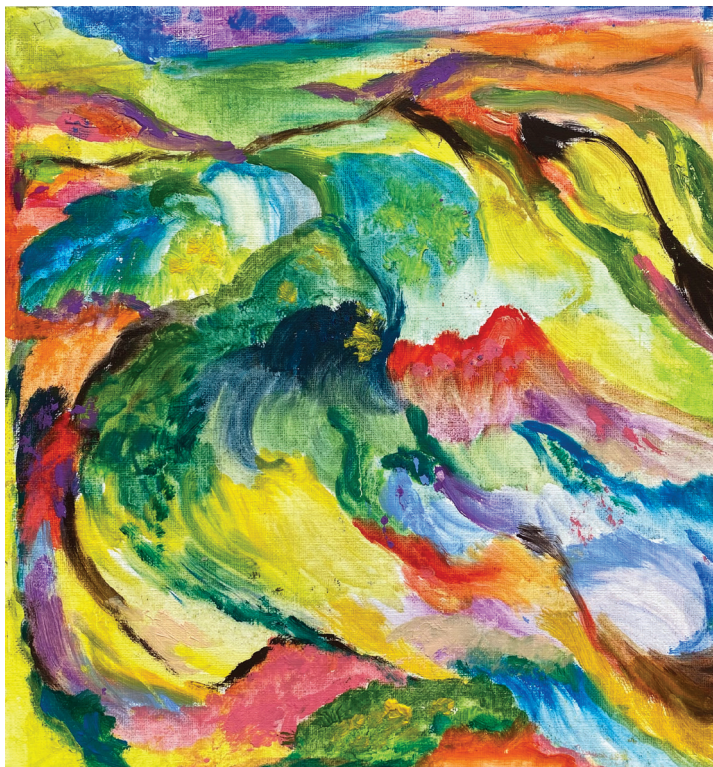


Q REVIEW  
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1995 - 2025



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Q REVIEW

THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

*Q Review* 2025  
Volume 30

**QUEST**

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## A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

This year has enjoyed a steady growth in the membership at Quest, thanks to an energetic advertising campaign and persuasive word of mouth invitations from members. We hope this publication will be relevant all of you as you contribute to Quest's offerings.

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

And our deep appreciation goes to you, our authors and artists, who, in conjuring up our distant and immediate past, have helped us come to terms with our daunting present. Your poetry, prose, and artwork continue to uplift us with your original ideas and their expression, helping us to empathize with each other and to cherish our shared humanity.

We hope you, our valued community, will enjoy this publication and will consider contributing to our 2026 edition.

– Ruth Ward

## IN MEMORIAM

It is with deep sorrow that we note the passing of Quest members Lois Cardillo, Loretta Menger, and John Spiegel, whom we lost during this past year.

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

## NOTE

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

A large, stylized letter 'Q' in a serif font, with a thin, light-colored outline of the same letter behind it. The 'Q' is positioned to the left of the word 'REVIEW'.

# REVIEW

THE CREATIVE VOICE OF QUEST

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**Q** REVIEW



## ZACH: PART II

*Nina Dioletis*

For those who don't know or don't remember, Zach is my now seven-year-old mitred conure. Mitred conures, which are South American parakeets, hail from Peru, Bolivia, and northwestern Argentina. They are thirteen to fifteen inches long (half of which is tail) and weigh about seven or eight ounces. How much challenge can such a small creature be? Well, let me tell you.

Think of the behavior of a two-year-old child on amphetamines. Then add wings, perhaps a bit more intelligence than a toddler, and the indomitable persistence to get what she wants. That's Zach in a nutshell.

Zach's favorite thing in the world is food and her vocabulary reflects this. She can say, "Mama makes din-din," in present, past, and future tenses as well as "apple" and "boy, oh boy din-din." The funniest, and rather intelligent, thing she does is ignore words she doesn't like. For instance, I tried to teach her to say "Is it good? I don't know," but she only repeats it to the word "don't" because "know" sounds like "no" which she hears an awful lot of.

This semi-feathered (she's a picker so is missing her chest feathers) eight-ounce creature rules the household and keeps the humans in line. She's never in the cage while I'm home and has decided that the kitchen makes a perfect playpen. Against one wall, we have an old free-standing cabinet with a door and two shelves where I keep her food and other miscellaneous items. When she was younger, I would put her on the first shelf where she would open the lid of her pellet jar, stick her body in, and munch.

But that wasn't challenging enough and lost its attraction, so she started climbing the other shelves and now ends up on the top of the cabinet. I placed unbreakable objects there, which she enjoys throwing off. She then gets herself down to the floor and can spend hours playing with them. Who needs to spend money on expensive conure toys? When she wants to repeat this game, all she does is call her human who promptly picks everything up so she can start the whole thing again.

Like a toddler, she reaches for dangerous and breakable objects, so I've had to move them to the top of the refrigerator. Boy, is it getting crowded up there!

Our meals can be a challenge too. She eats with us and so enjoys the food from her dad's plate, that she actually gets annoyed when he tries to dig in! She can sure stuff herself on human food, and after a while, I try to get her away from it since it's not too healthy. It's a struggle. But her presence is also fun, and when she calms down and cuddles, it is a real pleasure.

You may be wondering why I refer to Zach as a "she." A few years after we got her, we did a DNA test and learned she was a hen. What to do with her name? I then remembered my father had a female cousin named Zacharoula, based on the Greek word for sugar, so Zacharoula she became.

So, this is Zach (Zacharoula) Part II, following the first report in 2020. Part III to follow?

• • •

## GAYLORD THE DOG

*Linda Rothstein*

The first time my heart broke was when I lost Gaylord. I was old enough to know how short a dog's life is but still young enough to think my dog would be with me forever.

Some people are rescued by one dog. I was rescued by so many. The love of my dogs was something to reflect on when things got tough, when people were mean.

Your dog wants to be with you forever, but he can't. Your dog doesn't know this, so your dog is perpetually happy. On each and every morning that was given to Gaylord, he rose happily, his tail a metronome of wags. A dog can make you feel like singing. You know his lyrics... "Another great day and I'm so happy to be alive."

It was not as if I had no friends on the South Side of Chicago where I spent my youngest years. I was a part of a gaggle of pre-teens. We roller skated through the neighborhood, stopping at the house of this one and that one for a drink or to pee. Gaylord followed behind us, always lagging, sniffing the trail. When we lost sight of him, we'd turn our heads and shout, "C'mon, Gaylord." It happened so often that a grownup thought Gaylord was one of the kids.

Gaylord took care of an orthodontic problem for me although he did not intend to. My two front teeth were very large. I think all my teeth were too large for my mouth, and they were jagged. I was not much more than ten when the dentist wanted to file down the front tooth on the right. He never had the chance. His dentistry was preempted by a canine.

It happened one day as I roughhoused with Gaylord in the backyard. The dog was a beagle, and, if you remember the cartoon strip "Peanuts," he did exactly what Snoopy the beagle did. Beagles bounce up and down on their hind legs like they're on a trampoline. They will jump as high as you stand, all the time trying to tongue-kiss you. It wasn't a joke when Lucy said, "Ugh, I've been kissed by a dog." I got more than a kiss.

My beagle's GPS wasn't working so well that day. He leapt up for a slurp and bumped the crown of his head against that right front tooth. A little chip came off in my hand. Later as I peered into the bathroom mirror, I thought I looked better with my front teeth even.

Gaylord died young. He was no more than three or four when he was stricken. He became listless, the life leaked out of him. He lay for days, not eating, limp as a deflated balloon.

I knew it was the end on the night he let me carry him around the house cradled, belly-up. His nose was warm. He was gone in the morning. There was speculation he had been poisoned. Ever after I was devastated when I passed the old, overstuffed chair in the basement that was his bed, now empty.

I have grown old. So many teeth pulled. That right front tooth lives on in memory only and so does Gaylord the dog.

• • •

## IT'S TOO HARD TO HAVE A PET IN THE CITY

*Marian Friedmann*

I lived in Brooklyn, a short walk to P.S. 197 and James Madison High School and a short ride to Brooklyn College. The two-bedroom apartment on Kings Highway was spacious enough for my sister and me, my mother and father, and the grand piano, but not for any pets. My mother said, "It's too hard to have a pet in the city."

Every spring, my mother and I went to Madison Square Garden to see the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus and to visit Uncle Robert, my mother's brother, who, although not in the circus, toured the country performing in carnivals, road shows, small clubs, and such. He had a mind-reading act and knew all the circus people: the Fat Lady, the Tattooed Man, the Sword Swallower, the Little People, and others. He lovingly introduced me to all. The highlight of one such day was the purchase of a painted turtle in a small cardboard box. It had a cellophane window on top. My father, quite the Renaissance man, had taken up knitting and fashioned a small harness and leash for Myrtle from some thread, so I could walk my little treasure around the apartment. My dotting mother, however, shed tears when my little friend soon saw its last days.

I told this painful story to the man who would be my husband for forty-five years, so he bought me a seal-point Siamese cat as a wedding gift and then became severely allergic to it. The kitten, my second attempt at a pet, was less than a success. She had to go. I sadly found a good home for her.

What are the suburbs and three children without a dog? Maggie, an Airedale terrier, came into my life after I poured endlessly over the American Kennel Club book to select a perfect dog breed. Not too big, not too small, not too much hair, not too much shedding. Peter, my husband, might be allergic. And not too much jowl. I don't like slobbering.

Maggie was ideal. Forever a case of arrested development, she was always "the puppy." Fearful of loud noises and fireworks, she often hid in bed with me. She spent hours in the snow with the children until she could no longer see through the ice formed on the terrier furnishings around her eyes. The children guided her home for a thaw out. Her passion for chasing skunks never ended well. Doused with that pungent spray, she found her way home for a bath. This beloved family dog developed

pancreatic cancer and wandered into the woods one fall day never to be seen again. Her rust-colored coat blended perfectly with the fallen leaves. I mourned for her.

Rubin came along after the tragic loss of dear, sweet, forever-young Maggie. He was an adorable fellow, a Heinz mix with a lot of terrier touches, and, oh boy, did he have a passion for the girls. For reasons still unknown, my husband nixed this guy's "alteration." Gone from home days at a time (in the season), he would return exhausted, his chaffed thighs cared for with Bacitracin, lovingly applied by my children. When he died, an unwelcome quiet overtook the house. How I missed rambunctious Rubin, the most fun guy you could ever know.

Golda was not just any goldfish. When I won the ring toss at the Greenport Carnival, my prize was a goldfish about one-inch long, living in a zip-lock bag. I should have gifted her to the first five-year-old I saw, but instead I brought her home. Golda's first days were spent in a small Pyrex measuring cup. I soon outfitted this little swimmer with a tank, a pump, food, and a fitted lid with a light. After a successful transfer to the new home, she was energized and lived with me for more than ten years, graduating step-by-step to a 100-gallon tank to accommodate her now impressive girth. I said my goodbyes each Sunday night. "You're on your own Golda. See you on Friday."

Oh, how the years take their toll. When the work and responsibilities of a second home were no longer fun, and the lure of a full-time Manhattan life overtook me, Greenport had to go. But what to do with dear Golda? A friend offered a good home. Setting her free in Peconic Bay was not an option.

Life without a pet was strange at first, but I am my mother's daughter. I said, "It's too hard to have a pet in the city."

• • •

## DRAGONFLY LOVERS

*Linda Downs*

A line of people pushed into our subway car after leaving the adjacent hot car. In came a young boy around eight years old with a huge backpack and plopped down on the seat next to me. He pulled out a cellphone and started scrolling through photos of dragonflies. I couldn't keep my eyes off them. Each was a different size and radiant color. He caught me peeking and smiled. He opened his backpack to show me his handmade dragonfly held together with Picasso Tiles and cellophane.

"This is a damselfly." (He was a fast talker. His words mixed with the subway sounds.)

"A what?"

"A damselfly."

He asked me what my stop was. I replied, "42nd Street."

"Mine is all...the...way...to Wall Street! My name is David. What's yours?"

"My name is Linda." I think he was figuring how much time he had with a captive audience between 96th and 42nd streets.

David pulled out his handmade model. "It is a damselfly, which is thinner than a dragonfly. You see how the cellophane looks like real iridescent wings?"

"It is a wonderful replica!"

"Dragonflies have bulky bodies and are called Anisoptera."

"A what?"

"*Anisoptera.*"

"Which are more aerodynamic?"

He opened his cell phone again and found an *Austrophlebia costales*.

"It is a giant darner."

"A what?"

"It can fly sixty miles per hour!"

"It is absolutely gorgeous. The head looks like a space alien. It has the same coloring as a dragonfly I saw emerge from its exoskeleton in Michigan many summers ago. I was watching it with my mother."

"What did it look like?"

"It was iridescent green and about two and a half inches long."

"That was a darner!"

"The slimy wings slowly emerged. It was amazing to see how compact

the wings were before they filled with liquid. When the wings were completely formed, the dragonfly remained absolutely still. Maybe it was drying out. We waited for a very long time. Then suddenly it took off and flew with great speed into the top of a tree. My mother and I were awestruck.”

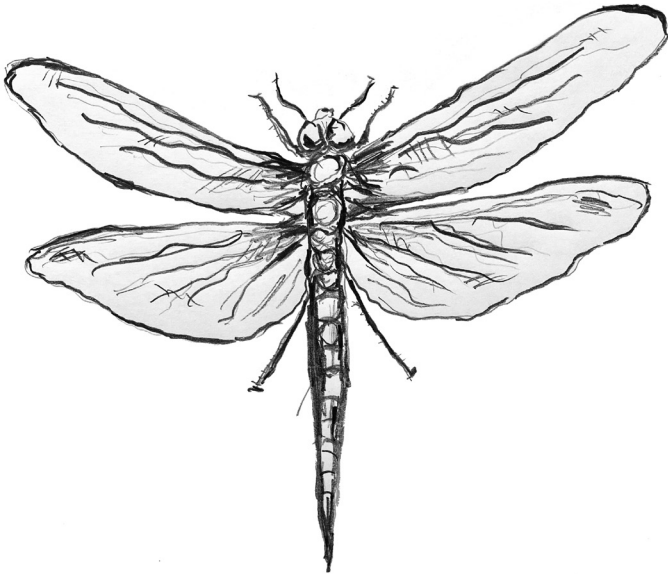
“What time of day was it born?”

“It was in the afternoon.”

“That’s unusual because they are normally born in the morning.”

The 42nd Street stop was announced. As I got up, we wished each other a good day and gave a friendly wave goodbye. David made my day.

• • •





## THORA'S CURE FOR BALDNESS

*Jennifer Jolly*

My mother, Thora, always wanted to be up to date and ahead of the times. Therefore, when a new health-food store opened in our working-class, iron and steel town in the north of England in the 1950s, my mother was first in there to try every remedy available. All sorts of pills and potions designed to cure headaches, rheumatism, spots, and sores arrived in our home. Pills to clean the innards and general workings of the body appeared in our kitchen cupboard.

On the day I'm going to recount, my dad was in the living room with me. My mother was in the kitchen preparing tea. I'd been playing tennis all day and told Dad my back was sore.

"Well," he said, looking up from his newspaper, "I expect your mother will have a cure for that. She has a cure for everything you know. But you must watch out. You never know what she'll do!" He thought for a minute before he said, "Did I tell you about her cure for baldness?"

"No, Dad. What was that?"

Meanwhile, my mother had come back into the room with a pot of tea and sandwiches, which she put on the oak tea trolley before sitting on the sofa to continue working on her crossword puzzle. Dad glanced at her before he started. "Well, it happened when I began to lose my hair."

Mum looked up from the crossword and interjected, "Oh, he used to have beautiful hair. It was very blond with lovely waves."

"Well," he continued, "when my hair started to wave goodbye, your mother reckoned she had a cure for baldness. I tell you, our Jennifer, your mother said to me, 'I can stop you from going bald, Jack. I've read about what you need to do, and I think it will work. You must stimulate the roots of your hair.'"

"Well, I agreed to try it out."

"So, one evening, we got ready for the big event. Your mother sat me down in a chair and prepared this thing called a mustard plaster. It looked like a thick yellowish paste. When it was ready, she said, 'Sit still, Jack.' So, I sat there like tripe, and she put this mustard plaster all over my head. Then she covered it with a piece of cloth and one of those thick hairnets, which she tied under my chin. Can you imagine that? I looked a right banana. Something like the big bad wolf in Red Riding Hood."

Mum by now was not doing the crossword but was starting to laugh and say, "Now Jack stop it." But he was on a roll.

"I sat there," he said, "and in the beginning it felt lovely as it worked on the roots of my hair follicles just as your mother said it would. It was quite soothing. But suddenly it took hold. My eyes started to water, and I felt as though my blooming head was on fire. My God did I yell. Get this blasted thing off my head I said as I rushed into the kitchen, pulled off this darned contraption, and stuck my head under the cold tap. Your mother sat there saying that I hadn't given it a chance. By golly if that was the taste of a chance, I didn't want it."

"You didn't do that," I said laughing.

"I'm telling you that's what happened. I couldn't dream up such a thing. But your mother could once she visited that health-food store and read all those new-fangled ideas." He touched the top of his bald head. "I'm telling you I have a very delicate scalp and not one to deal with mustard plasters."

Mum looked up laughing and saying, "You don't half exaggerate, Jack."

"Well, I couldn't make up something like that," he said. "Anyway," he continued, "you can see your mother's baldness cure didn't work, can't you?"

I looked at his receding hairline. "I reckon you're right, Dad."

"Well," he said, "I've learned to keep quiet when there's something the matter with me. Your mother always has a cure for everything, don't you, love? Oh well, it was a bit of a laugh, wasn't it? Now is that tea ready to pour?" He grinned and looked over towards her affectionately as she stood up and went over to the tea trolley.

• • •

## MY YIDDISHE MAMA

*Frieda Lipp*

This is a story about me and my mom—two strong willed women who knocked heads for too many years.

My mother, Masha, was born around 1900 (she was never sure of the year) in Soshna, a shtetl in Belarus. She met and fell in love with my father, Benyomin, when he, as a lone Jew in the Polish Army, was bivouacked in her village. Seven years later in 1929, she joined him in America. In those early years, he was a house painter, she, a seamstress. After WW II, with Lipp-family borrowed money, they bought a chicken farm. Although they lived the American dream, the shtetl was always nearby.

As I grew older my mother and I were constantly arguing. My “green-horn” mother: Why wasn’t I doing the right thing? “A nice Jewish girl goes to college, becomes a teacher, gets married, and has children. What’s the matter with you?”

To quit college to go on tour! “An actress, some actress!” And then, “You think you’re such a prize package. You’ll be an old maid; then you’ll be happy?” And, “What’s wrong with you; why are you so particular?” The litany and arguments continued well into adulthood.

My older brother Leon began having children. I am visiting; so is my mother. I am playing on the floor with a couple of young ones. I become aware of my mother sitting on the couch silently watching me with those penetrating blue eyes of hers. With a touch of smart aleck, I say, “What are you looking at?” She answers out of nowhere, “Don’t get married; have a child.” My old-fashioned mother! Speechless, her words hang, and I continue playing with the kids.

A few years later in the early seventies, we have begun to talk to each other without fighting. We are on the farm, rocking on a rusty two-seater, talking of this and that. Again she says, “Don’t get married; have a child.” A bit more prepared, “Ma, what would you do if I came home with an illegitimate child?” Her intensely serious response, “I would help you until the day I die.” My Yiddishe Mama—how blessed am I.



## A FISH TALE

*Rachel Shor*

Growing up in a city apartment, my big brother, Mike, and I had no pets as kids. However, since our father was a high school teacher and mother, a sub, in summer we escaped city heat by going to a Connecticut beach town. There we had rabbits—Jackie and Blacky—who lived in a backyard hutch built by Dad with the landlord’s consent.

In later summers in the Adirondacks, my brother and another teenager acquired Peggy Ann Nightrider, a pedigreed black and tan coonhound, who shied away from our mother. She had obviously been abused by a woman. Peggy stayed with Mike’s friend at summer’s end while we took home only imitations of her howl.

However, we always had two goldfish at home. They had a reverse life, living with us until each July 1st when we took them to Mrs. Bartel, the super’s wife, for summer care.

One late August when we arrived home and ran to meet our goldfish friends, Mike and I hesitated. We stared, we deliberated, we announced, “These are not our goldfish.”

Although our mother tried to ignore this, we firmly maintained our opinion for days. Certain she would see our truth, we pleaded in our best six- and ten-year-old voices, “These are not our goldfish. Please, please look again.”

She did, announcing, “Goldfish are goldfish.”

Years later, Mom confessed that Mrs. Bartel had confided that our goldfish, “had died, but I didn’t want to disappoint the children, so I bought new ones. I figured they wouldn’t notice.”

• • •

## RUMINATIONS OF A FATHER OF DAUGHTERS

*Michael Russo*

*In the middle of one night  
Miss Clavel turned on her light and said,  
“Something is not right!”*

– Ludwig Bemelmans

“She’s practicing.” That’s all he said. I didn’t catch it at first. It went by too quickly. By the time I figured out what he meant, it was too late to reply.

My younger daughter, Catherine, had played quietly and intensely in the sand and surf, wading, splashing, building sand castles, with little more than an occasional request for a drink since 10:00 a.m. By 2:00 it was clearly time to go, to get her out of the sandy suit and bathe and feed her before she fell asleep. The four-year-old began to fret. “What’s the matter, Caths?” I asked. “She’s practicing,” retorted my friend.

*“Practicing what, bonehead?” I snapped. “This is a remarkably even-tempered four-year-old who spends hours amusing herself at the beach without a peep. If she complains, there is much to complain about, like a wet bathing suit and four hours of sand chafing her butt.”*

That’s what I might have said. By the time I figured out what he meant, it was too late to say anything. But I knew that the little one didn’t deserve a cheap shot like that, and, unexpectedly, it hurt me. The incident, many years ago, marked a change in my world view as it concerned my daughters and their development.

A few years later Catherine was included in a special program at her school along with three boys in her first-grade class. They did some creative projects, and my daughter benefited from the challenge. During a routine meeting with her first-grade teacher, it became evident that this “pull-out” program was not to continue after the midyear break. I remarked that my daughter had benefitted from the extra stimulation and had proved to be well up to it, and I wondered why it was not to continue. “Oh, it’s going to continue,” said the teacher, “but for the rest of the year, they are going to be studying and building robots, and just the boys will be involved.”

*I felt my face screw up into an expression of horror and heard myself screaming uncontrollably, "Robots! Good God, madam, not robots! What would that do to her nurturing instincts, her child bearing and rearing ability." "Oh wait, I get it," I said, taking another tact. "Der Fuhrer wants them to learn to cook and clean. Die Hausfrau ist das Rückgrat des Vaterlandes."*

I admit, it would have been a major over-reaction had I actually said all that rather than just fantasizing the outburst. Actually, I said nothing more than, "Perhaps you will include her in a future program."

Years later, a wife, two teenage daughters, an octogenarian mother, and I lived at our house on Long Island. One of my routine household chores in those days was to do the food shopping from a carefully prepared list of specific items. All I had to do was to go to the supermarket and pick the items off the shelves. In truth, this was not an unpleasant job. But sometimes the list included "necessary items" that were for me, shall we say, embarrassing. It's idiotic, I know, but here I am compelled to "speak the truth, without fear of infamy."

On one occasion the list included an unusually large array of feminine-hygiene products. I managed to find everything without having to ask for help, even though not asking increased the shopping time considerably. As the young checkout clerk zipped the items over the barcode scanner, he said with a smirk, "Whew, looks like a pretty rough week at your house, hey Mr. Russo?"

*"Rough week, you say, dickhead." I reached over the counter, grabbed him by the collar, and screamed into his nose, "It's a rough week at my house when I am subjected to insipid comments by rat-faced grocery clerks. It's a rough week when I am reminded of the marginal intellects that populate my neighborhood. It's a rough week when ..."*

Well, you've caught on by now. I said nothing. I just shrugged good naturedly, bagged my groceries, and paid the bill. He didn't mean anything by it; it was just a bit of gratuitous humor that inexplicably struck a nerve with me.

My daughters are grown now and have children. I think of them often as little girls, a magical time in my life. I visit them and I enjoy discussing their professional interests.

I don't know. I can only hope I did the right things.



## YOU'RE FROM NEW YORK

*Barbara Gelber*

Among my friends growing up in Astoria in the '50s, was Saralee Finger. My grandfather, Saul Wolfe, would sit on a park bench with Saralee's zeyde (grandpa). My father, Lou Kaplan, was president of Sons of Israel; Saralee's father, Moe Finger, was president of Adath Israel. Both were orthodox shuls (synagogues). My mother, Helen Kaplan, was corresponding secretary of the Astoria Chapter of Hadassah; Essie Finger was corresponding secretary of the Ravenswood Chapter. Saralee and I spent time together in the Queensview playground.

I was elected president of the Queens Region of Junior Hadassah and spent the summer of 1960 in Israel with a JH group. We spent a few days at Meir Shfeya, a Hadassah-sponsored children's village. Only twelve years since independence, there were very few private cars in Israel, and it was quite acceptable and safe to hitch a ride along the road. One day a friend and I caught a ride near Jerusalem on the back of an army truck. We struck up a conversation with some of the soldiers—What's your name? Where are you from? Several of the soldiers were from Meir Shfeya, which created an instant connection. When we got to Tel Aviv, two of the soldiers asked if we would meet them for coffee that afternoon. We spent a very pleasant day together.

Fast forward to the summer of 1961. Saralee goes to Israel with a group from Young Judea. She, too, hitches a ride on an army truck. Easy conversation—What's your name? Where are you from? "You're from New York," says Shaya, "Do you know my good friend, Barbara Kaplan?"

Of all the gin joints...

Fast forward to the mid-70s: Saralee's daughters, Ilana and Tanya, played with my son Jeffrey in the Queensview playground. (They all actually looked like siblings.)

Fast forward to the late '90s, my first grandchild, Jessica, played with Ilana's daughter in the Queensview playground.

How many families in New York City have been friends through each of five generations, in the same location?

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## FRIENDS OF A LIFETIME

*Barbara Gelber*

Growing up in Brownsville, Brooklyn, my father, Lou Kaplan, had two close friends, Ted Freedman and Leon Mollin. They had met at Boys' Congregation in their early teens. By 1930, they each had a steady girlfriend and very little spare cash. The couples' social lives consisted of long walks, picnics in the park, subway rides to the beach, and the occasional movie. Each couple exchanged handwritten letters, which the post office delivered twice a day.

On November 4, 1933, Lou married Helen Wolfe in the rabbi's study. Ted and Leon were the witnesses who signed their ketubah (marriage contract).

On December 25, 1933, Ted and Emily Herzberg were married in the rabbi's study. And Lou and Leon signed their ketubah.

On February 14, 1934, Leon and Dorothy Richter were married in the rabbi's study; Lou and Ted signed their ketubah.

Eventually, Ted and Emily moved to Jacksonville, Florida. Whenever either of the other couples drove to South Florida to visit family members, they always stayed with the Freedmans on the way. One year the three couples took a cruise out of Miami. Helen in New York and Emily in Jacksonville had bought the same gown to wear at the Captain's Dinner!

Leon, Dorothy, Ted, and Emily all attended my Bat Mitzvah in 1956. In April 1971, Ted and Emily were staying with my parents in Astoria when I called to say my son had been born. The four of them toasted his arrival with champagne.

Ted died in the 1970s. Helen died in 1983. In 1984, my son was best man for his grandpa when Lou married Emily.

And Leon Mollin signed their ketubah.

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## THERE'S SOMETHING IN MY POCKET

*Helen Saffran*

When I was about ten, in 1952, I belonged to a Brownie troop of girls my age. We wore the brown Brownie uniform with its breast pocket and sang the Brownie song "There's Something in My Pocket." What was in our pocket, the song revealed, was a "great big Brownie smile."

I don't remember much about the experience of being a Brownie, but one thing stands out clearly. The leader, who I can't remember anything about, stood up and announced at a troop meeting that we had money for a Brownie project. I remember this clearly. Each girl could choose to do a paint-by-numbers picture or sew an apron. The girls were all excited to do the paint-by-numbers option and were shouting and laughing and one by one asking for that choice; except one little girl who also wanted desperately to do the painting but raised her hand and said quietly, "I'll make an apron."

They didn't have a Brownie therapist to take Helen aside to question why, since she so wanted to do the painting, she chose to make an apron. So all that I remember about my Brownie experience other than the uniform and troop song is watching the entire troop happily painting by number, while I sat there sewing an apron. I have no memory of the apron at all.

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## A SWEEPING VIEW OF MY EARLY JOBS

*Helen Saffran*

In high school, I worked after school at the Yonkers League for the Hard of Hearing washing plastic cochlea, used to test for hearing loss, and answering the phone. My boss soon said, "I've gotten complaints that your voice is too soft for customers to hear, so I need to let you go."

I worked in a small clothing store one summer before college. Part of my job was to sweep the floor. Occasionally I would wait on a customer, but very few people came into the store. I always felt awkward just standing around. I had gotten the job because my aunt was friends with the owner, Pauline. After I was working in the store for a while, Pauline told my aunt, "Helen isn't a good sweeper." My aunt told my mother, who didn't like Pauline anyway, and my mother told me, "What Pauline is probably saying is that I never taught you how to sweep."

In college I got a summer job at the White Swan Laundry in Yonkers, a factory that made and shipped nurses' uniforms. Workers punched in and out with timecards. I was ill-suited for this job, too. My work entailed corresponding with nurses who lost buttons on their uniforms. I wrote them postcards telling them whether their order was being shipped or the buttons were out of stock. After a few weeks, I got called in by the office manager. "Helen, you're too fast, and the union workers are complaining that you make them look slow." It was incomprehensible to me that you could do a job too quickly. I was moved to the button room, where I learned to work at a slow pace and socialize more.

My real strength was in typing, and I had proudly earned a ninety-nine percent on the Regents typing exam. My cousin Joan was having an affair with her married boss at Dellwood Dairy. He got me a summer job there. I hated Dellwood Dairy because I was in a typist pool where the women shared gossip all day. I couldn't find anything to contribute, and it was painful to be an outsider.

Luckily, after graduating from college, I found work in publishing that I loved and that used my skills. I was never again required to sweep the floor, and washing cochlea became just a memory.

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## ISOLATION I

*Joyce Hinote*

It is a midtown bar in Manhattan. It is neither a popular singles spot nor a common neighborhood pub. Its busiest time is that convenient period between five p.m. and seven p.m. called the happy hour. This bar is frequented mainly by men who enjoy the informal and undemanding company of other men. The conversations revolve around sports and computers because this is also the current hangout of a group of middle-aged men who have spent the last fifteen to twenty years earning a living “in computers.”

It is a comfortable environment; family, financial, or emotional worries are never allowed to intrude on the low-keyed banter that is the usual fare. Although women come into this bar and enjoy their own company, they are never more than ghostly shadows.

Three of the men have been meeting in this particular place for about two years, the latest in an unbroken string of nondescript bars. They always join or are joined by other men who also enjoy the informality and the impersonal male discussions, arguments, and debates that can be depended upon to create a comfortable atmosphere. Some of these men are transients in that they drop by for a month or two while attempting to reestablish themselves after the end of a relationship. When they form a new relationship, they drop out of the nightly banter, stopping in only rarely to confirm that this stable social gathering still exists if needed in the future.

The three men are regulars. One of them has never had a relationship to interfere with his attendance. The second was married many years before, but he didn't allow this relationship to interfere with his attendance, so his wife finally left him.

The third man had been married for twelve years, and he had wavered for many of those years between temporary attendance and regular attendance. Somewhere between two to three years before, he had become a part-time regular; he could be depended upon to appear three to four days a week. This was more than his wife could accept, and as she became more demanding, he became more regular. Finally she gave up and left. He had tried as hard as he could: he loved her, took her flowers, did everything he could think of to keep her except give up his regular attendance at these after-work gatherings.

He grew up in poverty and determined that he wanted better. He learned to speak properly, studied hard, went to college, got a job at a bank, and met a girl who spoke properly and had gone to college. He met his wife's family and decided they were ideal. He refused to acknowledge the huge cracks in the happiness of this "ideal" family and was not aware enough to realize that his upwardly mobile girlfriend knew no more about creating a happy home than he did. They married and expected life to be like *I Remember Mama* or *Father Knows Best*. Since he would never admit there were any problems and found that drinking and attendance at his evening gathering place helped him to see his home life as happy, he refused to make any attempts at solving their rather common difficulties. This man was also very private and was not in the habit of discussing his feelings or troubles with anyone. His wife, after working at solutions on her own, decided that the marriage couldn't be saved.

When his wife left, he was devastated, alone, depressed, and had an overwhelming need to talk to someone for solace and understanding. He called his good friend in Vermont, but this friend didn't like to discuss personal things and kept asking him about his job and his last hike. He got together with another good friend who worked at a local university, but this friend never listened to anyone and gave him his usual monologue on fly fishing or the latest British band concert or his last drinking spree.

He then called his very good friend, who had been his best man. This friend wanted to help, but he had quit drinking, and now there was no common meeting ground.

He finally went to his current meeting place to talk about his depression, anger, and loss. When he said his wife had left, they said, "sad," bought him a beer, and quoted the most recent Yankee escapade. When he said he was angry, they bought another beer and started discussing the latest questionable Giant trade. When he said he felt lost, they bought yet another beer and told him he should join them in their attendance at the football games that fall.

Now he felt better and knew these friends were good friends and would always be there when he needed them.

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## A WEEKDAY

*Ruth Ward*

### Sunrise

It is sunrise. My half-open eyes hesitate to meet the timid light suffusing my bedroom. As I look toward the window, the light warms and brightens. It invites me to accept the day with all its likely interactions—with neighbors I will greet as I make my way toward the subway, new colleagues I will meet at my longed-for morning part-time job, and strangers I will pass on the way home who will make me wish their lives were as full of possibility as mine.

I'm happy to have beaten my alarm clock because this will give me a moment to consider the mystery of being alive. I imagine myself a just-formed bread awaiting its time in the oven. All is unspoken potential, and the day is full of silent promise. I go to my window, where the sun cries out in triumph as it pulls itself into the sky. Will my spirits match its ascent? I turn off my alarm, roused to the day's challenges.

### High Noon

Having returned triumphantly to Brooklyn, I'm sitting at a table in Fowler Square. The afternoon sun is performing an oblique attack. This both pleases and distresses me. On the one hand, I'm no longer shivering in my air-conditioned office. On the other hand, I'm shriveling under the ultraviolet rays. I ask myself why I've chosen an unshielded table to have my egg salad sandwich when there are several empty tables with umbrellas all around me. I look upward toward an onrush of thunder clouds. There will be a downpour, and I will be drenched unless I hurry home. I consider the downside of staying seated. My food will get mushy, my lemonade will be diluted, and my new leather sandals may shrink irreparably. Still, it's tempting to wait for the relief of cool water on my arms and legs, the rare chance to throw back my head and take the raindrops shamelessly into my open mouth. Or, I could gather up my lunch and amble home, savoring on my skin the fine gradations between moistened and soaked, accepting that the present moment is all I'll ever have.

A booming thunderclap assaults my entrails and makes my decision. I will remain seated, awash in Nature's drama. Once I close my eyes to prevent a change of heart, unprocessed episodes in my life surface for my

attention. I remember one bone-chilling night in Paris when I shared an umbrella with my terminally ill girlfriend, braving a cloudburst to pursue a dinner at a hole-in-the-wall bistro. I relive a squall in North Carolina where my husband and I solemnly watched a thunder-and-lightning show shortly before our tempestuous divorce. And I recall my last overcast walk around the block with my trusting shelter dog on the day of his unsuccessful stomach operation. But I have survived them all, and now, cleansed of their bitter-sweet memory, I open my eyes to enjoy a soggy sandwich under a torrential rainfall that has no idea I can survive it, too.

### Dusk

Now it's dusk. The rain has stopped and the daylight is fading in Fort Greene Park, where I'm sitting on a bench with a paper bag of bread crumbs. I watch people passing by—left, right, in pairs, solo. The dimming light swaddles them, even the oldest, in its child's-lamp glow. No one walks entirely alone, as the sunset accompanies them like a kindhearted nanny. I stare at the birds who, half hidden, watch me from a nearby oak. Finally, a robin lands on the empty bench next to mine. I open my bag and toss him some crumbs. This scares him and he flies away. As the sky darkens, I get up and head home, hoping he'll come back for his waiting dinner.

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## CAR STORY

*Hilda Feinstein*

It was a chilly fall day in October 1992. A day I never will forget. I was living in Manhattan and had just gotten a job providing counseling services for the New York City school system. I was assigned to two Brooklyn Special Education elementary schools for emotionally and behaviorally challenged children.

I had not driven a car in many years, and, when my cousin asked if I was interested in his 1988 Nissan Sentra, the timing seemed right to get back behind the wheel. I could avoid the subway, and on school days I would have a Board of Education designated parking spot in the street. It was a quick negotiation, and I became the owner of a shiny, pale blue vehicle with a sunroof.

I was pleased with my new used car and was able to reach both of my school assignments with minimal traffic delays, arriving within half an hour. I avoided subway steps, crowded trains, and a ten-minute walk from the station—all positives. I had been driving my car, however, for less than a week when the terrible day arrived.

I drove up to PS 61 on Dekalb Avenue, a wide street bordered by housing projects. I was running a few minutes late and was forced to park at the end of the long street designated for staff parking. Sitting on a concrete barrier near the entrance to the schoolyard was a young man who I barely noticed, my primary interest being to secure what seemed to be the last parking space available on the street.

After parking the car, I opened the door and stood to exit. There were few children or adults nearby. Within seconds the young man who was sitting on the concrete barrier bounded up to the car. He was so close to me that he trapped me within the doorframe and blocked my way onto the street.

He was likely under eighteen, wearing a short, red jacket, a baseball cap, and jeans. He was about my height, and I probably outweighed him. His hands were concealed within the slits of his pockets. When he ordered me to start the car, I amazingly stayed calm. I responded that a code must be pressed on the dashboard to disengage the ignition lock before the car would start. I think I threw him off balance with my response, but it was

the truth, and in retrospect I was likely stalling for time, not ready to give up my new car. I started talking to him, which I think really surprised him.

“I work with kids like you. What are you doing? You’re going to get yourself in trouble with the police.” He seemed to get more and more agitated as I spoke, inching even closer to me if that was possible.

He said, “I have a gun; start the car,” while thrusting his left arm and hand, which was still in his pocket, into my arm. I pushed back with my right hand against his left pocket and felt what seemed more like a fist than a gun. I could have been wrong and been in big trouble. Then I heard myself say clearly and emphatically, “No, you can’t have my car.” Again, he ordered me to start the car. I then reached into my own pocket and drew out a twenty-dollar bill, which I offered. He grabbed it from my hand, fled across the street, and disappeared into the projects.

Everything happened so quickly. The event hadn’t lasted more than five minutes. Badly shaken, I spent several hours that day at the local police precinct looking at mug shots. I didn’t recognize my assailant among the hundreds of photos I viewed, and, as far as I know, he was never found.

You never know how you will react in moments of danger. I certainly surprised myself and feel extremely lucky to not have experienced a terrible outcome. Now, more than twenty-five years after the event, it is hard for me to believe how many details I still remember and how easy they are to visualize and relive.

I wonder what happened to this young man who also took a big risk trying what turned out to be an unsuccessful carjack attempt. I wonder how he spent the rest of his day and my twenty dollars.

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## PASSOVER REMEMBERED

*Zé'eva Cohen*

One day in the late 1970s, two friends and I decided to rework the Jewish Passover ritual of the Seder, which we were no longer celebrating and which we missed. We were all artists working in the theater, and independently from each other we realized that, like many theater artists of the time, we were embracing rituals of “exotic” and remote cultures but were not celebrating our own ancient rituals.

My two friends were Mira Rafelovich, who was a dramaturg from Holland working closely in New York with the Open Theater director, Joe Chaikin, and the other was Shami Chaikin, a charismatic actress and singer of great talent. When Shami spoke or sang, the walls of the theater vibrated, and the audience went silent.

When Passover was approaching that year, the three of us met at my kitchen table at Westbeth Artists' Housing in the West Village, where Shami and I lived, and we proceeded to rewrite and rearrange the Passover's Haggadah. If we were to celebrate this evening-long ritual, it needed to be more relevant to social issues of our time and, especially, more inclusive of women; their presence in the text would have to be strengthened.

As for myself—born under the British Mandate of Palestine to parents who were children of Yemenite Jewish immigrants landing in Palestine at the turn of the twentieth century—memories from childhood and teenage years of family and friends' celebrations of Passover surfaced.

I remember sneaking in to view the silent pre-Seder room with its U-shaped arrangement of long tables with the festive white tablecloths and the variety of leafy greens that covered the ritualistic food. It felt so peaceful and fresh. I also remember smelling the charoset's fragrant mix of nuts, fruits, and raisins symbolizing the Israelites' suffering during slavery mingling with the sweet taste of freedom. Breathing in the room, I almost trembled in anticipation of the story-telling ritual about to start.

Another strong memory was the shock of hearing the adults born in Yemen, who were at the forefront of modern Israel, bursting into loud, unified recitation of the Haggadah that sounded very primal and weird to our young Israeli ears. For us children of modern Israel, this passionate chanting, coming from seemingly one collective throat in a language that sounded very deep and unfamiliar was frightening. Who are these

people that we thought we knew? Lucky for us, this primal excursion did not last long. Soon after the chanting had subsided, the adults shifted to reading the Haggadah in modern Hebrew with each of us, adults and children, taking our turn.

As to Mira, Shami, and I, who set out to re-think and edit the Haggadah many years afterwards, the results of our labor were quite gratifying. For several years we got together with friends, family, and members of the Open Theater to celebrate this holiday of freedom at a Soho loft, the family home of two artists who were deeply involved in the creative and performative aspects of the Open Theater.

Many people—children, parents and grandparents—came with pots of food that were served during the meal that followed the reading of the Haggadah. Approximately fifty of us sat cheerfully on pillows placed on the floor in a large circle. People of all ages took turns in reading our Haggadah and joined enthusiastically in the singing and blessing of the ritualistic food that was placed at the center of the circle.

To my embarrassment, my uncontrollable four-year-old daughter took the liberty of dancing with great abandon, right in front of the sitting crowd, and there was no way of stopping her. After the meal, *all* participants danced joyfully.

In our Haggadah, God was genderless, and children, all sons in the traditional version, included daughters.

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## HOW I MET MY WIFE

*Bob Gottfried*

I met Ellen Nadler on January 4, 1976, at the Veterans Administration Building at 252 Seventh Avenue in New York City. That was our first day working there as claims examiners. We were both lawyers who had passed the New York State Bar Exam, but neither of us were able to obtain employment as lawyers. We first set eyes on each other when Ellen was in a medical area waiting to have a required chest X-ray. We were working with other law graduates in a relatively small space, so everyone got to speak to each other. I learned that Ellen lived in Malverne, which was the next village over from Valley Stream, where I was living, and that she took the Long Island Railroad from the Valley Stream station.

At that time, I was married to my first wife, Jan, who worked as a registered nurse from three to eleven p.m. As we had only one car, I had no way of getting to the train station except walking more than three miles. I asked Ellen if she could drive me to and from the train station, and since she was passing my block on the way to the station and on the way home, she agreed to drive me. We became friends by talking on the train going to and from work. We also often ate lunch together with other people who worked with us. Ellen had recently called off an engagement to an abusive man and in fact was supposed to marry him just about a month before we met. She told me about Alan and how everyone who knew her was happy that she called off the wedding.

Ellen felt safe talking to me because I was married, and a good listener. I never spoke to Ellen about Jan and certainly never complained about my marriage. We triple dated once with my wife, another man from the VA and his wife, and a friend of our co-worker, who paired up with Ellen as a blind date. My wife and I hosted Ellen for dinner once at our apartment.

At the beginning of May 1976, Jan told me she was leaving me for a patient she met in the hospital. We never had a fight, but I was not a good husband for her, and she was not a good wife for me. I was shocked by Jan's revelation but recovered quickly. Jan moved back to her parents' home in Wantagh, Long Island, but before she left, she told me I should ask Ellen out. Ellen knew Jan had left me because she drove by my house to pick me up for work the next morning, and I did not come out of the house. I later learned she was very angry by my failure to appear or communicate with her that morning. Ellen got over that fairly quickly too.

During the week of May 16, I asked Ellen whether she would like to go with me to see the New York Yankees the following Saturday, May 22. She was not sure whether I was asking her as a friend or as a date. I made it clear to her that this was going to be our first date. I arranged to pick her up at her home in Malverne at 5:00 p.m. so that we could go out to dinner before driving to Yankee Stadium. Even though we had known each other for five months, we were both really nervous that night. Ellen later told me that she changed outfits several times before deciding on the right one to wear.

We ate at Buckley's at the Station, which was appropriate, since it was across from the Valley Stream Long Island Railroad Station, where we went every workday. We learned we had much in common: we both ate cream cheese and jelly sandwiches, liked folk music, and were interested in current affairs and history. We held hands crossing the street from the restaurant to my car and stayed close the whole night. I told Ellen it was great to be with someone who wanted to be with me instead of someone who was obligated to be with me. We sat through the entire game, in which the Yankees beat their archrival the Boston Red Sox two to one in ten innings, and then drove back to my apartment. Neither of us wanted the night to end. We watched Saturday Night Live, and at 2:30 a.m. I reluctantly drove Ellen home.

The next week we saw each other every night and on May 28, just six days after our first date, I asked Ellen to marry me. She said yes, and the rest is history. We have been happily married for forty-eight years, and we also consider ourselves best friends.

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## VACATION ON THE NORTH FORK

*Bob Reiss*

I was recently talking to my granddaughter, Mariel, about the east end of Long Island. She had just rented a house in Easthampton, and that reminded me of my first vacation in 1946 when I was seven.

Mom and Dad, along with Grandpa Herman (Reiss) and Grandma Dora, took rooms at a fishing lodge run by Captain Laub and his wife in Southold on the North Fork. Grandpa Herman was a big fisherman. I was told that he caught the huge fish mounted in the fabled Lundy's restaurant in Sheepshead Bay. Lundy's was a major customer of Grandpa's Reliance Beef Corporation, and that's how the trophy fish wound up there. I'm sure this greatly influenced my dad, and as a result, he also loved to fish. At that time, Peconic Bay was extremely fertile fishing territory. Remember, it was just after the war and cars were not yet commonplace, thus limiting travel to the East End.

Every day, we would get up early, very early, and go out on Captain Laub's boat. Because it was still very cool in the morning and we had only light jackets with us, Mom would line mine with newspapers as an insulating layer. This was effective in keeping me warm out on the bay. By noontime the summer sun had warmed things considerably, and we took the newspapers out of my jacket.

Sometimes the bottom of the boat became covered with fish, including fluke, weakfish, and the occasional kingfish. We threw back those that were then considered junk fish but are now considered delicacies. For example, skates would be discarded; these are now highly desired as rays, especially in French restaurants. Blowfish were always thrown back, but I loved to see them blow up like a balloon when you tickled the belly. These can be poisonous if you eat the wrong part, but the Japanese love them.

The mate would give me a rod, and I would hold it over the boat's edge oblivious to anything happening at the end of my line. It was customary to have two hooks, one would be at the bottom and another maybe a foot higher on the line. So, one time, my rod was bending like a pretzel, and I was commanded, "Robert, pull it up." Try as I might, I couldn't move the reel; there was so much weight on the line. With help, I reeled it in and there were two enormous fluke, one on each hook. Grandpa Herman, to the end of his life, would recount this episode. It was only

in the cynicism of my adulthood that I wondered if someone took two already baited fish and surreptitiously put them on my line. I'll never know.

Supper usually included the day's catch. Weakfish, now quite rare up here from overfishing, are delicious. One evening after supper, we went into Greenport, the adjoining town, to see a movie in a theater that is still there. It was the first time I saw a movie. It starred Wallace Beery, a well-known actor in the '30s and '40s. Judging from the internet, the only movie he made in 1946 was *Bad Bascomb*, a western. I do recall seeing a western, so I'm pretty sure that was the movie.

I cannot finish this story without mentioning my first affair. She was older than me, but not by much. I think she was eight. Yes, I was in love with Carolyn, but alas it was a summer fling, never to be consummated, always to be treasured.

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## A PARABLE FOR LOVERS

*Art Spar*

Once upon a time, the Queen invited all the young women in the land to a gala ball to meet her bachelor son, Wolfbane. Though he was attracted to many women, Wolfbane was never able to sustain a long-term relationship. The Queen decided that an intervention was required, and Wolfbane was ordered to choose a bride.

The problem was that Wolfbane smelled. No matter how many times he bathed, the reek of sauerkraut unfolded throughout the room.

Hildegarde was a young barmaid at Ivan's Grotto, a subterranean beer hall in the old city. She was so strong she could carry ten one-liter steins of beer, five in each hand, without spilling a drop. Her biceps were prodigious. Her favorite dish was pickled pigs' feet. The moment Hildegarde smelled Wolfbane, all she could think of was bratwurst. It was love at first bite. She was enchanted by the bitter taste suggested by his aroma.

The lovers honeymooned lakeside at the Wurst Hotel next to The Brat Paradise Bar & Grill, and they lived happily ever after.

In an interview on *60 Minutes*, the queen told Anderson Cooper that, "Beauty is in the nose of the beholder." Wolfbane told Oprah Winfrey that Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy were his role models. In his abdication speech, the king placed the crown of state upon Hildegarde's head proclaiming, "Strong women carry the world on their shoulders." Hildegarde whispered to her lady-in-waiting, "The bitter taste of his aroma is my aphrodisiac." A certain court jester concluded each performance proclaiming, "Love conquers all!"

• • •

## COOKING AND WRITING

*Art Spar*

Immersion is the common denominator of my passions. When I cook, awareness of the outside world slips away. It is an exercise in focus. Experience begets confidence and successful outcomes. Just the other day, as I was making latkes, I dropped a potato on an egg sitting on the counter. It was a Humpty Dumpty moment. As the egg began to ooze in all directions, I pulled away the shell, grabbed a rubber spatula, swooped up the egg, and plopped it into the mixing bowl. No big deal. At any given moment, a cook needs the confidence and skill to move the process forward to achieve the best possible outcome. Cooking is a great hobby. It impacts on my relationship with food and provides the nutrition needed for a healthy life. How fortunate to find focus in such a basic element of being alive.

I wrote the above paragraph in a flurry of cooking and words. It's like letting a river flow and then getting into the river to tame it. I allow myself to write the first words that come to mind. Periodically, I stop, read, and make changes that bring the writing closer to how I feel. I sort random thoughts into something coherent. Cooking transforms individual ingredients into a meal that nourishes the body. Writing transforms nascent ideas into a composition that feels true. To write is to know myself.

• • •



## NUTS

*Frank Biebel*

Although seemingly in good health, I consulted a cardiologist because of a family history of heart attacks. After tests, an examination, and a long discussion, I was pronounced in fine shape though the doctor suggested I work to improve what was already a fairly healthy lifestyle.

"I see you take a statin," he said. "Most of the time," I replied. "The statin is very important; make sure you take it every day."

"What about exercise?" said the lean, seventy-five-year-old cardiologist who had previously indicated that he was a runner. "I run a little, but mainly I just walk a lot," I replied. "Where do you run?" he said. "Well, when I am heating something up in the microwave and am standing there just waiting for the ding, I run in place." "What is that, a minute?" he inquired. "Well, sometimes two or even four." "Not enough!" he said. "How many miles do you walk?" he asked. "Miles? Well, I don't know," I said. "You have to get your heart pumping, pounding," he offered. "Find some exercise that will push up your heart rate for a time."

"Now, you seem to eat well, but what about breakfast, cereal and all that." He related that he soaked oats in skim milk overnight and in the morning added nuts. "Twenty percent of my breakfast is of nuts, a mixture of nuts excluding almonds," he said. "Okay," and I paused waiting for him to say why not almonds, but nothing was forthcoming. "Nuts are the good fat," he continued, "You should eat a lot of them."

As it turns out, I had a bag of nuts in my cupboard, but "out of sight, out of mind." I asked my wife if she had a jar. "Well," she said, "I have just one left. I imagine I can get another one in the market." Women are like that. They will give you their last bottle even though they would really rather keep it for themselves. The nuts were soon in the container atop the frig waiting for me to see and use them.

Then, unexpectedly, an opportunity appeared that I thought might swiftly allow me to replace the borrowed jar. In a corner within the entrance to our apartment building is an oversized shelf for circulars. Residents in our building do not speak to strangers, which is almost everybody else living in the building, but they will leave something they no longer want on that shelf hoping, I suppose, that someone will find a use for it. Items left vary from the ordinary to something approaching strange.

Once a big white rabbit slouched against the wall, long bent ear sloping down. There was still a tag on him suggesting perhaps a surprise gift that hadn't been well received. His face bore a forlorn look. I hoped then someone would take him in.

On my day of opportunity, there were three items on the shelf: two small cans of peaches, and a sizeable glass jar. The label on the jar read, "Mrs. Adler's Jerusalem Gefilte Fish (Special Sweet Recipe)." Yes, I thought, this could be the replacement.

Soon, from our kitchen, loud howls and curses punctuated the air with rage throughout the apartment; the jar would not open. Hearing the familiar sounds of husband doing battle with stubborn inanimate objects, she wandered toward the kitchen to give advice or, perhaps, only solace.

"The damn thing won't open!" I declared in heated frustration. The intact, formidable jar rested on the top of the stove seemingly ready to counter anything further I might throw at it. For a few silent moments, we both stood staring at it. Finally, she said, "I think Mrs. Adler knows you aren't Jewish."

• • •

## MISS COWDEN

*Roy Clary*

Miss Cowden had never married and never had a boyfriend. She was at least eighty years old. She had never been pretty or even slightly attractive. She lived next door to the church where my father preached. She never missed a Sunday service. She always sat in the same pew. She was the first to arrive and the last to leave. Father figured correctly that she just didn't want to be alone.

Nevertheless, it was strange that she hired me. I only knew her as the lady from the church. Still, I was happy enough because I was always in need of a few bucks. All I had to do was stay at her house four nights a week. I would arrive in the evening at nine o'clock. Miss Cowden would greet me, give me a bowl of vanilla ice cream, and say goodnight before retiring to her ground-floor bedroom. I would then go to my bedroom on the second floor, finish my ice cream, put on my pajamas, and read or play solitaire before going to sleep. It was an easy job, and I guess Miss Cowden needed company.

Upon learning that I had a driver's license, Miss Cowden hired me to drive her every Saturday afternoon in late summer to the farm stands that bordered our town. She had an old Nash that, like Miss Cowden, was more than weather-beaten. It was a rather ashen green with numerous bumps and scratches, but I enjoyed driving, and so the job fit me fine. All Miss Cowden wanted was to drive out to the stands and sample the fruits and vegetables. She was especially fond of the peaches. Typically, we would stop at a stand where Miss Cowden would pinch a peach and take a bite. If it measured up, she would buy it and off we would go to the next stand where the process would be repeated. Sometimes I would drive her home with only the one peach but other times, close to a half dozen.

In the fall, I went off to college. When I returned home for the holidays, I was astonished to learn that Miss Cowden had a gentleman friend. He was around forty years old with polished black hair, powdered cheeks, and watery eyes. Miss Cowden had become an outrageous blond. Her cheeks were brightly rouged, and her lips, a smear of crimson. Everyone was aghast, but she seemed happy.

After returning to college to resume my studies, I received a letter from Father that said one day Miss Cowden's gentleman friend drove her around town and out into the country, but they never returned. People went to her house. No one was there. The local newspaper ran an article seeking news about her. Radio and TV broadcast news of her disappearance. Police were alerted but to no avail. It was the last anyone heard of Miss Cowden. Father said, "At least it would seem she was no longer alone."

• • •

# THE DEAD DON'T WALK UNTIL THEY DO

*Nancy Dobi*

There were two Civil War battles fought at Manassas, Virginia. While a National Battlefield Park had been established, there was plenty of land left on which prospective homeowners could build. My husband and I were one of many who bought.

While the government said all cadavers had been removed, I had my doubts. As we dug seven feet down to begin the build, several sections of bones were overturned. We were definitely building on top of a graveyard, but the dead don't walk so...

We lived in a trailer near the site. I was by myself during the week while my husband traveled for work. He would join me on the weekends.

The first time I heard footsteps, I was sitting on the cement foundation having a beer—just one beer! It was night. The steps started in the northeast corner and walked diagonally to where I was sitting. I stopped breathing. My body iced over. I couldn't move. The steps walked through me then stopped a short distance away and turned around and walked back to the corner. I felt no ghostly presence nor did a breeze pass through me. Nothing you read about in ghost stories. While I had always possessed a sixth sense, this was beyond anything I had experienced. I focused on what had just happened. I made up a story. He had been a confederate soldier and had come to salute his CO before entering what would be his last battle. That would explain his turning around. The salute. Would he walk again? Yes, he would but never when there was a man around. The workmen and my husband thought I had a vivid imagination until one night.

My mother-in-law stayed with me a couple of days during my difficult pregnancy. My husband was on a trip. She slept in the spare room on the first floor. One night she heard footsteps in the kitchen and got up to see if my husband had come home. She didn't faint, but the screaming went on all night, and it took a full day for her to calm down. She never stayed again even when my husband was home.

I named my ghost Jedadiah. I saw him in the bathroom mirror once. He was indeed a soldier and looked as haunted and emaciated as the pictures you've seen. He had so much facial hair it looked like an animal had crawled onto his face and died there. The downstairs toilet flushed once when I was upstairs. And there was always the walk.

I am now alone and dying. As I lie in my bed, I want to tell you that if you someday live in my house and you find yourself a woman alone, you just might meet Jedadiah. You might hear footsteps that begin at the front door and stop at the dining-room entrance then turn around and walk back—thirty steps in all. He's really very nice. Be kind to him and say hello for me.

• • •

## PEACE BE WITH YOU

*Kathy Cook*

At my church services, the presider always tells us, “Peace be with you.” What follows is an opportunity for worshipers to engage with others by waving or shaking hands. Because it is so routine, the significance of this prayer had been lost on me. I went through the motions without any focus on its meaning. However, I have recently been reflecting on the meaning of these words.

It turns out that the ritual is ancient. Liturgical commentators connect it to a passage in the Gospel of Matthew 5:23–24 that reads: “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother or sister and then come and offer your gift.” Clearly, this calls upon congregants to do far more than wave or shake hands with those around them. Instead, it requires the difficult task of seeking out those with whom you disagree, resolving differences, and receiving forgiveness before participating in the church service.

A neighbor of mine might have heeded this ritual long ago. Peggy Brown and her family have lived in their home for over fifty years. One of her sons has always loved motorcycles and vehicles, the louder, the better. About thirty-five years ago, the Jones family moved next door to the Browns, quiet and polite people with two quiet and polite daughters. The loud noises emanating from the Brown property were not well received by the Joneses. Instead of having any discussion with the Browns about their objections to those noises, the Joneses frequently called the police to file complaints. They also installed a high “spite” fence to separate their property from the Browns’. The families never spoke to each other. The ill will between them grew over the years. Peggy tried to have the neighbors pick a side and join team Brown against team Jones. However, the neighbors wisely declined and stayed out of the fray.

Except for the Joneses, Peggy was beloved by the neighbors. She was wonderful to our children, especially endearing herself to rambunctious little boys like my son. She often took out her children’s cherished old fire truck for my son to play with, unconcerned about the possibility that he might damage it. Peggy was also the neighborhood chronicler. She knew all the happenings, not only on the block, but in the whole town. Food

shopping and cooking were among her passions. She always had great advice about the best place to get gourmet products at the best prices and was also an avid gardener, providing advice on plants and flowers.

Unfortunately, the topic of the awful Jones family remained a constant in any discussion with Peggy. No matter what the topic, Peggy was sure to bring up how awful the Joneses were. Sadly, before the wake for her younger son, who died tragically in his early twenties of a drug overdose, Peggy's only question was, "Are the Joneses going to come?" I assured her that they would not. Although they were difficult neighbors, the Joneses were simply not that insensitive. Peggy's fixation with them remained even long after the Jones family moved away and a wonderful family moved into their house. The new family absolutely loves Peggy.

Peggy has become very ill. We neighbors visit her regularly, but even now the topic of how awful the Jones family was always comes up no matter what else we talk about. Peggy has never tried to forgive them, have them forgive her family, or let go of the anger she feels towards them.

Peggy has clearly not heeded Matthew's instruction that we reconcile with those with whom we have a dispute. Nor has she heeded the modern take on this admonition that we forgive not primarily to benefit the one forgiven, but instead to benefit the one who forgives. I take from Peggy's situation an awareness of the need to let go of petty hurts, find a way to forgive those who have done us wrong, and make amends with those whom we have wronged. I certainly don't want to give space in my brain to the Joneses in my life the way that Peggy has.

• • •

## HOMAGE TO MY DEAR FRIEND HANS

*Vince Grosso*

Is there such a thing as a self-made man—or woman—in any walk of life? The bottom line is I don't think there is.

If you were starting a new company, you would need to write a business plan, and there would be many factors to consider. The major areas are finance (accounting), production, marketing (sales), suppliers (vendors), and labor (personnel, human resources). My friend Hans helped me immensely in each area.

My business was a foundry in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. We melted bricks of bronze and aluminum and poured the melted metals into sand molds in order to make castings. We needed to purchase between fifteen and twenty-five tons of metal per month; this amount cost \$20,000–30,000 each month.

Hans Gundel owned a metal supply and scrap business that was conveniently next door to my business. When you first start a business, the vendor does not know you, and rightly has concerns about your credit and requires you to pay the bills on delivery. Hans kindly allowed me thirty days credit, which helped my production and financial capability.

When you're new to a business, it's tricky to make contacts and build relationships. I was glad that Hans and I could meet every morning to have coffee and walk to the post office together. We got to know each other during these morning meetings. Hans introduced me to guys who became good customers, and he gave me ideas to help me with personnel problems. Truth be told, whatever success I had, Hans was in the equation.

As we got to know each other, our friendship deepened and became important to both of us. Our age difference was actually helpful to each of us when we talked about our personal lives. Early during the AIDS epidemic, Hans's son became ill, and we would discuss his illness and later his death. It was difficult for Hans to talk to many people about his son. As good friends do, we helped each other survive. We were friends for twenty-five years.

Hans was a refugee from Nazi Germany. He was born in 1920 in Germany. His grandfather started a scrap-metal business in the mid-nineteenth century. The business became very successful, and his major customers were BMW and Mercedes Benz. Hans's father was an officer in the Ger-

man Army in World War I. As we all know, then things changed. Hans told me how hurt he was that he could not go to gymnasium, secondary school in Germany. Another time he told me how he hid on a train during Kristallnacht in November 1938. He and his family escaped soon after and first went to Palestine. It was the winter of 1938, and Hans was wearing his warmest coat. When he arrived in Palestine, where the weather was warm, he ran up and down the street with such happiness he didn't bother taking his winter clothes off.

After Hans retired, we stayed in touch. Hans lived in Fort Lee, New Jersey. I would try to visit him three or four times a year. I remember the last time we saw each other. I went to his house, and he came to the door. At this point, his dementia had worsened, and he didn't say much. We looked at each other and he smiled. He recognized me.

If a person is not remembered by someone, they are forgotten by the world. I will never forget him. There's a Jewish saying when someone dies, "May his memory be a blessing." I feel my memories of Hans have inspired me to try to be a friend and mentor to others.

• • •



## FAREWELL TO JIMMY

Wayne Cotter

A threadbare awning protected me from the rain as I stood, gun in hand, deciding whether I should abandon this whole stupid idea. Actually, the gun was not in my hand but in a plastic bag, and the awning shielded the entrance to one of this town's seedier pawn shops.

I've never pawned anything in my life; I'm a real babe in the woods when it comes to such interactions. I don't even know whether to accept the pawnbroker's first offer. Will this be a negotiation or a take-it-or-leave-it proposition? Surely he'll sense my desperation. He'll know I've never dickered in my life, not even for all those new cars I bought over the years.

Maybe I should have dressed better. Make it look like I don't really need the money. No, who am I kidding? Everybody who's selling stuff at a pawn shop needs the money, and pawnbrokers know it.

Yes, I'm lost, but how could I have prepared better? I've used stockbrokers, insurance brokers, and mortgage brokers over the years, but I've never needed a pawnbroker—*until now*.

I guess I could have asked someone about how it all works. I'm sure a few of my friends have turned to pawnbrokers, but who would admit it? And how could I ask such a question without revealing too much about my situation? So here I stand, collar turned up, a shivering lamb to the slaughter.

And it's not even my gun. It's my dad's. He's gone now, but this was his all-time favorite weapon. Dad was a big Second Amendment guy; I was not. He knew how I felt about guns so was touched when I told him I would gladly care for his old friend. "You never know when you might need Jimmy," he whispered as he handed me the gun. Yes, he named his gun Jimmy. I never learned why; he died the following week.

I never loaded Jimmy. I hardly even touched him—not through the marriages... or divorces; not through the multiple jobs and layoffs; not through the illnesses or foreclosure. It's ironic that Dad wanted a gun to protect his most valuable possessions, and now my most valuable possession turns out to be his gun.

Well, it's time to move in from the rain and get on with it. Sorry, Dad, it's time to say *Farewell to Jimmy*.

• • •

## LATIN LOVER

*Rachel Shor*

It was September of my senior year at the original Bronx High School of Science, which accepted girls before many other specialized high schools did. A classmate, Steve, asked me, still fifteen, out for my first movie date. Although not at all tall, he was manager of the school's basketball team, I, a newspaper editor, and we both liked swimming.

Although I don't remember which movie we saw, I recall that he had to take the subway from Greenwich Village, where he lived, to the Bronx, where I did, so we could then walk to Fordham Road, which was full of theaters and shops.

Later on, Steve invited me to a party at his home, but this time he not only called for me and took me back to the Village, afterwards he escorted me home before returning alone at night to his home—a courteous, devoted sixteen-year-old!

At some point, I told him I didn't think we should keep going out together, because he liked me more than I liked him. These seventy years later, I'm not sure why I said that and am still embarrassed about how cruel those words must have sounded.

Although Steve soon found a girlfriend from one of the private schools, he had not forgotten me. In our June graduation album, he wrote, "Little Miss Coming and Going. I Love You." It was in Latin.

• • •

## BIRDS

*Dennis Sherman*

After so many, the day begins  
alone, I don't mind  
the day yet to be cherished,  
forgotten, curtained off,  
a day when birds may sing before  
falling.

At a park bench a bird lands  
an arm-length and grasp away,  
proudly white-breasted, open-  
cloaked in browns and grays  
with no need for a name  
and stays for long seconds with me  
prancing, moving her head from  
side to side  
to beguile, as so swiftly she does,  
when no good surprises seemed in  
the offing.

I flit away from present moments  
to when  
by choice and habits of our  
lifetimes  
we, more careful and long lasting  
than that bird on this bench's  
far side,  
shared our sides of the bed, her  
side, my side,  
our chairs, hers' leather-graced,  
mine crushed velveteen,  
had our own safe branches of being.

Birds in stories sing their songs  
of "Hear I am" and "Are you  
there"  
when they could still swoop and  
shine,  
leaving me, through no fault,  
without song.

I read a book about a beloved  
falcon,  
how she flew above in perfect  
circles  
when coupled into words  
before hard truths and approaching  
sorrows.

I read in another book of a  
passing, of a lamenting,  
that no more will she "touch me,  
stare at me,  
or press living fingers on my cooling  
lids."

Winds of our own making made  
flights uneasy,  
our feathers fluttered,  
some falling in grey traces and  
truces.  
So often we rose up again till we  
couldn't,  
the brilliance of our days faded.  
Slower came our breaths.

For that bird, my momentary  
colleague,  
who must squeeze hours into  
seconds  
and years into days,  
promising in her wildness and  
hints that she could be tamed,  
what remains must seem endless.  
She will live a short, guiltless life.

Now, on our park bench,  
that bird with heart-painted  
plumage flies away,  
and after another thousand sights  
and scents  
under the sun's warmth and  
night's chill,  
descends to quiet sleep without  
hope  
or solace in a thicket that  
rustles in the wind and then in  
memory.

Over time everything happens,  
the day after becomes the week  
after,  
fingers turn book pages,  
notes and chords full of life and  
death  
tumble in to distract more than  
console.  
There is little mercy in under-  
standing.  
Anything once repeated a  
hundred-fold  
works well enough.



• • •

## SISTER

*Helen Saffran*

We're from the  
Same garden  
Our roots intertwine  
Pink and purple  
Morning Glories  
From the very  
Same vine

• • •

## YOU CAN BORROW MY SOUL FOR A WHILE

*Joyce Hinote*

You can borrow my soul for a while,  
But please return it whole.  
It is bruised but doing fine,  
Use it gently, it is tender.

You can borrow my soul for a while,  
I can lend it for a short time,  
But need it to continue on,  
So please return it whole.

• • •

## ODE TO JOY AND SORROW

*Dennis Sherman*

“I wept for him day and  
night

...

When he was gone, I did  
not find life again,  
I roamed the steppe like a  
brigand.”

### **Gilgamesh’s lament on the death of his friend Enkidu**

The one a too-occasional daring  
guest  
carrying a basket of miraculously  
ripened fruit,  
the other waiting too patiently for  
play’s end  
in the theatre’s wings for the  
earned embrace.

Joy when she burst in with  
“Oh my dear,”  
when I was the surprised “dear,”  
or that band’s dubious appearance  
marching out of an evening pine  
forest  
playing a sweet swaying song,  
a toe-tapper, a smiler, the irony  
of it.

Silvered memories and too-few  
cloying photos  
muting such felt-glowing  
moments into

pleasure, then pleasing, grand,  
good-enough,  
finally, the sea-deep compromise  
of acceptance  
to keep me here just above the  
slush in the road.

Too soon comes the faultless too  
late  
for what did or might have but  
cannot,  
the dog running toward the street,  
the metastasizing test,  
the persistent faltering.

Of course, love lost calls for  
sorrow,  
requires it from flushed bargains  
rightly made too long ago.  
Of course, life lost calls for it,  
the child, the dog, and you.  
It arrives after the scream,  
when we are grayed with life,  
when “Oh that happens,” consoles  
not at all,  
then lingers in soot-smear days.

Now, beyond hope and wonder,  
left with old movies, old songs,  
I look for solace by  
lounging with two words  
and the sturdy facts  
that gave birth to them,  
the facts dying memories,  
the words to follow.

• • •

## PROUD OWNER

*Helen Saffran*

He almost made it  
Said the elated man  
As his large puppy peed  
At the unopened door  
This is our stop  
He said smiling  
A child stared intently  
At the pee  
As it ran  
Slowly along  
The subway car

• • •

## THANKS FOR GIVING

*Hilda Feinstein*

True thanks giving  
Is more than giving thoughts of  
gratitude  
It's gratitude with oomph

Gratitude alone is sterile  
It makes only one person feel good  
Gratitude with oomph makes  
others feel good too

Ironically those with more to give  
Often give less and get more  
While the have-less get less  
And often give more  
Of what little they have

Thinking thanks  
Without thanks-giving  
Is oomphless

The un-thanked and have-less  
Forgotten shadows  
Reduced to tattered lives and  
vacant stares  
Clink coins in tin cups  
Unheeded, dismissed, disdained  
Troubles thunder  
Like sky claps preceding rain

Gratitude without oomph  
Enhances only the gratified

The haves do not claim their  
oomphlessness  
Hiding within coarse heavy hides  
Blinded to their own fragilities  
Bide time with thought flight  
and denial

Gazing inward only occasionally  
Off-put by the image  
They slink and slip silently  
Into the cozy, warm hearth of  
denial

Whether noticed or not  
Stuffed thought thankers  
Are empty  
And oomphless

• • •



# WORLD WAR 1 MEMORIAL DAY FROM THE ENGLISH PERSPECTIVE

*Judy Hampson*



Eleven, Eleven, Eleven  
So much meaning  
In one three-syllable word.

The eleventh hour  
Time to remember  
Represented by a flower  
The poppy, vibrant and red  
Reminding us of so many dead.

Eleven days into November,  
The eleventh month  
A dreary month that delays  
The onset of winter  
Yet going out with a blaze  
Of brilliant colors  
As we watch the sun's rays  
Fade.

A month of significance  
Recalling war's brutality  
When generals goaded soldiers  
Barely out of school  
Praising their willingness  
Punishing any timidity  
At thinking it precipitous  
To hurl themselves ubiquitously,  
Over the top.

Sacrificing young bodies  
With vindictiveness

War is not a gentleman's sport  
Each side zapping the other  
Aiming to thwart  
The other's advance.  
It's barbaric, cruel, savage, brutal  
And in the end  
Quite futile.

A man's game  
Where enemies maim  
Without blame  
Or even shame

While women weep  
Fall in a heap  
Cannot sleep  
Fear life is cheap  
For those they love.

Does turning women into soldiers  
Make it right?  
Giving them guns  
So, they too can fight?

• • •

## MISSING WORDS

*Judy Winn*

My words have not abandoned me  
Just go into hiding sometimes  
Sitting on the tip of my tongue  
Debating whether to come out.

Usually taking only a few seconds  
Before they escape my lips  
Leaving me satisfied with myself  
Happy I have not lost my words.

I turned on a TV tribute  
For Willie Nelson's ninetieth  
His mellow songs were played like rock  
One member played a mouth thing.

There are words that want to play hardball  
This instrument had a stuck name.  
Mouth organ I shouted out loud  
Knowing it was not called that.

My brain kept searching for that word  
One hour later it burst out  
HARMONICA  
I knew it would come back to me.

• • •

## REVERIE

*Judy Winn*

I shut my eyes and I am walking  
Through a field of wild flowers  
My hair is blowing in the wind  
When the sun sets behind the trees  
I lay in the grass and watch the sky  
Until there is the soft light of a full moon.

I reach my hand out to touch you  
You smile and nod your head  
The way you used to do  
An almost imperceptible movement  
An expression that meant "this is good."  
A pleasant reverie in the afternoon  
To have remembered that nod.

When you died I bought two plots  
Near a copse of trees and a stone bench  
To sit and contemplate life and death  
A single headstone, you on one half  
The other half left blank.

The cemetery has no fields of flowers  
There are only fields of gravestones  
Many are like ours long waiting  
For the other occupant  
You have been waiting for twenty years.

I am not ready to join you  
I want more years on this side of the earth.

• • •

## THE FISH

*Linda Rothstein*

A lawyer I once knew died,  
A lawyer who wasn't too nice.  
Perhaps that's why he came back as a fish.

I could tell it was him  
By watching the fish swim.  
First of all, it was too big for the tank,  
But it wasn't a bother because  
This fish knew exactly which coral  
To slip through  
Without scratching a fin.

It swam, fat and free,  
Many times larger  
Than the gobies and goldfish and clown fish  
That swam innocently.

Even though it had been a lawyer,  
This fish had soul.  
He was old, probably cold.  
I knew because his lips had turned  
blue.

He was a homely fish,  
But somehow endearing,  
One eye on each side  
Of his massive flat face.  
He stared at me sideways  
From the periphery of his freshwater tank,

His gills feverishly pumping  
As if pleading,  
"Please save me.  
I'm not a mere fish,  
But a sentient being  
Reincarnated as something akin to a flounder."

What I told him was that  
A fish's life is short  
And reincarnation is an endless chain.  
Next you may be a big bird or an oversized rabbit,  
But your case isn't closed,  
So surely will come back again and again.

## VILLANELLE FOR A SAD CLOWN

*Linda Rothstein*

Life's a dance some do like a clown  
Not minding how the steps repeat  
Dancing and dancing until the band dies down

The fiddler lays his fiddle down  
So I go out into the dark  
To sit on the stoop all night—a saddened clown.

My makeup runs. I am a tired clown.  
I need a bath, a place to sleep.  
The music's gone. The dance hall has shut down.

So silent out here when the band's shut down.  
In the quiet I reflect.  
How I could not help but be a clown.

I've tried my best to play it straight, not be a clown.  
Why didn't I at least suspect  
What would happen when the gate came down?

I hung in there when the chips were down.  
So what if I lost face?  
Who in this world is anything but a clown?  
Is that an up-note or have I ended on a beat that's down?

• • •

**A TRIP TO THE OCEAN  
ROCKAWAY BEACH CIRCA 1950**

*Mary Ann Donnelly*

A blue and orange striped umbrella  
Shielding paper bag lunches  
Sandwiches wrapped in waxed paper  
and a thermos of hot tea.  
Pale bodies resting on the green wool army blanket  
Brought back from World War II.  
My grandmother clinging to the ropes  
Laughing as the water's foam  
Covers her white legs.  
My grandfather's tan weathered face  
Framed by his smooth white chest and arms  
As he backstrokes through the breakers.  
The white of my mother's bathing cap  
Growing smaller as she swims  
Far out past the waves  
Her long confident strokes  
conquering the ocean  
Fearless as she wasn't always on shore.

• • •

## SUMMER IN THE CITY

*Mary Ann Donnelly*

An East Flatbush playground was our training zone  
to conquer the human terrain  
occupied by the pent-up spawn of World War II.  
We were our own army—the street our proving ground.  
Fathers at work mothers around somewhere  
Out each summer morning till called for dinner.

A ball, a piece of chalk, a bottle cap.  
No grown-ups to blow whistles.  
No how to hit a ball three sewers  
Or when to duck a dodge ball coaches.  
Somehow we all knew when to shout  
Ring-a-Levio 123 and home free all.

Rough play—settling our own score,  
We owned the streets.  
Authority vanished in June to return in fall  
With school bells ringing back to Robert Hall again.

I see street game rule books for sale  
on fifties nostalgia sites  
skelly boxes painted in schoolyards by principals who  
remember.  
But no one's on the streets.  
It's all organized now with parents on the sidelines.  
Secure but at what price?

• • •

## I RARELY CRY

*Rachel Shor*

But last week as trees turned  
autumn gold and red,  
I heard news that got  
darker and darker.

I learned  
that the younger daughter  
of Robbie, my oldest friend  
(from sixth grade),  
had succumbed to cancer at 57.  
Those who laughed  
at the online funeral  
were hearing past joys  
of young Celia's life.

With my petite friend Bobbie,  
a thoughtful, active woman,  
I shared volunteering  
at Big Apple Greeters (NY)  
and Shakespeare & Co. (MA),  
eating yogurt—she for lunch,  
I for breakfast,  
kayaking, and talking in her car  
with a background  
of old Broadway hits.

After a December museum visit  
I treated Bobbie to lunch  
on her 92nd birthday.  
She was suddenly failing, failing,  
and died of cancer  
within two weeks.

When my long-time friend Jack,  
an urban historian with whom  
I often traveled and went  
swimming,  
called about his visit to Florida,  
I was pleased to hear him  
in good shape.  
We agreed to meet soon.  
That weekend, early in the  
morning,  
I learned Jack was in an emergency  
room.  
By noon he was gone.

One evening I got an email  
that Jim, Shorewalkers' 6 ft 4 VP,  
a humorous, intelligent guy  
whose recent heart surgery  
sent him back to the hospital  
had not survived.

That was about a month after  
Jim and I led the last hike  
of his life.  
And then I learned  
this large, lovable man  
was just a year younger than  
my own daughter.

• • •



## SAILING

*Ruth Ward*

*On deciding whether to move back  
to New York for retirement*

As no voyage you plan has meaning,  
You renounce heading left or right.  
Hands in lap, you sail with no wind  
And with no destination in sight.

But don't yield to self-pity,  
Just look down at your idle feet  
And if you can find your boot-  
straps,  
Hoist them up and arise from  
your seat.

Do a horn pipe toward the horizon,  
Forge ahead with your sea dog's  
dance  
That hiccups with clumsy back steps  
Yet allows you to advance.

Then cradle rock your muted heart,  
And attend to how it sings,  
And when you plumb its siren song,  
List toward what the new wind  
brings.

It may not thrust you straight ahead,  
To island or continent,  
But you'll sense in its propulsion  
The course that you were sent.

Then your feet will urge you to  
the prow  
Where you may have a vision  
Of the place to which you're  
headed,  
Though you've made no considered  
decision.

Although your mind may lag  
behind,  
You'll sway to your heart's delight,  
And when at last your ship glides  
home,  
And you reach your sacred site  
You'll realize that your siren song  
And trip were both the same,  
And your purpose, now made  
manifest  
Is one you can venture to name.

Then dance a jig and sing out loud,  
Rejoice in the bliss of knowing  
That soon your rapturous delight  
To others will be flowing

For no one is an island,  
No, we are all bound together,  
And our friendships will carry  
and guide us  
Through uncertain and stormy  
weather.

So now that your life has meaning,  
And you pitch neither left nor  
right,  
You can follow your course with a  
bright inner calm  
That makes high noon of every  
night.

• • •

TELL ME  
O  
LA BALADA DE LÁZARO Y CHANGO

*Steve Koenig*

Templo Mayor. Zócalo. Un hombre. Ses yeux.  
He looks back at me. Walks toward me.  
“Can I practice my English with you?”  
I need to practice my Spanish with him.  
And his eyes. Caminamos. Charlamos. Sonrisas  
Caminando all the way to the Torre Latinoamericana.  
The conversation unfinished, nous promènt  
al Parque Alameda, trilingüe nosotros.  
Caminando. Charlando. Swapping lives.  
Des songes. Nuestros sueños. His ideal  
job sería un fotografo por Playboy.  
Dos sonrisas. I, j'explique, lo mismo  
pero por PlayGirl. Plus sourires, y comienza  
una amistad, une amitié commence,  
two immediate friends.

I rarely see him en vivo; he teaches  
el inglés, el francés, filosofía y literatura.  
Twenty-five years later he sends emissaries,  
his pupils, con regalos: una jarra de mole,  
y discos de chocolate Mayordomo, the best  
brand for making hot chocolate. I buy milk,  
heat it up, put in a disc of chocolate, stir it up,  
add chile, it now tastes like our language.

• • •

## BELT

*Steve Koenig  
after Robert Hayden*

"I'm going to smack you," he said.  
A week later the same. "I'm going to smack you."  
He'd go to our, my brother's and my,  
toy closet, go to the rack behind the door,  
which creaked as he slowly opened it,  
pulled out a belt, and dramatically but subtly,  
slowly, repeatedly whipped his palm with it,  
like something from out of the Old West.  
I'd run to the saloon, to the arms  
of one of the painted ladies who,  
in times of need, would look after  
us kids, harbor us against the bad guys,  
the bankers, saloon owners, the gamblers,  
the riders dressed in all black. I heard  
the crack of the whip, of riders trying to  
make their horses obey. Smack! The  
sound of the word terrified me. My father  
rarely hit us, maybe once or twice in  
my lifetime, but the Smack! makes a  
wince-worthy pain on my red cheek,  
just from the word, the threat.  
Dad only wanted to play ball with us,  
teach us to ride a ten-speed bicycle.  
I was no sportsman, had no idea that  
in this season teams were playing baseball,  
sticking to the teevee, avoiding other  
activities whether fun or work.  
I get up from the table, poring over  
my new postage stamps for my  
Scott's Philatelic book for mounting  
the treasure, and I hear the game on  
the living room box. I hear a Crack!  
the bat engage the ball, the sudden  
commotion following a hit.  
"I'm going to smack you," he said.

• • •

## ANDY IN KANSAS CITY

*Zandra Cooper*

Andy went to Kansas City  
Not the one in the state  
But the one Max owned  
Where he ate

Dining on Cuisine Nouvelle  
Of creme de champignons

And that is when the whistles and bells  
Reminded Andy that art sells!

Those metal cylinders labeled in wood pulp  
Warmed by memories of the gulp

Already known for multiples of  
Marilyn, Elvis and Jackie  
Yes, it's kind of whacky!

And so Andy dining in that private plush room  
Conceived and memorialized  
Campbell's Cream of Mushroom

• • •

## CANADIAN ROCKIES

*Art Spar*

It is good to be home  
To our beach house with a barbecue  
Summer as young as  
Tiny blue eggs in a catbird's nest

The places we've been  
A rambling transport  
Through Canadian wilderness  
Living and burned dead

On the solstice we strolled  
The length of the lake  
And dined amid opulence  
Well choreographed

Mountains mesmerize  
Still waters soothe  
We are  
Old but still walking

It was an excess  
Of food  
Of packing and unpacking  
Of showing up

Yet we are richer  
Lake Louise always glistening  
A magpie's long black tail a blur  
All part of our lovers' journey

The last night bite at the bar  
A Jean-Georges moment in the TWA Hotel  
A waystation of memories  
Preparing to bring ourselves home

• • •



Marilyn Weiss, *Near Nude*, Acrylic/Multi-media Collage



Carole Cronig Abrahams, *Leaf Motif Plates*, Ceramic



Diane Figueroa, *Chinese Carvings*, Serpentine & Brass





Victor Brener, *Man With Red Shirt*, Oil on Canvas



Ruth Kovner, "Bibi", Park Avenue, Photograph



Gary Friedland, *Picasso, el Matador*, Acrylic on Canvas



Frank Montaturo, *Mercado di Rialto, Venice, Sept 2023*, Photograph



Paul Adler, *The Magic Grotto*, Gouache on Paper



Roy Clary, *Undecided*, Oil on Canvas



Shirley Ranz, *Autumn Chain Links*, Glass Seed Beads

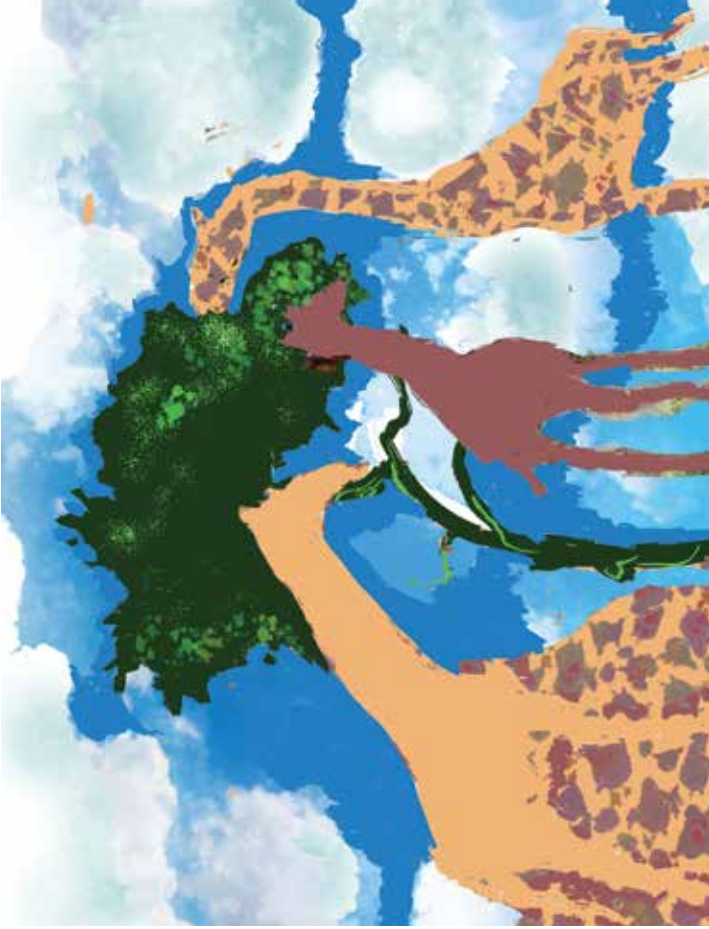


Rosalie Regal, *Three Figures*, Clay





Yona Rogosin, *The Return*, Paper Collage



Linda Rothstein, *Giraffes*, Digital Painting



Gil Santiago, *Berlin Window View*, Watercolor



Helen McMahon, *In The Victory Gardens*, Watercolor



Pete Weis, *Luncline*, Photograph

## ALIVE

*Carole Cronig Abrahams*

A man peeked in  
the open door  
of my hospital room.

Would I like to hear some music?

Yes, please.

He strummed his guitar a little,  
asked,

would I, could I, walk to the  
reception area with a window  
facing the Hudson River?

Yes, I could get that far. Yes.

Surface calmness

held

until his softly sung song  
let my tears flow  
with relief to be alive.

• • •

## MEDITATION

*Carole Cronig Abrahams*

brain neurons  
stretch, tangle, twist  
as adventurous thoughts  
swindle forward, spring around

they can sweetly smooth,  
with hope for understanding  
a miracle  
if away from excess  
with neurons reaching out,  
connecting

• • •

## HARMONICS

*Richard Elrauch*

A tree makes leaves  
that turn to earth  
that holds a seed  
that makes a tree.

---

Fluttering leaves wave  
farewell  
to the breeze  
which set them singing.

• • •

# THE ROCKET'S RED GLARE

*Donna K. Ramer*

The ballfield in the center of town  
fills with people of all ages  
toting lawn chairs, blankets,  
baskets of goodies to  
stave off any internal fireworks of hunger  
that might disrupt the pyrotechnics overhead.

Two young officers stroll through the crowds  
casually looking for potential trouble  
potential troublemakers while  
little kids run free and teens  
hang around the periphery  
of the large white tent  
sheltering a local rock band  
from any droplets the overcast  
evening sky might loosen.

A drone ascends then hovers to the crowd's  
delight wondering if it's part of the show or  
taking aerial shots of the crowd  
as the first of dozens of rockets explode into  
cascades of tentacles reaching for the ground.

The white and blue and gold and pink rockets red glare  
bursting in air reverberate in the chests of upright  
two legged animals but forcing four legged ones to flee  
into the safety of the forests  
abandoning their nests of unborns  
and newborns.

The crescendo builds and builds until it's  
hard to catch your breath and  
as quickly as it started it's over  
and the crowds disperse forgetting  
the drone and their trash for someone  
else to collect so the ballfield in  
the center of town is ready  
for what comes next.

• • •



## NINE HAIKUS

*Ellen Rittberg*

1.

Strollers drift across bridge  
Backlit by sunset's last embers,  
I fight loneliness.

2.

Leaves furred, obdurate  
await pungent spring air,  
The wind objects, fierce.

3.

Cherry blossoms drift  
From tree to ground, a fine mist,  
My dreams bestirred.

4.

Dogwood leaves curl, beckon,  
Die, fall, secrets undivulged,  
Pink-tinged, a praise poem.

5.

River birch sheds skin  
Man with bike glides onto train  
Illumined, sun-bathed.

6.

Starling's beak bears grass,  
String, scraps, oddments for new  
life,  
Its song, a flute.

7.

Music. Blue-haired girls  
In harlequin pants dance  
Pizzicato notes.

8.

Coal-haired girl's fingers  
fly, blue nails click, tap cellphone,  
Hope she gets home soon.

9.

Our lives' course, a road.  
Shorter days fleet as horses  
breezes stirs minds.

• • •

## WHAT MAKES ME ME

*Hilda Feinstein*

Is it my features reflected in a mirror  
Or those observed across a brightly lit room?  
The tallness, the blondness, the oldness,  
Times lines etched upon my face?  
The gray boldly peeking through my hair?  
Or am I what cannot be seen by discerning eyes?  
Does vision beyond sight  
Make me me?

The accretion of years of life experience,  
Thoughts, conclusions, emotions and deeds?  
The beads of sweat across my brow  
That form while making hard decisions?  
Attempts to see reason and hope and logic and magic  
Through a kaleidoscope of mismatched fragments—  
The laughter, the tears, the pleasures, the pain,  
The sunshine and the rain  
That have washed over me through the decades  
The spontaneous spark of childlike joy  
That can quickly change into adult cynicism or anger?  
Do all of these make me me?

Taking one step then another  
Through yesterday's today and today's tomorrow  
Sometimes trudging clumsily  
Sometimes strolling with grace  
Sometimes stumbling and tumbling  
Through life's challenging paces  
Finessing life  
Meeting heavy and light, wrong and right  
Melding multiple facets of matter  
Into that which makes me me

• • •

# I HAVE A HEADACHE

*Judy Hampson*

I have a headache.

It follows me around,  
An irritating tormentor  
Scrabbling up my neck  
Wrapping around my cerebrum  
Sticking its penetrating claws  
Into the vulnerable muscle  
That controls everything I do.  
Everything.

Debilitating?

Yes

I can read, talk,  
Cogitate and walk,  
But it never leaves me.  
If only I could scoop it out  
Lay it aside like a  
Beating pulse  
On the bedside table.  
Separate  
From me.

Sometimes it sneaks off  
To a quiet place for a while,  
Maybe for a cup of tea.  
But when I notice its absence  
It roars back in  
Banging the door, screaming  
"I'm back!"

Will I miss it when it's gone?  
Will I reminisce about it:  
"Remember when we lay side by side,  
On my pillow?"  
For, one way or another  
It will leave.

• • •

## WINTER – AN ABECEDARIAN

*Judy Hampson*

A chandelier of ice globules  
Bent branches leaning into  
Chilly water  
Dipping into the swirling  
Energy of a  
Frenetic river.  
Gliding, then  
Hastening towards the sea.  
I watch in fascination,  
Jiggling my numb fingers to  
Kindle some warmth  
Lest they freeze inside  
My maroon mittens,  
Now insufficient  
On this frigid day.  
Perhaps it's time to go in? I  
Query, aware that my nose is  
Rosy from the cold.  
Surely it isn't wise to linger.  
Thus, I head for the entrance,  
Under its green canopy.  
Venturing out  
When the temperature  
Exceeds ten below...  
Young no longer  
Zeal to explore is not a wise choice.

• • •



## SPRING

*Judy Winn*

Fading yellow and white daffodils  
Red tulips come to take their place  
Purple hyacinths still hold on  
Not ready yet to fall asleep  
And hibernate until next year.

The trees are heavy with blossoms  
Cold wind shakes petals to my feet  
They make a carpet for my walk  
I button up my winter coat  
While all around me wanders Spring.

Arriving home I find petals  
Fallen pink and white in my hair  
Stuck to the bottom of my shoes  
I have become a flowering tree  
A wondrous creature to behold.

My roots are deep into the earth  
I have been here so many years  
Intent on holding on to life  
And hoping for another Spring  
To watch in awe as blooms unfold.

The day will come when I am set  
Beneath the ground nearby a tree  
To nurture many future Springs  
I will wave in windswept blossoms  
And be there in the colors bright.

• • •

## ANTICIPATING SUMMER

*Zé'eva Cohen*

Summer—here you are  
This time around  
Shall I succeed realizing all that I set up to do?  
I bet the piers along the Hudson River  
will tempt me again

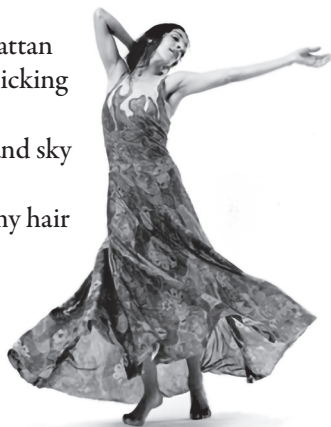
Who knows what I'll find there this year  
Dances I never saw before  
New music  
People from countries I hardly ever heard about

Why have I not ever seen or heard  
information about your contry I'll ask  
(Implying: and where is it exactly?)

Our country poses no trouble  
they'll say

How about that bench  
Where I can sit  
Looking all the way to the tip of Manhattan  
While hearing the children's voices frolicking  
And in front  
I could stare at the vast space of water and sky  
As I do nothing  
While the swoosh of the wind combs my hair  
And my body soaks it all in

• • •



## FLYING

*Rachel Shor*

Exercising outdoors,  
I scan the sky to see  
the birds in season,  
hearing their calls,  
their songs  
from spring's robins to  
sparrows and starlings,  
morning doves to  
an occasional hawk,  
plentiful pigeons in  
brown, black, and white,  
even sea gulls  
away from the sea.

Under clear skies,  
sleeker, larger,  
noisier bodies  
with striped tails in  
red, yellow, blue,  
all colors  
fly into airports  
with their own  
song.

• • •

## SUGAR

*Linda Rothstein*

When I get nostalgic  
I want a snow cone  
Suffused with a syrup  
In Crayola colors...

Or maybe I'd rather  
Bite into a frothy cotton candy  
And see the place where  
The wet of my lips  
Left a pink imprint.

I want to hear the Good Humor man's bell  
That somehow makes me feel I was. Loved  
Because I was always looked after enough  
To have a cool nickel in my hot hand.

I was the pre-Splenda generation  
Living in the glory  
Of root beer floats and Coca Cola  
In glass bottles...

That shattered when  
They fell from the shelf

The way my dreams  
Of popsicles and creamsicles  
Shattered when they should  
Have done nothing more than melt away.

• • •



# THIGH HIGH LEVEL PORNOGRAPHITI

*Byrd*

You  
My Twisty-Tasty-Melody-Shaking  
Baking Jelly-Dancer I Shiver and Skate  
On Crimson Hot Ice As You Silly Putty  
Your Pudding Right On To Me  
Dagger

The Moaning  
After The Groaning

I Awaken Enveloped  
In A Myriad  
Cornucopia Of Golden  
Gardenias Adorned With Aquamarine  
Marshmallow Cream

I Straddle Your Beige  
Coated PopLolli As We  
Ride To The  
Sable End Of  
The Sheets  
I Yodel  
As You Silly Smutty  
Your Pudding Left  
Off To Me  
Dagger

• • •

## THE FIRST WORD

*Richard Elrauch*

My neighbor a little grandma  
talks Russian at me  
under her head scarf  
one day  
as she appears up the stairs  
smiling clutching one of the boxes  
I left three floors down  
and I gestured no! you shouldn't  
to the lady  
who said the first word I ever knew  
one word two times  
through her smile into my eyes  
to explain so I would know  
pointing certainly to her chest  
she said smiling  
"mama... mama..."

• • •

## THE GIFT

*Marilyn Weiss*

It is indeed many things  
Both the prologue and the epilogue  
The complicated circle  
  
It is my love, my pride, my joy  
It is the aftermath of my heart, my head, and my tears  
It is fun  
It belongs here in the nursery, the incubator, the new womb  
  
It is to and for all the children. any child, and one special child  
It is both a tribute to, and in memory of  
It is yours, and it is all of ours

• • •

## A WORD TO THE WISE

*Lillian Hood*

You don't need to vote on the way life is  
When you schedule your priorities  
You can accept that you already have  
And live your life with ease

Believe we are one with God  
And that he is everywhere  
Unite with all people  
Regardless of their convictions  
A life based on love and freedom  
Where there are no restrictions

• • •

## ADVICE TO A CHILD

*Joyce Hinote*

You should not know mortality yet,  
my child. You are young and should be  
full of hope. That sadness that comes  
with age needs the wisdom of age to understand.

I want to tell you what to expect, how it  
will feel to be old, how the sadness consumes.  
But I want to spare you, knowing it is not your time,  
and you can not understand.

Have patience with me as I try to go forward,  
feel hope, and reject the limits on my dreams.  
Live your life as without limits, ignore my sadness,  
and my losses, and hear me in your heart.

• • •

# NOW AND NOT NOW

*Marilyn Weiss*

## NOW

Get up  
Go do it  
Now

The sad is too great  
But you must get up.  
You must do it

Before It swallows you  
Before It engulfs you  
Before It becomes you

.....

## NOT NOW

Not now  
It's too soon  
There's still time

I don't think so  
Time is fickle  
Time does not wait

Hurry up  
If not now  
Then when?

• • •

## IN FOCUS

*Ruth Ward*

Do you remember how grounded you were then,  
Solicitous mother, kind teacher, fine wife,  
Your middle-aged years filled with unswerving purpose  
A long ways away from your teenaged strife?

Have you ever consulted with those who once knew you  
To see what they thought of you way back when?  
Did they think you should don the emotional armor  
That changes shy mice into spirited men?

Well, your mother declared you inert and unsmiling  
An introvert needing to scout for a spouse  
Your father detected a sponge and a bookworm  
But wouldn't protest if you stayed in the house.

Your brother insisted you start dating beatniks  
And frequent cafés in a black turtleneck,  
To bury yourself in your books and your music  
Would make you an outcast, a spinster, a wreck.

So, what did you do? Did you take their suggestions  
Bedecking yourself in their outer "if onlies,"  
Turning yourself inside out just to please them  
Afraid you would join a vile cluster of lonlies?

No, you smiled and envisioned in mother and teacher  
The high aspirations you'd have as a bride  
And you took strides each day on your way toward that vision  
With soft inner voices that served as your guide.

And that's why in traveling back you can see  
Glowing photos of mother, instructor and wife,  
Your mom and your dad and your well-meaning brother  
Helped dress up your soul for a meaningful life.

• • •

## ORGANIZATION

*Ruth Ward*

I have to organize myself  
My papers are a jumble  
They shoot each other dirty looks  
Preparing for a rumble.

My mind reflects this disarray  
My world is topsy-turvy  
My being pines for sure straight lines  
Not angles spiked or swervy.

I'll think in terms of pigeonholes  
All things alike in kind:  
My must-do list, my that's-all-done  
These lists will calm my mind.

If I put blank folders on my desk  
Would my papers know to enter?  
Foreswearing fight would they alight  
As ally, friend, or mentor?

I hope even without my help  
They'll sort themselves with reason  
They'll jump feet first, compress their wings  
And firmly get their knees in,

Mindful of my need for rest  
A niche for every season.

• • •

## BROADWAY'S BULL

*Wayne Cotter*

“Water! Water! One Dollar!”  
Shouts Bearded Man  
With Sullen Stare.  
“Key Chains! — Key Chains!”  
Another Bellows  
From a Flimsy Chair.  
Meanwhile  
Zig Zags of Cultures  
Colors  
Voices  
Wait Anxiously  
Feverishly  
To Engage the Mighty Beast  
For a Moment  
Or Such.  
Smile for the Camera  
Reach Out, Perhaps Touch  
Those Most Private Regions  
Of a Most Public Bull.  
This Bizarre Ritual Unfolds  
On the Sultriest Days  
On the Frostiest Morns.  
But Proudly This Bull Stands.  
Sense He Not the Scorn?  
Nor Hear the Snickers?  
Nor Wonder  
As Do We  
WHY?

• • •

# THE IMPENDING DOWNFALL OF THE PLANET OF THE RAPES

*Byrd*

a little boy  
a little girl  
surviving on a diet  
of chicken snot pies  
with Maddog 2020 as a chaser  
dessert will be the usual garbage  
can soufflé mixed in with a  
pinata of disfigured dreams  
curious are many  
despite being enveloped in a  
galaxy gutter they refuse to  
be consumed by merchants of desolation  
they continue to aspire they still find a way  
to smile  
the merchants are plundering on absconded time  
for one day the little boy and girl will learn how to  
fight

• • •



## AND THE WINNER IS . . .

*Zandra Cooper*

The two largest department stores Macy's and Leptis Magna were  
at war  
vying to win Best in World Department Store title  
Which would achieve the status of this exquisite singularity?  
Each partook in Olympian competition including  
which main floor was adorned with the most sumptuous  
arrangements of flowers for tea  
Which cafeteria boasted the best iwashi or sardine salad  
And other equally daunting competitive events  
The winner would be awarded a Loving Cup and a Pink Ribbon,  
Blue ribbon having become extinct  
Competitions in abundance  
included the millionth customer of the winning store receiving a  
lifetime supply of tea flowers and sardines and as an  
extra bonus having their  
genomes counted and classified

• • •

## IF I COULD BE BORN AGAIN

*Art Spar*

I'd be twins  
It's no fun growing up alone  
Five much older siblings  
And their aging parents

Of course  
I never would  
Have perfected  
Playing alone

Or created  
Imaginary playmates  
Like the girl  
Who lived inside the TV

Or invented  
Competitors  
For games and sports  
Who let me win

But I would  
Have loved  
A confidant  
In the flesh

• • •

## SADNESS AND EQUANIMITY

*Art Spar*

*At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make  
Ambiguous undulations as they sink,  
Downward to darkness, on extended wings.  
"Sunday Morning" by Wallace Stevens*

As the path of life shortens  
I am grateful for what has been,  
But there is a growing sadness  
To be at this moment.

My body is inexorably diminishing.  
Abilities slip away. Pains pester.  
Old motivations become irrelevant.  
Each new day a challenge.

Aged loved ones suffer and die.  
For the suffering and death I share,  
For the suffering and death I bear alone,  
Sadness is my harvest.

All that shimmers and shatters  
In my memory, support me.  
Life has been full,  
But I am afraid of what comes.

I pray for the equanimity  
To extend damaged wings  
Searching for the updraft  
That will carry me home.

• • •

## LAUNDRY 1940

*Carole Cronig Abrahams*

We had a round tub machine  
with a central black pole  
holding blades  
that rotated back and forth,  
swishing fabric  
through water and soap suds,  
then clean water  
before a final spin  
and a cloth trip through a  
roller-wringer above...  
(even wet-heavy sheets fed in by hand)

yet a blessed convenience

• • •

## BEFORE A/C

*Mary Ann Donnelly*

Summer memories  
Seeping like sweat through the pores  
Conjuring late night stoop-sitting  
Take-out pizza from Sam's  
Smells of warm Rheingolds on the grown-ups' breath  
The odor of hose-fed water  
On the dried clay of a postage stamp lawn  
Passers-by appearing like fireflies in the night  
United in their quest for cool.

• • •

## THE PEOPLE I ENVY

*Betty Farber*

The wives whose husbands are alive,  
The folks who suffered and survived.  
Hikers, skiers, climbers, walkers,  
And all New Yorkers.

Poets who make their readers cry  
Folks who easily say, "goodbye."  
People who feel that life is fun.  
Anyone younger than 91.

• • •

## GOODBYE

*Betty Faber*

A childhood friend, of my same age—  
We were happily engaged  
In talking of our own life stories  
We were eager to explore these,  
Ready and willing to see the ending  
Without regret, without pretending.  
When she left, I said, "Goodbye."  
She turned to me and begged, "Don't die."  
"All right. I won't," was my willing lie.

• • •

# NINETY YEARS OF ACQUIRED WISDOM; WHAT AM I MISSING?

*Steve Rosen*

1. Don't run for a bus. (Mel Brooks)
2. Do the right thing. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest.  
(Mark Twain)
3. Love your neighbor as yourself. (Steve's Bar Mitzvah portion)
4. Living well is the best revenge. (George Herbert, 16th century poet)
5. Take frequent naps.
6. Love life, love family, love friends, love nature.
7. Marry up—someone better than yourself.
8. What comes from the heart goes to the heart. (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)
9. Who is the greatest of all heroes? One who turns an enemy into a friend.  
(Talmud)
10. Always choose the right grandparents.
11. Spend all you have for loveliness, buy it, and never count the cost;  
(Sara Teasdale)
12. Always punch above your weight. (boxing)
13. Receive everything coming your way with simplicity. (Rashi)
14. Nobody's perfect. (*Some Like It Hot*)
15. When I was young, I admired clever people. Now that I am old, I  
admire kind people. (Heschel)

• • •

## THE FLUTIST

*Carol Rubin*

She walks onto the stage  
Or maybe she strides—that's more like it  
Wearing a gown that sparkles when she moves  
Dark navy I remember  
And it has beads woven into diaphanous silk  
She is young—maybe 23  
And she has alabaster skin  
The gown, cut to show off her arms  
Moves gracefully with her  
Her hair is luminous  
And is styled  
With bangs just so  
Illuminating her doll like features  
Bow shaped mouth

And then she reaches the mike  
And takes it from its stand with quiet authority  
And introduces to the audience the piece she is about to play  
Speaking with a Russian accent she references her grandfather  
Who was a musician too and the piece she has chosen is his  
composition  
And then... she begins  
And the notes spin out into the auditorium  
Tracing melodies  
As beautiful as she.

• • •

## A HOMELESS PERSON

*Joyce Hinote*

Let me give you a hand,  
a few coins, a bite to eat,  
to rest that haunted look,  
to still those unreal fears.

Where are all your people?  
Those friends who should care?  
Have you turned them away?  
Distrusting even those you love?

Let me do something to cure  
the sores, the scabs that fester  
on your ankles and feet, banish  
the grit that infects the wounds.

You disowned your only sister,  
because you saw something else.  
You banished all your children  
thinking they were in danger too.

Can you trust for even one moment  
so we can take away the fear,  
heal the bodies awful torments,  
and give peace to a troubled mind.

• • •



## FLEEING ALEPPO

*Nancy Jones*

We are scrambling to get on the bus in Aleppo, Syria, because we are running for our lives. We are seven students and a Columbia University professor on a study tour through the Middle East. It is 1958, a particularly dangerous year in the world and especially for Americans touring exotic places. Eisenhower has just sent the Sixth Fleet to Lebanon to support a Christian president friendly to the West; the UK is in Jordan protecting its interests, and the Arabs see us only as outrageous intruders.

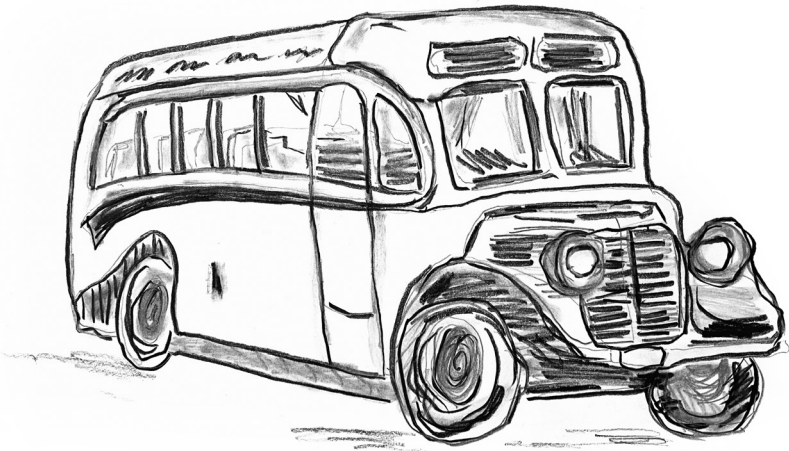
We have just escaped from a mob in Damascus and have been in our hotel in Aleppo only a few hours when our professor receives an all-to-familiar telephone call from the American Embassy. "Leave your hotel now," the official says. "You are obvious-looking Americans, and a mob will be there any minute. They will tear you limb from limb." We have already traveled through Egypt meeting with politicians, journalists, and students, and although not loved, we were tolerated. Professor Samuel Klausner has done a remarkable job of keeping to previously determined schedules and appointments, but Syria has been a new and totally different experience.

The bus is now behind the hotel, and the mob is in front of the hotel screaming, "America! America! America!" Vengeance is again tolling from the minarets, I think to myself. Professor Klausner is a Jew who speaks fluent Arabic, and he has somehow persuaded the bus driver to deviate from his usual route to pick us up. The bus is a dilapidated-looking vehicle half full of peasants carrying sacks of their belongings and even a caged chicken. "Leave quickly now!" Sam orders the driver in Arabic, and I can't help thinking that this Jew who is our savior will certainly ascend to one of the nine spheres of Dante's Heaven. As the driver begins to pull away, the crowd has found us and, armed with stones, begins pelting the bus amid curses in Arabic.

The further the bus distances itself from Aleppo and the closer it gets to the Turkish border, the more relaxed we all become. I now have the luxury of studying my seated companion. He is an elderly gentleman with his head wrapped in a blue-and-white keffiyeh. He is also using a rather frighteningly large knife. He plunges the point into a melon, and when he sees my curious gaze, he shoves a large piece toward me. I presume he is saying help yourself in Arabic, and I nod my head in thanks.

The juxtaposition of nearly getting stoned to death and this spontaneous act of kindness throws my analytic Western mind into turmoil. There is no point in trying to unravel it all and put our travels into a neat schematic whole. If I have learned anything so far about the Middle East, it is that nothing is predictable. Perhaps some day I might understand it all, but for now, I am on a bus traveling with a companion not of my choosing but a stranger whose kindness I may indeed need.

• • •



## MY CHILDHOOD HOME

*Carole Cronig Abrahams*

My immigrant parents bought a gracious home on Martha's Vineyard that grew into a small hotel, the Gosnold, named after Bartholomew Gosnold, the first European to come to the island, and yes, wild grapes grew on the beautiful land of the Wampanoag tribe. When I was a child spring meant the scent of budding lilacs and the arrival of workmen at our house. Carpenters first, then painters, plumbers, and electricians arrived in waves as my mother adapted our house.

She added a summer dining room for family and staff and took down the French doors separating our dining room from the window-lined sun-room. A craftsman (her sister Grace's father-in-law) decorated that large space using a small metal tool to create fan shapes in soft beige paint. He and his wife lived with us for many weeks.

One end of the porch was enclosed to form an office where mother could type letters and keep records, and guests could check in and out. Some living room windows were bumped out to create a bow-windowed music alcove for our grand piano and harp. Mother put a ping-pong table outside; there was no space for it in the house. Cousin Gene and I played while the guests ate lunch.

A wing off the living room had five bedrooms and three bathrooms. Upstairs, there were five more bedrooms and two bathrooms. Even the basement was changed; my father had a card room built and brought in a pool table and ash trays that stood on the floor. Only the upstairs five bedrooms and two bathrooms went unchanged.

During World War II so many educators who had traveled to Europe every summer came to the Vineyard that mother had to rent bedrooms for them all up and down our street. Newcomers joined our regulars, among them the Reisers, the Glotzers and the Hurwitzes. Everyone handed over a share of their food-ration stamps, but there were many shortages and workarounds. For example, the butter substitute was white; we blended in food dye to make it look better, but there was no help for the taste.

The single phone was in the kitchen next to the basement door; everyone could duck inside that door for privacy, and phone numbers were scrawled on the wall. When I told a guest she had a call from Texas, it bewildered her until she learned it was from D'Alice, not Dallas. During

World War II a naval officer my sister was dating answered the phone with, “Hello, Cronig’s Nuthouse,” and was flummoxed when it was his commanding officer calling for him.

A structure we called the bunkhouse extended behind the two-car garage. We camped out there when our rooms were rented. We ducked under clotheslines in our grassy back yard to go to and from this “summer house,” which held bedrooms for my parents and Alice the cook, two bathrooms, and the namesake bunks—four large ones for a rotating cast of family and waitresses.

Beyond the bunkhouse, our empty yard stretched down a hill to a quiet back street. That is where I watched the armored “ducks” slowly rumbling toward the newly constructed airport built by the Army Air Force. Those were among the first vehicles to move on both land and sea; these combinations of tanks and boats were both exciting and frightening.

As for food, my mother and Alice turned out three meals daily for around sixty to seventy people. Breakfast was served to order. (Sister Shirley quit waitressing because she found the orders confusing—a four-minute boiled egg next to an over-easy, oh, my.) Lunch and dinner were set menus—New England style food with Jewish touches. For example, the Gosnold served traditional salmon cakes with peas on the Fourth of July and house-made challah bread on Friday nights. When I was little, mother would give me dough to braid my own grubby little roll, but I graduated to portion control. Mother sent me around the tables carrying a cloth-lined basket of challah rolls with instructions to go to each guest once before returning to anyone for seconds. With my two braids, I looked like the cute actress Margaret O’Brian, and there were smiles as I came around. I don’t know of anyone complaining that there weren’t full baskets left on each table.

Eventually, the building became a nursing home, with the dining and living rooms as wards. Then it reverted to a more modern place to stay—rooms and a coffee/tea/snack station on the porch. Finally, the Martha’s Vineyard Hospital converted it to housing for their staff. The dining room is now a communal kitchen, so the meticulously painted walls are long gone.

• • •

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

*Yona Rogosin*

When I entered elementary school, I had the devastating experience of having my first name mispronounced when the teacher called the roll. In an era of plain names like Betty, Jane, Mary, and Carol, my name, although only four letters long, was rife with mispronunciations. Yona became Yeena or Yana or Yada or some other awful variation that usually provoked peals of laughter from my classmates. In those days, girls aged four or five did not correct the teacher, especially in front of the class.

My father, who spoke fluent Hebrew, named me Yona because in Hebrew it means dove, the universal symbol for peace and a condition that was sorely sought in world-war-torn 1943. But I found that my name was too unusual and made me and others feel uncomfortable. I decided to do something about it.

Fortunately, I had a middle name—Gail—given to me to honor a Mormon friend of my mother's who had been a great help to her in Brigham, Utah, where I was born. No one can mispronounce Gail, I thought, although they could spell it differently. With my father's reluctant approval, I had my mother ask the school to change my name from Yona Gail to Gail Y. on the school records.

For the next fifteen years or so, I was known as Gail until I traveled to Europe where I met fellow travelers of many nationalities. When we exchanged names, I found that often theirs were difficult to pronounce, so I felt at ease to say mine was Yona after admitting that Gail was really my middle name. But this time, instead of giggles, I received positive responses. "Oh, what a beautiful name," they said, "What language is it, and what does it mean?"

So, I began to accept, use, and like the name my father gave me, especially as I was an early and ardent member of the anti-war movement to protest U.S. involvement in Vietnam. My travels also gave me an awareness of the possibilities of other realities and perspectives.

Several years later I was introduced to Carlos Castaneda's book *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* that describes the experiences of Castaneda, an anthropology graduate student who wrote his doctorate thesis on the subject. Under the guidance of Don Matus, a Yaqui Indian shaman, Castaneda wrote that he acquired knowledge

using his experience with “non-ordinary” reality that had been induced through Don Matus’s administration of hallucinogenic drugs.

While reading the portions of the book where Castaneda describes in meticulous detail his experience of transformation and flight through the air as a bird—a crow—I did strongly identify with the intensity of that feeling and the motion of flying. I was not under the influence of any drug myself, but I wondered for a moment whether I could have been a bird in another lifetime. Perhaps my name was not an accident. I did love to be on the move, to travel, to feel the wind sweep across my face when I was sailing or on the back of a fast motorcycle. It was exhilarating and powerful.

Today, as I watch with wonder the birds flying among the trees that surround my country home and listen to their birdsong, I sometimes think about the journey of self-acceptance and self-knowledge my name has taken me on. It still is mispronounced or misspelled at times, but I greatly appreciate having it. Thank you very much, Dad.

• • •

## RETURN TO PARIS

*Dennis Sherman*

I think about going back to Paris. That's probably an illusion, both the going back and what I would be going back to. My wife and I first went there in 1968. Age would make the trip so much harder now; I am weighed down by what's left of my life. Even if I could, what would I be going back to?

I came across a film of Paris during the 1920s. What struck me most were scenes at outdoor cafés, the men in their hats and tight suits, women in the smart dresses of the era, blank-faced waiters weaving in and out, the streets a mixture of horse-drawn and motorized traffic adding to the noise and smells of the city. I don't know what they were thinking as they sat there, coffees or wine on those little tables, looking around, some sitting nonchalantly, some leaning toward each other as if revisiting the early days of love, some looking out at passersby from their temporarily prized perch to see or catch someone's eye or recognize a writer or actor, perhaps some trying to judge where they are in life compared to the stranger they are intently observing, and maybe some sitting and looking in an attempt to escape boredom or despair.

In my own scripted movie of them, they are trying to rewrite history, imagining a return to the Belle Epoch, as if Paris never changed from the years before the Fall (World War I), as if Paris was and remained an impressionist painting, as if the city had not aged, modernized, putrefied, commercialized, as if its people were not crushingly wounded by the death and destruction of war just a few years in the past, imagining that they are seeing and being seen in the glow of those better times that they perhaps never experienced, in a sense living in a dream at the same time that they are in the present of their lives, their daily lives, survivors, in that café on a boulevard in Paris.

Surely, I've buffed 1968, when we spent the year in Paris, into gilded images of streets and markets and cafés filled with interesting people and edited my memories of that year's experiences into a series of small adventures that had far more exciting and sweet times than frustrations. During that first year, I knew the differences between the romanticized images of Paris we wanted to be visiting, wanted to be living in, wanted to be drowning in, and the historical past, which I was studying, and the

reality of everyday, which were the streets we walked on and the cafés we stopped in and how we were getting along together as two ambitious-for-life individuals with two not-always-easy boys. But those distinctions often merged into an amalgamation of life there. We were young, learning the language, looking for sophistication, immersed in the present, and not haunted by the past.

We visited Paris again and again over the decades. Each time, the city's romantic image and its history faded. Everyday reality seeped and then flowed in. Increasingly we thought of our own early times in Paris during the 1960s and 1970s in nicely laundered nostalgic memories—almost how I imagined those Parisians sitting in the outdoor cafes in that video of the 1920s were experiencing their present as if living during the twenty-or thirty-years earlier Belle Epoch. The 1960s and 1970s were becoming a version of our own Belle Epoch.

Were I to return to Paris, it would be to walk back to the neighborhood we lived in during the 1960s, and then neighborhoods we lived in in subsequent years around the Rue de Bac and Auteuil and La Motte Picquet. I would be visiting fading images of my past in hopes of having moments of reliving those days, perhaps in vain, for such days can only be relived in my mind. What I want to go back to is not those places. I want to go back to those times in my life, and even then, only to the best parts of those times.

No, I don't think I'll go back to Paris. I suppose I could. More than one friend would probably tell me that it might be fun. It might be. I miss it. I could say, truthfully, it's because I am too old, but that is not quite the truth. I could still manage it, and without too much difficulty. But I fear that what's left of those good images and realities of our times in Paris would be too tarnished by a sense of loss. I could still sit in one of those lovely outdoor cafes on the Boulevard St. Germain. But this time, history and romantic image would not save me from the reality of the everyday.

• • •



## BURNING BUSH

*Donna K. Ramer*

Looking a bit pensive, The Voyeur sat waiting for a burning-bush-life-changing moment. The V had been to—no through—Bryant Park innumerable times but had never slowed long enough to experience it as an oasis in the center of the city that never sleeps, that barely catnaps.

So, The V sat on a bench, waiting for inspiration, feeling the warm summer breeze on naked arms, gazing at the roped off, pristine great lawn, listening to the many familiar and unfamiliar languages of the people, alone, in pairs, in groups, as they strolled by or hurried through.

With a slightly cocked head, The V watched as the street noise slowly dissipated, people became hazy, and a young woman of about eighteen came into view. Fashionably dressed in a knee-length pinafore of light summer colors and a straw bonnet tied loosely under her chin, she carefully chose a spot and sat on the grass without a thought to staining her clothes. The V watched her remove hat, shoes, and stockings, then tie her long auburn hair with a blue ribbon, tucking in the few loose strands that fought to remain free. Picnic basket at her side, she placed a large sketchbook in her lap and a drawing pencil between her fingers.

The V was transfixed but acutely aware that the walkways, carousel, and coffee vendors were gone, the playgrounds and outdoor book rooms now forests. The world-renowned library had become an extraordinarily large house that would be home only to robber barons or royalty.

The sound of a horse neighing startled them both and, in what seemed rehearsed simultaneity, they looked up to see a stunning black Shire horse begin to graze in the field. The young woman picked up the sketchbook and, with practiced strokes, outlined the horse, the field, the sky, smiling with satisfaction at a job well done, a sense of deep pride in the talent she was nurturing. The horse stopped grazing, knowing he was no longer needed and could disappear into the forest, perhaps to return another day.

Somehow The V knew the girl was Emma, who lived in the big house on the east end of the lawn. Her father was a banker, but it was her mother's inheritance that gave the family their house in the country, barely two miles north of the Gilded Age's center of town. The rooms were full today

with her parents' friends and their children, their minister, his wife and four children, all invited to escape the heat that blanketed miles and miles in every direction. But while they were sitting on the terrace or walking in the gardens or dipping their toes in the pool or playing lawn games or napping, Emma escaped to be alone, to satisfy that deep hunger to be with her sketchbook, the need so strong she disobeyed her mother's orders to help entertain the younger children.

"There you are," said Emma, her attention now on the rabbit, whose eyes she felt staring at her even before she looked up. Slowly turning the page, she quickly and easily sketched the rabbit. Her third drawing was of some trees and a fourth of the house she knew she must return to. It was getting late; the sun was now in the west, so she gathered her things, put on her shoes, stockings, and bonnet, and headed back, knowing her mother would be cross but not for long. "Mother knows," Emma said aloud to no one. Her mother encouraged Emma's passion to draw and sketch, paint and collage, to see her creativity, her works, on the walls and in the halls of the house, replacing the stodgy old art brought over from the great galleries and houses of Europe. "It's almost 1900," she said aloud, again to no one, but letting the depth of her passion take voice.

As The V watched Emma pack up her pencils and sketchbook. They both reached into their baskets, plucked a few grapes, and popped them into their mouths. They had become one, each turning inspiration into a different art, both feeding their souls with their deepest passions.

As they walked east, a slight smell of smoke from a very small burning bush tickled their nostrils; they both turned to look, but a servant had it under control. Continuing on, Emma stopped at the back door of the house, the servants' entrance, thought better of entering there, and, along with The V, continued around to the front of the house. Together but unaware of each other, they climbed the steps between two giant lions. Inside, Emma ran up the stairs to bathe and change for dinner. The V slowly walked up to the third floor to return to work in an office with watercolors and sketches of horses, hares, and horticulture signed by an artist known simply as Emma.

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## MY ADVENTURES IN PITTSBURGH

*Michael Wellner*

“Why in heaven’s name would you want to go to Pittsburgh?” That question and, “Can you name the three rivers that meet in Pittsburgh?” were what I heard most often when I told my friends that I was going to spend a week in the “Steel City.” It was as if they wanted to say that surely there must be more interesting places to visit than Pittsburgh!

Well, truth be told, I was looking for a place that was not too far away. (I had even considered driving but finally opted for a simple seventy-five-minute flight.) And, equally important, Bob Reiss had told me at some length about his visit to Fallingwater, the Frank Lloyd Wright house in Mill Run, Pennsylvania, just about ninety minutes from Pittsburgh. I had seen several other Frank Lloyd Wright houses and hotels across the country, and I knew that Fallingwater was certainly an attraction. So, with that in mind, off my wife and I went in August of this year. And, somewhat to my surprise, it turned out to be a much more interesting trip than I ever expected.

To begin, let me confirm that the three rivers are the Allegheny and the Monongahela, which meet in downtown Pittsburgh and combine to form the Ohio River, which then flows for nearly a thousand miles until it joins the Mississippi at the southern tip of Illinois. One of the first things I did, being a longtime boater, was book a tourist-boat ride that encompassed all three rivers. (Not the most exciting boat ride ever, but it did offer an interesting perspective on the city.)

Of all the things that we saw in Pittsburgh, four stand out. The first is the architecture in the city, which is incredibly diverse—lots of relatively new and architecturally significant buildings, intermixed with late nineteenth and early twentieth century landmarks that combine to produce a wonderful reason for extended walks in every direction.

The second sights that one must see are the two inclines, the Duquesne and the Monongahela, that date back to the 1870s and have been in continuous operation since. Each is essentially two small cog-railway cars that carry passengers up and down the short but very steep ride from the banks of the Monongahela River to a section of the city perched high on the hillside above. Just think of the Palisades along the Hudson River

and you'll get the idea. Each is a short ride, very well worth the \$2 fare, and the fact that they have been operating for nearly a hundred and fifty years is incredible.

The next surprise we found in Pittsburgh was the many, many colleges and universities that are located there. Many we knew; several we did not. We drove by Duquesne, Carnegie Mellon, the University of Pittsburgh, Washington & Jefferson, and Chatham University just to name a few. And the University of Pittsburgh has a huge medical center and hospital right in the heart of the city.

There are also several performing arts venues in the city, including one that features the life and works of August Wilson and is definitely worth a visit. And, of course, there are two well-known sports stadiums right in the middle of the city: PNC Park, where the Pirates play, and Acrisure Stadium (formerly known as Heinz Field), where the Steelers play. Each is a short subway ride from almost anywhere in the city, and on game days one of the many bridges over the Allegheny River is actually closed to automobile traffic so people can simply walk across the river!

And, of course, we drove the seventy miles to visit Fallingwater, where we spent three or four hours. For those who are Frank Lloyd Wright fans, it is well worth the trip. And, as a bonus, upon the recommendation of one of the parking attendants at our hotel (the William Penn), we stopped at Ohiopyle, a fascinating little town and state park on the banks of the Youghiogheny River, an ideal spot for hiking, swimming, bike riding, and more.

Finally, on the way back to our hotel, we learned that one can stand simultaneously in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Maryland! Who knew? All in all a very interesting and enlightening trip.

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## A MAGIC MOMENT OF MADNESS (SOME CALL THIS SPIDER CIDER)

*Richard Byrd*

**Time:** The Unpleasant Present

**Place:** The headquarters of the Intercontinental Mind, Body, and Thought Control Cartel

**Ronald:** Top of the morning. I greet you my fellow/female despots-degenerates-bottoms feeders on the morning of henomatia-juju-lucisprine, one of our most sacred of all holy days. For on this date 666 time parcels past, our founders, the Order of Beloved Infidels, infused the land with the sanguine liquid of those whose coriums are bluer than Indian ink, from which a new empire was spawned.

**Macdonald:** I'm as sentimental as the next person, but let's move forward. Your man Corstairs has spent two billion frogskins in the past six lunar cycles.

**Betty:** Let us on peep the results.

**Crocker:** Hump hip hurray, let our impatience cause us to be delinquent in paying homage to our gore mothers and fathers.

**Mary:** Give it to Bikey, he'll lick anything.

**Poppins:** What do you think Walton?

**Walton:** I feel we should give Mr. Corstairs the benefit of the doubt. While a great deal of expense has gone into this project, the rewards will be well worth the expense and then some. Bear in mind, if he has failed, we can always dissect and disintegrate him.

**Corstairs:** Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention. I understand a lot of time and money has been invested in this endeavor. However, if I can have a few chronological-meters of your time, I assure you when I'm done you will concur your investment has been well worth the effort. I ask you to direct your attention to this device in my hand. You will notice how portable it is. Do not let its small size fool you. It possesses the perfect combination of powered range. It is known as the Laser Phaser. Similar to a conventional laser, it can amplify any color of the spectrum. The phaser aspect enables it to control, depending on the color one uses, any one of the five senses, touch, sight, hearing, taste, and spell. Think of the possibilities, with the red they will see the world through any eyes we decide upon. With the blue, they will feel up, down, sideways, or backwards, whatever we deem fit for the occasion; the orange, green, and blue are

geared for the other three senses. An added benefit is the other two colors, indigo and violet, can be used to control the emotions. Case in point, fear, envy, hate, love are ours to control with the flip of a switch. Each unit has a range of ten million of the citizenry. Its being portable enables us to mount them virtually anywhere. With ten units, we can control the entire populace of this nation. With a mere 700 units, the world is ours to rule. *Betty, Ronald, Mary, Macdonald, Poppins, Crocker in unison:* Long Live the Tin Man, Sig Hip Hump Heil Away, in the name of the Tar-Strangled-Banner, this world is ours. Neuron by neuron, we will rule the world. What do you think, Walton?

*Walton:* To hell with the world, the universe and beyond is ours; forever and a day, the universe and beyond is ours.

They all raise their glasses to drink a hearty cheer toast. Within six hundred seconds, they all commence to scream in agony as their vital organs begin to permanently shut down. The Hungry Angry Children on the Milked Chocolate Hill having learned of this heinous venture, realized it must be budded in the nip. They destroy the insidious mechanism smashing it into a million molecules. As a precaution, they demolish all the research notes and incinerate the edifice until nothing but dust and ash remain.

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## PAIN

*Judy Hampson*

It's hard to remain optimistic in the midst of pain. As it creeps over your body, every action, every thought, is dominated by it. When Advil doesn't restrain it, and Tylenol merely dents it, inner resources have to take over.

Sleep becomes a stranger, one that has to be lured into the bedroom at night with warm tea and cold icepacks and distractions like flickering blue screens or a comforting book. When it comes at last, your body melts into the bedclothes, warm and snug, and dreams take over the waking nightmares.

Are we living too long? Are our bones not equipped to last three score and ten, as Psalms promised? In the Bible, Psalm 90:10 states, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

This verse suggests that life is short and full of trouble and that death is inevitable. It also conveys that anything beyond seventy years of life is a bonus.

What about Noah, who was 600 when he built the Ark, a rather Herculean task. Or Sarah, who gave birth when she was ninety? Don't we have amazing medicine now that can stretch our lives longer than our forebears, supposedly? Why is it so difficult to age?

For so long we were oblivious, sailing through life with only moderate discomfort, more mental than physical. We observed aging relatives, struggling to get in and out of chairs or hobbling down the street, and never for one moment considered that would be us one day. We blithely said we would live well into our nineties, never thinking what that would actually feel like, what frustrations we would encounter. That turning over in bed would become a challenge, our secure place where we used to thrash around, churning the bedding, sending pillows crashing to the floor as our dreams fired our limbs into action. Now we lie mute and still, every action carefully thought out, each exit to the bathroom a declaration of war with our bodies.

We search for the sunrise that gives some relief as an excuse to start the day, to stop fighting the darkness that can seem so oppressive when in pain.

As we watch the sky lighten, the shapes of trees become defined against the dappled greyness of a fall morning. Today will be better. Moving around brings some relief, and there is the promise of an early brew and aroma of warm toast to savor. Such simple pleasures bring us comfort.

Sharing our situations brings no relief. Our descendants do not understand, and we don't want them to. Why scare them with what is inevitable? Sometimes my daughter looks at me with knowing eyes, for she too has known pain, but not like mine. I don't want her to, try to make light of it, pretend that really it's not that bad. But it is.

Not every day, not every hour, but more than I can sometimes cope with. Someone asked me recently: "Do you ever contemplate suicide?"

"Of course not." I replied, "I have too much to live for!" And I do. But there is that occasional, sneaking feeling, too awful to say out loud, that death will be such a release, one day.

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## CONFESSION: I'M A MEMORIAL SERVICE JUNKIE

*Arlynn Greenbaum*

It all started on March 13, 2006, when I went to a memorial service for the playwright Wendy Wasserstein. I had learned about it in *The New York Times*. It was at the Lincoln Center Theater, and it was free. I was a huge fan of Wendy Wasserstein, and the price was right, so off I went. There were video interviews of her, famous actors enacting scenes from some of her shows, and funny and touching tributes from friends and family. I was blown away. They gave out a playbill, which I still have, with tributes from dozens of luminaries who knew and loved her. After that day, I was hooked.

At John Leonard's memorial, the famous book reviewer was eulogized by Toni Morrison, E. L. Doctorow, and Gloria Steinem, among others, and Eugenia Zukerman played two musical pieces. Among the speakers at Studs Terkel's memorial were Walter Mosley and Jimmy Breslin. Saul Bellow's service at the 92nd Street Y featured Jeffrey Eugenides, Ian McEwan, William Kennedy, and Martin Amis. Frank McCourt's was at Symphony Space and hosted by Isaiah Sheffer. There were videos of Frank and his brother Malachy and tributes from James Naughton and Colum McCann. Betty Comden's was at the Majestic Theatre, and the presenters included Lauren Bacall, Lucie Arnaz, Christine Ebersole, Phyllis Newman, Elaine Stritch, and Barbara Cook.

You can see why I was hooked. These people being celebrated were hugely talented and special, and I was glad to be there as they received the tributes they deserved.

Then in 2009, my friend Eileen Sharaga and I went to *New York Magazine* founder Clay Felker's memorial at the Ethical Cultural Society. Speakers included Tom Wolfe and Gloria Steinem. The emcee was Sir David Frost. Eileen told him how much she enjoyed his remarks, and he said he would see us at the reception—which we hadn't known about. The reception had a jazz band, hors d'oeuvres, and an open bar.

The next day, I had lunch with Alyse Myers, a friend from *The New York Times*. I told her about going to Clay Felker's memorial, and she was surprised that I would go to a memorial for someone I didn't know. When I told her about all the others I had attended, she asked if she

could do a story about it. I agreed. On Sunday, July 5, 2009, in *The New York Times* “Style Section,” a long story ran with the headline, “I’m Honoring the Dead (And Look at These Great Seats).” Alyse wrote that she had started off skeptically and had called Gail Sheehy, the widow of Clay Felker, to ask how she felt about Eileen and me going to his memorial. Gail said she thought it was fine if it was a way for us to honor her late husband. At the end of the article, Alyse asked me whose memorial I was looking forward to. I told her I was a fan of Bea Arthur, who had died recently.

A few weeks after the story ran, Alyse called me and asked what I was doing the next Wednesday. “Why?” I asked. “We’re invited to Bea Arthur’s memorial at the Majestic Theatre,” she told me. Angela Lansbury, Sheldon Harnick, Norman Lear, Rue McClanahan, Anne Meara, Rosie O’Donnell, Chita Rivera, and Jerry Stiller were among the speakers. And we had house seats!

Many other memorials followed for Arthur Gelb, Gore Vidal, Julie Harris, Mary Travis, Marvin Hamlisch, and Toni Morrison, to name a few. Elaine Stritch’s memorial was a star-studded affair with Nathan Lane, Bernadette Peters, Hal Prince, Betty Buckley, Christine Ebersole, and many others paying tribute and telling hilarious stories.

Most of the memorials I’ve attended were open to the public, but two were by invitation—Nora Ephron’s and Christo’s wife, Jean Claude. Nora’s was at Lincoln Center, and she had planned the whole thing. Speakers included Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson, Martin Short, Mike Nichols, Delia Ephron, Meryl Streep, and Rosie O’Donnell.

Finally, the one I thought was really over the top was for Christo’s wife, Jean Claude. It was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The service was held in the Temple of Dendur. Mayor Bloomberg spoke about their installation of *The Gates* in Central Park. Then there was a huge reception in the Great Hall with big slides of their works, music, champagne, and hors d’oeuvres. It was quite something!

The last memorial I attended was for Ann Reinking in 2023. So, if you hear of a memorial for someone famous, please let me know. I’m rarin’ to go!

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2024 – 2025

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**Q** REVIEW