

Q REVIEW



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THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

Q Review 2026

Volume 31

From the Editor

In this year's *Q Review*, you'll find something old and something new.

The old: *Q Review* is essentially the same as it's always been—chock full of Questers' creativity. Huge thanks to all the editors and to all the members who submitted their work.

The design, however, is all new. Kudos go to our talented designer, April Koral, who worked with us on every last detail. Among other changes, we've added color; used a variety of fonts; and mingled the prose, poetry, and art. We've also made space for the artists to write about their work if they wish.

Perhaps the most important aspect of our new design is that the names of our contributors are first and foremost on the page. After all, without their submissions, *Q Review* wouldn't even exist, let alone be the extraordinary publication it is.



In Memoriam

In the past year, we were saddened by the deaths of John Hood and Marilyn Weiss. They will both be greatly missed. We were also sorry to learn of the passing of Helen Neilson, a former *Q Review* editor in chief.



Note

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



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Q REVIEW

THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

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THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

Helen McMahon



100 Years of NYC Architecture, watercolor

Nancy Jones *This Is Ved Mehta*

*V*ed Mehta was a blind Indian writer, the author of twenty-four books and a former staff writer at *The New Yorker*. I first laid eyes on him in 2013 at the North American office of Oxford University. He was a graduate of one of the thirty-eight colleges that make up the university, as was my late husband. Periodically, Oxford held meetings to introduce alumni to important people, projects, or programs they should know about.

I loved going to these meetings because they were so unlike the typical American college get-together; they were very British and very Oxford. For instance, one must not go to these meetings salivating over potential hors d'oeuvres, because there were none. Instead, a bowl of pretzels was on hand or, if one was very lucky, bite-sized watercress sandwiches. It was far more advisable to get in the mood to drink. The variety of wines was superb and delicious, and alcohol was a mandatory ingredient to loosen the tongues of these initially very reserved gentlemen. After a sip or two, these brilliant men would finally socialize and expound on their subjects or expertise. Since I was not a graduate, I never mingled but would grab my drink and head to a nearby sofa to observe the scene.

Not socializing didn't bother me in the least, because it gave me more time to simply look, and it was at one of these gatherings that I first saw Ved Mehta. He was a diminutive but attractive man and was being led around the room by a woman holding his arm. In a distinctive, clear voice she announced to each and every person she approached, "This is Ved Mehta." I hadn't the foggiest idea who he was but watched as he was greeted by some attendees who seemed to know and needed no further introduction. I was extremely impressed that he held his wine glass in one hand hidden behind his back and managed to spill not a drop. The fair-complexioned brunette making the frequent announcements, I found out later, was his wife, Linn Fenimore Cooper Cary, a descendant of James Fenimore Cooper, who wrote nineteenth-century novels including *The Last of the Mohicans*.

After guiding her cargo around the room and standing by idly while

he chatted, Mrs. Mehta apparently tired and sought a little refreshment on her own. Ved Mehta was parked and abandoned very close to my sofa. He looked rather lost and might have been wondering where his guide was. When, finally, he wasn't claimed or sought after by anyone, I spoke up. "There is a soft armchair just behind you if you care to sit down." He began to feel behind his back with the hand not carrying his wine glass and very carefully lowered himself to a sitting position; he and his wine glass landed safely. He asked me who I was, in effect what Oxford College I had attended; I answered "none," and explained that my husband was a graduate of Exeter College. He volunteered the name of his college, Balliol, which meant nothing to me. He asked if I had children, and when I told him I had one son who was an architect, his face lit up and he immediately responded with, "I wrote a book on architecture. I will give you a copy."

Once Ved Mehta had established his impressive credentials—he was a very good writer—he seemed to relax and realize no further performance was necessary. I was a nobody. I asked him if he had published anything recently, and he became sadly reflective and lamented that it was nearly impossible to get anything published these days. He then talked about his two daughters: one had recently applied to medical school, and he almost cried when he said she didn't get in. "But she's brilliant! I don't understand this." He looked so tired and heartbroken that I was about to get up and get him another drink when his guide arrived. She was ready to take him for another jaunt around the room.

I saw him one last time, in 2014. Exeter College was celebrating its 700th anniversary with a weekend of festivities, and he was descending a stairway. I stopped him to say how much I enjoyed his writing. His wife was with him, and she was very cordial. It must have been a relief to her that she didn't have to say, "This is Ved Mehta."



Michael Hamburg *They Came to Save Us*

I had just arrived at the latest emergency meeting of our neighborhood council when I heard that help had finally come.

So I and a few of the other council members went to greet them. They had come to save us, but would it turn out to be too late? Our world was too long dying from a history of abuses. The planet's greatest thinkers had given up searching for solutions. All of our leaders had withdrawn from public office. The media carried only frivolous games. It seemed just a matter of a few months until the last semblance of order would crumble. Many resorted to violence; others took their own lives. Our numbers were now greatly reduced. Then they arrived. Most people greeted them with open arms and desperately accepted their plans. They hadn't said exactly where they came from, but we sensed their home lay well beyond the reach of our most powerful technologies. They promised all would be well if only we followed what they proposed. A few among us were suspicious, but our voices fell on deaf ears and closed minds. "Please save us!" the world's survivors echoed over and over. But we doubters had more questions.

In reply, they referred to themselves as missionaries whose sole purpose was the preservation of life no matter its origins. They had been aware of our plight for many years and deemed it was the proper time for an intervention. They would relocate us to a new world on which we could rebuild our lives. It would be very much like the home we used to have, they promised, with the exception that there would be certain safeguards to prevent a recurrence of the abuses that doomed our planet. I could only feel saddened by my last glimpses of home—the empty streets, the dark houses, and most chilling of all, the utter silence covering the countryside. Finally, it was our turn to leave. So the few of us remaining embarked on the epic journey in ships that filled the sky. We were escorted to what were described to us as our "sleeping berths." We would make the voyage in a deep hibernation. This is when I began to feel truly afraid.

I had no awareness of the passage of time, so when I awoke, I didn't know how long we had been travelling. But shortly I sensed a change in

the motion of the ship and then nothing. No movement. No sound. Had we arrived? But where? And what about the others? A door opened, and I was told to drink something that resembled fruit punch but wasn't. "It will help you adjust to the air," came words of assurance. Strangely, I could offer no resistance as I was led into a massive building whose hallways were lined with display cases as far as I could see. We stopped in front of one of these vast cabinets that had an orange-red pastel backdrop and a floor of rust-colored mud. Arrayed side by side were giant bubbles each holding one of us! And directly in front of me stood an empty bubble. "No! No!" I tried to scream but no sound came out of my mouth.

• • •

"Well, that's the last of them."

"So it seems. Another successful mission. The museum's collection just keeps getting bigger and bigger. By the way, what was the name of that place anyway?"

"I think the catalog listed it as the third planet from its sun. Sol 3 or something. It's quite a shame what happened there. Previous scouting parties reported that it was once a blue and green jewel. Now it's just another barren rock in space."

"At least we recovered a few of the dominant species."

"Remember though! They are extremely dangerous and must never be allowed their liberty."

"Understood, sir."



Linda Schwartz *Photo*

It wasn't easy for us to dress for Thanksgiving. Basically, we had interchangeable wardrobes in two sizes: Levis, BVD tees, and plaid flannel shirts. I occasionally wore a variant leotard or a 1950s thrift shop sweater, but nothing formal enough for dinner with his family in Queens. So we dropped by my parents, and, in my old bedroom closet, I found an embroidered dress from high school and a turtleneck to wear underneath for an autumnal effect. Nathan borrowed a shirt from my father and pulled back his hair with one of my ponytail holders.

I wish I could remember the specific conversation we had in his ten-year-old '62 Ford Fairlane on the trip from the Lower East Side to Jackson Heights, but I could easily remember the tenor. On the light side, there was smart, funny talk. On the tender side, there was a familiar, childlike tug. But when the sun lowered over the expressway, the truth was revealed. I loved Nathan, but Nathan didn't love me. When my nineteen-year-old heart opened to him, to his face in the amber light, to his post-adolescent angst, to his gloomy dissertations on Sartre and Nietzsche, to his edge—his irresistible boy edge, my thin young skin was sliced by icy words. "I don't love you." There it was. You just can't read between one line.

The photo was taken shortly after we'd arrived. We were seated on the couch next to an odd 1960s lamp with a big cork base. I was trying to remove something from the corner of my eye with my index finger. My thumb was stretched out, and my other three fingers were curled around a cigarette that would be lit momentarily. My long hair was half tied back, and I was half smiling. Nathan was seated next to me holding up a wine glass. Actually, it was a martini glass filled with wine. He was in profile, silhouetted against the blank wall behind us.

He was looking at me in a way I had never seen before and never saw after. Was it for a fraction of a second, or had it lingered and I just hadn't noticed? I've stared at the photo repeatedly, and time and again I see it. Admiration. No. More—adoration. Decades later and I'm still contemplating the mysterious contrast of memories—the soft, still moment of Nathan looking at me, seeing me, loving me and the mountain of hard words on the other side of the frame.

Bob Reiss



Lobstermen's Gear on Matinicus Rock, photograph

Matinicus Rock, where this photo was taken, is a bit remote—twenty-seven miles seaward off the Maine coast. It has no electric power nor other infrastructure, and the few homes on it are completely self-sufficient.

“The Rock” is part of the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge and a nesting ground for seabirds like puffins.

Bob Reiss *Isn't that . . . ?*

My wife, Debra, and I used to keep score of noteworthy people whom she or I encountered in New York and elsewhere. Always outscoring me, she had the advantage of running the Cornell Med School Humanities in Medicine program, which invited well-known people in the arts to speak. That's how we met the actors Kathleen Chalfant and Dominic Chianese, for example. Dominic, who played Uncle Junior on *The Sopranos*, later became a member of Quest along with his wife, Jane, and we got to know them quite well. Dominic ran a charity that supported musicians who played gigs at nursing homes, and they once invited us to a fund-raising event for the organization. At this party were various other members of *The Sopranos*' cast including Tony Sirico and Steven Schirripa. On another occasion, we found ourselves at a table next to Schirripa at Noho Star restaurant.

Other luminaries we met through Debra's Cornell program included William Styron, author of *Sophie's Choice* and *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*, the latter an account of his almost suicidal depression. Another was the sportswriter Bob Lipsyte, who had written *In the Country of Illness*, wherein he speaks of infirmity as if it is a foreign land, a place he calls "Malady . . . another country, scary and strange." You see why these two were invited to speak at a medical school.

In addition, Debra snagged other speakers and performers including acclaimed guitarist Sharon Isbin, whose brother died of AIDS; legendary artist (and severely disabled) Chuck Close; Rose Styron, Bill's widow and noted human-rights activist; Susan Meiselas, well-known documentary photographer; and anti-war activist priest Daniel Berrigan.

Walking on Madison Avenue one Sunday afternoon, we saw a poster advertising a jazz concert. After the concert, we spoke to and became friendly with Al Gallodoro, nonagenarian and former clarinet and saxophone lead in the Paul Whiteman band. Al was so proud of how he could play the opening clarinet solo in *Rhapsody in Blue* with its spectacular two-and-a-half-octave rise and glissando. A few months later, Debra booked Al for the Cornell program. Paquito D'Rivera, Grammy-winning Latin-jazz-band leader, dropped by Al Gallodoro's appearance at

Cornell and extolled the “Golden Rooster” (*Gallodoro* in English). We then had dinner with Al and Paquito at an Italian restaurant on the Upper East Side, apparently a mob hangout. Debra told me that a dicey character at the next table was packing heat. I didn’t see it, because I was facing the opposite direction. In any case, both Al and Paquito were fun guys.

Recently, our friend Perry Goldstein, music-department chair at Stony Brook, comped us to a concert by Kelli O’Hara at the Staller Center on the Stony Brook campus. At the after party, I took a selfie with Ms. O’Hara, who is my number-one-fave Broadway star.

At a concert in Carnegie Hall, my friend, Bob Ackerberg, got us backstage to meet Hilary Hahn, the violin soloist that evening. We had been following Hilary since she was fifteen and performing as soloist with Bob’s Massapequa Philharmonic Orchestra.



Bob Reiss and Kelli O’Hara

Debra and I decided one Memorial Day weekend to take a quick trip to London to celebrate our anniversary. On the trip over, we were in first class, thanks to some frequent-flyer miles. Across the aisle was the actress Laura Linney. She sobbed the entire trip. No idea why.

One day at Quest, I was about to make a presentation on the jazz-saxophonist Chet Baker, and I saw two unfamiliar faces in the class. I went over to welcome them to Quest and noticed their badges had the surname, Tomei. I couldn’t resist asking them, “Are you any relation to...?”, and, before I could get out the name, they said, “We’re her parents.” Being on the Guest Speaker Committee, I then hoped to get Marisa to come and speak to us. Alas, I heard that Mr. Tomei was quite ill and passed away shortly after I met them.

An art gallery in Palm Beach once gave us two tickets to a signing event for a book of photographs depicting artists at work. The affair was

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in Bob Rauschenberg's New York studio, and we bought a couple of books for him to sign. Unfortunately, by that time he was suffering from severe arthritis and apparently was not able to write, so he signed with a thumb print. We still have the books.

Given space limitations, most of my sightings from the sports world must be deferred. As we erstwhile Brooklyn Dodger fans used to say, "Wait 'til next year."

Dennis Sherman *Waters*

*In eddies the water lingers, rests
For there is such a long way to go.*
—Marie Helen Dupont

 In this mid-winter day, I look at the scene outside my window. Automatically my eyes center on the Hudson River, an irregular strip of blue-gray waters occupying the midground between the Riverside Park trees that rise in the detailed foreground, their budless, bare branches waiting in dormancy, and the background, white and gray strips of New Jersey apartments rising into a wispy, dull morning sky. I think of sketching this scene, then building the sketch into a full drawing to suggest that this is more than it is: something that hints of wonder, with the cliffs rising over the river to the west; that suggests scenes once captured and romanticized by Hudson School painters like Thomas Cole and Asher Brown Durand almost two centuries ago. I have the heart to sketch it but not the talent.

I like the river from up here better than up close. I've walked or run along the shore countless times. Usually the river looks murky, but not murky enough to hide dead fish and trash near the shoreline. On the other hand, I've often sat out on the long pier near Seventieth Street, looking upstream toward the George Washington Bridge and downstream to the rising cityscapes of Manhattan that I know so well. I often linger there, sometimes for fifteen or twenty minutes, especially when the wind, just warm enough, whips the waters into white caps.

I take another look from my safe bedroom perch. I want the scene out the window to lighten me. But these days, now years, I am where I am. I think back to other waters that have been important to me—the pure high mountain streams graced with surrounding slopes and forests that, as a boy, helped make me feel competent and at home in the world or the Seine that represented my adult arrival at an enviable, cultural center of the world of which I longed to be a part.

I have lived closer, physically, and longer to this body of water, the Hudson River, than any other. In ways I can't quite put my finger on, I suspect that it has played a meaningful, important part in my life. I do not live only in my head, or perhaps I do, but what I see makes a difference. I've often traveled and hiked to places to see scenes. I have all these paintings on my walls. They are not portraits; they are all landscapes, usually with some water—a pond, a river, the edge of a lake. They testify to the importance of seeing in my life, and I see the Hudson River, literally, every day in all its hues: ice filled, windswept, shivering, listless, buoying large ships that power their way upstream.

I take solace in the river when I wake in the night's small hours. I go to the window, pull up the blinds to get a better view. In the half-darkness, the river is almost but never quite black because of the city glow above and lights streaming toward me from New Jersey.

But this is not “my” river. The idea of it makes my heart neither wax nor wane. It is not an old friend. Never did my wife and I picnic or hold hands along its shores. It is there, reliably so, bringing a small but significant source of color and perspective into my life.

As I look at the river, I don't know what more I want to be. I am solitary, still, self-possessed. The river is full, flowing, following its own course. For the river and me, there is no further “should be.” There just is.

In the fuller sense, I don't forget who I am when watching these waters. But sometimes it distracts me from myself, just for a moment, usually from a glance, a ten- or twenty-second look, an unfocused stare. I have done that thousands of times. That distraction, in a good way, makes me want to take another breath, to ponder what my next words will be. Now these waters are part of what I have left.

Dennis Sherman

A Fall of Sunlight

I read of a man who remembers himself when younger
Sitting in the dry grass of a field,
Exhausted by the years he already has led,
By the miles he has walked,
By the efforts at what seemed so important,
Sensing exactly where he is and
Knowing his life for what it has been and
Feeling what mercy there is in a fall of sunlight.

I see a photo of myself as a child,
Another when I am in my twenties,
And myself in the mirror,
And I can see no sign, no telling scar,
Of what happened to the old man I now see
During the long decades in between,
No hint of what the lines and grey mean.

How long the days can be when so many years and people have passed.
There is not so much ahead,
Though what there is should be plenty.
There is so much that my grandchildren
Will not know, and there is loss in that,
But not so much in the end.

And now, more than ever,
Now that I am so distant from those early intense times,
Now when all that was fresh and new is well behind me,
Now that I am toward the end and seek refuge in a few vivid memories,
Now when I know my whole life for what it is,
I need what mercy there is in a fall of sunlight.

Before I Sleep

I am with my dog Chloe in the park
 where late-day's shadows fall
 and we stop to watch
 a seemingly fearless squirrel
 at work on all that is budding
 as if we were not there,
 for he has more work to do
 before it is time to rest,
 doing what needs to be done
 for no other reason than
 it needs to be done,
 unlike my dithering,
 my biding.
 We continue on as we must,
 past people on benches talking
 as if they are leaving sorrow behind.
 One, a late middle-aged woman,
 clutches a heavy-lidded, yawning dog
 to her breasts as if she has
 lost love.
 On to our building
 where the elevator man tells me,
 as if he would never come to
 dislike life,
 that his girl just turned two.
 We pass our neighbor's door
 cracked open, empty boxes
 cluttering her floor and as if,
 with her disheveled hair, she has
 given up.

We walk into our home,
 Chloe's for seven years now
 and likely for another seven,
 her eternity,
 mine for light years gone by,
 Long long enough.
 She has fresh water in her bowl
 and a half-portion of kibble to
 contend with,
 I an apple to peel and that keyboard
 on my desk to nurture
 my day.
 Yes and yes I've done that,
 shared the best of what
 we could
 stood as one in crowded classrooms
 waited bedside in the hospital
 becoming alone.
 I think of a forest about to be
 covered, silenced, and put to bed
 by snow.
 I don't know what is coming,
 though I think I do
 and act as if I know
 while cringing from losses
 for what else can I do
 with few more
 "promises to keep",
 and few miles to go.

Jennifer Jolly *My Father's Hands*

When I think of my father, I often remember how, through gestures and expressive movements, he used his hands when telling stories of his boyhood, the days when he started work, times of adversity during World War II and the years that followed.

Dad was one of six children. In 1924, he had to leave school at the age of fourteen to contribute to the family income. He started at the local steel works, where he joined his older brother and his father.

During the general strike in 1926, Dad lost his job. Eventually, he found work at a large local bakery. It was there he discovered his vocation and where his hands, strong and sensitive, were a major asset. He learned how to mend heavy machines; how the ovens worked; how to make bread, cakes, pies, and pastries on a large scale; and how his sense of fairness helped him to deal with people. Ultimately, he became a master baker by traveling to school thirty miles away, a long distance in those days. After earning many awards for his breads and cakes, he became manager of the bakery when he was twenty-eight, the youngest manager to be appointed at that time.

His hands were interesting in that they had fine tapered fingers, and you could imagine they had a refined sense of touch. The right one, which had done so much work, was noticeably larger than the left. "Do you see these hands, Jennifer?" he said to me. "Look how much bigger the right is. I reckon it's because I've used the right one such a lot that it's grown to be bigger."

He had also started to smoke at sixteen, and, by the age of fifty-five, when he gave up cold turkey, he was a three-pack-a-day man, and the first and second fingers of his left hand were stained dark brown with nicotine. He never seemed to be without a cigarette, and I would watch him inhale, blow out smoke rings, and finally stub out the butt in the ashtray, then light up again.

Once he stopped smoking, he would tell the tale of how he kept a roll of mints in his pocket and would take one each time he had the urge to smoke. "Do you know," he said, "I was having my usual pint of bitter, and I reached in my pocket to take out a mint. Then automatically I took

out my lighter, which I still had, and I tried to light up the mint. You wouldn't believe it would you? It's right though. I was in such a habit I tried to light up a mint. Old Ernie Taylor was at the bar, supping his pint, smoking away, and saw this. Being Ernie, he had to put his oar in and says to me, 'when you stopped smoking, Jack, it looks to me as though you went a bit daft!'"

Dad's hands were able to carry heavy loads and were sometimes caked in black grease when he worked on the engine of his car. His hands were also capable of very delicate work, and, when I was a child, he used them to craft toys. He was very particular and once made me a doll's house with small windows and doors carefully molded and paint applied with a very fine brush. On another occasion, he carved a small wooden figure with a round head and loose limbs attached to strings so it could be moved like a puppet. However, the thing my dad liked to do most was make kites. He spent hours crafting them from wood, paper, and string in various shapes and sizes. Then he would take me into the open fields to fly them. He would run and play the string until they caught the wind currents and at last flew high in the sky, their colored-paper tails flapping in the breeze.

He could decorate a wedding cake of several tiers with white icing sugar, carefully applied and with a variety of lacy patterns to finish it. There seemed little that his hands were not capable of doing.

He always worked hard, but when he was not engaged in physical labor, he wore a ring on the little finger of his left hand. My mother, Thora, had bought it for him on a whim from an antique store. It was gold and held a black "eye stone," like a dilated pupil with light blue rim, said to have spiritual properties. After my mother died at the relatively young age of sixty-five, the ring never left Dad's finger until he died, showing it was perhaps his most cherished possession. Now I keep it in my jewelry box.



Mary Ann Donnelly

The House on Clarendon Road

Open any door in summer
to release the heat
that holds the smells
that opens the mind's eye
to summon up the House.

Enter the porch
inhale the smell
of damp geraniums
or hyacinths in spring.
For the moment
the quiet holds you.

Move into the rooms
hidden from the light.
Catch the whiff
of the polish that shines the mahogany sideboard
and the musty odor of the starched Irish linen.
Climb the stairs to meet the scent
of Camay soap, Castile shampoo and Old Spice.
Turn to the front room
heavy with moth ball smells
from the stored woolens.

Gaze into the middle room
to see his Big Ben clock
set to 2 A.M.
Embrace the fragrance of eau de cologne
and her loose face powder.

Observe the back room with
its flowered paper
and starched Priscilla curtains.
A room with suede high heels and
vinyl records left behind.

Ease back down the stairs
to the cellar.
Other people's memories gather there—
Army uniforms, a navy pea coat, 78s and a
wind-up record player.

Back, up to the kitchen
and the little breakfast room.
Where I imagine
They will all be there.
Waiting for me.



*From Altagracia by Mary
Beth Yakoubian, page 107.*

Mary Ann Donnelly

First Watch

The first light of day
Warms my window
Facing east so feng shui
It could be 6 am or closer to eight
My own passage grave
Tracking the sun
Ticking off the days
Still wonderstruck
With the why of it all

I Am Supposed to Say

I am supposed to say
It doesn't matter
It's okay
That you never call
Although you say you care
Even that you love me
It does matter
To me
To be
Part of your life
Not an irrelevant memory

Harriet Finkelstein



Another World, oil on canvas mounted on fabric

Harriet Finkelstein *Weird? Wonderful?*

I was never well coordinated; I didn't have sufficiently strong wrists to play tennis properly and my wobbly ankles made ice skating a challenge. As you might imagine, the lowest grade on my report card in high school was always physical education. So what happened when I was in my junior year in high school was so odd that it wasn't until years later that I truly understood the "gift" I had inexplicably received. Every word you are about to read is absolutely true.

In my high school, for gym we had to rush to the locker room, change into our ugly green gym suits, and quickly line up in the vast space that was called the gym. There we were, about fifty girls of various heights and shapes forming about eight lines of six or seven students each. The most important and prominent object in the room was the platform on which the assigned teacher stood and barked out commands. This term's teacher seemed quite severe; someone told me she was the head of the department, to which I nodded knowingly.

It was day one of the new semester. I was in the middle line, directly in front of the platform, and I was the second person in that line. As long as I wasn't the first person on a line, I was perfectly happy. The head-of-the-department lady said that we would be doing a series of exercises. She then said, and I quote, "You, come on up to the platform." I waited for someone to go up to the platform, and she repeated once again: "You, come on up to the platform." No, this couldn't be happening; she meant me! Somehow or other, I was able to move, and I climbed up onto the platform and stood beside the woman. She then said, "I am going to show you the exercises, and you are going to lead the class."

It was at that moment I learned some things that have stayed with me for the rest of my life. Of course, at the time, I had no clue that I was getting a life lesson. Something in me, and it is probably within most people, switched on, and I just did exactly what I was instructed to do. There is no question in my mind that the thought of looking like an idiot brought forth superpowers to accomplish feats I would have formerly considered impossible. Like most sixteen-year-olds, not embarrassing

myself in front of my peers was first and foremost in importance. When you are under the gun, so to speak, it is amazing what you can achieve.

From that very first time and at subsequent sessions, the teacher left the room as soon as I was ordered to start my routine. Did she go for coffee, a smoke, do drugs? Was she a sadist or was she secretly conducting some bizarre experiment about how far sixteen-year-old girls can be pushed. In any event, someone must have reported to her about how I was doing because she gave me a grade of ninety-six. The next term, as you might expect, I went back to my usual seventy-five.

Now, as to what was going on with this teacher, I can only conjecture. Personally, I think she liked to mess around with her students. (Apologies to all the wonderful gym teachers out there.) But she did give me a ninety-six. I'll give her that.

As a sixteen-year-old, I definitely did not think through the whole experience. Sixteen-year-olds have so many other things to think about. But years later, I did ruminate on it quite a bit. I thought if I could bounce that basketball against the wall fifty times, I could do lots of other things. Where there is a wall, I mean, where there is a will, there is a way.

Poem?

At the *Q Review* party, the poetry lady said they take just about everything.
 So why not give it a shot
 Even though a poet I am not.
 What is poetry?
 That's like asking what is art?
 Or what is life all about? Or what is going to happen next?
 The answer to all those questions I wish I had
 If that were so, then I would never have to worry or be sad.

Rachel Shor *Snapshots Along the Way*

A Sweet Book

When a high-school girl approached the library's fiction section requesting a particular book, I asked, "What book do you want?"

"It's a mystery," she said, adding, "but I don't know the title...or the author."

"Can you tell me a little about the story?" I said, hoping discussion would help.

"Oh yes. It had something about chocolate chips."

Perfect! A chocolate lover myself, I looked up "mystery and food" and found *The Blueberry Muffin Murder*, a Hannah Swenson mystery by Joanne Fluke. It includes two recipes with chocolate chips, Twin Chocolate Delights and Multiple-Choice Bar Cookies.

Just what was craved!

Observations

My blue-eyed daughter Lisa was small but observant and articulate even at two. When she wept heavily one night, I went into her room asking, "What's the matter?"

"The monkeys are coming. Monkeys are coming," she exclaimed.

Somehow I realized she had heard about Vietnam gorillas in a TV report her father had put on. How do you tell a two-year-old, or anyone, that it's not animals, but people killing each other? Trying to calm her, I said we would not be hurt, because these people were very far away.

To this she announced, "But they could come by airplane."

Two years later Lisa and I were at a lovely beach in southern France. At first we appreciated the view, and she played in the sand. Then, in my two-piece bathing suit, I suddenly realized all the women were bare breasted. At home I would have ignored this, but here the practice seemed so common, so accepted, I took off my own top.

My four-year looked up to inform me that she "liked it better the other way."

Sharing Flowers

Though allergic to many flowers and greens, I love taking photos of their beautiful colors, so I climbed over a low fence at my building to assess light and angles on the richness of the lovely hydrangeas.

Just then two bike riders, a man and his teenaged son stopping to observe the view, asked if I wanted them to take my picture. I looked at these strangers and said, “Okay.” This left me with a good photo of the purple hydrangeas, my green outfit, and a smile.



Loss

Aging, we lose
our friends too soon
before their time, or ours.
Hearing may lessen,
limbs weaken, eyesight blur.
Yet the cruelest loss
is flowing language—
as connections dissolve,
thoughts float away,
sought after words hide
in eddies of the past
like dried up blossoms
in the fall, beyond beauty.

Rachel Shor

Autumn Colors

Hoping trees were still abloom
in late October
we drove miles north
to a very blue quiet lake.

Most red maple trees
had already turned, yet
hard-to-say euonymus bushes
glowed like red wine,
oak leaves were tan and brown,
beech trees shined
yellow, orange, and gold
as not-to-be-forgotten pines
enclosed the colorful setting.

On our last New England morning,
gray and cold at 30 degrees,
old worn houses (unlike ours)
were exposed, yet we left
with memories of nature's
splendid paintbrushes.

Laura

I miss Laura
my friend of fifty years
who died last year
devoted to music
and her kayak
Spearmint
named by me when
she called my kayak
Geranium
which I've given
to her family
as we recall
her love and ours.

Shirley Ranz



Victorian Vibrant, dyed pearls, glass seed beads, crystals, and gold-plated beads and findings

Ruth Ward *Fortune Favors the Bold*

 On Friday morning, Axel was seated at the Worth Street Starbucks, a block from the FBI's Art Crime Field Office. He was admiring the stack tulip pattern of the latte he had ordered for the first time. He had only worked with Anna for a week, but she, by her difference, fascinated him. He was a crackerjack cop, she was a PhD and an art-history teacher, but his boss had assured them that together there was no case they couldn't crack.

As a new hire in the Art Crime program, Axel was hesitant, skeptical, and above all, insecure. He was an ignoramus about art. How could he hope to catch criminals while looking professional and hiding his attraction to Anna? Maybe he could impress her with police jargon—"search warrant, charge sheet, temporary restraining order." No, bad idea. He was likely to go overboard and use these words in inappropriate ways that even she, a novice in a police setting, would find awkward.

The captain had made him observe Anna teaching at Pace University's New York City campus. He saw she was incisive when she analyzed art. Would she turn her analytical gaze on him? That could be humiliating. When he grouched that their pairing was a terrible idea, the head honcho had replied, "Well, you're a terrific cop, but you cannot work with a Type A policeman like yourself, because of your anger-management issues. You can't have forgotten that you were fired from your last gig for shaking your fist in your boss's mug." Axel's calves began to twitch.

At that very moment, Anna was seated at a table in the Pace faculty community room, nursing a decaf while she reviewed her questions for the Art History final. She was relieved that her teaching career would end on Friday so she could give 100 percent to her new career.

She mused that Axel wasn't the first angry young man she had been compelled to deal with, as she had grown up in the shadow of her older brother. At age twelve, smarty-pants Sean had declared that riding the bumper cars at Luna amusement park was the best way to release stress. He said every time he knocked into another car, he pretended it was a different teacher—Mr. Foyt, who had criticized his English essay as "too pedestrian" or Mr. Hagerty, who had rejected his science-fair hamster

project as lacking “academic rigor.” And then there was Harry the Hulk, who had been laying claim all week to the Mars bars that were supposed to terminate Sean’s bologna-sandwich lunches. “Terminate?” Sean admitted the one day he had smashed into a car while holding that thought, he realized that the driver was a little girl with buck teeth who appeared to be seven years old. Well, too late for apologies.

As Anna drained her coffee, she remembered the Halloween when at age sixteen she used her mother’s sewing machine to make her Artemisia Gentileschi costume. She had been impressed in her Art Survey course with Artemisia’s painting of Judith Slaying Holofernes—the pious widow Judith decapitating the enemy general with a butcher knife—its lethal intensity, its mortal violence. She had thought, “Judith really understood righteous violence.” A month later, when an undiagnosed breast cancer claimed her mother’s life, Anna threw out the costume along with her enthusiasm for brutality. She now wanted to focus on caretaking—of individuals and of society at large.

Her mother had coached her in managing her brother’s unrelenting outrage and had helped her react with kindness to backstabbing girlfriends who mocked her successes—on the basketball team, the junior orchestra, the honor roll. Whenever Anna spoke of vengeance, Mom had explained how important it was to probe people’s perspectives and motivations rather than rushing to judgment and hasty reactions.

Now, on the eighteenth anniversary of her mother’s death, and after many years of analyzing acts of revenge in Western art history, she felt ready to take on the world’s wrongdoing by fighting crime. The loss of her mother had gradually transformed her from a seeker of crooks upon whom to unleash homicidal justice to souls upon whom to shower maternal kindness. And Axel, with his ludicrous attempts to mask his ignorance, seemed like a good prospect.

At 9 a.m. the following Monday, Anna and Axel reported to work at the Field Office. A Chagall painting entitled *Eve* had been stolen from a gallery in midtown Manhattan. Sitting with a bowed head, Axel was barely recognizable. “I’m a good cop, but I know nothing about art,” he muttered. “Can you teach me?” Anna felt hot tears burn her eyes as she thought, “This could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”

Ruth Ward

Forgetfulness

Am I getting more forgetful?
Am I really not as sharp
As my recollection of my teenage self?
Maybe not but I don't want to carp,
Still, if I compare the mem'ry
Of some past academic success:
An A on a difficult physics test
That had caused me a great deal of stress
To the stress I now feel re the physics involved
In opening a tin can—
If my can op'ner fails can I use a box cutter
To realize my shrewd plan?
And I worry a lot that the mem'ries I've got
Aren't true to what really transpired,
That my fear of decline has made some mem'ries
shine
And blaze forth as if somehow hotwired,
While others, obscured in a distant past
Take refuge in a bog
Where no sort of cognitive work on my part
Will make them emerge from the fog.
But so much for long-term mem'ries,
What problems do I now face?
I know I just left my keys near the front door
Yet they've vanished without a trace.
And my glasses—I'm certain I just set them down
On the table by the lamp,
Why would they take this particular time
To raise themselves up and decamp?
Now mind you, I'm not complaining,
I still have my wits about me,
If an object hides, my bona fides

Will insist it can't do without me.
 So my keys will usually smile my way
 From a recess in my purse
 And my glasses will often freewheel to my desk
 Without the need to converse.
 Yes, it's difficult to grow older
 And to think of myself as lesser,
 So I'll write "Search again!!" with my new gel pen
 That I think I left on the dresser.

Ugly

What does "ugly" bring to mind?
 A less than winsome rhino or a rotting jackfruit rind?
 What is harsh and discordant in my life?
 I look for peace but encounter only strife.

My existence is rife with all kinds of irritations
 From trivial annoyances to grandiose frustrations.
 At times I feel so surfeited I'd like to scream
 As if bile were gushing madly through my whole blood stream.

Now I'm in a movie theater, to my right I hear gum-chewing,
 To my left, heavy breathing and intermittent cooing.
 I'm in a public library where silence tops the code
 When a cold-blooded child insists on mimicking a toad.

Still, the ugliest of sentiments surge from what I cannot hear
 They're the ones that lurch forward from a state of abject fear
 The ones that goose step forth from resentment and rage,
 That stomp out reason and the wisdom of age,

continued on next page

continued from page 37

Or the ones that spring from hating all that's wrong with the world,
That remain tightly coiled until they're suddenly unfurled,
Erupting into violence, destruction, defacing,
Followed by years of rebuilding and replacing.

Could this rancor be transmuted into elation?
If only we could de-stress in a state of meditation
And reflect on the ties that bind us together,
Might massive disagreements then float upward like a feather?

If I take my mat to Central Park and sit in tailor fashion,
Working on my peace of mind, on love and compassion
Might external noise then mute itself or soften and decline,
Might I find a universal silence I could call mine?

My heart might then beat slower and my pressure might decrease
I might wish this state of wonder would never cease,
But since time isn't smooth I could take refuge in a crease,
Aware my hour is not for keeps; it's only on lease.

Since life is short I'll focus on what is uplifting,
No more time for ick, no more time for downward drifting,
And since I can't foresee what may come around the bend
I'll just be grateful to borrow what the stars may lend.

Ruth Ward *My Instant Pot*

What is the virtue of my Instant Pot?
It doesn't charm like Siri or a gabby chatbot
It just rests on my table like a sad beached whale
Having very little choice but to listen to my tale:
Some years back I was losing weight
The doctor said to plump up or confront my fate
"Put on pounds," he typed in the portal,
"Stop pretending you're immortal."
Eating a lot had never pleased me
But the thought of giving up the ghost suddenly seized me,
I saw myself stretched out on some rocky terrain
My skeleton dissolving in the rain.
Then I solemnly resolved to improve my lot
And into my mind flew my Instant Pot.
I reasoned that if I could cook good food
My weight would frolic upward and so would my mood.
So I dumped in more veggies than you've ever seen
And ended up with only one pot to clean.
I added navy beans, baked tofu, rice,
And threw in bags of quinoa once or twice.
My health improved, my imagination soared
I saw myself cavorting on a new surfboard.
So what's the weighty moral of this ditty's plot?
Dash out and hasten home with an Instant Pot.

Susan Diehl *Cooking Hamburgers: A How-Not-to Guide*

My mother loved hamburgers, so growing up we had them every Saturday night. But my mother's idea of a healthy burger was to fry the patties, repeatedly pressing down on them with a spatula in order to "get the fat out." But, of course, it also released all the juices leaving the patties rather dry and *very* well cooked.

She also bought hamburger buns on sale and kept them in the freezer, so we had dry buns to match the dry hamburger patties. I remember eating a burger at a friend's house with a fresh bun and being amazed how delicious it was. I never told my mother for fear it would hurt her feelings.

My aunt used to make "potato hamburgers" by integrating chunks of potato with the ground beef. My cousins loved them and asked for them repeatedly. It wasn't until they were grown that my aunt confessed that she added the potato in order to make a pound of hamburger stretch to feed a family of five.

And then there were the hamburgers that my best friend's mother made. She put lots of ketchup in with the raw meat, and, although it did moisten the patty, I never liked the taste. I ate the burgers to be polite, but, to this day, I don't like ketchup.

The very best hamburgers were the ones my father grilled. Nothing better than a grilled burger! Somehow that charcoal flavor made up for the overcooked patty that my mother still insisted on to "get the fat out," but then, there was the dry bun.

Since we lamented the lack of grilling in the winter, my father tried cooking the hamburgers in the fireplace one year. He had a wire grill basket he held over the hot embers, which would flare up when the grease dripped down. We didn't take into account that the grease would mix with the smoke moving up the chimney, and, a few fires later, the chimney actually caught fire. Luckily it went out quickly, but that ended our fireplace hamburger cooking. My bedroom was above that room, and I endured a light smoke smell the rest of the winter.

My sister and I often laugh at the memory of those overdone hamburgers, and we marvel at the fact that today we love burgers, given

the ones we grew up eating. But I think our current love of them has nothing to do with the food of our childhood. Rather, it is the warm memory of that Saturday night family ritual that tastes so good.



Stella Gold *Unexpected Thoughts Upon Waking*

To stay alive while getting old
Just seems to be
The best alternative.
As memory fades
And creative thoughts melt away
Comforting routines
May be one way
To avoid Nothingness.
One can still enjoy
The sunrise
The coolness of morning
And the knowledge
That a cup of coffee
Will soon provide the strength
To welcome—or curse
Another day.

Stella Gold *Cyclamens*

On the window sill	In those days
Stand three cyclamens	I didn't think of it.
Purple, white and pink.	Now I wonder...
They bring a smile to my face	In front of the house
And pleasure to my heart.	A road had been built
They bring back memories	To link the neighborhood
Of life in Israel	With Haifa's center.
Some sixty years ago.	Springtime brought
We had just moved into	A sudden burst of sun.
Our first apartment	And in the ditches
Since getting married.	On the sides of the road
It was a new building	Purple cyclamens
On a hill above Haifa.	Adorned the grass.
The land was once pasture	A lovely gift,
And behind the house	A memory.
Arab shepherds still passed	Today I fear
With flocks of sheep	The hateful war
Feeding on the new grass.	Could destroy
Had they lived there before?	The country we knew.

Frank Montaturo



Totò and Sleeping Man, Naples, October 2025, photograph

Wayne Cotter *My Job Interview: December 2024*

*W*ell, that was a colossal waste of time. Lucky for me I didn't bother wearing pants for this job interview. Just a nice dress shirt. I thought about a tie, but who wears ties anymore?

Anyway, now I can quickly get back to bed and try to catch up on some sleep.

I've been out of work for three months, but it seems like three years. Job interviews are completely different these days than they were twenty years ago when I was last looking for work.

In most of my interviews now, I'm not even talking to a human being; I'm just answering questions that flash on my home computer screen. Or, even worse, the questions are generated by Artificial Intelligence, which produces a voice that sounds human, but isn't. Think Siri. Think creepy.

The interviews are video recorded with AI generating the transcripts, but who knows if a human actually ends up watching or reading these things.

And the questions they ask always throw me for a loop. For example, in today's interview this question flashed on my screen: "What was your biggest failure and what did you learn from it?" I didn't feel like dredging up my failures in front of a computer screen. I'd rather focus on my successes. As a result, I just sat there, tongue-tied and pantless.

And I'm not exactly young anymore. I'm sixty. Who wants to hire a sixty-year-old guy who never warmed up to the computer age? A luddite who can't even load phone numbers into his smartphone.

Hey, I didn't even want this damn smartphone. I was happy with my good old flip phone, but I got tired of my wife and kids calling me "Flipper."

If it were up to me, I would just smash my cell phone and retire except for one major stumbling block: I need the money. Rainy-day funds dry up quickly when paychecks disappear.

My wife drives a school bus, so at least we have health insurance. She's also a part-time real estate agent, but it seems like everyone's a part-time real estate agent these days.

And yes, I voted for Trump, but I'm not proud of it. Twenty years ago,

I thought Trump was a major-league huckster, and my opinion hasn't changed. But I just couldn't bring myself to vote for the same old, same old again.

I used to vote Democratic but the party abandoned me. Democrats are far more interested in young, upwardly mobile professionals than guys like me, old geezers struggling to make ends meet.

I bought an apple the other day—it cost me two bucks. Sure, it was a rather large apple, but \$2? And it's been months since my wife and I have enjoyed a dinner at an actual restaurant. Last week I treated myself to breakfast at a local diner—\$30 for an omelet, coffee, tax and tip!

Do I think Trump will do a better job than the Democrats? Not really, but I'm willing to roll the dice and see what happens. Am I concerned about the state of democracy? Of course. But I have to admit democracy is not high on my list of priorities right now.

Anyway Christmas is coming, and nobody hires over the Christmas season. I need to think. I need to rest. I need to go back to bed.

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



*From The Fantasy Forest
by Paul Adler, page 103.*

Lillian Hood *Fair Exchange*

It was Saturday morning. The appointment with Vanessa, my hairdresser and friend of twenty years, was for 10:00 a.m. I knew being late was not an option, because she was booked back-to-back and that would impact her day in a negative way.

If I hurried, I could arrive at the beauty salon in a timely fashion. After addressing a few immediate household concerns, I began applying my makeup. I never leave the house without putting on my face; I don't even run down to pick up my mail without putting on my face! I also never leave the house without checking Alexa for the weather report. "Alexa, what's the weather today?" Today, Alexa responded, "It's cloudy with showers." I hurried back to my bedroom and switched from my sandals into my ankle-high, leather boots to, hopefully, protect my feet from the puddles.

Right before leaving my apartment, I reached into my hall closet and grabbed the nearest umbrella and ran out the door to the elevator. Thankfully, the elevator came quickly, and within three minutes, I was exiting my building. As Alexa predicted, it was a wet and dreary day.

The oversized black umbrella protected me like a tent. I held onto the handle with both hands to keep it balanced, which wasn't easy since I am short, and it was a very windy as well as a very rainy day. I was aware that I was taking up more than half the narrow sidewalk, and I was a little concerned.

As I approached Columbus Avenue, I spotted a pair of combat boots coming in my direction. I looked up and saw a tall young man in a blue blazer shielding his head with a small, fold-up umbrella. He was enviously eyeing my golf-size tent. As he got closer, he uttered in a gruff, sarcastic voice, "Take up the whole sidewalk why don't you." I responded by smiling up at him. I then pointed to both our umbrellas and impulsively uttered the words, "Want to trade?"

He was astonished. His face registered surprise. Then humor. After a slight hesitation, our eyes met, and he enthusiastically responded, "Oh, okay!" In a split second, we made the switch and continued on our merry way.

Upon entering the hair salon—on time I might add—Vanessa greeted me with, “Hi, how are you?” and “What’s new?”

My response was, “You’ll never believe what just happened!”

Different

I love my children equally
 No matter what they think or say
 They appeal to me individually
 Each one is beautiful in his and her own way

The least attractive of my kids was Louie, the big bloke
 He became the brunt of each sibling joke.
 But he was impervious to their ridicule
 By using his sense of humor, he would rise above most folk

Whenever I heard them call him “ugly Louie”
 I would reprimand them in a very stern voice
 “Don’t you ever let me hear you say that again”
 “It’s shocking to witness you hurt him by choice”

They came to love and respect him one day
 When he began chasing bullies away
 During which he’d be laughing
 And acting as if he were gay

He became my hero too
 By constantly asking “Mom, what can I do?”
 He enjoyed helping me in the kitchen whenever he could
 Something I still wish his father and siblings would

Donna K. Ramer *A Baker's Dozen* *of Opening Paragraphs for My Great American Novel*

1. She stared out the window trying to see between the raindrops flooding her view, trying to look past the headlights of the car speeding down the tree-lined driveway, trying to see who was in such a rush to reach the McMansion she had reluctantly called home for more than a decade.
2. The bus sat idly waiting for its driver to bring it to life after a short break transporting humans of all sizes, shapes and colors from one place to another for reasons its programmed brain could not comprehend. Day after day, it proudly stepped up, with time off only for tune-up holidays that included surgically replacing a part or two, a short-lived respite in a playground filled with others indistinguishable from each other except for the numbers tattooed on their foreheads and the blemishes on their bodies incurred in the line of duty. Today, Bus Number 1949 was eager to get back on the road, to catch up to Bus Number 2025, the new sleek and sexy model.
3. They had known each other for more years than either could remember, weathering the countless storms that can shipwreck most friendships, but this was a category nine.
4. The room was dark except for the glow of the computer on the marble table in the center of the foyer, and she saw the dozen vases, each filled with a dozen roses. She knew what she would hear when she hit “enter” and was not disappointed when the room filled with the etude he composed for her, hoping to return to a life that was long over for her.
5. She was forced to shade her eyes from the sun’s harsh rays, but her body was fighting her brain’s instructions to wake up, get up. Mouth dry, head hurting and ears buzzing, she heard dogs barking and waves crashing, lying on the hard boardwalk on a beach in an unknown town.
6. Despite feeling uneasy, she turned on the water, stripped and stepped into the shower, once again wondering if the noise was drowning the warning signs of someone lurking but knowing it wouldn’t matter because they would never let her get away this time.
7. It was the one thousandth three hundred and seventy-seventh day of the

longest pandemic on record. Three years and eight months. Almost forty-four months. Eating alone. Sleeping alone. Watching good, great, bad and unspeakably dreadful TV shows and movies. Clothes from a week of yesterdays piled on the chair, mocking her loneliness.

8. The cats of 11E were named for well-known artists, mostly American. The girls were O'Keefe, Kahlo (for Frida, of course), Cassell and Frankenthaler. The boys were Max Weber (Maxie cat), Picasso, Jim Dine, Jackson (as in Pollock) and her favorite, Reubens, who was built like the subjects of many of his namesake's paintings.

9. She sat alone on the hard wooden bench, sipping an iced coffee, wondering whether drowning in the salt water of the Atlantic, stretching for miles in front of her, would be more painful than drowning in the water of one of the great lakes, perhaps Lake Erie.

10. It was a grey, grim day with icy snow covering the leafless branches of his heart.

11. The clear, cloudless, half-moon night was making him feel restless. Pulling aside the heavy damask drapes, he leaned against the windowsill, his forehead against the cool glass, and watched shadows dancing on the street in time to the rhythm of the gentle breeze. He was born in Rougrais, one of those little border towns that, depending on the year, was part of either Hungary or Romania; it was not far from Transylvania, another town that suffered identity trauma each time the border was redrawn.

12. When I get inside my head, I know I've entered a very bad neighborhood with traffic careening across lanes at lightning speed, so fast the noise becomes one continuous din and mental exhaustion is right around the corner. But I'm going too fast to know which corner to turn on and which exit to take.

13. She sat on the couch, underlining key words, phrases, sentences in an over-written book required reading for her book club. It had taken her decades to become comfortable adulterating the pages great, and not so great, thinkers spent hours, days, years, slaving over a typewriter or putting pen to paper to capture the creative thoughts they were compelled to share with others. She wondered if it had been the iPad that broke the sacred bond she felt with the scent of ink and feel of paper, paving the way to inking notes in the margins of hard covers and paperbacks.

Donna K. Ramer

Roots of Envy

The backyard trees were envious of the trees on the mountain
that were part of a forest of tangled roots
that shared stories and alerted each other to dangers
but don't discriminate against infirm ones

The backyard trees were tired of the bleak cold days
of the sun struggling to get its rays to
warm their bare branches
their leafless limbs looking lifeless

The backyard trees lived in fear of the noisy machines
that shamed them and felled them before their time when
a limb was broken or parts eaten from within
then hauled so they wouldn't embarrass the
people in the house that would then use them for warmth
in their fireplace

The backyard trees were bored
after standing straight, tall, at attention
for dozens of years,
often forced to bow to a wind that amuses itself
by stirring the leaves on the frosted ground

The backyard trees were searching for something
to awaken their senses
while the large animals napped and the small ones foraged
for scraps to fill their empty bellies

The backyard trees were held captive by the cries
and kicks of the kids playing hide and seek with the wind
and red light green light with the birds
the backyard trees no more than home base

#13 Black Cat Road

Down a silvery path of spider silk
whispering crawlies lead her on
a hand-held pumpkin
glowing orange and loud
against her dreams of candy.

The moon watching, pale and sly,
laughter tangled with the rustle of dry leaves
the little ballerina in pink tights and tulle
knocks three hard thuds
on number thirteen.

The door sighs open and shadows shift
a ghost swaying and whispering, BOO PRINCESS!
that wears no crown, no sash
just a little dancer trembling in biting shoes,
with a heart skipping like a stone.

A gleaming axe from behind
Sings once through the arc a head thuds
Eyes still glowing faintly blue
past the lanterns, splitting light into shards of fear.
She stumbles back her cape a fluttering wound of pink.

The air grows thick with startled gasps
phones lift like torches, breath misting in the night.
And the ballerina stands frozen
her pumpkin heavy with coveted treats
as sweet and terror melt together on her tongue.

Hilda Feinstein *Meet Up*

If grandma returned, she'd be in shock
 To see the world spinning, like a speeding clock
 Years and time have made much change
 So much different, out of range
 Of what the mind, could have divined
 A century ago

It would surely be great to see
 Whether she would stay or flee
 And to observe what her response would be

To Wi-Fi and sci-fi and CD and 3-D TV
 Of iPods and iClouds always looking down
 Of HD, and all-around sound
 Smart phones and ringtones of dot coms and streaming
 Of lines on phones, they called them bars
 Of apps and downloads and GPS(es) in cars

She was a user of an old washboard
 Had a telephone that had a cord
 A mouse was a mouse for trapping, not tapping
 Birds tweeted and voices greeted
 Back then, when life was slow,
 More than a long, century ago

A meal could be bought for only a dime
 No one talked of climate change
 Or electric cars, of fracking, or stacking windows or avatars

Online truly meant on a line
 Decisions for dinner like where to dine
 Were decided by trial and usually turned out fine

Books to be held were dear, close friends
 No social media, likes or trending trends

Messages then were sent snail mail
 And the postman would rarely crash or fail
 To deliver
 And everyone's memory seemed just fine
 At that time

Would she decide to retain her graces
 Be faithful to back then,
 When face-to-face
 Meant real live faces
 Would granny choose to use her feet
 Accept current modes or hit delete
 Move around data with digital touch
 Or jump into her Ford, foot to the clutch

Granny most likely would be in shock
 Get lost searching for Googles in her printed frock
 The ringtones would ring on waxed deaf ears
 Her pics she'd save but refuse to share

I think with considerable cer-tain-ty
 High tech would prove a wreck, indeed for she
 But then again, she might surprise
 Dig right in, give it a spin
 Get an iPad Air and a computer chair
 And actually show she had some flare
 For the net and the cyber world, you know
 I bet she might just download some devilish docs
 And set us all agog
 With a grand slam grand old
 Granny blog
 HMMMMMM

Hilda Feinstein *So Interesting*

So interesting
How religious speak can spark
The passions of the unsparked

So interesting
How when invoked
The subject of religion
Unharnesses harnessed tongues

So interesting
That when questioned
It unquiets the quiet
And arouses restive reserves of reason and irrationality
The question of religion

It defends the offensive
Offends the defended
Suspends disbelief from believers
Provoking nonbelievers to bleed deeper
Into more believable disbeliefs

So interesting
That elusive truth
May in truth
Be mere illusion
In full view
Invisible
To both the faithful and the faithless

So interesting

Roy Clary



Flowers #1, watercolor

Jenna Orkin *The Days Since...*

Part One

In Union Square, a shrine appears
and then another 'til the place
attracts reporters who report
its volunteers' hard work and grace.
A fireman with a haunted look
sits on the bench, his eyes rimmed red.
A woman asks him, "Coffee? Bagel?"
Without a word, he shakes his head.
Around, a wall of Wanted posters,
"wanted" in that other sense;
the Missing, all so very young.
The pictures stay up on the fence
for weeks, for who will tear them down?
Who'd commit that sacrilege?
And yet one night, somebody does
when hope takes its last breath. It was,
in retrospect, a far-fetched dream
that anybody would be found
and nursed to health when a million tons
of stuff had crumbled to the ground.

A fire truck, not red but beige
with dust in which someone has written,
"God bless the New York Fire Department."
Someone else has drawn a heart.
Across the street, the rectory,
where Father Mychal combed his hair,
they said at his memorial,
and raced downtown, to die in prayer.

T-shirts needed! Dogfood! Boots!
 AOL provides a list,
 all obsolete; they're overwhelmed
 downtown. The chance is sorely missed
 by millions who want to help out
 and be part of this awful thing.
 For nothing matters next to this.
 "God Bless America" they sing
 at services all over town,
 at meetings of the PTA,
 at school, in concert on TV,
 they sing from sea to shining sea.

The weeks go on and still the fire
 burns. At Fulton Street the smell
 still greets whoever's on the train
 and says, "Ascend and witness Hell."
 Upstairs the crowd stands quietly
 and takes it in. The tired cops
 sigh, "All right, move it; that's enough,"
 to tourists snapping photo ops.
 For foreigners are less appalled,
 they, never having known it when.
 Its metal's bent like willow branches.
 The church clock's stopped at five to ten.
 W-T-C, those letters,
 now a code for grief and fear;
 when I was studying music they
 stood for the Well-Tempered Clavier.
 A few blocks down, at Trinity,
 the ancient graveyard's buried, itself,
 in dust. Another poignant sign:
 Its clock is stopped at five to nine.

Trudy DeWeese *The House on Broad Street*

There are houses as unique as a pearl in an oyster. You know from the moment you open the shell you have a gem.

I felt this way about my grandma's house in Richmond, Virginia. I lived there the first twelve years of my life until my parents bought their own place nearby, and even then I often stayed with Grandma. She never made any changes to the house, leaving it true to the year in which it was built, 1854.

We spent a lot of time in the little round parlor that juttied out of the side of the house. The window-seat storage under the bay windows contained the games and puzzles we played on the table in the center of the room. Outside the windows were trees and flowering bushes. The parlor faced the hall where the entrance held the loveliest staircase, which twisted and rose to the third floor.

A large salon was to the left. Two white pillars showcased the entry to the room, and because the open space between them was broad, it became my stage where performances took place regularly for a sometimes-ensnared audience. I sang, danced, and rehearsed for the plays in which I performed at school. Two pocket doors in the salon slid open to create a larger space and reveal a fireplace. This must have been a formal dining room at one time, but then it was my parent's bedroom. From there, French doors opened to reveal a long hallway leading to a door that opened onto a dark staircase down to a gloomy basement. I always ran past as fast as I could because it was where my imaginary monsters hid. Another door opened into a small bathroom and another to a smaller dining room across the hall near the kitchen.

Grandma had a big bedroom on the second floor where she had three beds so visiting cousins and I could all sleep together. We lay in our beds and told stories to each other about ghosts and grandma's life as a girl until we were so tired that we fell asleep.

One of my favorite places was the pantry in the kitchen. Usually grandma kept the door locked, but when I could open it, the smell of apples, cinnamon, and cookies awakened my senses. There was a profusion of tins stacked on top of the old dining room cabinet. I enjoyed

rummaging through the tins filled with goodies, and some with surprises like buttons, medals, and pictures, all the time munching on the wonderful cookies my grandma made. Near the pantry was a black wood-burning stove that kept a tea kettle warm.

In the center of the kitchen was a round table where Grandma rolled out pastry and packed up small boxes from the post office with cookies, socks, candy, and toothpaste to send to my uncle in the army. I loved watching her, but I would say in a scolding manner, “I don’t think Uncle Hunter would like a present with toothpaste and socks. That is no fun.” “Don’t you concern yourself with that. Your uncle will be glad to get them,” she’d reply. Years later I discovered he was in a war. The worst was when he had to undergo standing in a tank that pitched and struggled to get near the beach in Normandy. Bullets pelted down on them from the Germans, who were hidden in their bunkers. He survived and was sent to Paris with some of the other soldiers. Once there he purchased a beautiful white muff, beret, and ermine wrap to send me. I appreciated that, after all he had been through, he thought of me. Sometimes I close my eyes and imagine him choosing these clothes for me in a little boutique. When he came home, he never spoke of the war.

One block up the street from our house was St. John’s Church where I often went. I liked to stand where Patrick Henry had stood to give his famous “liberty or death” speech. Mostly I liked to walk through the cemetery and look at all the graves. One day as I walked with a friend, I said to her, “Shirley, do you notice how many of these graves are occupied by young women?” “Yes, one man had three wives buried near him. I suppose they died having babies.” She spoke sadly. “That was not fair,” I responded angrily.

I knew one day I would leave my historic neighborhood and Grandma’s house. As a child I never realized I would live in three more historic homes with histories just as exciting.

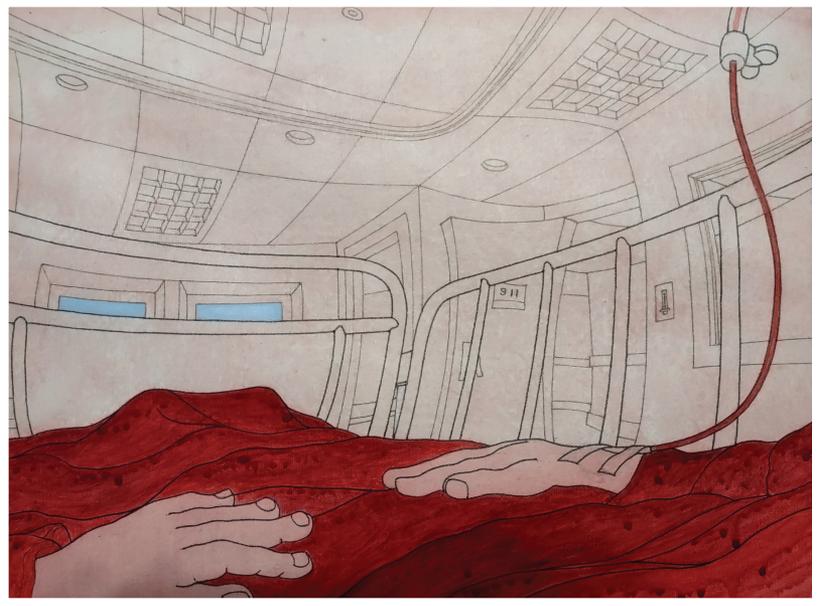


Trudy DeWeese *Contrasts*

The Mediterranean has the bluest water
Its beauty abounds on the coast of France
The waves lap slowly onto the sandy beach
A whisper of breeze blows through my door
Perfectly timed waves wash onto shore
Sounds of water lull me to sleep once more

The water in my basement is an ugly mess
The cesspool overflowed with great excess
Water everywhere I scream for help in panic
The foul-smelling water may become gigantic
Madame a plumber is what you need immediately
Only he can remove this catastrophe

Gil Santiago



Room 911, pencil and acrylic on canvas board

September 11th triggered memories of lying in a hospital bed looking beyond my body out the window into the night that I came so close to dying. I started to paint and write about flashbacks from when my teaching job was interrupted for a year because it was in the 9/11 zone.

Helen Saffran

Passion

I recently had an experience that was almost too large to take in. It overwhelmed me, and I felt like I was in a magical place.

It was long after dark on a quiet early-spring evening, and I was home with my cat, Maggie, when, out of the darkness and stillness, I heard the sound of a single bird singing in the night. It was around eleven p.m., a time when birds are usually sleeping.

The curious things were that you don't usually hear birds this late at night and that this bird was not making a repetitive sound like a birdcall but was creating entirely different vocal sounds. I got to know a parrot once who kept surprising me with different patterns of sounds and clicks, but that would last for a few minutes. This bird was singing different songs in a master surge of creativity, passion, and energy.

I listened rapt as he went on for hours. Was it a lover's serenade? Was it a serenade to being alive? I listened in disbelief and was mesmerized by the bird's non-stop singing, creating ever-new patterns.

I finally decided to go to sleep in this sacred atmosphere. I wanted to be serenaded in my sleep by this bird with its incredible energy and passion for life.

Addendum: The next day I read this to my downstairs neighbor and asked her if she believed my story. She's a birder, and she quickly replied, "Of course, it's a mockingbird."



*From 100 Years of NYC
Architecture by Helen
McMahon, page 9.*

The Old Albums

*M*y sister, Betty, brought out the old photo albums from our childhood, when my brother Richard, ninety, and I, eighty-two, visited her last week. Once, the photos had been neatly placed in the albums, each one surrounded by little black tabs that allowed the photos to be easily removed to see the date they were taken on the back.

Betty, ninety-five, was freaked out about her children tossing out the albums when she died because they didn't know most of the people. I tried to assure her that we would write something that would identify each person, and we would forbid her children to toss out these family treasures.

My sister said my brother and I should take whichever photos we wanted. I found one of my mother's siblings and another group picture of the whole family that included my Aunt Esther, who had died early of a stroke and wasn't included in the other sibling photos. Aunt Esther was important to me because she had taught me to sew and to love jewelry.

There was also a photo of me at almost four on my uncle's farm with my father, who was to die two years later. My arm is around his neck, and he is petting either Skippy or Puppy, the dogs on my uncle's farm whose names I still remember. My father and I look so happy. When I came home I put the photo in the dish I ate from as a baby, along with another photo of him holding me on his lap when I was about three. We were at his favorite place, Jones Beach.

I framed the two group photos in one frame and put it on my dresser. Whenever I look at them, I feel I have my whole family back.



Helen Saffran

Well Shod

My mother never preserved
My baby shoes in gold
But they must have looked
Like the iconic shoe that
Babies, who can't walk yet, wear

The next shoes that were de rigueur
For dressing up
Were shiny black patent leather
Mary Jane's
Which I wore with my
yellow, organdy party dress

In junior high
I took care to brush
My saddle shoes
With white, liquid polish
On the white part
Without getting it
on the blue part

My first low high heels
Had an ankle strap that
My older sister told me
I needed thinner ankles to wear

Then came high, high heels
So pretty on the foot
So impossible to walk in
Without blisters and pain

In my thirties
My boyfriend told me
To be cool
I had to wear cowboy boots

But the best shoes of all
Are the stylish and sturdy
sneakers
That are now the shoe
For all ages

Swans

In sixth grade
Girls were called
Cute
Sweet
Pretty
Beautiful
Ugly

I was cute and sweet
I wanted pretty
Beautiful was out of reach

The ugly girls
In sixth grade
Sometimes
Turned into
Swans
In Junior High

Vigil for Maggie

Maggie is beginning	Friends give me
To lose her balance	Kind advice
And her appetite	Whatever you do is fine
	Then one with
Afraid that she'll	Compassionate
Fall	Swimming
I make an	Eyes
Appointment	Beseeches me
With the vet	To let her die
To "put her to sleep"	At home
As if she knows this	Instead of
She begins eating	Looking at Maggie
And her balance	With fear
Seems a little better	I let go
	And look with love
So, I cancel	
The appointment	For two weeks
	Maggie and I
She begins	Say goodbye
To ignore the litter box	
I read that very old cats	She dies
Choose to go on	Peacefully
a clean space	At home
Like my wood floor	
I make another	
Appointment	
With the vet	
And immediately	
Cancel it	

Linda Rothstein *Sunset*

When was it we grew old?
When did your hand first shake?
When was it first that stairs
Made your old knees ache?
We've shared bedrooms and kitchens
Never straying far.
I cooked the sauce
You opened the jar.
When did flesh melt away?
Tendons all knots on a string
When did my shape burgeon out
To curve like a violin?
We are one tree with two roots
Our branches intertwined
I give you all my tomorrows
And all of yours are mine
When was the first time we wandered
Lost in our very own town?
Our steps not nearly as sure
Is this our sundown?
We've ached for each other
Shown each other the light
Now it is sundown
Soon it'll be lights-out
And we will make that alright.

Sandra Schein



Bashful, photograph

Linda Rothstein *My Jerzeebel (A Tall Tale)*

There was nothing unusual about the new pet store down in the village. Playful puppies in the window, kittens climbing in cages, parrots on perches. All too high maintenance for me. I told the owner I was interested in a goldfish.

“Sure,” he said, and he took me over to a tank where fish swished back and forth.

I watched them, but not one stopped to look at me. “I don’t know much about fish,” I said. “They don’t look too friendly. What does a fish think about?”

“A fish is thinking about how good you would taste if you fell into the tank,” said the owner.

“Maybe a hamster would be better company,” I said, and he took me over to where a litter of babies slept quietly. I tried to stroke one, but it backed away.

I was about to leave when I saw an odd-looking critter curled up by itself on a shelf. The little thing opened one eye and winked at me. “What is that?” I asked. He answered that the sweet little thing was a jerzeebel, a very rare species, and he could let me have it cheap.

That’s how it happened. I purchased a brush and comb set and a carrying case and a year’s supply of kibble. The pet-store owner threw in a manual on the care of jerzeebels, gratis. I felt good. Maybe my new pet would cure my loneliness.

I let him sleep on my pillow. He made little noises in my ear, something in between a trill and a sigh. The days passed, and we got used to each other.

Then the rains came, and things changed. He no longer slept through the night. He found a new sport: bellyflopping down the steamed-up window, landing with a thud on the radiator.

After a few sleepless nights, I told him no, but he didn’t listen. That was when I got out that manual and read. I learned that jerbeezels cannot be trained to obey. I learned that they are illegal to own in some states, but I was yet to find out why.

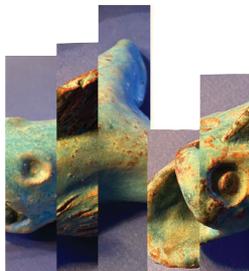
I tried again to reprimand him; told him he was a “bad boy.” That was

when he lunged at my throat. When I bought him, I hadn't noticed the tiny, pointed teeth. They had grown. Now they were like shark's teeth, and they looked like they could saw right through you.

I knew I'd have to get rid of my jerzeebel. I grabbed him by his leathery tail and hurled him into the commode, slamming the lid. I was wondering what to do with the drowned jerzeebel body when the lid sprang open. Out he popped, his wiry hair looking like the sharp ends of thumb tacks. His hooked claws were extended, and he snarled at me.

I backed into the bedroom and slammed the door, trapping him in the bathroom. For a moment I thought I was safe, but no... I can hear him gnawing through the wooden door.

Grind. Grind. Grind. It is only a matter of time....



*From Sea Creatures by
Carole Cronig Abrahams,
page 99.*

Vincent Grosso *Miss Gallo*

*T*eachers influence the lives of their students more than they will ever know.

In 1958 and 1959, when I was in the fifth and sixth grades, my teacher was Miss Gallo. I was eleven years old. I'm guessing now that she might have been around twenty-seven.

My most vivid memories of Miss Gallo center around our class trips. My parents were poor and uneducated and weren't able to take me to the places I visited with Miss Gallo. These visits changed my life. They introduced me to a world different from working-class Brooklyn.

I especially remember the visit to the United Nations. It was just twelve years after the end of WW II when Miss Gallo spoke to us about how the UN might help prevent another world war. Her talk touched me and motivated me to have conversations with my father about his experiences in Europe during the war.

I also remember our visits to various New York museums. I loved the dioramas in the Museum of Natural History, especially the one showing cave people. Many years later I visited the museum with my grandchildren, and I think the same dioramas are still on display.

Not all our class trips were educational; some were just fun. I will never forget our visits to Radio City Music Hall for movies and the Christmas shows.

Sixty-three years later, I decided to see if I could locate Miss Gallo. I wanted to thank her and tell her that she was the best teacher I had ever had. It was a long shot.

I began doing some research to find her. I got very lucky. I googled her name as a teacher in Brooklyn in 1957. Her picture in a local newspaper popped up. It was her wedding picture. I now had her married name and was able to identify her current address, which was on Long Island.

I sent her a letter telling her how she had influenced my life. I included my phone number but emphasized that she should not feel obligated to contact me. Three months later I got a call. Remarkably, it was Miss Gallo.

We spoke for an hour. She told me about her life. Her husband had

been an engineer, and, because of his job, she had lived in different parts of the country. She had taught school in Los Angeles and Arizona, where she had raised her children. She currently lived on Long Island to be near her grandchildren.

We shared stories about our childhoods. We had more in common than I would have dreamed. She also had grown up in the Williamsburg neighborhood in Brooklyn where I had lived. Her father had been a neighborhood barber; her childhood was also working class. She went to CUNY Hunter for her B.A. and master's degrees. This was another thing we had in common: both of us were the first in our families to attend college.

Throughout our conversation, I kept calling her Miss Gallo. She said it was okay to call her Gloria. The age difference between us, which had seemed so enormous when I was a child, was no longer a factor, but she will always be Miss Gallo to me.

As we finished up our call, I asked her if she remembered me. Unbelievably, she did. She said, "Yes, you were the boy with the dark black hair."

I feel that teachers deserve enormous credit for the work they do for children. Miss Gallo certainly changed my life.



Ellen Pober Rittberg *Every Morning's a Good Morning in Brooklyn Bridge Park*

In small patch of pond and leaves
 I spy a woodcock, eyes atop its head
 360 degree world-view, beak no broader than
 a carpet needle and as long as the rest of him is,
 eating perpetually eating, boosting his body mass
 to enhance his chance to mate early and often
 this serial monogamist.

For me, he's a lifer
 in birder's parlance
 a first-time sighting
 to be added to a list
 I never keep nor miss having,
 deferring to the experience,
 dwelling in each bird's,
 the morning's, perfection.

Trucks' thrums ready me for my descent into
 the diurnal when suddenly I see
 dangling from a nearby branch like an ornament,
 small as a child's fist, brown, sliver of white
 trailing down its back like sap,
 thin skim of skin on bony bent legs lean as
 a jewel box ballerina:
 a sleeping bat!
 The following day I return.
 He's still there swaying in
 the wind, imperturbable, sleeping,
 one hand clasping himself,
 the other aloft as if in greeting.

I tip my hat, salute him,
 in kinship!

Sandra Schein



Midsection of a Traveler, graphite and charcoal on white paper

Judy Hampson

Who Knew?

Who knew
 Being a one-armed bandit
 Could be so unglamorous?
 Undignified
 As I stumble through each day
 Simple tasks now challenging
 With one arm a dead weight.

Swooning limply on my recliner
 Purple fingers squeeze and pulsate
 Throttling my left arm.
 Thank god it is not the right
 Or I'd be helpless as a babe
 Unable to dress or feed itself.

Reflections occupy my waking moments
 Discomfort the night-time.
 One small slip has chained me to the living room
 Expeditions to the bathroom or kitchen
 My only ventures out.
 Even the smallest tasks an effort of will.

It could have been worse, they say.
 Really?
 Your hip, or head.
 Well, I've had hip surgery,
 But that was planned,
 Expected.
 Hurling myself **up** some stairs
 Was unplanned, violently unexpected.
 Passing out on the train platform

Being lifted onto a stretcher
 Ambulanced to hospital
 With my arm helpless beside me
 Not.

We are told: “Be careful. Don’t trip”.
 Easy to say. Balance is an unfamiliar challenge.
 As toddlers we were always tripping
 But the floor was much nearer
 Our limbs softer
 Not easily bruised.
 Now our brittle bodies snap like twigs.

Ugly

Ugly
 Consisting of harsh consonants
 Gangly dangles
 A ubiquitous vowel
 Ugh!
 Conjuring unpleasantness
 A sense of inelegance.

Who thought of it?
 Sat down one day saying:
 “I need a word
 Totally opposite to beauty
 Expressing contempt, distaste.
 An absence of everything
 Enjoyable in life.”

continued on next page

continued from page 75

It needs a vowel.
U would serve
Expressing upside down conformity.
Not a pretty vowel
Like 'ooooo.'
It introduces 'un'
Always used to express
Something not,
Or never, like
Unpopular,
Uneasy,
Uneducated,
Undone.

Yes, we'll start with 'u'
Adding the harshest letter, G.
Not the soft G of giraffe,
But the scraping G of
Gang,
Guard,
Grrrrr.

Let's keep it short
'Ug' with a suffix:
ess, by, le, ing.
I know!
'Ly,' the ending of other derogatory words.
Rudely, abruptly, horrifically
Yes!
Ug-ly
Ugly
Such an ugly word.

Judy Hampson *Missing*

Do we focus way too much
On what's missing in our lives?
Obsessing on what's not,
Never taken by surprise.

Wearing hypothetical blinkers
Concealing fun from our eyes
Leaning always to the negative
As we constantly agonize
Over everything that's trivial
When it might be only lies.

Stop, look around you
Note the joy in each sunrise
Search for pleasure in each rosebud
Let your expectations rise.

Don't allow another's jaundice
To blow dust into YOUR eyes
Let your heart remain wide open
As towards a growing wonder,
It now flies.

Madeleine Brecher *My Genealogy Search: I Struck Gold!*

Back in the 1980s, I became fascinated with a global Jewish teen tour to visit WWII concentration camps in Poland. This March of the Living journey gave kids the opportunity to learn Holocaust history firsthand. Sadly, I was way too old to be a candidate. Miraculously, a decade later, I discovered an adult journey to the *Konzentrationslager* (camps). I quickly signed up. My dad was *not* at all pleased with my decision. As a thirteen-year-old boy, he couldn't wait to get out of Poland! And here I was going to join the March of the Living and find my dad's shtetl (village) in the old country.

The study of family history, involving the research and documentation of ancestral connections, was quite primitive back then: no Wi-Fi, internet, or 23andMe (a genetic testing site). I joined the Jewish Genealogical Society hoping to plant seeds for my ancestral quest. For \$15, I received the *Guide to Beginning Genealogy*, a simple, blue, three-ring binder with pages of typewritten directions on how to track your genealogy.

While Dad often hung up on me when I called to corroborate a finding, Mom tried to encourage me to track her family instead and leave poor Dad alone. But my lovely mom was born in The Bronx and that held no fascination whatsoever.

As I proceeded with my search, I kept returning to my trusty \$15, three-ring binder to review the how-to-use pages and study the sample sheet. When I approached the 1915 NY State census, a single handwritten 8 ½ x 11 sample was included that listed 25 names of people living in a single building in the Bronx: 1491 Brook Avenue.

I slowly ran my finger down the names, and I came to Selensky. My mom's maiden name was Silensky, with an *i* not an *e*. The first name of this Selensky was Hyman, my grandpa's name. Could it really be my grandpa? My eyes quickly rolled across the line where it said "crockery merchant." That had to be grandpa: white male, thirty years old from Russia, three members of his household in the apartment, in America for eight years, and he was a citizen.

I continued down the page and found the same data on my Grandma Sadie who was twenty-seven years of age and in America nineteen years. Under Grandma's name was Uncle Sidney, age three, and Aunt Helen, age two. But where was Mildred, my mom? Based on her siblings, we knew Grandma must have been pregnant with my mom. Believe it or not, on the very same page, we found the names Louis and Jennie Quatinetz, my mom's grandparents who, we discovered, lived in that same building with a thirty-year-old male lodger from Austria. Who was that young man, Jacob? We never found out. But all of this information, on a single, random, handwritten page on the right street in The Bronx was a goldmine. Just what Mom had told me to do weeks before!

My trip to Poland was sensational, but finding out all these facts about Mom's family in The Bronx was totally awesome. In Yiddish, we call this *bashert*. Mom, you called it. It was truly meant to be.



*From Moonlight
Reflections on Jones Pond,
NY by Yona Rogosin,
page 111.*

Nancy Dobi *With This Ring*

*M*y church has several beautiful artifacts, and years ago it was not uncommon for parishioners to donate stones from jewelry that would eventually be embedded in a newly created chalice. One such piece, a beloved communion chalice, had an engagement ring welded to the stem. I had always wondered why the whole ring was used; it was most unusual. The diamond should have been removed from the setting and the ring melted down and added to the casting of the cup. Even more of a mystery was how the ring disappeared.

For ten years I have served as the pastor of St. Thomas' Church in Camden, Maine, and, as such, I am head of the Altar Guild. The nine members who serve on the guild rotate Sunday duties to set up the altar. Since I have the only key to the sacristy, the room where chalices and vestments are stored, I ensure that all items are accounted for after each use.

One communion Sunday a year ago, I unlocked the sacristy door for Mildred, who was on duty that day. I had no sooner given her access than she let out a scream. Sitting in its normal spot was the revered chalice but bare of the ring. Where the band had been lodged, there was now only a small, perfectly smooth indentation as though the ring had been gently lifted off its resting place.

The police were called. All avenues of theft were explored, and at the end of the day, there were no leads and no explanation. The only way the ring could have been removed would have been to use a jeweler's blowtorch, but the noisy, delicate process would have taken days. That certainly did not happen! It was an impossible and unbelievable disappearance. The police were baffled and the congregation devastated. I couldn't continue using the ringless chalice, as it was a constant reminder of what was not there. I chose a plainer model.

This was not my first unusual occurrence involving this ring.

Several Sundays before the disappearance, an elderly woman I had never seen before had knelt at the altar to receive communion. She audibly gasped when she saw the chalice. As I bent over to serve her, she took the bottom of the chalice with her left hand and rubbed her right

thumb over the diamond. I realized it was the ring that caused her to react. As I pulled away from her and proceeded to serve the next person, she looked at the ring, looked up at me, and radiated extreme calm and joy. I never saw her again, but I would never forget that look.

I searched through the church's archives hoping to find any information that pertained to the ring. There was just one letter, dated August 23, 1964, from the Keane Family confirming the donation of a diamond ring to St. Thomas'.

Looking through the church's past members, there had never been a Keane family listed. I had reached a dead end.

I know the missing ring and the elderly woman are connected. I believe the ring had been hers, and she wanted it back. If that's true, did someone take the ring from her? Had she been in a poor state and forced to sell the ring? To the Keane family? What led her to St. Thomas' in the first place?

In my religious training, we are taught to accept the unexplainable. Our reasoning minds insist on explanations where none exist. I accept what was experienced in my church as a miracle. Now I hope for another: as suddenly as the ring disappeared, that it will suddenly, one day, reappear.

Note: This story is fictional. Any resemblance to real people or events is unintended.



Nancy Dobi

Polar Dance

A shimmering, white round mass
hovering inches above the ground
seems to be held up by a pair of
unseen hands.

Too brilliant to look at straight on!
With eyes narrowed, I note the flaming rim.
I dream of small ballet dancers
Clothed in lemon colored tutus
Who are practicing pliés, jumps and pirouettes.
Up and down, round and round they go.
How quick they are!

If I walk towards the show, I am afraid I will scare the hands.
They might drop the enormous sphere to the
Ground and it would splinter like a golden glass
Christmas ornament and the ballerinas would be crushed.

I will admire the Arctic sun from a distance
And enjoy the dance!

Lazy Day

When the fierce August sun
beats hard on my head,
I flee to the woods and make a soft bed
under my oak tree.
That mean sizzling ball high in the sky
can chase someone else
and leave me to lie with a good book,
a soft blanket and a crisp apple for munching
under my oak tree.
The bleating in the lower field
becomes dull and vague and I find
I must yield to their soothing sound as
my head falls forward, book slips to the ground
under my oak tree.
Morpheus beckons me to release
myself to her arms that offer peace.
I cannot resist.
Nature's lullaby,
born by a soft breeze,
coaxes me into happy reveries
under my oak tree.

Frank Biebel *Squirrel*

From the sidewalk, in front of the fence, I could see into the little park. The heart of it was an oval with a bordering path. Trees, some very tall, ringed the oval. A grassy lawn hid at the center behind the trees.

I found the park appealing, so I walked over to the front gate and pushed on it; it swung open. Once inside, a set of stone steps lay before me. Off to the right side of the path, there was a park bench. On it was a squirrel splayed out face down so tightly onto the green-painted, wooden slats that it looked as though a great weight had pressed down on him.

He lifted his little head and watched me slowly descend the stairs. At the bottom, I stood there looking about deciding which way to walk. Seemingly a picture of immobility, the squirrel suddenly shot off the bench landing on all fours, his curved tail swishing gently back and forth as he eyed me. And I him.

Soon he moved slowly up to the great tree in front of us, perhaps fifty feet or more in height, and proceeded to quickly climb toward the top as smoothly and efficiently as I walked along the nearby sidewalk.

When almost to the top, he stopped moving. Then, his body, apparently operating without any visible assistance from himself, whipped to the left and completely around leaving him facing toward the ground below. He stared down at me while I from below stared up at him.

Then, he began to move slowly back down looking to his left as though there was something there to find. He stopped before a branch, one extending out some great length.

The branch remained steady as he stepped upon it. But, as he moved slowly out along its decreasing girth, the squirrel's feet and body compressing in response, the branch bent down.

As the narrowing branch came under increasing stress, I became concerned that it would suddenly snap, flinging the squirrel to the ground. Yet he kept moving, now very slowly along it. Soon there was only the squirrel wrapped completely around what appeared as thin as a reed. The branch seemed almost to have disappeared. Looking like some overweight spear, it moved more and more toward being perpendicular to the ground.

Dipping to some four or five feet above the ground, the squirrel suddenly released his grasp landing lightly on all fours. He then dashed over to me and, standing upright on only his hind legs, extended his paws toward me in an imploring manner.

I am used to freely enjoying all nature has to offer, yet this fellow seemed to expect some sort of reward for his efforts. Where I come from, payment is always before, not after, the show. Still, I supposed, his performance, his rules. I reached into my pocket and found two peanuts. I took out one and held it up so that he might see it. His head bobbed from my face over to the peanut, his eyes growing bigger. I tossed it beside him. One bounce and it's in his mouth. Then, off he goes into the bushes.

I really can't say if this was a one-peanut-worthy or two-peanut-worthy performance, but if it was me, I would have stayed there and hung tough until I was given another nut.



From *Lobstermen's Gear on Matinicus Rock* by Bob Reiss, page 15.

Sandy Gordon *July 4th at Chautauqua*

Being in Chautauqua on the 4th of July is akin to being thrust into the Norman Rockwell calendar illustrating a “proper” celebration of our country’s independence. The Chautauquans are suddenly imbued with the holiday spirit; decorations are everywhere: lawns are lined with flags; bodies are draped with patterns displaying stars and stripes—predominantly in red and blue—and glitter. The atmosphere is buoyant with expectation of the festivities established many years before as appropriate for this commemorative day.

What could be better than a parade?! And, best of all, a children’s parade. The band is always on the steps of the imposing Colonnade Building, the conductor in patriotic uniform, and the children, ages three to six, wave flags as they march in clothes adorned with the hand-drawn decorations they created. Parents and grandparents line the path, and joy fills the air. The band plays; the children sing and gesture with their hands to such songs as Woody Guthrie’s “This Land Is Your Land” while phone cameras snap away. At the end of the parade, the children return to camp, and the adults attend the first lecture of the day in the huge amphitheater.

At the stroke of high noon, Independence Day activities resume. The iconic yellow school bus delivers the children to their parents, who quickly take them to their chosen place on the grassy mall for the picnic, accompanied by the orchestra. I say “orchestra” because it is huge: a combination of the professional symphony orchestra musicians and anyone who has arrived with an instrument and plays well. It is quite a scene; this huge orchestra performing next to the imposing fountain in the center of the mall with people standing and listening and singing, picnickers eating, flags waving, dogs behaving. And, above all, the laughter that fills the air!

Evening is for us adults to find our inner child. Tradition at Chautauqua calls for a pops orchestra, with an invited pops conductor, so the symphony orchestra now shows their “cool.” Show tunes and jazz melodies tease the memory. The voice of the guest singer is magical. Service members are recognized with the appropriate music for each of



Chautauqua, July 4, 2025. Photos by Sandy Gordon

the branches of the military. Excitement grows as paper bags are given to each person to fill with air and pop when instructed, to simulate the cannons in Tchaikovsky’s 1812 Overture. First there is “practice” with clapping at the proper time; then, as the moment arrives, the conductor points. Adults breathe into their balloons, and the synchronized sound of about 3,500 bags popping—with perfect timing—does sound like cannons.

Lake Chautauqua now beckons again. The lake will host the fireworks display, not at all like the Macy’s extravaganza, but satisfying to the eager viewers. As the last of the fireworks peter out, and the now weary Chautauquans return to their nests, the warmth of the shared day is reflected in hushed, late-night conversations. Independence Day has, once again, been appropriately celebrated.



Art Spar *Moses Shall Not Go*

God told Moses, “You shall not go across”
For Moses was old
His legs were heavy and his feet hurt
Though he was too proud to admit

Oh, the adventures
Dueling wills with Pharaoh
Parting the sea
Smashing the tablets

Life is like manna
Honey like
A daily miracle
Which cannot be stored

So God replaced Moses
Joshua led the crossing
Yonder Jordan
Moses died looking across

Growing old is a passageway
Where life’s mysteries fall away
Where truth comes to focus
The wisdom of being old

The blessing of seeing so much
The blessing of knowing so many
The blessing of beholding nature
The blessing of completion

So Moses rests in peace
Where the living will never know

Diane Figueroa



I made the three larger beads from silver precious metal clay. In person you can see the greenish tones from the liver of sulfur patina. The other beads are aquamarine, of a rather poor quality, but they have the same greenish tones that are in the patina.

Disappearance

D opened the letter bearing an official wax seal. In great flourishes of calligraphy, it stated, “You are invited to perform your magical disappearing act on the royal stage of the palace on December second, 1491, at 10:00 a.m., before an audience of the king and his court.”

Well, I had been perfecting this illusion for several months, and I was thrilled to bring it before the king and his court. In particular, I was eager to perform before Giselle, the king’s niece, who I saw at the king’s ball last summer. She was beautiful beyond compare and smiled at me when I stole a glance in her direction.

On the morning of December second, I awoke early to dress and prepare my illusion. I arrived punctually to put all my mirrors and screens in place. At the appointed time, I took the stage, closed my eyes, and offered a whispered prayer to God to make my disappearing act a success. But God must have been having a bad day, and he was distracted by one of his angels. Apparently, Adolpho, the angel of magical troubadours, was complaining about why the heavenly lyres weren’t properly tuned. Amid the cross-conversations, God turned his countenance upon me and made the king and his court disappear instead of me. I guess he misunderstood my request. I was a forgotten soul performing before an empty house.

But when I looked into my illusion mirror, Giselle, the king’s niece, appeared before me. Stepping out of the mirror, she planted a kiss on my cheek, and we disappeared together. It has been many years since Giselle and I married and raised our family. Our first born we named Adolpho in gratitude for his intervention in our lives, for a choir of angels led by Adolpho swooped down and set everything aright. When the king and his court reappeared, I was given a standing ovation for creating an incomparable illusion of magical dimensions. To this day, I never offer a prayer to God without speaking clearly and pronouncing every word as carefully as possible

Summer 2025



as it Edward Hopper or maybe Norman Rockwell? The Connecticut shoreline scrolling by my Acela window.

September first, Labor Day, and me, returning to the city. The stillness of late summer flies past in a blur. Great painters capture quaint New England scenes, frozen in time. But time is elusive. The well of a lifetime falling away into memories. How quickly we wander from May to September, only to sense that time can't be captured? How many more years will I inhabit the paradise of summer on Cape Cod? The wisdom of aging reminds me to keep an awareness of how beautiful it all is, how priceless are the days. I will miss this summer. How blessed to idle away an afternoon in the shade with "li'l master Davy Copperfield," who spills out of the pages of a book I'm reading for the third time. I admire the repair job I made on the book's spine twenty years ago, a book I rescued from my childhood home, handed down from older brothers and sisters.

In the city, I'll keep swimming at the JCC, but the terror and delight of swimming in the ocean have departed till the warm winds of summer return. My feathered friends will have to fend for themselves when frost settles on a bird feeder with no one to feed it. Yesterday a Cooper's Hawk swooshed through our trees and landed twenty yards from Shelley and me enjoying our happy hour in our Adirondack chairs. Her majesty Ms. Cooper proclaimed sovereignty over the kingdom of our yard, at least till she finds the meal she needs to continue her journey south. So it is southward I ride on wheels of steel, heading toward new adventures, whispering a prayer to be granted another summer.



Art Spar

Yesterday and Today

Just yesterday
The sky was blue
The air was calm
A balmy October afternoon

We followed wooded trails
To marsh views of tranquility
Where shorebirds gather
For their journey south

But today the wind howls
Foreshadowing a coming storm
A deluge is imminent
A dam about to burst

I venture out to experience
Nature's wild side
Before the heavens open
Exiling me to the indoors

The tall grasses undulate
As wind whips white caps
Across the cove
Buffeting birds seeking shelter

I head inside to imagine words
That capture the face of nature
While preparing a roast
To warm the chilly evening ahead

The Stage

This is my space
Where I belong
Ever so comfortable
Before the world

So many stages
Across a lifetime
Favoring the small stages
For their intimacy

Oh, there were days I was terrified
Unsure of my fit
And days not my best
Forgetful of the stage's majesty

Lacking the desire
To command
The grand stage
I choose my roles carefully

To be with my fellow actors
Sharing moments together
Building connections
Ripe with affection

Fearful of flying
Too close to the sun
I set my sights
Where contentment reigns

To be alone
Expanding to fill emptiness
With infinite consciousness
And joy with myself



From *Another World*
by Harriet Finkelstein,
page 27.

Ze'eva Cohen *Morning*

I woke up this morning and had to decide
Should I do my workout first, bicycle or floor work
Should I have breakfast, first or after
Should I check my emails
Respond now or later

What was certain was that I first had to take my shower
When the glistening hot water dissolves my morning pain
With each vertebra stuck to the other
Yawning and allowing space and nice comfortable cushioning
While inviting its sisters to lay nicely one on top of the other

Oh—I almost forgot to tell you about my other shower ritual
I hold my breasts and proceed to bounce up and down
As my ankles pound the bathtub floor with all my might
While chanting Pam Pam, Pam Pam,
This they say would replenish the gradually deteriorating bone density

No questions about it
Getting old and ever older requires new rituals.

Pete Weis



Laissé Passé, photograph

I've always enjoyed going through markets with their colorful array of ingredients. But what made this vendor in Myanmar special was the t-shirt with its misspelled French. The photo is on my desk as a reminder of the fascinating country but with an oppressed citizenry. Does her t-shirt express Buddhist resignation to her status, a desire to be somewhere else, or just a play on words?

Ze'eva Cohen *In Praise of Hamantaschen*

*I*n 1997, when I was still teaching at Princeton University, I was asked by the chair of the Center of Jewish Life to participate in the traditional seasonal debate, “Latke vs. Hamantaschen.”

Though I had never debated before, this invitation presented too much of a temptation to refuse.

To be honest, I chose to argue for the merits of hamantaschen rather than for those of latke because my opponent was a very famous history professor known for his wit and experience, and it seemed easier for me to defend. Frankly, I do not remember who won.

Here is a condensed version of my argument:

Dear audience members,

As most of you probably know, the pastry known as hamantaschen is eaten in the Jewish holiday called Purim, and the potato-pancake-like latke is traditionally eaten during Chanukah.

Though both holidays celebrate the survival of the Jewish people as achieved by heroic acts of a few courageous and crazy individuals, Purim points towards Esther. Being a woman, I identify more easily with Esther’s heroism than I do with Judah the Maccabi.

Esther did not use force, she used diplomacy. Since she knew so well the integration of body, mind, and soul in service of her people, she must have been a creative dancer, trained to challenge the norms.

I will start with the aesthetic issues that these pastries present as well as the plain gastronomic aspects relevant to them.

Take a good look at a latke. Isn’t it so flat and so uninteresting to look at? From any angle you choose, it looks the same. Except for size, all latkes look alike.

Now take a good look at hamantaschen. Doesn’t it look like a gorgeous clay sculpture? It has spatial depth, it is voluminous, it is structured with beautiful folds and contours. In other words, hamantaschen is way more artistic and more multidimensional.

If you look at it even longer and more carefully, you’ll notice that hamantaschen reflects the human touch that formed it. Its form expresses

the vision of its creator, its baker. No one hamantaschen looks exactly like another. It definitely supports the philosophy of modern dance, which finds beauty in difference and in individual creativity.

And should you choose to close your eyes and take a bite, a latke will taste the same all over while you never know what you'll get with the hamantaschen: the thin side or the thick, the prominent prune or the alternative raspberry or apricot filling?

A hamantaschen is highly self-sufficient. Whereas a latke needs additional help like apple sauce or sour cream.

A hamantaschen is also more time efficient: it can be stored in a closed jar for weeks, and it will taste fresh and delicious for a long time after its baking day. What you are guaranteed in eating the hamantaschen is a sumptuous baked dough that crumbles into countless delicious micro-bites in your mouth. And latke? Have you ever eaten a reheated two-day old latke?

And how about the plain fact that a latke is simply not good for you? We all know that latke celebrates grease. Very bad for your cholesterol level. Very bad for your heart. And the irony of it all? When you think of the word latke in Hebrew, *levivot*, there seems to be a problem. The singular and very similar sounding word, *lev* or its plural, *levavot*, means heart or hearts. So, when you eat a latke does it mean you are eating your heart or just getting a heart burn?

And here, my friends, begins the end of my defense in praise of hamantaschen: In the content of a prune-filled pastry that is good and healthy, your digestive system is assured of staying pure, clean, and regular. Isn't this a source of pleasure, joy, and comfort?



Ze'eva Cohen *Hot and Yellow*

The ground was white as a snowbird lifting its wings
The grass was so green it almost hurt my
Eyes with its perfection of unified color and shape

The sky was as blue as could be
The air so pure and comforting

It reminded me of reading Heidi
The little girl
Who found a loving home
With her uncle's family living in the Alps

While I
A child born to
Cracked earth sand
Hot dry and yellow
Milk, no cream

A shepherdess in the Alps
Became a dream

Carole Cronig Abrahams



Sea Creatures, ceramic

Judy Winn

Night

*Awake! for morning in the bowl of night
Has flung the stone that puts the stars to flight:
And lo! the hunter of the east has caught.
The sultan's turret in a noose of light.*

—From the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*

I am not here alone
The shadow figures of the night
Float in and out of alleyways
Features masked by lowest light
I feel them following me
Not fully seen nor seen at all.

Who are they the ones who come
Before dawn creeps between the shades
There is one whose hood is dropped
Familiar and yet not the same
Too young to be the one I thought
The haze is playing tricks on me.

I turn and look the other way
Not to be reminded of who may be there
They choose not to go away
All creatures who just hang around
Displacement not a choice they make
This floating crowd of apparitions.
The most persistent ones are those
Whose hands I could not reach to hold
As they slipped off into this night
They blame me and I blame them
Why did you not visit more they ask
You moved too far away I say.

Their retreat begins with morning light
Unwanted visitors slowly faded by the sun
Replaced by objects in the room
They do not surface every night
Quietly waiting to sneak into a dream
Semi-disguised in the shadows.

Forgiveness

I am told “to forgive is to be free.”
Forgiveness will release me from anger
Hate is more destructive to the hater
Than to the perpetrator of the acts
Forgiveness should lead me to peace.

Perhaps my heart cannot forgive
The crime is too great to be forgiven
Will my anger bring me down
Leaving me to suffer with resentment
Interfering with a positive life.

Some may hold grudges against me
Never forgiving me for what I thought
Was an inconsequential act
I feel hurt by their behavior
Spurned and subjected to gossip.

Forgive or not forgive
This is a tricky business.

Judy Winn *MRI*

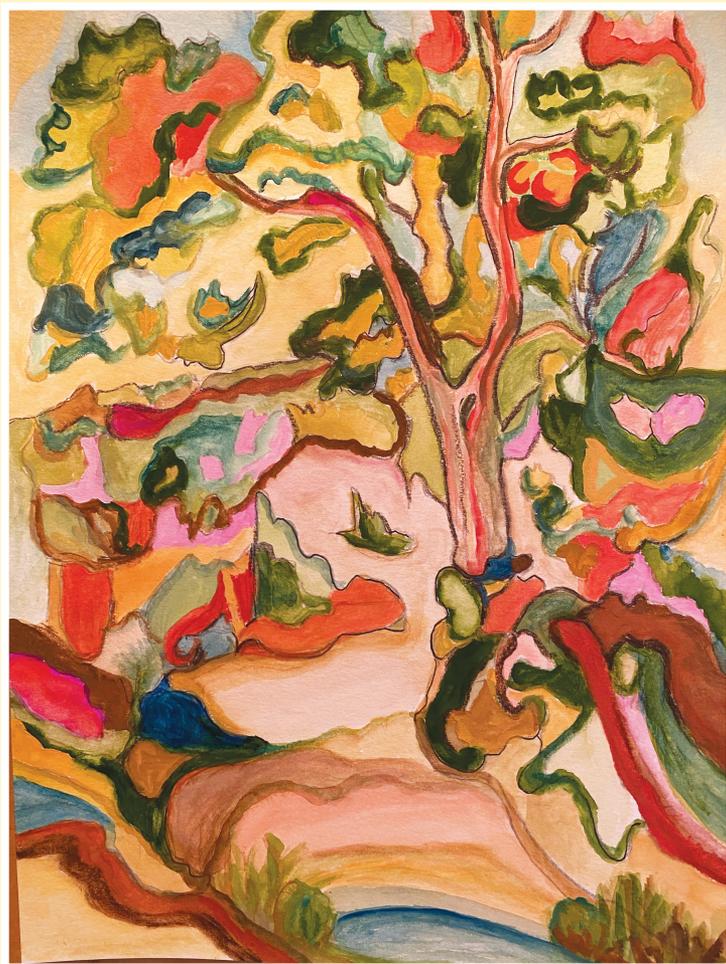
I am in the MRI machine
Beeps, dings, higher pitch, lower pitch
Two minutes, stop, six minutes, stop
Stay perfectly still.

A tiny man appears
He dances with joy on my shoulder
Stamping feet and wildly waving arms
I call him Chaim, for life
My first husband's Hebrew name
Who never danced and was not joyful.

The tech says I was moving
He has to do a repeat
Chaim has to go
His dancing must have made me move
I replace him with Herschel
My second husband's Yiddish name
He didn't dance but he was joyful
He sits quietly and smiles.

I slide out of the machine
Done with beeps and dings
Chaim and Herschel are gone
Back to dust.

Paul Adler



The Fantasy Forest, graphite and gouache on paper

Lynne Scheurer-Foster *Finding My Nest at Quest*

A therapist for decades,
 In the last chapter of my career,
 I refuse to play cards or pickleball,
 My mind is still in gear!
 I'd been seeking/searching for something,
 But could not put my finger on...WHAT.
 Could I ever find "kindred spirits"?
 I had a good feeling—in my gut!
 My first visit was back in April,
 Marion S. was my Quest host.
 Her class on Astronomy was...stellar,
 'Though she'd never, ever boast!
 By my second day of sampling,
 I'd made up my mind already.
 Though a "free summer" was offered,
 A membership made me feel heady!
 So proud of my red-corded name tag,
 I drank in the Summer Encores "buffet,"
 Each class filled with fun surprises,
 And always a great takeaway!
 Can't fit all of them in here,
 (The limit's 76 lines!)
 But I'll highlight just a few...
 Sweetest "grapes" on the many Quest "vines!"
 My longtime love of theatre,
 Made Musicals on Broadway divine.
 Dutch art packed with erotic symbols,
 And Jefferson's Women—THAT was truly fine!
 Life in a French Utopian Village,
 And many fab French flicks,
 Profiles in Courage aplenty,
 And 100 Best New Yorker Cartoons and pics.

Déjeuner Français at lunchtime,
 A fun tribute to “Coffee Pam” and her team.
 A concert, meditation or trivia.
 Midday options are a dream.
 I love Questing early each morning,
 To have coffee, & kibbitz & schmooze.
 Before class starts—the world’s problems: solved!
 Now there’s a plan that can’t lose!
 It was fun to try Quest Sole Mates,
 A riverside walk after school,
 Some chat time and snacks and cocktails,
 Were a combo that really was cool!
 This summer a Culture Quest trip,
 To Staten Island—for my very first time.
 The ferry, the lunch and historic tour—
 We’re nothing short of sublime!
 And classes on Numbers and classes on Time,
 Short Stories and Poetry read aloud.
 Politics, Jazz and Rock ‘n Roll
 Something for everyone in the Quest crowd!
 A tour of Japan, and the Age of our World
 and Love and Hate Letters galore.
 ALL this in only my first several months—
 Could I ask for anything more?
 The members and staff are SO welcoming.
 The Quest vibe is friendly and kind.
 In-person and sometimes by Zoom,
 At Quest, “Seek and you shall find!”
 I know I’m still on my Quest “honeymoon,”
 Which perhaps might not ALWAYS last,
 I’m hoping this feeling continues,
 ‘Cause so far Quest has been a real BLAST!
 I look forward to what the future holds.
 I’ll begin presenting at Quest.
 For now, I express my gratitude.
 This special community’s truly the BEST!

Mary Beth Yakoubian *Herodias*

*P*reamble, Mark 6:22–23 And when Herodias’s daughter came in and danced and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, “Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you.” He also swore to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom.” Following is a narrative of the events leading up to Salome’s demand.

Herodias recalls wistfully when, years ago, her interpretation of the “Seven Veils” dance would have her audience mesmerized. Those days are long gone; however she has by her side her Salome, her blossoming daughter whom she has carefully taught the ways of a true princess. Herod, her second husband, had begun lusting after her daughter before she had even reached the age of puberty. While Herodias is no longer bothered by feelings of jealousy, she is keenly aware of the predatory attention Herod lavishes on his stepdaughter.

At the present time, Herodias has but one all-consuming objective that she focuses her energy on: to get John the Baptist out of the picture. It’s humiliating to hear his booming, daily harangue condemning her from the depths of his cistern cell; his performance lets everyone in Galilee know about her adulterous past. Herodias understands exactly why Herod tolerates the incessant ranting: he believes John the Baptist is a holy man and is afraid to harm him. But she cannot take it any longer. What good is having luxurious jewels and a fancy lifestyle if she can’t hold her head up when she travels outside the palace?

From the time Salome was very little, Herodias had doted on her, had never denied her anything, and had hired the best teachers to give her dance lessons from the day she was able to walk. Now Herodias and Salome were close, and she was gratified her daughter had grown to be so beautiful that men would trip over themselves just to look at her.

One night at dinner, Herod has a bit too much to drink and is relentless in his lusting after Salome and begs her to sit closer to him. “Salome my child, come here and drink wine with me. You must take a sip of this amazing wine that Caesar himself sent to me.” She is so

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Mary Beth Yakoubian



Atagracia, polymer clay

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spoiled she tells him she's not thirsty.

"Salome sweet girl, come here by me and take a bite of this luscious golden apple. I want to nibble on the bite marks left by your adorable little teeth." She's not hungry! Herodias is becoming impatient and glares at Salome with fire in her eyes. It's clear that Herod's fervor is reaching a tipping point.

"Salome, Salome, dance for me. Dance for me, and I'll give you anything you want. Anything!" Herodias observes Salome's lip twitch ever so slightly. Ah, finally. Salome fakes a small delicate yawn; Herod's excitement unmistakably hikes up a notch. "Salome, name it, I'll give you anything in my entire kingdom if only you will dance for me."

Herodias relaxes back in her gilded chair, smiling and thinking with satisfaction: My sweet concupiscent Salome is her mother's daughter. John the Baptist's rejection turned her on, and I know she will absolutely have her way and ask for the reward that I must have.

She turns her lovely, innocent face toward Herod: "You'll give me anything, no exceptions?"

"Yes, yes, no exceptions, my dear child. Anything your precious little heart desires."

Salome insists: "You swear it, Tetrarch?"

Herod replies breathless: "I swear it, Salome!"

She consents: "I will dance for you, Tetrarch."

Herodias relaxes back in her gilded chair, smiling with satisfaction. Salome will ask for the reward that I must have.



Yona Rogosin *The Search*

Black backing breaks off
crumbling like ash
revealing nothing.
No names and dates to guide me
I stare and stare
in my despair
at the faces who are long gone
but somehow connected to me.
Like an orphan longing to know
I search for my forebears of years ago.
But the gaps are chasms
the alleys are dead end
with too few threads to tend.
So many pieces are missing.
No one to ask who is living.
A difficult and frustrating task,
I will persevere and push on
until it is absolutely, positively clear
that I cannot find a speck more
about those whom I hold dear.

Yona Rogosin *A Mother's Nostalgia*

Where's my little girl?
I want her back!
With her arms clasped tightly around my shoulders and neck
Her lips smacking juicy pecks
On my left then right cheek
Her eyes dancing and playful,
a bedtime ritual
every night of the week.
"One more story," she begs.
"An apple please," she pleads.
My little girl does not like to go to bed
And finds any excuse to stay up instead.

It's not so different now,
A night owl she is.
This time busy with family, friends, work,
and so many pursuits, don't ask.

Three thousand miles away,
Three hours past my bedtime.
No hugs, no kisses to receive, no requests to meet,
no way to turn back the clock.
Just loving thoughts to send her way
for the girl she was, the woman she has become,
And for the wisdom she will find and seek.

Yona Rogosin



Moonlight Reflections on Jones Pond, NY, photograph

Betty Farber

New York, New York

To some folks who grew up on farms
New York City rings alarms.
“Can you get through the day unhurt?
Are the subways filled with dirt?
I hear the park is even worse!
At night, hold tightly to your purse!”

No, no, as I have oft discussed,
This bleak description is unjust.
It’s understood that bad or good
Folks live in every neighborhood.

I can spend my New York days
Attending great museums and plays.
What fun to ride upon a landmark:
The carousel in Central Park.
Like reading? Well, with fearsome looks
Two lions guard its many books.
There is so very much to see,
When you explore its history.

As I am a New York defender
I smile as I enjoy its splendor!

Remember

Remember when we sat in an orchestra seat
At the Metropolitan Opera
Listening to a rehearsal of glorious music?
Remember when I walked 10 blocks
On a city street, using only a simple cane?
Remember when I taught classes in fiction
And Contemporary Poetry?
Remember when we travelled to France
And England and Ireland with friends?
But just now, when we met,
I couldn't remember your name...



*From Flowers #1
by Roy Clary,
page 55.*

Betty Farber *Superwoman*

Long black hair billowing behind her,
A floor-length purple cloak on her back
Floating above her high-heeled shoes—
She runs past me on East 61st Street.

Is she rushing to catch the Third Avenue bus?
Or late for the W train to wake up Wall Street?
A glance at her face will give me a clue.
I turn the corner. She is gone.

No bus has arrived. Subway stairs—empty.
Is she flying above the traffic on Third Avenue,
Purple cloak lifting her aloft? Look! Up in the sky!
A purple light shines in the misty morning.

Arnold Davis *The Four-Letter Expletive*

Here are those within my tight inner circle who would be unable to speak if this four-letter word were deleted from the lexicon. These fools are highly educated and have accumulated lots of post-master's credits. In addition, they claim to have many talents and abilities, and they enthusiastically speak about their very high IQs.

I've told these "above-averages" how offensive I find this language and that I don't want it spoken in my home. They laugh at my views and often claim that the First Amendment allows free speech, so they can speak as they choose.

To settle this matter, I placed a call to Philadelphia to get some advice from one of my imaginary friends, Alexander Hamilton, one of the writers of our Constitution. Explaining the situation to Mr. Hamilton, I asked if there was any merit to their views.

"None at all," was Mr. Hamilton's reply. "The wording is very clear in the First Amendment, which states that Congress shall make no law prohibiting free speech. Further, your home is not Congress, and you have the right to prohibit any speech you deem offensive in your sacred domicile."

That settles that. Now on the matter of their many talents and abilities: I placed another call, this time to England to another of my imaginary friends and my writing mentor, William Shakespeare, a.k.a. The Bard of Avon. "Mr. Bard," I asked (he prefers I call him by that name), "How can I respond to these folks who flaunt the many talents and abilities they claim to possess?"

Mr. Bard told me he'd written about precisely this. Looking through his writings, I was delighted to find a quote contained in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Confronting these people, I paraphrase, "I'm sure you folks have many talents and abilities. But where are these talents and abilities hidden? What curtain veils them from our sight?"

They are now almost speechless. "But how about our high IQs?"

"Fret not," I respond. "I'm sure you folks have the highest IQs ever recorded by North American primates."

Bob Gottfried *Grandparents*

*M*y paternal grandparents, Josef and Zlota (Lotte, née Maymon) Gottfried, died in the Holocaust, so I never met them. My maternal grandparents, Lazarus and Pearl Greenblatt, whom I called Zayda and Bubby, lived next door to me on Albany Avenue in Brooklyn.

Lazarus was born in 1900 in a village near Kiev, Ukraine, and came to the United States in 1911. Although he spoke only Yiddish as a child, he graduated from Columbia University's College of Pharmacy. After attending a Yeshiva through high school, he became an atheist and rejected all organized religions, including Judaism. He met my Bubby on the Lower East Side, where they both resided, and they married on October 31, 1923, in Brooklyn. They had three children: Thelma, born in 1925; my mother Henie, born in 1927; and Michael, born in 1937.

Zayda loved his family, but I seldom witnessed him showing affection to Bubby or his daughters although he loved to kiss and hug me, and my Uncle Michael was the apple of his eye. He was always kind to me, but he did not converse much with me, even though I saw him almost every day for the first seven years of my life. He was generous to his grandchildren and to some extent to his children. We always got Purim Gelt (money) and birthday presents.

My grandfather owned a pharmacy downstairs from where he lived. He was retired by the time my family moved from Brooklyn to Valley Stream in 1957. Although he was only fifty when I was born, he always seemed like an old man to me. I was told by my Uncle Michael that as a young man Zayda played handball. The only activity I witnessed was his afternoon game of pinochle. I loved seeing him relaxing with his friends.

My Zayda had a quirky sense of humor. Once while visiting us in Valley Stream, he called the telephone operator and asked her to connect him to his daughter Thelma. The operator said he could dial the number without assistance. He told her he was blind. The operator then asked for Thelma's number, and he replied, "Wait a minute, I have to look."

In 1967, when I was sixteen, I received a call from the Miami Beach police, who were trying to reach my Bubby. She was attending an Emma

Lazarus conference in New York City, so the policeman notified me that Zayda had died in his sleep.

Pearl Greenblatt, nee Hichenka, was born in 1901 in another small village near Kiev and came to the United States at the age of two. She lived on the Lower East Side before moving to Brooklyn. Bubby graduated from high school but did not attend college. She was a voracious reader her entire life, and maybe I got that from her. Bubby was industrious and spent many hours working in the pharmacy. Later in life, after the pharmacy was sold, she worked as a bookkeeper.

Bubby was especially kind to me. She took me on many walks in the neighborhood and frequently bought me a chocolate malted at the corner candy store or a black-and-white cookie at the bakery.

In the years after my family moved to Valley Stream, we occasionally returned to Brooklyn to visit my grandparents, but I have no recollection of them visiting us together, nor did they ever babysit for me. In 1960, they moved to Miami Beach, where I visited them several times.

Following the death of Zayda, Bubby married Lou Gassman and lived with him for several years until he died. She developed dementia and moved to an assisted-living facility in New York and then to a nursing home. I visited her in the nursing home, but she was in her own world and was unable to communicate with me. She spent her days reading, often the same book multiple times.

I have precious memories of both Bubby and Zayda, but now I wish they had shared more of their life stories with me. Bubby died on December 31, 1983, and was buried next to Zayda in Wellwood Cemetery in Pinelawn, New York.



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