Stamped by the years.
Today she accepts
With some regret
The reflection in her mirror
Of the face of an aged woman.

• • •

THEY FOLLOW HER

Ellen Rittberg

they follow her
with their eyes
ready to attach
themselves to her
they come ashore
she shakes off
her composure
like sleep
and they are
fooled by it.
she breaks
herself off
in pieces
like taffy,
the sea enters her
the men advance on her

for centuries
she sits
at her islet
with no outlet
a small hellenic
trade-route post
she sees all
she lives alone
and those who come to call
are consumed
by her lizard eye glance
her berry red hellion crawl.

I like the woman's power
I like her pluck.

• • •

CONFETTI

Judy Winn

Atlantic City, August 1945
My mother told cousin Bobby
To take me on the boardwalk
Join the throngs of crowds.

The air was thick with confetti
Thrown from apartment balconies
I held tight to Bobby's hand
The world was out celebrating.

Soldiers on a hotel terrace
Now a convalescent home
Slashed open their pillows
Mixing feathers with confetti.

Bobby sniffed in a feather
Choked and dropped my hand
A little girl lost in the crowd
That surrounded her.

This is how I recall the end of war
I did not know what war was
I knew my uncle Sammy was in it
He had gone away somewhere.

More wars came and ended
Greed, political ideology, religion
Youth killed and maimed
Bombs stored to protect us.

Until some lunatic says go
And there will be no more confetti.

• • •

PISCES LOVE SONG

Linda Rothstein

You've got to watch what you put in
your aquarium
The big fish have a way of eating the
small.

I am still waiting for the fishes of the
sea to go vegan
And abandon their cannibal ways

And you — my trout, my angelfish,
my piraña,
Who nibbles on my toes in the
morning,
What have you eaten up?
Confess...

My years? One by

Downing my life with a flask of
champagne.

You dip me in your butter like a
lobster —
Come... let's look in the mirror...
Barnacles and wrinkles..
You've matched mine one per one.

Will you tell me, my oyster
Would you have had it any other
way

• • •

THERMOBUSTGOOSEBOOSEBOOGIE- DOWN IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE

Byrd

Your HANDS Emit La Vie En Rose Petals- Sensous
TENTACLES — Your
FINGERTIPS Emanate Agave
Tangerine Confectioneries Topped With
Honey Crunch Candy Canes
You are Helen of Joy deep dipped in Chocolate Marmalade
Crispy Creme Brulee My Belly's Buttons
I Go Cuckoo Over Your Syrupy Chestnut Bunny Bump
Your PALMS Tingle My Tonsils
Aroused Be I By The Way You Titillate
Under The Rainbow
You HANDLE My Ups Downs
And Inbetweens-Squeezing My
YippyYappyYa-Hooey All The Way
To The Mucous Membranes
I
Thank
Your
HANDS
For
Rinsing
The
PAgliOUCH-me
Out
Of
My
Being
I
Am
Grateful
To
Your
HANDS
For
Introducing
My
Essence
To
Your
Enigmatic
Hothouse

• • •

BRIDGES

Judy Hampson

Bridge over troubled water,
Where does it flow?
Can it take my problems with it?
So that they don't grow.

Staring at the water now
Sludge gray this wintry morn,
A sense of peace o'ercomes me
Comforting and warm.

My life is such a little one,
Primal drop amidst this stream
Why stress and wail so loudly,
Let triviality become extreme?

One thing that bridges teach us,
As we cross, or choose to stay,
There are always possibilities,
If we only seek the way

We tend to drift or just ignore them,
Avoid the road less travelled, and delay,

When going over is the best choice
To keep that fear at bay.

For sadly, while we linger,
Life is passing us right by
Missing every opportunity
To reach up to the sky.

Life is short — don't we all know it,
So, grasp it by the hand,
And run across those bridges,
That lead to another land.

A place where you can blossom,
Become yourself, or whom you want.
Don't submit to cautious counsel,
From a friendly confidante.

But skim across those bridges
Where all your dreams are bliss.
Be happy in your new life,
For the old one, you won't miss.

• • •

CIVILITY

Ruth Ward

I was seated by my window
On a rainy autumn day
Hoping the subject of a poem
Would pussyfoot my way.

But I found myself distracted
By the memory of my cat,
Of his sympathetic silence,
More supportive than a chat.

He was the perfect sounding board
For all my stockpiled gripes,
My grievances, resentments,
My objections of all stripes.

To him I could express the fact
That as an aging female
I couldn't speak out in harsher terms
Than those of a nettled email.

If someone had interrupted me
With a hostile contrary view
While I was giving a researched talk
My cat would have murmured "Mew"

And though to others standing by
His comment might have had no meaning

It would have soothed my indignation
At what I had found demeaning.

So kudos to my dear feline
For keeping me gracious and calm
And validating civility,
His memory is a balm.

• • •

DARK MORNING

Rachel Shor

The sky is black
getting darker,
the rain relentless,
a deluge, while
the wind whistles
through the trees
as the morning rises.

My bedroom
window flies open
and my head hurts
as it does in storms
even without
the frightening
thunder and lightning
I faced driving home
last night on
unlit country roads.

Hearing there's
a flood watch
I try to go back to sleep
at 5 A.M. when others
are not yet awake
and it's still dark.

• • •

FOREST

Ellen Rittberg

Carolina wren I beg you
Show yourself
Your liquid pure sound
From highest arch
Has song ever been this clear
This sound discernment-judgement
Not like the mockingbird
Tail high prone to pronouncement
Why imitate at all
When your repertoire
Is so varied
Piano player in large hotel.
There's a special place in my heart
For fungus
Spectral white or buttercup yellow scalloped
 capped or cupped
And clouds that hover
Devoid of omen
And rocks ragged jagged
Some composite
Once pyroclastic
Waldeinsamkeit
My natural juice
My equipoise

• • •

HANDS, IN 5 PARTS

Dennis Sherman

She who
In verse two hundred years ago
Would have been elevated
To "my beloved"
Is right here and yet gone
Slow walking with me
Every day holding hands,
Whispering so only
The gods hear.

* * *

There was a time
Keen days with ceremony
When we held hands in hope
Then pronounced believing I do I do
With smiles attached for all
As if vows and
A sprig of budding white flowers
Would yield innocence enough
To forever hold on.

* * *

There was a time
Of bereft mornings
When we held hands in grief,
Our third dog dying
While lying in his bed

His little bully-boy head
On the small plaid puff
We got for him
When he was budding
When he was young
When he was fierce.

* * *

Some hopes but no days
Were in vain
Never was there a need
To count days or bleed nights
Though in the beginning
I did count and again now
When the past is past.

I remember
Good and somber seasons

In that barn-like house
On that bland suburb's streets
Except when I forget,
The forgetting piling
Unstacked and unboxed
In years of grey closets,
Though that, that, that,
And holding hands,
I never forget
Not yet but I will
In the end.

* * *

Now holding hands
Holding on to what's left
Of the earth, moon, and stars
I tuck in the label on
The back of her sweater
The old one she's still wearing
From the Boulevard St-Germain

Now that I've lost her
Though I still have
a shadow a memory
A presence a whisper,

Still fleshy, disappearing.
So without asking I
Take up her hand,
Gently entwine, lock,
And hold on.
So without hearing I
Say yes that's right, thank you,
I'm going to, I promise,
I'll never forget.
So without forgetting, I
Remember, like a visitation
From a past life,
The sprig of budding white flowers.

• • •

A CREATION STORY, AKA PEACE & WAR

Ann Barandes

My name is Anniethena. I am the goddess of prophecy. I was chosen to tell you the story of creation. It is my truth!

Day 1-4: I fell from the sky onto a blank pallet. My first job was to name nature. I named the colors: Blue for the sky and water. Green for the grass and trees. Yellow for the sun. Black for night. White for the twinkling stars. Red and orange for the scary fires. The earth was beautiful! These four days seemed as if they would be endless, until...

Day 5-6: Creatures from the sea, sky, and land appeared. Best of all, a handsome man fell out of the sky and was called Adamo. He was the god of action. We fell in love and created children, a son we named Haden (soon to become an UNDER achiever) and a daughter Hairia (in her, vanity and vengeance reigned). Our family became known as The Creators. The Begets followed, but that's another, very long story.

Day 7: The Creator family looked around at the wondrous landscape and were satisfied and proud of our world. We rested!

Day 8+: Now consequential actions would begin for us, for humanity, and for our world. We were hungry. Adamo hunted around and found natural resources, which we used greedily. The waters yielded fish, the land gave us meat, and the sky provided fowl. Mankind multiplied and followed in our footsteps and became gluttonous. As a prophet, I predicted ugly, competitive, and vicious societies.

Rest was no longer an option. Adamo, a warrior, needed an action plan to combat pollution; the resultant heat waves, fires, and floods; famine; poverty; and horrifying WARS. Tragically my predictions had come true. The Creators failed! As you see now, beauty became ugliness and peace yielded to war. The Creators yearned to recreate and "build better!"

Is this a myth? All I can say is, OY VAY!

• • •

WONDERLAND OR WINE-DERLAND

Sandy Gordon

Visiting my daughter-in-law Denise and my son Scott in California, during the December holiday period, was like being transported to a wonderland, or wine-derland. The amount of planning and love that the two of them poured into the three-generation gathering was incredible. What wasn't planned was that the usual California weather in December would be a week of rain, but the rain was "soft," and the air warm, for an Easterner, and the atmosphere was filled with joy!

My two grands, Eli and Abigail, were in from college, and since they had not had a "proper" Chanukah, the house was totally decorated for the holiday, even including blue-and-white paper guest towels in the bathroom! A formal, Chanukah-themed table, with appropriate menorah, was set, and a spectacular dinner followed: delicious chicken soup and challah, both homemade, and of course, wine. The air was filled with giggles and smiles as the gifts were opened, all wishes fulfilled.

Prior to Denise's going to sleep, the kitchen returned to its normal gleam; no help allowed. Then Denise prepared her last gift. She changed the decor to a happy-birthday-to-me theme, so we would have it ready on Thursday upon our return from an excursion, complete with gold-splashed champagne glasses, dining table to match, and happy-birthday crowns, for a celebratory lunch.

On the following day, Scott had planned a trip to Paso Robles, sans young adults, noted for its wineries and olive groves. We enjoyed a superb Italian dinner at their favorite restaurant, of course with wine, and we met one of the winery owners and his huge extended family. We toasted one another, and then we returned to the posh hotel where we gratefully showered and collapsed onto beckoning, pillow-filled beds.

The next day brought more wineries and an "olive-ery," where we tasted olive oil and had a lecture from the owner's son, a master's-degree candidate in philosophy; this was to be a serious education. I learned that all of what I was doing in my kitchen with olive oil was wrong. Then a surprise! We were served vanilla ice cream that had a sprinkle of Himalayan salt and a drizzle of lemon-olive oil. Crazy? No, delicious. I bought the lemon-olive oil for each of my daughters-in-law back in the East.

It was a contented, but exhausted, crew that climbed in the car for the two-and-a-half-hour drive, that brought us back too late for lunch. Too

tired to dress again, we all voted to cancel the elegant restaurant that Denise and Scott had booked for my birthday dinner, and my son, an excellent cook, offered to prepare dinner. He then drove to their favorite shop to buy fish and other specialties and prepared a luscious dinner, ending with an assortment of elegant, and fattening, individual cakes, and a happy-birthday toast. We made full use of Denise's birthday table after all.

Can there be more? Yes. On Friday, my grandson and I had lunch and went to the San Jose Art Museum. Denise transformed the house again. It was "Snowflake Day." Although Denise is the most Jewish of my Jewish daughters-in-law, Denise's dad is Italian, and she grew up with a close, large, and Christmas-celebrating family. Another spectacular dinner. Denise makes her own gravy. (Italian marinara sauce does not contain meat. If a tomato sauce includes meat, then it is called gravy. I hadn't known the difference). Dinner was pasta and meatballs and Italian bread, with homemade challah as well because it was also Shabbat, and another dessert extravaganza! I left Saturday morning, with oranges from their tree, a few pounds heavier, and just ecstatic.

This was an extraordinary experience that will be an extraordinary memory of sharing family and love in Wine-derland.

• • •

HERMAN

Ruth Ward

I'm so happy here in this animal shelter. My mom isn't around, but my big brother Arnold is. I've heard humans passing by our cage say, "Oh, the small one, he's eight weeks old? He's a wiry little thing." I figured that age in weeks was important to humans; I certainly didn't know what "eight weeks" meant, and I still don't, but their tone was sort of sweet, so I figured it was something good. As to the word "wiry," I had an idea that our cage was wiry, so I guessed it meant that I looked at home in my environment.

At first I liked the idea, but then I saw humans coming with soft little cushions and taking kittens out of the cage next door with the comment, "Now we're going home." Did that mean there were homes other than this one? I wondered what they might be like — if they had soft-cushion beds. Maybe they had other wonders that might please me. If there were other homes, there might be other foods, other visitors, other kittens. Oh, maybe I would have an extended family or more playmates or more contact with these humans who were capable of such gentleness.

I felt restless. I was going to examine all new visitors to determine if I might like them to take me home, call me "wiry" in a gentle tone of voice, and — oh heaven — stroke my furry little body with their kind human hands.

A few days later, a young couple came by. They were almost the same height, walked arm in arm, and talked to each other in low tones that I could barely hear, even when I pressed my nose to the grill of my cage.

They proceeded slowly from cage to cage, calling gently to the indwellers, he, in a muted summons, and she, in a melodious birdsong. As they approached my cage, I meowed at my brother so he could join me in a show of well-behaved enthusiasm that might cause them to consider adopting us both. Although their soft chatter was captivating, I couldn't imagine life without Arnold — my playmate, my soulmate, my lifeline.

I pounced on him in an exaggerated display of affection, which would have made him laugh if we were humans, and although surprised, he responded in kind. From the corner of my eye, I saw the couple had stopped to watch us. They appeared to be smiling. I nodded at my brother to join me in wrapping our paws around the grill of our cage

and making plaintive sounds intended to express our great need for protection and care. We took turns vociferating and when she, whom the man had called Tam, stretched her index finger through the grill, my brother Arnold reached for it as quickly as I did. She said, "Tommy, look at how charming they are. Do you think we could take them both?" For a very long moment Tommy stood still, and I froze, too. Maybe I wasn't meant to leave the shelter. Maybe I was meant to grow old with only Arnold for consolation.

When Tommy started what looked like a headshake, I let out my most heart-rending cry and jumped playfully on Arnold's back. Tommy looked at Tam and smiled. I felt a little manipulative, but frankly, I was desperate.

Now that we had their attention, Arnold and I cavorted in the most endearing way we knew how. But suddenly Tam and Tommy whispered something to each other and left the room. I could hardly breathe. Had we overdone it? Did they find us frivolous and unworthy? I had never before felt my heart beat so wildly. The thought of them petting me grew louder in my mind until it silenced even my fraternal mews. I floated, motionless, on a cushion of tender hopes. And then they came back with Zach, the shelter keeper and, oh marvelous world, I distinctly heard Tam say, "Yes, we'd like to take them both." Arnold cried and pounced to rouse me from my awestruck stillness because I had, for one unfathomable moment, truly gone to heaven.

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LUCKY TAKES CONTROL

Jennifer Jolly

My name is “Lucky Jolly.” I have a shining, black fur coat, a long, elegant tail, and gleaming, yellow eyes. I’m an extremely beautiful female cat. When pleased, I purr. When cross, I hiss. I have a mind of my own.

I live with an ancient man and woman. I found them when I was abandoned as a kitten. It was freezing cold, about to snow, and I feared for my life. I dodged through traffic and encountered surly dogs. Eventually I ended up on a doorstep that belonged to the daughter of these old geezers. She felt sorry for me and asked them to take me in. Lucky me! Now you know how I got my name. Though I prefer being addressed as “Lucia” or “Mistress L.”

These two old fogies rattle around in a large Victorian house in Hoboken, New Jersey. “Noo Joisey,” as the locals would say. The odd thing is that the old folks live in America, but both have strange British accents. They don’t speak like most normal folks around here. For instance, when I’m with Americans, they say things to me like: “Git yer butt off that chair, Lucky.” The two old buzzards will say, “Kindly remove your rear end from the chair.” Most normal people around here would say, “Waddya want for dinner?” My old folks say, “Would you care for a few tender morsels, Lucky?”

I think they’re stuck in a time warp, but they mean well.

The old man has a white beard like Santa Claus. He usually shuffles around in brown carpet slippers. He wears a tatty old cotton dressing gown that looks like a shade of dirty gray. He sits at the computer and writes scientific papers about the genetics and behavior of baboons. Seriously! He’s very smart but strange. Fortunately for me, he loves animals. People refer to him as “The Professor.” I call him Grandpa.

The old woman has white hair. Her name is Mrs. Jolly. She doesn’t have a round smiley face and rotund body, as you would expect from her name, but is tall and fairly thin. This old bat doesn’t hear very well. She keeps saying “Eh? Eh, what was that, Cliff?” to old White Beard. Then Grandpa shouts and the old bat says, “No need to shout like that.” There’s no pleasing some people.

My main problem with the old folks is they try to control me. I hate that. The old man thinks he’s in charge, but I control him. Here’s an example. Usually, I stay on the top floor of this large house where he works on his

computer, but in the evenings, I go downstairs to the main floor. I roam about taking in the smells and poking around to see what's what. When it's time to go upstairs to my bed, the old man says, "Come on Lucky, up up, up." Then I'm supposed to race up the stairs. Sometimes I don't want to go. At times like this, I hide under a chair where he can't get hold of me. I have a good laugh when he hops around, then looks under the chair saying, "Come on out, now," and flaps his hands. I take no notice and stay still as a rock. He can't do anything about it.

The old woman also tries to control me. One day I went under the sideboard when I didn't want to go upstairs. "Come out, Lucky," I heard her say. I refused to budge. Then this hand came in and grabbed my tail. The nerve of it! I hissed and snarled, baring my teeth at her as she pulled me out. "How dare you pull my tail?" I yowled and bit one of her fingers. Then I gave her a scratch for good measure.

Well, the old bat jumped around as if she'd been shot, yelling "That darned cat bit me. I'll kick its behind if it does that again!" "Oh, don't say that, Jen. She's bound to get cross if you pull her tail," said old Grandpa. He seemed to think the whole thing was a joke and was trying not to laugh at Grandma dancing around and yelling. "It's all very well for you, Mr. Smarty Pants, you didn't get bitten, and of course, you would defend that cat. You spoil her rotten," said Mrs. Jolly angrily.

The old man spluttered in amazement when she said this. I just arched my back and strode off with my nose in the air. She won't do that again in a hurry, I can tell you.

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THE DUMBBELL AND THE FUNKY LIE

(A Tale From The Ultra-Violet Vestibule—A.K.A. The Black Light Zone)

Richard Byrd

He was christened Sillyvester StallMorone. Having an IQ twenty-five degrees south of Kermit's on a foggy day, his friends, family, and neighbors dubbed him Rockhead. After flunking out of the University of Miami, he heeded the mantra of Horace Greeley and ventured west. Sillyvester realized he had no viable skills or cranium capabilities worth mentioning. He felt being a movie star was his best option. It had worked for John Wayne among others. So he was off to Hollyweird, where lack of talent could be overcome by creating a marketable image. He bided his time, and between bit parts, he studied all who came before him. He realized they had two common denominators. They were ultra-macho, and they were ardent defenders of white nationalism.

His career thus far had amounted to minor roles in low-budget movies. Nothing that would make the studios take notice. They say fate at times is a wake-up kick to the stomach. Having nothing better to do, he decided to go see the Muhammad Ali Chuck Wepner fight. Wepner was known as the Bayonne Bleeder. The fight, despite Wepner's dirty tactics, rabbit punching etc., went as expected. Ali, channeling his inner Captain Macheath, commenced to slice, dice, and disfigure the Bleeder. In the ninth round, the Bleeder knocked the champ down. Photographic evidence later proved the Bleeder had illegally stepped on Ali's foot. Channeling their inner Jack London, white amerikkka did the dance of the cross burners. This was evident from the subsequent reactions in print and electronic media.

To the unjaundiced cornea, all the Bleeder did was piss Ali off. The next six rounds were a study in how to give and take a beatdown, with Ali administering the former and the Bleeder receiving the later. In the fifteenth round, Ali put him out of his misery by knocking him out. Like a jolt of lightning to his waffle-brain, Sillyvester saw his opportunity. He would write, direct, and star in a film based on the fight, albeit with a different storyline and outcome. The plot was simple as Simon Sez: A barely functional, illiterate club fighter gets a shot at the Heavyweight Championship. The current Ku-Klux mindset, combined with the nostalgic urge to bring back the "Fabulous Fifties" (see the success of TV's *Happy Days*), was the proof in the rice pudding. He would play

the lead, the Muhammad Ali character (true champion inside and out, who not only slew his pugilistic antagonists, but subjected the United States Government to a crushing defeat), renamed Sapollo Coon. The success of TV shows such as *Good Times* and *The Jeffersons* proved the Stepin-Fetchit, Colored Boy was back in vogue. The Malt-Liquor Minstrel Show was all the rage. In Reel as opposed to the Real version, the fight would be much closer. It would culminate in a split decision, in Sapollo's favor for now. The title and the lead character would be taken from his childhood nickname, Rockhead.

The cinematic venture was beyond his greatest and wettest nocturnal emissions. The film won an Oscar for best picture. A statue was erected of him in Philadelphia. He wrote two sequels for Rockhead. In Rockhead Two, he would wrest the title from Sapollo in dramatic fashion. They would simultaneously knock each other down. Under boxing rules, the person who gets to his feet first is the victor. In the spirit of George Lincoln Rockwell, Sillyvester would be the first to arise.

Over the years, he found great success with his Rockhead movies. In the interim, he created a new character: Shambo. Shambo was a Vietnam vet who almost single-handedly won the Vietnam War. Having put the Coons back in their place, why not the Gooks, he figured. His reactionary white supremacist astigmatism circumvented his capability to perceive that there is a REEL WORLD. There is a REAL WORLD, and there is a DEAL WORLD. Morning after, he awoke submerged in a vat of cyclamate and pachyderm piss. He learned too brittle, too eleventh hour. In The DEAL WORLD what you HUMP is what you DRAWBACK. He would have an eternity, and a steady diet of mint, chocolate-chip dog feces, to figure it all out.

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RETIRING

Dennis Sherman

December 2017. I walk down from my office at the college toward room 231 and the final class I will teach. Students in the corridor seem as young as ever. Their clothing has changed, again and again over the decades, while mine has remained the same. They are more shades of ethnic mixes than when I first taught here in the 1970s. They are more anonymous to me as the hours in these corridors and classrooms stretch into the thousands. I have been teaching at the college for forty-seven years. I have forgotten all but handfuls of students.

I enter the classroom. The students quiet down a bit, but not much. I put my folders on the desk, take out a piece of paper with the outline of my lesson plan, and stand there without saying a word. Years have long passed since I was uncomfortable in front of a classroom, since I felt at all threatened by anything they might ask or do. As I slowly scan the room, giving eye contact to as many of them as I can, they stop talking. I conduct the class, or rather facilitate the discussion, calling on students with or without their hands up — long how I have handled classrooms. And so the class goes, special only to me because it is the last one I will teach. I do say so, tell them at the end, and I get a little applause — not rousing but just enough to be appropriate — and the class is over.

I walk back, maybe a bit slower than usual, toward my office, the halls given hints of life by faded impressionist prints. I pass colleagues' offices, colleagues that I would drop in on from time to time that last semester and over the decades just to socialize. In the early years, colleagues such as these would be part of my broader life. Now they are much less so. So many people who were once friends and close acquaintances have drifted away with age. There remain a few good ones, just a few. On this last evening, their office doors are closed.

I turn into mine. Over the years, the college expanded into different buildings. This is my fourth office, and it has the best view. To the west, new buildings have risen over what were once parking lots. Beyond them I can see parts of the Hudson River, and further on, the darkening horizon. I have been in this office the last five years. I've never grown into it as I had my others; I knew I would not be here for long. It's already cleared out: decades of books I put into boxes and sent down to the library, with

few illusions that they would really be useful to anyone, but that was the right thing to do; a dozen or so large bags of duplications; old, unpicked-up papers; radios and printers that no longer work; and just “stuff” that had accumulated, stuff that may have once been useful, like those books, but no longer were.

I’ve had my obligatory retirement luncheon, which was blessedly small, informal, and low key. These sorts of occasions can be pleasant affairs involving a nice meal and conversations and even laughter about the old days, turning the old days into the good old days that they may or may not have been. They can also have the quality of attending, while not yet unconscious, one’s own funeral/memorial service; I suppose some people like that.

I take the elevator down for the last time. All too appropriately, it is an evening in mid-December. The sun has set. Winter has begun. I feel the weight of what I am doing, of what is happening in my life, of where I have arrived after so many years.

At that moment, I think of a word from so long ago: weary. It’s a word I add to a line in the song by The Band called *The Weight*: “where I can lay my weary head.” That song graced a film about the 1960s I used for my last classes during my first year of teaching. I loved the film, a collage of images that evoked my time when it was still my time. I used it in my history classes the next year and the next, but after a while it became too dated for the students; they no longer connected to it as their history. I had to “retire” it.

I think of those words now and lament. Retirement is not taking a weight off my shoulders. Rather, it adds weight to what remains. It’s not the days behind that make me weary. It’s the days ahead.

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44 YEARS

Donna K. Ramer

It was well past midnight when she exited the elevator, turned right and started to walk down the hall. Although the dearth of noise was unusual — even for so late an hour — she wasn't unnerved; she smiled at the familiarity of the deserted hall and resumed the short walk, turning left at the end to face the door with 11E on the brass box that also held the peephole and nameplate.

She put the thickest of the keys on the silver ring in the Medeco lock, turned it 180 degrees left and heard and felt the deadbolt retract. She extracted the key and, without looking, used her thumb and forefinger to secure a thinner but longer key, which she slipped into the bottom lock. Turning it slightly right, the bolt retracted just enough to allow her to open the door.

She entered the one-bedroom flat but didn't bother turning on the light; the night's half moon illuminated the room through the wall of uncovered windows that faced southeast. As she closed the door, she kicked off her shoes and shrugged her left shoulder to free her tote and purse so they would glide down her arm. Grabbing their leather straps, she placed them on the black slate floor next to her shoes.

She looked around. Nine boxes to her left were labeled "books" and "office supplies." To her right, a dozen more boxes of varying sizes blocked the front closet; these were filled with kitchen items and linens. The boxes in front of her held the tchotchkes, art, and artifacts she collected from her travels and received as gifts. bubble-wrapped paintings leaned against the now bare walls. Gray, well-worn, padded tarps covered the sofa, easy chairs, and dining-room table.

She grabbed a bottle of water from the otherwise empty refrigerator and walked into the bedroom, where she had disrupted the moat of boxes around her bed by moving a large cardboard wardrobe so she could undress. Pulling on a t-shirt, she looked out the window and watched traffic moving on the Williamsburg Bridge about a mile away. She usually was comforted by the red taillights heading into Brooklyn and the white headlights to the City. But tonight, she felt tears slowly spilling down her cheeks.

It was her last night in a flat she always hated and always intended to leave. But life had gotten in the way. A couple of divorces, boyfriends and

lovers (unforgettable and forgettable), illnesses and surgeries, redecorating, birthday parties, holiday dinners, book-club meetings, work, out-of-town guests... 44 years of life and its distractions, fears, joys.

More than an hour later, she finally fell asleep. At 6:15 the alarm shocked her out of a dream-filled sleep, and she dragged herself out of bed. She frowned as she looked around the apartment and straightened a framed mirror on the wall. After showering, she dressed, grabbed her briefcase, and walked the block to pick up her mobile order at Starbucks. Heading to the subway, she tried to shake the feeling of disease caused by a disturbing dream and a feeling that, just maybe, she was about to embark upon a life-altering change.

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THE UNLUCKY TRAVELER

Michael Wellner

After my last article, in the 2023 *QReview*, about my pocketbook being lost during a recent trip to Southern California, I began wondering if that was just a one-off incident, or if, in fact, I am something of an unlucky traveler. That got me thinking about other trips and other incidents. I'll let you judge for yourself—after hearing another story.

Chapter I: In January of 2020, just before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, my wife, Marva, and I planned a trip to Hawaii, with a two-day stopover en route to see Marva's daughter in Sacramento. We learned that JetBlue has a non-stop flight from New York (JFK) to Sacramento, so we booked that as a one-way, then a Hawaiian Airlines flight from Sacramento to Hawaii, and then, ten or twelve days later, a non-stop from Hawaii back to JFK. So far so good.

On the appointed day, we checked in at the JetBlue terminal in JFK, with one bag each, which contained, of course, clothes for the entire two-week trip. *An important point.*

As you might already have guessed, when we arrived in Sacramento, only one suitcase arrived with us, and it was not mine! A minor sense of panic set in because I could not imagine being away in Hawaii for two weeks with only the clothes on my back. And I also could not imagine that JetBlue would be able to (a) figure out where my bag was and (b) get it to me in Sacramento in time for my flight to Hawaii just forty-eight hours later.

We found a baggage-claim office, which wasn't so easy at 10:00 p.m. when our flight landed, and explained our predicament. Luckily for us, a very attentive and caring agent was still on duty, and after I produced my baggage-tag receipt from JFK, she promised that she would do her best.

A couple of hours later, I actually did receive a call from the agent, who said that they were able to locate my bag, and it was en route to Dallas/Fort Worth. Not very helpful—but she assured me that they could and would get it to Sacramento before we were scheduled to depart for Hawaii. The agent followed up with several calls, each giving me an update and assuring me that they were “on the case.” But imagine my surprise at the next call when she told me that my bag was now en route to Las Vegas.

True story! And then late the following evening, when we were at a party hosted by Marva's daughter, my phone rang yet again to tell me that my bag had indeed arrived in Sacramento and was at the airport. We immediately left the party, drove back to the airport, and found my suitcase, essentially none the worse for wear and with a tag that clearly showed it had been on a trip of its own, from JFK to Dallas to Las Vegas to Sacramento, all in fewer than forty-eight hours. I was impressed — and very thankful. The next morning it was the two of us *and two suitcases* en route to Hawaii. The question of how a bag on a non-stop flight could go astray has never been answered.

Chapter II: Our flight to Hawaii—Maui first stop — was uneventful. Our itinerary called for visits to three islands, Maui, Kauai, and Oahu. We had booked short flights between the islands, which ordinarily would not have been any issue at all. But, true to form, on our first inter-island flight, going through security at the airport in Maui, somehow my prized money clip, given to me by Marva as a wedding gift, disappeared! Needless to say, I was more than a bit upset, especially when the security guards would not allow me to go back and try to find it. My only option, they explained, was to board my flight and then call the security/lost-items phone number that they provided. "Good luck with that," I thought, but there really was no other option.

So onto the plane we went, more than a little upset, convinced that I would never see my money clip again. This would not be a story worth telling were it not for a happy ending. When we arrived at our hotel in Kauai, I immediately called the lost-and-found phone number in Kauai, and the man who took my call, after asking me for a detailed description, told me that they actually had found it and that they would mail it back to me. Amazing! So, I provided my New York City address, and to my astonishment, it arrived, safe and intact, a day or two after we got home. My faith in human nature was sustained yet again. As the saying goes, "All's well that ends well."

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STUFF

Yona Rogosin

As the late and great George Carlin said so famously, “Americans love their stuff.” He was referring to American consumerism and the marketing machines that foster Americans’ compulsion to buy products they do not need. Similarly, manufacturers produce goods, especially large-ticket items that are designed to become obsolete quickly or break after a short life span. Then, consumers are forced to buy “new and improved “ upgrades that are often poorly made, over-priced, complicated versions of the original item.

There are many books, TED Talks, support groups, and experts that can advise you how to efficiently deal with an ever-growing pile of stuff. We now have a vast industry of professional organizers who will come to your home and help you organize, simplify, and get rid of stuff for as much as \$200 or more an hour. Currently, there are hundreds of organizers of one stripe or another in the U.S. who belong to any one of several “organization and productivity” professional associations and twelve other countries around the world with similar associations, each with a minimum of 100 members.

There are companies that specialize in manufacturing containers of all sizes, shapes, colors, and materials that are uniquely designed to fit under the bed, in bookcases, and in pantries, and for jewelry, makeup, hair dryers and tools, utensils, spices — even plastic bags — all for the purpose of making your home look neat and helping you efficiently find what you need.

And let’s not forget the closet. An organized closet is just the ticket for efficiency and economy and to simplify your life and bring you joy. You can buy color-coded hangers to help you line up your clothes by category; specially designed ones for handbags, belts, pants, and skirts; hanging bags with slots for shirts and sweaters; and shoe racks, some of which revolve or are hidden in chests.

You can hire someone to build a custom-designed closet to perfectly house your collection of clothes, belts, shoes, socks, scarves, and what-not, or you can buy do-it-yourself materials that can take hours of your time to put together and install.

But no worries! There are specialty retail stores, online sellers, and cable TV channels devoted to providing you with instructional YouTubes,

books, and other demonstration tools. Yes, lots of services and stuff to buy to keep you organized.

Once your home is overrun with stuff and you want to minimize, you can reduce the clutter by passing on your stuff to someone else. You can do this by donating items to a growing number of thrift shops, charities, and causes so that others can reuse or repurpose them. Or, you can try selling them in a garage or sidewalk sale or on eBay, Craigslist, Nextdoor, and other services including designer resale shops. There's even some cachet and a higher resale value given to clothing of a certain age and style; it is labeled "vintage," and today sellers and buyers of vintage stuff have their own trade show that you can attend. There also are movers for rubble, rubbish, and large items like old appliances. They are called junk removers and have names such as Junkluggers and 1-800-GOT-JUNK. What's more, charities such as Housing Works will send a truck to pick up your big, heavy stuff if the items are in good condition and in demand.

Best of all, if you really cannot bear to part with certain stuff or don't have sufficient room in your home, there is the great invention of the storage locker or room, for which you not only pay a monthly rental fee but also incur the expense of insurance and movers to take your stuff from your home and put it in storage and then move it back when you need it. Some of these movers, such as Box-n-Go, urBin, and PODS are not ordinary movers; each one has special services and containers with distinctive names and features.

Last but not least, is digital storage for your digitized stuff. You can buy a handy, trusty thumb drive or various external hard drives to back up and save your stuff. Better yet, you can rent space on the magical iCloud and store your ever-expanding number of photographs, documents, emails, and videos that take up so much memory on your computer and smartphone or space in boxes, albums, or drawers.

Who cares if it is hard to keep track of or easily retrieve our digitized stuff? Rest assured, another service will come along, if not already here, to help us.

AI anyone?

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THE MERMAID'S TALE

Linda Rothstein

Dear Department of Fisheries:

I didn't mean for anything bad to happen. I was sitting on my rock minding my own business, shucking oysters for my dinner. If that surprises you, let me say that we mermaids may be mythical, but that doesn't stop us from enjoying a seafood dinner. You'd be surprised at how much we can eat and still keep our figures. It all goes to the tail, and then we swim it off.

The day it happened there was this fisherman on shore stringing bait. He was threading his hook right through the worms' guts. I don't like to see invertebrate abuse, but I didn't want to start anything, so I kept my peace.

Next this big wave comes my way and knocks over my bucket. All of my oysters spilled out. I still had some scallops from the day before, but they needed defrosting. That made me mad as hell, so to cheer myself up I thought I'd mess with that fisherman.

I wiggled my tail, and he splashed right in. I knew he'd do it. Fishermen always find mermaids alluring. I saw him wade toward me and thought, my dinner's ruined so why not have a little fun, but in my heart I knew why not. It's been tried before and never worked. The damn tail we mermaids are cursed with gets in the way.

All this was going 'round and 'round in my mind when I spot this eel that lives under my rock. The eel takes one look at the delicious bundle of worms still in the fisherman's hands, and what does he do? The darned eel slithers out to grab the worms. The fisherman fought back of course, so the eel gave him an electric eel shock. The fool fisherman keeled over, right into the deep, and drowned. Just like that. To make it worse, the eel steals away, leaving me to take the rap. That's why they say "slippery as an eel," isn't it?

That's how it happened — that's how I became the only mermaid ever charged with a felony. I told the cops the fisherman groped me, but they looked at my tail and said, "Groped you, lady? Exactly where did he grope you?" Then the cops had a good laugh. So here I am behind bars. I miss my rock, and the oysters here are deep-fried and so fattening that even my tail is spreading.

Can you please bail me out?

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MY MEMORY

Rachel Shor

My memory, especially for names, is disappearing. Although never concerned about brand names, car models, or actors' names, I did, somehow, learn all my students' names the ten years I taught at York College (CUNY). Now, a downhill trend seems to be increasing.

A recent *New York Times* article said that people who got fewer than six hours sleep starting in their fifties had a thirty percent greater chance of losing memory early or having dementia. Great to cheer me up that way! Then, after enjoying a Calder exhibit at MOMA, I strangely forgot his name not for two hours but for two weeks. More stressful, especially considering I still recall the names of two of my three childhood dolls, now long gone, was that I could not recall the name of a bear who is one of my favorite stuffed animals.

Sure, they're toys living in a large basket no longer on my bed and I'm an adult, but by now the twenty animals are part of my life, with their individual source, look, character, and, of course, name, even nickname. For example, Moo, short for Tangle moo (i.e. Tanglewood) Holstein, who, in his floppy eagerness, sometimes bumped into others, is still lively but more considerate. Orly, or Sweet William Orlando, is, despite his size, a gentle manatee who came home with me from an American Library Association convention in Florida. Al, a small bear in a sailor cap, who likes to sit at a window to watch the snow, was given to me in Alaska by my late, long-time companion, Stan.

After taking about thirty years to graduate from college, I finally finished my second master's degree at sixty. Stan said I should let him know when his gift arrived, but not to open it before graduation day. I agreed and soon after reported I had the surprise present — a large box clearly labeled Vermont Teddy Bear Company. I named the bear, dressed in academic gown and mortarboard, Honey Bear. Sometime later, Stan, a widower, brought over a bear he had once given his wife. I named her Coco, though she was honey colored, whereas Honey Bear was more cocoa flavored. We decided they would be married, as I would not.

My editor and best friends (whose adult kids' names I tend to forget) assure me that, like everyone else, I am just experiencing aging, not dementia. They remind me I'm a reading, writing woman looking forward to the next walk or talk. Yet, I still wonder how I could have forgotten Honey Bear's name for even minutes. And more disturbing, what will I forget next?

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SHRED THAT BUCKET LIST!

Wayne Cotter

I'm not sure why I wince every time I hear someone mention their "bucket list." Perhaps it's a grim reminder of my dwindling days on this earth. Or maybe I'm uncomfortable with the thought that a person can cavalierly convert their dreams into some kind of existential grocery list.

And these bucket listers always seem shocked that I maintain no such list. I guess I just don't understand the concept. What happens if I complete my bucket list? Am I expected to die? Or, what if items are left unchecked on my list? Will I be plagued by guilt on my deathbed?

And why in the world would I want a list of places I must visit before I die? That's just too much pressure for this rapidly aging retiree. What if someone suggests a wonderful trip to, say, Brazil's Rio Carnival, but it's not on my cherished bucket list? Will I be haunted by self-doubt for overriding my list?

I know some zealots who include stepping foot in each of our fifty states on their bucket lists or visiting the capital of every European country. Hey, my days are numbered. Do I really want to spend some of them in Mississippi? And doesn't Paris have bed bugs?

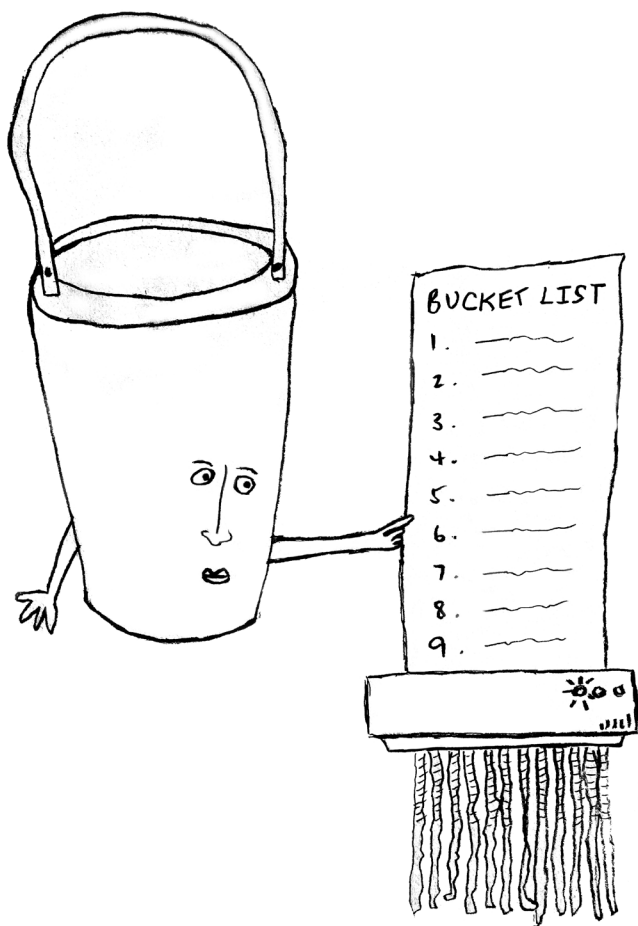
I thought the term "bucket list" had been around forever, but I just learned it originated with a 2007 movie of the same name. The film featured Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman as two terminally ill buddies who choose to spend their remaining days completing an outrageous to-do list.

It was neither actor's finest film.

Even the phrase "kick the bucket" rubs me the wrong way. The term, some say, stems from the involuntary leg spasms of pigs after they are slaughtered while hanging by their feet from a beam (known as a bucket). Ugh!

Other slang terms for death are far less objectionable. "Croaked," for example, conjures up thoughts of sleepy-eyed frogs reclining on lily pads, while "bought the farm" has a bucolic charm about it. Even the phrase "taking a dirt nap" suggests a certain grimy peacefulness.

So, here's my suggestion to all bucket listers: Consider adding a bit of disorganization to your lives. Be flexible and open to new adventures. And yes, shred that bucket list! Some of the best experiences in life never appear on a list.





EVA SHATKIN

Mary Ann Donnelly

July 20, 1918 – November 20, 2023

Eva Shatkin was a founding member of *Quest*, editor in chief of *Q Review* from 2009 – 2011, and prose editor for the 2015 and 2016 editions. In addition, she contributed her poetry and prose over the years and was an active member of the Poets and Writers Workshops.

The 2024 edition continues the mission of highlighting the creativity of our members. As Eva wrote in the 2015 20th-anniversary edition, “Our *Q Review* carries on. Perhaps it’s the freshness of material from the latest student corps that regenerates the stream of our endeavors. We welcome whatever impulse moves members to compose poetry, paint, or tell a tale. ‘Keep the juices flowing.’ Thereon lives life.”



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