



Reflections

in poetry and prose

2018



UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS • RETIRED TEACHERS CHAPTER

REFLECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

It is always a pleasure to experience the creativity, insights and talents of our retired members, and this latest collection of poems and writings provides plenty to enjoy!

Being a union of educators, the United Federation of Teachers knows how important it is to embrace lifelong learning and engage in artistic expression for the pure joy of it. This annual publication highlights some gems displaying the breadth of intellectual and literary talents of some of our retirees attending classes in our Si Beagle Learning Centers. We at the UFT are quite proud of these members and the encouragement they receive through the union's various retiree programs.

I am happy to note that this publication is now celebrating its 25th anniversary as part of a Retired Teachers Chapter tradition reflecting the continuing interests and vitality of our retirees. The union takes great pride in the work of our retirees and expects this tradition to continue for years to come.

Congratulations!



Michael Mulgrew

PRESIDENT, UFT

REFLECTIONS

in poetry and prose

Welcome to the 25th volume of *Reflections in Poetry and Prose*. Reflections in Poetry and Prose is a yearly collection of published writings by UFT retirees enrolled in our UFTWF Retiree Programs Si Beagle Learning Center creative writing courses and retired UFT members across the country.

We are truly proud of Reflections in Poetry and Prose and of the fine work our retirees do. Many wonderful, dedicated people helped produce this volume of Reflections in Poetry and Prose.

First, we must thank the many contributors, UFT retirees, many of whom participated in the creative writing classes at our centers, and also our learning center coordinators, outreach coordinators and instructors who nurture talent and encourage creative expression.

To our Communications Coordinator Lynn Lospenuso; to our Editorial Committee of Genevieve Richards-Wright, Karen Millard, Gail Sternfeld and Cheryl Richardson; and to the UFT Graphics Department: A big thank you for a job well done.

We hope you enjoy reading *Reflections in Poetry and Prose*.



Tom Murphy
RTC CHAPTER LEADER



Gerri Herskowitz
DIRECTOR, UFTWF RETIREE PROGRAMS

REFLECTIONS
in poetry and prose

TABLE OF CONTENTS

AUTHOR	TITLE	
Roberta Ann Afflitto	SIXTY FIVE.....	Page 1
Martha Andujar	A MEMORY.....	Page 2
Ann Marie Antenucci	NICKNAMES.....	Page 3
Risa Baghdadi.....	1969.....	Page 4
Ilene Bauer.....	TWO SIDES OF A COIN.....	Page 6
Elinor Baumbach.....	DAYBREAK.....	Page 7
Vivian Bergenthal	FAMILY REUNION (AMSTERDAM) “IT’S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL”	Page 8
Victor Bianco	CHILDHOOD’S NEIGHBORHOOD A MEMOIR.....	Page 10
Judy Bloom	SATURDAYS IN BROOKLYN.....	Page 12
Barbara McGuillicuddy Bolton	DO YOU LOVE ME?.....	Page 14
Barbara McGuillicuddy Bolton	THE NEWLYWED’S PRAYER.....	Page 15
Frank Bolton	ADVICE FROM THE BARBER.....	Page 16
Marianne Bongolan.....	LOOKING BACK.....	Page 18
Marianne Bongolan.....	GROWING UP.....	Page 19
Phyllis Bowdwin.....	INKLING.....	Page 20
Phillis Brown.....	QUIETNESS.....	Page 22
Yvonne Bruno.....	DRUMBEAT.....	Page 23
B. Lynn Carter.....	DAWN’S SONG.....	Page 24
Susan Collender.....	MAKE A DIFFERENCE.....	Page 27
Sheila Conticello	JOHN BY NIGHT.....	Page 28
James Cunningham.....	LUNCH WITH HILLARY (A MEMOIR)	Page 29
James Cunningham.....	SOLACE.....	Page 31
John DeSantis	negative spaces.....	Page 32
Lynn Easton.....	FOR MY GRANDCHILDREN: REMEMBER ME	Page 33
Lynn Easton.....	SONG OF LIFE	Page 34
Marcia Eversley.....	POSER.....	Page 35
Marcia Eversley.....	PROCRASTINATION (I IMAGINE IF...)	Page 36
Eugene Forsyth.....	I MISS HER.....	Page 37
Eugene Forsyth.....	WE BOTH MADE A PROMISE	Page 38
Judy Fritsch	THE END OF AN ERA	Page 39
Dianne Piankian Geiger.....	escape.....	Page 41
Dianne Piankian Geiger.....	the weaver.....	Page 42
Francoise Gewirtzman	LOOKING FOR CLAUDE MONET	Page 43
Francoise Gewirtzman	ODE TO THE REFUGEES	Page 44
Cyndy Gilbertson	DAWN IN THE BERKSHIRES-AUTUMN	Page 45
Cyndy Gilbertson	DAWN IN BROOKLYN	Page 46
Joan Gilgin	TO THE MOON.....	Page 47
Eric Glaberson.....	MY DOUBLE LIFE	Page 48
Mel Glenn.....	Q TRAIN ROMANCE.....	Page 50
Mel Glenn.....	THE FOUNTAIN.....	Page 51
Yolanda Hardy	LOST AND FOUND.....	Page 52
Eunice Harris	THE LAST DANCE.....	Page 53
Eunice Harris	TREASURED FRIENDS.....	Page 54
Sharon Hawkins	TECH SAVVY AND SOCIAL MEDIA FRIENDLY	Page 55
William Lemmon	ODE TO ACANDLE.....	Page 57
Barbara Levitt	THE MAN I KNOW	Page 58

REFLECTIONS
in poetry and prose

Janet Lieberman.....	MY LOST ANDROID.....	Page 59
Jocelyne Lindor	JUVENILE LOGIC	Page 60
Jocelyne Lindor	DISCLAIMER	Page 61
Madeline Mandel.....	LITTLE LEO.....	Page 62
Madeline Mandel.....	WHY WRITE?.....	Page 63
Lucille Mattioli-Baron.....	ZIA O SORELLA AUNT OR SISTER.....	Page 64
Edith Merle	LOSING COUNT	Page 65
Ted Mieszczanski	GROWING UP BX	Page 66
Teena Miller	SINGAPORE BEFORE DAWN.....	Page 68
Teena Miller	THERE IS NO BAD WEATHER	Page 69
Yvonne R. Milton	ONE MAGIC MOMENT	Page 70
Constance Mitchell.....	ON THE KNEELING BUS	Page 71
Eva Morris	THE BEACH HOUSE.....	Page 72
Selma Reva Newman	MY FANTASY DATE	Page 73
Selma Reva Newman	ENCOURAGEMENT.....	Page 74
Edmond Paul Nicodemi	UNREACHABLE STAR	Page 75
Deborah Palmo	THE EMPTY ROOM	Page 76
Suni Paz	EXCEPTIONAL REQUEST.....	Page 77
Lorraine Pearson	RED PEN ENCOURAGEMENT.....	Page 79
Dorothy Prideaux.....	GIFTS GIVEN/GIFTS RECEIVED	Page 80
DM Rankins	first day	Page 81
Terry Riccardi	ON STARTING MY MEMOIR	Page 82
Jane Rose	MAILSTROM.....	Page 84
Donna Rubens	GRUMPY	Page 85
Pamela Salmon	LONLINESS	Page 86
Betty Samuels	WHO WOULD HAVE KNOWN.....	Page 87
Roseann Saracino	THE CAT WHO WAS AFRAID OF MICE.....	Page 88
Ellen Schwartz	CHILDREN'S FIRST HOLIDAY IAN AND ALAN'S FIRST THANKSGIVING DAY PARADE ..	Page 89
Leslie Selbst	ARISTOCRACY	Page 90
Greta Singer	BULLYING: FIFTIES STYLE	Page 91
Vivian Skinner.....	SILENCE IS	Page 92
Christine Soper	THE ESCAPE ARTIST.....	Page 93
E. Mildred Speiser.....	HOW I BEAT THE ODDS	Page 96
Sylvana Swinburne	THE BOX	Page 98
Dotti Anita Taylor	LOVE'S THE KEY	Page 99
Dotti Anita Taylor	A SONNET	Page 100
Gloria Taylor.....	HUMOR TECHNIQUE SECOND OPINION.....	Page 101
Adrienne Toomer.....	HAIKU REVERIE.....	Page 102
Adrienne Toomer.....	my song.....	Page 103
Linda Torres.....	ODE TO BLUE ROSES.....	Page 104
Linda Torres.....	MY ROCKING CHAIR	Page 105
Wendy J. Trontz	THE MYSTERY WOMAN	Page 106
Wendy J. Trontz	THE WHISTLER.....	Page 107
Anita Weisenfeld	WRITER'S BLOCK.....	Page 108
Sarah Williams-Harrigan	THE SHAKESPEARE INCIDENT (A SKIT IN TWO SCENES)	Page 109

SIXTY FIVE

BY ROBERTA ANN AFFLITTO

Mirror, mirror on the wall.
Last year, wasn't I a bit more tall?
New wrinkles appear with each passing week.
What's that noise? Did my knee just creak?
To put on makeup, I squint my eyes.
Can those two trunks really be my thighs?
I feel a pain in my left hip.
My pants are snug, hope they don't rip.
My neck is stiff when I dry my hair.
Flabby arms waving, like flags in the air.
Was that a twinge I felt in my back?
What happened to my up-standing rack?
"Rusty years" are now, I heard them say.
I smile and go out to enjoy this day.

A MEMORY

BY MARTHA ANDUJAR

A bright, sunny day,
I see the people are there again today.
They stand on the corner of Essex Street and Sutter Avenue
In front of a closed door,
Forming a twisted line.
Like a multi-colored collage
Their faces and clothes blend together
And I see vibrant colors:
Browns, reds, whites, blues, blacks and greys.
Some chairs are scattered around
For the seniors and the disabled.
People speak in a quiet tone,
While others are silent.
All have shopping carts or shopping bags
Patiently, they wait for the truck that brings the food.

My eyes linger on the scene,
As thoughts take me back to an earlier time
When I stood on such a line.
A 22 year old college student and single parent
Surviving on two hundred dollars a month.
Waiting and hoping to receive the government issued
Rice, beans, eggs and canned meat.
Now watching the people
I want to call out to them,
Offer words of encouragement like,
“Though you are struggling now,
You are not alone.
Don’t give up. Life can change.
I know. Life certainly changed for me.”

But I didn’t share those words with them today,
Because I began to reflect
On the many problems facing the United States
And the rest of the world.
Yes, I believe things will change one day;
Hopefully soon.
But today, I am just going to walk home
And write myself a poem.

NICKNAMES

BY ANN MARIE ANTENUCCI

What's in a name? Or better still, what's in a nickname?
Does a nickname reflect who we are, or just the opposite?
Skinny. Lefty. Tiny.
Are we saddled with a nickname — sometimes for life — given to us by our childhood friends?
Pokey. Wise Guy. Sweetie.
How about your attitude?
Missy. Diva. Macho.
Are you hiding your identity or nationality with a nickname?
Domenica — Mimi
Santa — Sandy
Giuseppina — Jo
Salvina — Sally

According to the dictionary, a nickname “adds or replaces the actual name of a person in a shortened form of a proper name.” A certain Italian organization uses a whole set of carefully chosen nicknames in order to describe its members.

Patsy. Rat. Stooly. Bully. Shady.
Chief. Squeaky. Pigeon. Swifty.
Is your nickname a sign of endearment?
Honey. Precious. Sweetheart.
Or does it indicate a lack of hygiene?
Smelly. Sweaty. Pigpen.

Would you want to share a hamburger with Killer at your family picnic?
Do you think Stupid could balance your bank statement each month?
Would you be comfortable meeting with Butch in a dark alley at midnight?
Why does Carmela become Cammi?
Annuzzata — Nuzzie?
Angela — Lina?
Antoinette — Toni?
Francesca — Fran?
Vincenza — Gina?

Nicknames can be fun, tragic, belittling, on the mark or completely inaccurate. Let's hope you are happy with your nickname.

1969

BY RISA BAGHDADI

Can you smell it?
Grass, not AstroTurf.
Cigarettes, before the Surgeon General told us we were killing ourselves.
Dirty hot dog water.

Can you feel it?
Cold rush of November air.
Being jostled by (mostly) men as they excitedly passed by.
Shoes sticking to floors dirty with spilled drops of beer.
Butterflies banging against my stomach.

Can you see it?
The brown paper bags filled with homemade sandwiches wrapped in wax paper, and that old plaid Thermos filled with hot chocolate.
The smaller bag hiding a flask of soul-warming hooch, tucked inside a jacket.
The dark tunnel, with the promising light at the end.
The blinding sunshine as I emerge, looking simultaneously at sky, ground, and cavern.
I almost fall over taking in the bigness of it.

Can you hear it?
The thunder of feet booming their way to their section.
The swoosh of corduroy pants and woolen jackets as every person stands for the National Anthem.
The cheers rising at the words “land of the free”.
The calls of boys hawking Cracker Jacks, peanuts, soda and beer.

Can you remember it?
My father and me.
Shea Stadium. My first professional football game.
The New York Jets. When they were on top, 1969. Don Maynard, Matt Snell, Emerson Boozer, George Sauer, and of course the star with the deep dimples and electrifying smile, Joe Namath. I was 12, and one of the only girls my age that I saw at the game that day. I didn’t care. I was actually sort of proud of that fact, and would brag about it at school the next morning. Stats, scores, and autographs made some girls annoyed at me, and all the boys jealous of me.

1969, when the most controversial headline on the back page of the Daily News was Joe’s famous “I guarantee it!” press statement or a picture of him modeling pantyhose and his white fur coat.

1969, when football was rough and great.
1969, when athletes weren’t murderers, wife-beaters, junkies, or millionaires.
1969, before helmet-cams documented concussions and paralyzing hits.

REFLECTIONS

in poetry and prose

1969, before corporations and greed made it hard for a father to bring his family to the stadium for less than the price of a mortgage payment.

1969, waiting at the Players' Entrance, hoping to catch a glimpse of a rookie or a star, and maybe get an autograph. No cell phones to snap a Facebook moment, no metal detectors at the gates, just grass and a parking lot to cross, to touch, to see, to meet the moment. That moment before they armed themselves with the sports armor of shoulder pads, chest protectors, helmets, green and white jerseys, and black streaks at the top of their cheeks.

Those happy Sundays spent with my father at Shea Stadium in Queens, New York happened every football weekend until 1975. Today's Jets play woeful seasons in New Jersey. I am hard pressed to recall the names of more than three players. Most autumns find me watching them in my living room with my father and husband shaking their heads over bad calls and sad plays. We wait for the Boston cousins to send us their cheeky condolences on yet another loss, inviting us to come to The Dark Side and become Patriots fans.

Never. I will not cave. For a few Sunday hours, I can pretend it is 1969.

TWO SIDES OF A COIN

BY ILENE BAUER

She stands there in knickers,
A cap on her head,
Looking tomboyish, truant and tough
And a cigarette dangles
From unsmiling lips
To warn all she's not taking their guff.

It's a sepia snapshot,
The 20's, I'd guess,
The photographer long in his grave,
But the girl is my grandmother
Though I'll admit
It's an image she'd choose not to save.

All the years that I knew her,
So quiet and prim,
Don't quite match with the face in the frame.
That's the reason I treasure
This photo of old,
'Cause both Jennys' were one and the same.

DAYBREAK

BY ELINOR BAUMBACH

Early morning
Startled movement
And large dark eye,
A threshold dream
Of hoof and tail in
Manicure of grass and fence.
They live with us,
The stolid grey rabbit
Behind the bush
The squirrel's hot-footing among the branches
And birds, birds everywhere
Calling, singing
Swirling over land
And sea
Where whales breach and rise
In foamy wave.
And the swift brown doe
Who knew me, yes?
As I knew her
Deeply

FAMILY REUNION (AMSTERDAM)
“IT’S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL”

BY VIVIAN BERGENTHAL

After wandering around and through many streets in the neighborhood, while asking people for directions, I finally approached the famous plaza known as Dam Square. The well-known department store, *De Bijenkopf* ★, with its huge and beautiful structure sat at the rear of the plaza. The grand sign situated atop and across the roof was impossible to miss. I crossed the plaza and entered, while admiring lovely displays which greeted me. I meandered around and through part of the ground floor and then rode the escalator up to the top floor. It was there that I was supposed to meet up with my daughter and her family for lunch. As I had already eaten an early lunch, I was planning on simply having some tea while enjoying the meet-up.

While engaged in moving about I couldn’t help finding myself drifting back in time to another visit to the shop, which had taken place with my mother. I’m not sure how long ago it was. We did celebrate my mom’s birthday in Holland after she turned 90, which was eleven years ago. And, of course, we had been there many years before, as well. On that last trip with my mom, I remember falling in love with a soft teddy bear which seemed to be staring at me as I came down one of the aisles. My mom agreed that he was the cutest and cuddliest of all those on display, which led to my purchase. Teddy still lives with me to this day and he continues to send out signals of fondness. I also recall that on that day we ran into someone that my mother knew on one of the lower floors. It’s possible that I knew her, too.

While contemplating that last scenario, I suddenly had the belief that on this very day I might once again run into someone I knew. I realized that it was a far-fetched feeling or idea, but it remained with me, nonetheless.

My daughter and her family did finally arrive, and we spent a lovely time together eating and drinking while jokes and stories were interchanged. After some time, we all began heading towards the escalators. I was last in line as I was enjoying looking at all the food offerings in the stalls along the way. The scents were enticing, as well. I slowly approached the area where the family was gathering. Apparently my grandchildren were engaged with peering through binoculars alongside the highest window on the floor. They were perched above the canal, so it was a perfect place to hone in on. I continued to enjoy taking in the sights when suddenly I came to an abrupt halt. I was forced to stop in my tracks by reverberating sounds. What permeated the air was a clearly, loud-pitched calling of the name “Vivianne” with a Dutch accent. The sounds came from my left side and seemed to float across the room. I slowly pivoted to my left and found myself face-to-face with a group of people seated at a table alongside the banister. A rotund gentleman with a wide grin was staring at me as he called my name, while smiling and waving his arms. It didn’t take me long to recognize him and some members of his family. I called out in excitement, “Is it really you?” I had met them in December in the town of Phuket, Thailand, where I was on holiday with my son and his family. I couldn’t believe my eyes. It was quite a surprise. Of course, we all started excitedly chatting and my daughter and her kids soon joined in. Eventually, the gentleman’s wife came up the escalator with her two daughters and joined our little celebration. The whole conference was quite amazing. I told the family that I was planning on meeting the lady’s parents that

evening. This part of the family was visiting from Australia, as the wife was there to attend a medical conference. I had originally met them in a yoga class at the hotel in Phuket. Their adventure in Thailand was a family reunion, with the other daughter being the first one I had hooked up with. She had lived in New York for four years before returning to Holland. Apparently, at *De Bijenkopf* it was actually the ten year old son who first recognized me and quickly grabbed his father's arm to tell him that I was approaching.

My evening meet-up with the older family members took place on *The Prinsengracht*, a lovely canal not far from where I was staying. We had tea while sitting outside, perched atop the canal at a café. Lovely, colorful trees graced the streets above and tour boats travelled beneath us as foreigners took in the sights.

While enjoying our get-together, I slowly began to share my story. While looks of great astonishment slowly crept across their faces, I spoke of my encounter with their family members earlier that very day. Without a cue we all broke out in unison, singing the song, "It's a Small World After All."

**De Bijenkopf - The Beehive*

CHILDHOOD'S NEIGHBORHOOD
A MEMOIR

BY VICTOR BIANCO

I remember a next-door boy, Roberto Sanchez, who used to hang out with me between age seven and age eleven since we were going to school together, but in different classes. His grandfather, Don Gomez, was a retired army colonel with light brown hair and a crew cut who frequently wore a gaucho hat and leather boots.

Don Gomez, as he was known in the neighborhood, had always a stoic posture and managed things as if he were still in the army. His grandson, Roberto complained about the man being strict. This neighbor's most precious possession was a beautiful beige horse he called Zaino that he kept in a small stable behind his house. This family had a large land parcel with open space where the horse could roam. Although many children in the neighborhood were afraid of Don Gomez because they perceived him as menacing, a few of us tried to approach him hoping to have a chance to pet the horse.

I was particularly mesmerized by this fantastic animal and many times, after school, would hang out with Roberto to have a chance to be close to the horse. On a good afternoon, I would not only pet Zaino, but also brush his long tail and part of the body I could reach. I still remember the smell of his skin and the strong vibrant muscles moving and twitching under my fingers.

I had to wait at least one year to earn the privilege to mount Zaino and go for a gentle ride. When I was riding high up on the horse, the whole world seemed to change before my eyes as he took me around. The ride on the horse brought back memories from my early childhood such as sitting on my father's knees, the bicycle rides and the motion experienced during the month-long boat trip from Italy.

I was also mesmerized at the fact that my fantasies about Argentina were becoming reality as I was enjoying the interactions with this beautiful horse. Since there was no fence between the properties, the ride expanded into my backyard where we had several trees that included apples, figs, plums, pears and one large walnut tree. It was a lot of fun to ride between the trees touching the upper branches or the fruits while sitting on top of the horse.

Unfortunately, after only a few years the horse became ill of what we were told was old age and the horse was taken away. Don Gomez was a different person after the horse was no longer there. His demeanor looked no longer menacing with his shoulders bent downwards, and he sat on a rocking chair under his porch drinking mate* for many hours. Even his walk changed from a stoic posture to a deflated one.

A few months later, the family divided the huge backyard into parcels and the lots were quickly sold. A new family with three children bought the lot that was the space between our properties; a house was quickly built and occupied. This event started a rapid development that changed the neighborhood when the population more than doubled within a two-year period and we were forced to adapt and adjust to this phenomenon. One of the things the kids felt as a big loss was that we no longer had very large open spaces where we used to run around and play unrestricted soccer games. The change was welcomed by many, but felt that the urbanization did not improve

REFLECTIONS

in poetry and prose

the quality of life we had enjoyed prior to the development. I missed the open spaces where the kids could freely roam and enjoy the outdoors.

*mate – a South American caffeine-rich infused drink

SATURDAYS IN BROOKLYN

BY JUDY BLOOM

Saturday afternoon – Jumping onto the B train and getting off at a stop in an unfamiliar neighborhood. This is my way of exploring Brooklyn. I get off the train at 4th Avenue. Here, in Bay Ridge the homes stand like modern castles, set back from the street, surrounded by stone walls for privacy. The front door of this house is the door to heaven. Up the graceful steps are perched marble animals, here a tiger, there a dolphin; tail in the air. The door, huge, halfway up to the second floor, embellished with as much gold as possible, has a couple of cherubs carved into the dark, glossy wood. There are sculpted trees in the lush gardens full of petunias and rose bushes. Makes me wonder who lives here? A family? Young children? I can see her in my mind, pushing a stroller, pricey black wool slacks and a blue long-sleeved sweater, and all her jewelry sparkling. She rushes home to make her good-looking husband a steak dinner, rare for her, well-done for him. I remember running home to make dinner for my husband, and I suddenly yearn for those days. They were full of promise.

Another Saturday – I catch the F train to Court Street and stroll around Brooklyn Heights. It's a formal neighborhood, old buildings, very historic. I glimpse centuries old brownstones with lavish entrances and polished windows, two stories tall. There are abundant crawling ivy and perfect red geraniums in the perfect window boxes. These homes are kept simple and proud. Some of the dark oak doors, heavily polished, wear tasteful wreaths. They are pastel, springtime themed for the season. These are the homes with the young kids. I catch a glimpse of a family through the dining room window, and I watch the young millennial parents and a small boy with blond hair, around five and a slightly older girl, also blond. They relax cozily at the table eating an early dinner. They laugh and talk and seem to love each other. I'm a little jealous.

Entering a dark, somewhat gloomy vintage shop on Montague Street; I almost have to squint to see some of the items for sale there. I delicately pick up a beaded antique bag with a gold chain handle and an embroidered red rose on the front. There sits a pile of books, dusty and ripe with possibilities. An old doll in a frayed straw hat and a faded pinafore perches on a shelf next to an old red toy train. An antique doll with staring eyes frightens me and I put it down quickly. Here's a pair of long, graceful old silver earrings that will look great with my new black dress when I lose 10 pounds. I buy the earrings and a Lucite pin with a small red rose embedded on it. It looks like something handmade from back in the day. The pin is for my mother. I hope it makes it, at least, to her jewelry box. I forego purchasing the books. I have too many books already.

When I was young girl, around 8 or 9, my father would come and find me, all warm and toasty, sitting on the radiator reading a book, behind the white flowing curtains in the living room. He'd ask me what I was reading and I would tell him, showing him the book cover. He would smile, ruffle my hair and retreat into his own life.

I was allowed to read while I ate. As a matter of fact, we all read at the table. We sat there with our separate book holders and our separate books. The table was round, taking up most of the yellow kitchen. We used the blue dishes for dinner, which was always healthy, meat, veggies and potatoes (always potatoes), and except for my mother's heavy hand with garlic, tasted good. I read my books, my mother read novels and my father read the newspaper, propped up on the potato dish.

Getting off the subway at 69th Street on Saturday evening. I'm in Bensonhurst. Walking down the dark street, lined with lush old maple trees and elms for shade, the smell of a ginkgo tree close by greets me. There's an old glowing red neon sign in the basement apartment window of the house. Inside are four rows of folding chairs. On one of them, a blond girl is perched on her boyfriend's lap. The other chairs are filled by mostly guys. Picture after picture hangs on the wall on the left-side of the room. The red neon sign blinks "TATOOS." Out comes my laptop. Hours online were spent searching for designs until I found this beauty. It has dark, curvy vines, four red roses intertwined; a larger vine with three red rose creeps up the back to the left shoulder. I march outside to see if I can get internet service. There's none in this old basement.

I signed my name on a piece of paper when I came in. Anthony works until about 2 AM. If he gets up to your name on the list, you get your turn. If not, come back tomorrow. I prepare to wait. The young man sitting next to me asks me, "Are you a cougar?" "What's a cougar?" We start chatting and he tells me about his drug addiction. "Methamphetamines," he says. I am called in for my tattoo at eleven o'clock.

Anthony and I admire the picture of the tattoo I am getting. As he expertly uses the needle to apply the ink, reds, greens and black, we talk about ourselves. Both nude from the waist up, I'm leaning across the table, my back to him. I feel safe. "My motorcycle accident changed my life," he tells me. "My second divorce changed mine," I answer. "My cousin Frankie stepped up to the plate," he says. "Four surgeries on my leg after the accident, but Bobby my old buddy, let me down. One day, I went to church with Frankie. I took my pain, fear, and my self-pity along with me that day. I walked into the little chapel over at Paces – the one that's got the statue of Mary, and I remembered loving her as a kid. I remembered my faith. Now, I live as a Christian. The accident made me realize that I was reckless, irresponsible... "Hell, I almost died. God gives me peace," he tells me. I leave out the story of my personal growth. He's just too young and he won't get it. He's not a woman.

DO YOU LOVE ME?

BY BARBARA MCGILICUDDY BOLTON

I didn't choose to love you
You led me on, my man,
And I let myself be led on
Passion without commitment
Living unto myself
In a studio in the Village
I turned a deaf ear to your proposals
Told myself: I will say nothing
The night the lights went out all over the city
I was swallowed in darkness
So, so alone for much too long
When the power came back
Compelled to give what only I could give
Wanting what was best for you, for us,
I dialed your number
Yes, I said, yes, all right, yes, yes.

THE NEWLYWED'S PRAYER

BY BARBARA MCGILICUDDY BOLTON

To gaze was to know
To know was to love
To love was to claim
To claim was to marry.
From this day forward
Neither pain nor privation
Nor any other person
Can desecrate our love
For from it and through it and in it
Not conforming to the vagaries of the present
But transformed by the oneness of ourselves
We shall live forever.

Dear God, may it be so.

ADVICE FROM THE BARBER

BY FRANK BOLTON

“Don’t cut it too short.”

“It looks better short. Remember last month, I went to that conference and you went to the barber. He cut it shorter and it looked really good.”

“She.”

“She?”

“I told you – the barber was a she. Cute. Peppy.”

“I remember. And I told you she probably was reminded of her grandfather when she cut your hair.”

“I thought that was a little unkind, if I remember.”

“But true.”

“Yes. I said it was probably true. She did a nice job but it was too short.”

“Don’t tip your head so much please.”

“I thought I was helping.”

“You weren’t.”

The woman steps away, looks, and reaching in, grabs a few strands of her husband’s hair between two fingers. Snip! She drops the hair into a paper bag, its top folded down, sitting on the ground.

“I don’t know why you don’t just let it fall onto the grass. It’s biodegradable.”

“When it was mostly black, I didn’t mind. But now that it’s white, I don’t like seeing it on the green grass.”

“When we first met, my hair was all black.”

“Not entirely – it was nearly white on the sides. That’s what made me notice you.”

“I didn’t have white hair at 34!”

“*Au contraire!* I liked the idea that you were older. I never dated younger men.”

“Until me.”

“Until you.”

He shifts in the chair. She snips above his right ear, combing the hair down again to see the result.

“So when you asked me in the car that time how old I was and you discovered I was 3 years younger than you, did it put you off?”

“It was too late.”

“And ever since, I’ve said that I’m married to an older woman.”

“I don’t resent it.”

She picks up a hair brush and teases his hair into place. She walks around the chair to inspect her work.

“So . . . a little advice.”

“From my barber. Barbers always give advice.”

“Yes – from your barber. Should I pre-decease you, don’t get yourself involved with a young woman. Like, for instance, that cute, perky woman who cut your hair last month.”

“Peppy.”

“Excuse me?”

“Peppy, not perky.”

“I stand corrected.”

“Why not? If she didn’t think of me as her grandfather.”

“Because she’d want a baby.”

“No.”

“Yes. Most young women want to have a baby.”

“*You* didn’t.”

“I wasn’t that young – and I already knew I wasn’t good mother material.”

She removes a towel from his neck and kisses the top of his head where his hair is thinnest.

“And she wouldn’t know that your beard turned gray perfectly symmetrically. I kept waiting from some gray to appear in some random place but it never happened.”

“It still could.”

She looks at him quizzically.

“It could turn pure white in some asymmetrical place.”

“Do you look in the mirror in the morning, sweetheart?”

“Every day – while I’m brushing my teeth.”

“Ah! Before you’ve had your coffee. Thus your brain doesn’t realize your beard is totally white.”

She picks up the paper bag and takes a few steps to the compost bin. He picks up the chair and starts walking to the house, but stops.

“So if you pre-decease me,” he calls to her, “you suggest I get involved with an *older* woman.”

Without skipping a beat, she says, “I suggest you do what I will do if you pre-decease me.”

“Which is?”

“Live with your memories.”

LOOKING BACK

BY MARIANNE BONGOLAN

In a real dark of the soul it is always three o'clock in the morning.
F. Scott Fitzgerald "Handle with Care" (1936)

Is it possible to tell the story of a life
to a perfect stranger?
Will that person feel the bitter taste
under the tongue of the narrator?
Will the listener shudder by the crack of the window,
or hear the muffled whispers from next door?
Will he detect the muted rage
under the unspoken history of long ago?
Can he feel the terror triggered
by crawling rodents in the dark or
the buzz of a flying bug suddenly hitting the wall
with a thump in the night – and then the silence...?

It could have been the other way around.
 She could have left the fight,
 She could have married the prince
 She could have gone far away
 She could have nodded to unlikely choices
 She could have ended it all ---

But those trains have left,
And she contemplates over the intractable choices.

Her person is neatly tied into a Gordian Knot
That no stranger understands
And no magic can find the true mirror
To the crux of her soul.

GROWING UP

BY MARIANNE BONGOLAN

I look back to all who came before with
ancestral rules and regulations.
Their silent nods left no room
for dissention like mine.

But I was born during noise of war,
dismissing expectations
and rebellion became my religion
the ebb and flow of struggle in my young self.

The need for power through fights and escape,
Rolling between revenge and reconciliation.
Fights I could only win through fantasy.

Fantasies I had!
I saw myself jumping in the Danube,
or climbing onto a train
with destination to No Man's Land.
Or taking off with the traveling circus
With no trace left behind --

and all the while, I was not free.
My worried parents were playing in my head,
As they cried in anguish for their lost child.
Their grief and guilt brought
vindication to my vengeful heart,
as I imagined them being trapped the same way I was.

But I woke up, still miserable,
A powerless child in a cage
Small and humiliated
Because I could not yet make the leap
To become that person I had to be.

INKLING

BY PHYLLIS BOWDWIN

It was the autumn of 1965. The morning sun beamed into Janine's window and lit up her new space. She stretched and did a dance. It was going to be a great day for shopping! The youngest of five children, Janine was the last to leave home. Her parents kept urging her to stay a while longer, but she was tired of being treated like a baby. She wanted her freedom and independence. It wasn't as if she hadn't learned the rules: Waste not, want not; if you can't afford to pay cash, you can't afford it -- save until you can, by then you may not want it; buying now and paying later will always cost you more; a penny saved, etc. She was working as a secretary, going to college at night, and had some money saved. When she found a cute affordable studio apartment, she moved out over her mother's feeble objections that she might not be ready.

Today was the day! She was going on a shopping spree to decorate her apartment. She had carefully planned and budgeted for each item on her list which was organized by the location of the stores so she wouldn't waste time or carfare zipping all over the city, north, south, east and west. She pulled money earmarked for each item from separate envelopes and put them in different areas of her wallet to avoid pulling out a large sum in any store, attracting unwanted attention. She put her carfare in a separate pocket, looked at her watch and was out of the door.

She hit Manhattan like the Road Runner, happily zipping in and out of stores, accumulating bags and making change as she went. She checked items off her list. Her last stop was Vercesi Hardware on Twenty-Third Street. She bought the special lock they carried exclusively, but it was a little more than expected and then there was the tax. She pulled out her change purse, counted out her coins and handed them over. She was done, with time to spare. She felt so efficient!

Janine reached the Twenty-Third Street subway station at Lexington Avenue and pulled out her change purse for her carfare. It was empty! She looked into each compartment of her wallet and her pockets, they were all empty, not a penny! She hadn't been paying attention as she hurriedly spent and spent, using up all her change and ending up with no cash -- not even enough for carfare or a phone call! But who would she call anyway? It was just after five pm. No one would be home or at work. They'd all be in transit! Perplexed, Janine stood riveted to the spot in the middle of the sidewalk, unable to think. Streams of strangers swiftly pushed and brushed past her in their hurry to get to their destination. It was getting dark. The wind was picking up. She shivered as an uneasy feeling crept into her stomach, rolled around the emptiness and sent a warning signal to her brain. Fear and hunger set in. She was stranded, alone and far from home. Tears welled up in her eyes as she racked her brain: How was she going to get home? She desperately searched her purse and pockets again for money. Not a cent! A low, hysterical wail rushed up her throat from the center of her being, but was suddenly quelled by another voice inside her. She emerged full force: "No crying!" Janine heard herself say. "That's not the way! Somebody will give me money to get home!" she declared, "and they'll feed me too!"

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than a tall man in a tweed blazer, grey slacks and blue oxford shirt materialized on the sidewalk several yards away. He was hurrying in her direction. As he got closer, she realized his dark piercing eyes, framed by owl-like eyebrows, were staring directly at her! He stopped abruptly.

“Janine?” The young man asked peering at her through thick horn-rimmed glasses.

“A, Albert?” She stammered in an incredulous quivering voice.

“Girl, where have you been?” He reached out and hugged her, lifting her off the ground.

“I haven’t seen you since junior high school – it’s been years! Let me take you to dinner so we can catch up!”

Albert gave her enough money to take a cab back to the Bronx. She never saw or heard from him again, and she never mentioned the incident to her family.

QUIETNESS

BY PHILLIS BROWN

Home alone no bones about it.
Aren't you afraid?
Shh, did you hear that?
No.
Me neither.
I don't hear anything.
Isn't that great.
I like it that way.
Who are you talking too?
I, myself and me
Peaceful
Quietness
Alone
I like it like this.

DRUMBEAT

BY YVONNE BRUNO

Sweating palms
Fingers taut
Leather stretched
And left to dry

Pulled over drums
ONE, TWO
And THREE
Three and four

Hear the beat from far away
The echo reaches near
And dies!
To start again

Dancing hands and fingers
Rebounding drum heads
Explosion of musical sounds
Synchronize

To Float----F-L-O-A-T!
The tom-tom beat.
Fills the air,
And dies----
To start
And dies
Once more!

DAWN'S SONG

BY B. LYNN CARTER

(THIS IS AN EXCERPT FROM A NOVEL THAT I'VE WRITTEN)

Chapter 27 - Dog Daze

"Siegfried's ears flew up. She was on her feet before I even knew what was happening. Baring her teeth, she emitted this, like, low growl that came from somewhere deep in her chest. Someone was coming. I cautioned her to quiet down. She did. Then the sound stopped."

"So that's where you slept, on the top landing?" Danny crushed the joint in an ashtray, sat up in the bed across the room, back against the wall, knees bent, unfocused eyes straight ahead.

"That was the plan," I said. "But the constant sound of people coming and going on the staircase kept Siegfried on high alert. There was no way to sleep. I was so exhausted. Even though it was cold, I decided that it would be just as safe and a lot quieter if we slept out on the roof." Danny lit another joint and from way over there on the other side of the tiny room, he listened.

The image of Siegfried and I huddled together on the rooftop bloomed in my mind. Siegfried . . . she was my blanket. She was my pillow. Her fur was my comfort and reassurance, the warmth of her body, the whisper of her heartbeat, all lulled me to sleep. I slept. I slept well.

"How long did you sleep on the roof?" he asked, smoke veiling his beautiful face.

"That one night. It was okay that one night," I said, trying to keep the tremor out of my voice. I knew I couldn't keep Siegfried, couldn't provide for her. So the next day I called my mother to tell her that although I would never go back home, I needed to bring Siegfried back. But it was her husband who answered the phone. He said that the dog was no longer welcome in his house."

I didn't tell Danny the effect that those words had on me. That once I heard what he said, I had trouble hearing much else over the white noise that went rushing through my brain. I didn't mention what else my mother's husband had said. Or at least, what I think he may have said that day. Something about a dog only having one master; that *he* was not that master. I think maybe he said something about it being dangerous; such a large animal who didn't respect his authority. I think he said that he wasn't my father and didn't care to be. I think that's what he said. But I didn't tell Danny any of this. What would he think? How did we even get on this subject?

"So what did you do?" With his eyes straight ahead, he was speaking to some unseen thing on the opposite wall. I sighed and plunged on.

"I spent that day trying to find a place for her . . . for us. I thought about asking my friend Josette but I knew her father Jonas had developed an allergy. So when night fell, we went back to the roof."

The memories having been resurrected so abruptly were seeping into my head in spikes and shocks and tangles of distorted flashbacks. I clasped my hands together, interlocked my fingers and squeezed tight as though I could somehow slow them down, squeeze them away. But the events of that night came flooding through. So I told the story in the most coherent way that I could manage.

Siegfried and I enveloped in our cocoon. Me asleep. Siegfried on her feet . . . a creaking sound. Siegfried baring her teeth . . . roars out a warning. The screech of the roof's door opening. Two dark figures silhouetted against the bright full moon. Two shadows, one female scantily dressed, staggering. One male, tall, lanky, sure footed. They halted. Siegfried, ferocious, snarling, snapping, a wild beast. Me holding her collar. Them standing, staring. The man, a creature, stepped into view, bony face contoured in shadow, eyes bright with malice set deep in their sockets, one front tooth missing, the other a chipped fang.

"Now looky what we got here." A ragged grin, breathing, panting, his chest heaving up and down, his body is quaking. Bile rising in my mouth. Me clinging to Siegfried's collar. Siegfried snapping, snarling out threats, clambering for release. "I'll bet that sweet young mouth of hers can give a real good blow job, much better than yours, bitch" he said addressing the woman. For some reason, she ventured a smile. It was really just a gummy, toothless grimace. She was gaunt, skin swinging off her skeletal frame, vacant eyes that saw nothing. She staggered, said nothing. "Now why don't you save us all a lot of time and trouble and tell your little puppy there to calm down."

Cold fear shot through my spine. My heart took off. I had to get away, get to the door. The skeleton woman teetered directly in my path. If I made a run for it she would be no obstacle. The man stood slightly off to one side. He was old, probably forty, thin, not in good shape. Based on where he stood, I was sure I could out sprint him. He took a step towards us. Siegfried went crazy. It was all I could do to restrain her. Something metal glinted in the moonlight, something ominous that he held in his hand. I knew I had to go for the door. This running through my head, Get away, get away, go! go! go! I dropped my gaze so as not to telegraph my intent. Then, releasing Siegfried I yelled,

"Let's go!" I charged forward, tackled the woman head on. Her body, like a sack of butterfly wings, gave way easily. She crumbled and fell. But Siegfried was not by my side. Once released she had charged the man, had taken him down, protecting me just liked she'd done with my mother's husband. His screams cut through the night air. At the door, I stopped and turned. "Siegfried, come-on girl, let's go!" She looked up, headed towards me. I was half way down the first landing when I heard it, Siegfried's howl. It was not a victory howl. It was a howl of pain then a whimper and then silence. *Siegfried!* Conflict and indecision shot through me. *Get away, get away, go! go! go!* played in my head like a needle stuck in a record's groove, over and over. *Get away, go!* Fear in control, adrenaline pushing me forward, my feet flying down the stairs, out of the building, into the frigid Bronx night . . . my eyes never looking back.

This, or some version of this, is what I told Danny as he sat up on his roommate's bed, on the other side of the world, in the dimly lit room with the psychedelic posters glowing, his back against the wall, his knees bent, his unfocused eyes staring straight ahead.

Then after a long awkward silence, without looking at me, he said,

"Did you ever find out what happened to your dog?"

"I woke up the next morning in Josette's house," I said. "I don't even remember how I got there. Anyway, I called my mother's house praying that she would be the one to pick up the phone. She was." Then never looking at him, I told him about that phone conversation:

"Mommy . . . Siegfried," I sobbed into the phone, tears streaming down my face.

“Dawny thank God! Siegfried’s here. What happened? Are you okay?”

“She’s what? She’s there?”

“Yes, she showed up late last night, limping, looking like she’d been in a fight with a wild animal or something. I was worried sick about you! What happened? Why isn’t she with you?”

“She’s hurt. How bad is it?”

“Yes! Like I said she’s hurt. She’s very badly hurt. She has some kind of a wound on her left side and there’s blood coming out of her ear. She can barely stand up. Are you okay? What the hell happened?”

“I’m fine. It’s a long story. I . . . um, I couldn’t find a place to stay, not with the dog. Well the thing is, she was defending me.”

“What?! Why didn’t you just bring her home. Why don’t *you* just come home. It’s time!” Obviously she didn’t know. Her husband didn’t tell her about the phone call, about how he didn’t want the dog in his house, about how it’s clear that he didn’t want me either. I thought about telling her what he said but for some reason I decided against it.

“It’s complicated Mom.”

“Well I patched her up as best as I could but she’s not looking good. We’re getting ready to take her to the vet. Where are you?”

“I’m at Josette’s.”

“Do you want to come? We’ll pick you up.”

“We? Meaning you and your husband?” The specter erupted, then his face impacting my face, the dread, the grief . . . the guilt.

“I wish you’d stop calling him that.”

“I keep forgetting his name. Anyway, I’ll pass on going. I’ll call you later to see what the vet said. If it’s okay I’d like to come by and see her later. He’ll be going to his plant; right?”

“Of course it’s okay. This is your home.”

“Right. Anyway, you can reach me at Josette’s. I think I’ll be staying here for a while.”

In Danny’s room there was this long silence . . . a time-out. It felt like time was needed. It felt like the story was just hanging there in the air; like it needed time to settle in, to nestle its way into all the room’s dimly lit nooks, to ease its way across the chasm, to reach out for Danny.

“So your dog, she was okay?”

“No,” I whispered. “They put her down.”

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

BY SUSAN COLLENDER

Make a difference many say
Remember to seize the day
Try to meditate, reflect, pray
helping others feel better today

I hope I've been a role model
for the kids, grandkids to see
To teach by example,
they also teach me
(especially in technology)
Set new goals every day
Hope I've made a difference
in life along the way

JOHN BY NIGHT

BY SHEILA CONTICELLO

A short, squat, slightly limping figure lumbered into the city building courtyard. He unlocked the steel and glass front door and took the elevator to the fifth floor. He limped along the hallway past three apartments till he came to #5D. The old man entered and went directly to his rented room on the horizontal bar of the L-shaped corridor of the large apartment. As usual, it was 10:30 p.m.

The old foreigner was of advanced years. Nonetheless, he kept long hours in his salvage business. There were always fires, damaged shipments, declined and sundry detritus of the trade, especially groceries. It was because of his dealings with grocer Jimmy that he had come to this apartment. Jimmy's wife, Ellen, had needed some extra income to pay for their son's college tuition and John's small monthly rent was part of the solution. Of course, she had to rent John the room on the QT because tenants were not allowed any kind of sub-lease. Since John left the apartment shortly after dawn and returned late at night, he was their ideal roomer.

Jimmy's adolescent kids, Shirley and Patrick, were instructed not to disclose the secret roomer. Their parents didn't need a rent increase or notice of eviction. Of course, teens often have a friend over who stays late at night and so the situation got complicated. At night, when either kid heard the lock tumbler click or John's thumps down the hall to the bathroom, they had to pretend not to have heard a sound. They had to create a distraction to block the friend from stepping out of the room into the long hallway and spying a dark, ancient figure in a loose, ill-fitting suit who had broken into the apartment. Every such episode was a real life sitcom!

Mrs. Dooley, an elderly Irish neighbor with a taste for gossip or scandal (preferably both) was curious about the "swarthy man" she had occasionally seen in the building. She had spied him on Ellen's floor and she was sure he was opening her door. Of course, she hadn't gotten close enough to be absolutely certain since she was on a landing almost one flight below her neighbor. Ellen proceeded to play the innocent and assured Mrs. Dooley that she was most definitely mistaken.

Roomer John was Lebanese but--funny story. In his business dealings he met a sturdy, young Irish girl who was a butcher. Maura had a great appetite and even remarked once "I could eat ten pounds of meat" when John invited her to a steak dinner. He had a serious crush on the woman and he even took her to the Metropolitan Opera in New York. She gave the swarthy foreigner a new lease on life; he lathered himself in Old Spice cologne, and had the Chinese laundryman press his shirts to perfection. John even invited Maura to attend a Billy Graham evangelical rally, which she reluctantly, but courteously declined because of her long standing Catholic beliefs.

But age progressed too rapidly for John. He learned that he had advanced diabetes and that he had to have a leg amputated. He left his apartment room for one in the hospital. The whole situation was too demoralizing for him. His fleeting fascination with Maura had ended with his illness. The lost limb was too much.

It was just two months later that John left to meet his Maker, but the old Lebanese had left behind; for an Irish grocer storyteller and his family, lasting tales of a mysterious nocturnal transient.

LUNCH WITH HILLARY (A MEMOIR)

BY JAMES CUNNINGHAM

“It Takes a Village to Raise a Child.” This was the title of a book written by Hillary Clinton back in the day; furthermore, it was the motto of my school, M.S. 226, in Ozone Park, Queens, N.Y. Since our school’s philosophy of education was in sync with hers, Mrs. Clinton decided to visit our school.

We only had several days to prepare for Hillary’s arrival, so we made a plan and followed it vigorously. Classrooms were cleaned thoroughly and new bulletin board paper and border paper were put up. Recent student work was displayed in precise geometric patterns. All the students were eager to show off what they learned in class and have their work displayed. Next, teachers and students worked on all the bulletin boards in all the hallways throughout the entire school. Everyone was busy and buzzing with expectation; it was truly a labor of love. Also, every teacher in the school wanted Hillary Clinton to enter their classrooms to see what they loved to do each and every day – teach.

Finally, on a beautiful spring day in the late 1990’s Hillary and her entourage of aides and secret service men arrived at our school. Our principal greeted her and they proceeded to the principal’s office. Mrs. Clinton spoke over the PA system and thanked us for inviting her. Hillary entered various 7th and 8th grade classes both regular education and special education. She was shocked to learn that our student body of 1,200 students was so diverse that we had students from 70 different countries in the world.

The principal had the daunting task of selecting several teachers from the 100 teachers employed in the school to be observed by Mrs. Clinton. Based on recent classroom observations, “master teachers” who employed the Best Teaching Practices, the Principles of Learning, Cooperative Learning and Thinking Maps in their classrooms were asked if they wished to be observed. All of the teacher candidates said “Yes,” right away.

The principal decided that the lunch would be at noon in the teacher’s cafeteria. The attendees would be: the principal, several assistant principals and deans, teachers on the Leadership Team who were chosen by other staff members, parents from the PTA and some teacher aides. Although Hillary Clinton’s visit was very special, the school day had to be on schedule. After conferring with Mrs. Clinton’s staff again, the principal noted that the luncheon for Hillary would be catered by a popular Italian restaurant, not from the school.

Before Mrs. Clinton’s visit, secret service men came to the school and blackened the small square window on every classroom door throughout the school building. The staff was told that the windows were blackened so that the students wouldn’t be able to look out into the hallways to see Hillary’s movements. Furthermore, certain closet doors, such as the janitor closet doors, were marked with a big black X the whole length of the door. These doors were then bolted with padlocks. The secret service men noted that these small rooms posed a security threat to Hillary and could be used by assassins. Secret service men with bomb-sniffing dogs walked throughout the hallways. The secret service with Hillary was given the word “CLEAR” over the walkie-talkie and Hillary proceeded to visit the chosen classrooms.

REFLECTIONS

in poetry and prose

Since I was on the Leadership Team, I received an invitation to the luncheon. There, I finally got a chance to see Hillary. Hillary ate with us, joked with us and was very likeable, gracious and “down to earth.” She praised us, our students and our principal. Finally, someone asked Hillary the “big” question: “Would you ever consider running for the Presidency?” She smiled and hesitated and said, “I haven’t ruled out any options as yet.” We all applauded and yelled out: “Hillary! Hillary! Hillary!”

The next day many students stated that they would never forget this day. I agree with my students, for I will never forget this day either. It will live in my mind’s memory but also in my heart forever. Hillary was and will always be “First Lady” of the United States.

SOLACE

BY JAMES CUNNINGHAM

Mind filled with worry
and much anxiety,
I wander toward the woods
in search of solace.
Walking down the beaten path -
a broken man, I ponder life's problems
and perplexities – trying to find my way.
Trekking onward, I see the tall, fall trees
with leaves of orange, red, brown and gold,
taking in the tundra, flora – flowers of purple,
yellow, blue and green, a kaleidoscope of colors
like a rainbow's rays.
Nature's brilliant beauty – magical to behold.
Continuing on my mystical journey,
I hear the chirping of the boisterous birds.
Insidious insects hissing and buzzing
in a melodious melody.
Sound of music – sweetness to my ears like
angels voices calling out to me.
Welcoming the warmth of the sun's relaxing rays,
and cool, calm breeze upon my battered face,
feeling Mother Nature embracing me like a loving
Mother hugging her child to her bosom.
Nourished by her tender touch, my heavy heart resuscitates.
Casting worries to the wind, surrounding woods engulf me
in splendorous wonder.
My senses awakened – I stand in awe like a
little child on Christmas morning.
Looking forward to tomorrow with all its love and laughter,
once again I feel whole as solace fills my sullen soul.

negative spaces

BY JOHN DESANTIS

dog lying in the congruent folds of her body
her legs languishing in fitful sleep
he watches them there
silently thinking of black holes
and alternate universes
dimnsions within dimensions
are they numbered *ad infinitum**
reflections of reflections
before and after regarded
behind and in front of
the barber's chair
do they reflect forever
or do they finish in spaces
unseen and untouched
negative spaces more potent
than the visible ones refracted
in the spectrum of seen light
unseen visions sweeter more
than visible ones and mind
meandering around the edges
of his imagination go
for the name of spaces
negative but as they posit
in the mind his mind
your mind my mind
the conscious appears
from out the unconscious
collective of all the spaces
we are wont to call negative

Raso: My wife was lying asleep and our dog was lying next to her, perfectly conforming to the negative spaces of her body. I got the idea to write a poem about negative spaces, those virtual tracings around positive ones.

**ad infinitum* – again and again in the same way; forever

FOR MY GRANDCHILDREN: REMEMBER ME

BY LYNN EASTON

Remember to put in the crocus before the frost.
Take in the beauty of a frozen lake.
Be joyous at the first signs of spring.
Warm yourself in the summer sun.

Savor the seasons:
 A harvest moon.
 The flurry of snowflakes.
 A happy mass of daffodils.
 An August sea: sparkling and sun-kissed.

Be kind.
Treasure yourself.
Always say “I love you” to those who bring you joy.
Greet and cherish each new day.

No epitaph need be written nor candle lit in my name.
These remembrances alone will suffice.
Remember them
An you remember me.

SONG OF LIFE

BY LYNN EASTON

Sometimes it is all compacted into a moment in time,
This song of Life.
It sweeps by even as we try to stop it, fiercely attempting to freeze and capture it.

It appears unaware, unexpected, unplanned. . . . just happening.
It might be a warm afternoon on the beach.
Sun and sand and the briny smell of the sea.
Gulls calling.

Sometimes it is the little girl you catch and kiss at the end of her slide.
Or the perfect red of a cardinal's painted stillness on a snow covered branch.
And then too, so gentle on the skin, that first warm caress of spring.

In these moments, Life sings its song.
How exquisite the melody.
And, oh, the joy of it.

POSER

BY MARCIA EVERSLEY

How confounding, how preposterous,
Did my ears deceive me?
How does one fix the tongue and lips to form the words to ask?
It takes courage, more like gumption and unmitigated gall.
Did you utter such words to make yourself feel tall?

What was the intent?
Was it to bring yourself content?
Was there no thought process before you spewed out the question?
How does one reply? Or does one simply smile and just sigh?
It is unbelievable that one person would think so highly of themselves as to pry.

Was it rehearsed like lines to a verse?
What prompted such an unethical query?
A slap to the face would equalize this situation,
But then that would give rise to the question...
Is that crude, insensitive posture being given serious consideration?

Is it self-satisfaction you mask?
Did you regret having asked?
Did you honestly, consciously, take yourself to task?
Sometimes a statement gone wrong is considered a slip of the tongue,
But what do you call such an invasive interrogation that stung?

Is this anger arising?
Why does this inquiry provoke such an emotion?
Silence is always an option – isn't it?
No need to get all bent out of shape and in a snit
No need to answer, such a thought is unworthy of a response albeit.

PROCRASTINATION (I IMAGINE IF ...)

BY MARCIA EVERSLEY

If I really took the time
Maybe wrote it down line by line
I could develop a personal anthem
That would be understood by me and baffle some

If I followed through with my great ideas
Not just think about them for days,
But truly study and plan how to accomplish them in various ways
Then, I could develop something to give God praise.

If I started to make that Granny Quilt
I could get rid of some of this guilt
Of having done nothing with my God-given gift
Because I'm sure within my family it would mend any rift.

If I just put on those garden gloves,
Started pruning some of those backyard shrubs,
Took time to design and set up a garden bed
My backyard could rival the beautiful scene in my head.

It's easy to imagine
You just need to begin
Doesn't take much effort to form pictures in your head,
The challenge is in putting your doubts and insecurities to bed.

I MISS HER

BY EUGENE FORSYTH

I MISS HER KISS,
I MISS HER SOFT CHEEK,
I MISS HER TOUCH,
OH, I MISS HER SO MUCH

I MISS HER STORIES,
I MISS HER LAUGH,
I MISS HER BODY,
IN ALL ITS GLORIES

I MISS HER DANCING,
EVEN WHEN IT'S ONLY SHAKING,
I MISS HER FREEDOM

I MISS HER WHEN SHE
NO LONGER COMES,
I MISS HER

WE BOTH MADE A PROMISE

BY EUGENE FORSYTH

The night we met,
I shall never forget,
How bright the skies,
Never bright as your eyes

We both made a promise,
Conceived in bliss,
That every night would be one such as this

We both made a promise,
And sealed it with a kiss,
That every night would be one such as this

That every night would be one such as this,
That every night would be one such as this

THE END OF AN ERA

BY JUDY FRITSCH

We were first introduced to square dancing at our children's elementary school, where it was a parent/child get-together and fundraiser. The caller was a noted professional who worked with a set of vinyl records to provide the background music. He taught us a few of the basic moves we would need and soon had everybody up and moving in the school's gym area. After each dance, we were encouraged to move around and join a new square, so as to mingle with as many people as possible. When I caught my breath enough to look around, I saw everybody with smiles on their faces, as was on mine.

After the dance, we gathered around the refreshment area, all talking about how much fun the evening had been. The caller joined us and mentioned that there were several square dance clubs in the area, but it was also possible to start our own and he would be available to teach us more moves. We could meet Friday evening if we could get at least ten couples to agree. We canvassed the group, received enough assurances from those here, plus suggestions of other couples who couldn't attend tonight's activities, but might be interested in joining our club. Since the school gym would not be available at all times, one of the couples who lived in Co-Op City volunteered to sponsor us to meet in one of their recreation rooms. The only requirement was that the activity be non-profit and educational. Our group fit both specifications.

So CO-OP SQUARES was born. We met every Friday evening and learned more and more moves, quickly processing to the standard basic level which would enable us to visit other clubs and to invite other club members to come dance with us. We bought or sewed outfits to wear to dances: circle skirts worn over crinolines and lacy petti-pants for the ladies with flat rubber soled shoes, and for the men, western styled shirts and ties matching their ladies' skirts.

As the years went by, many couples dropped out for various reasons and replacements were scarce. CO-OP SQUARES died. We were sad to lose this valued activity. Square dancing filled so many niches in our lives; it was social – where else could one dance with eight people at the same time? It was certainly physical, and it was mentally stimulating. We had to learn how to move our bodies when the caller sang out: *DO-SI-DO* or *ALLEMAND LEFT* or *PROMENADE HOME*. We had to learn definitions for more than fifty moves, and how to combine them into complicated patterns.

After CO-OP SQUARES, my husband and I moved on to join other clubs and to attend private workshops in various homes, where we practiced to tapes of actual dances and learned more and more advanced moves. We progressed up the levels until we were at the top, having to memorize hundreds of call definitions and attending dances "by invitation only." We went to weekend and week-long jubilees across the United States and Canada, meeting many wonderful people from all over the world.

When we met a couple from Japan at one of the dances and mentioned that we were planning a trip there soon, they insisted on hosting us in their house and taking us to some of the dances there. It was amazing, how could they dance to American callers without knowing any English? We realized that the calls we responded to were not English at all. What does DO-SI-DO mean

or *ALLEMAND*? Even when the names of the calls were in English, like *EIGHT-CHAIN-THROUGH* or *RIDE THE TIDE*, knowing these words would not help to know where to move your body.

It was necessary to memorize hundreds of calls and to react to them immediately, without missing a beat of the music. To help us in this matter, we wrote the definitions on index cards and studied them as we drove to dances or workshops. These cards were with us always and we used every opportunity to study them. One day we arrived early to stand on line for rush seating to a Shakespeare performance at Hunter College; so while waiting for the doors to open we took out our cards and began quizzing each other on the definitions. Some college students standing nearby overheard us and interrupted to ask, "What course is that?" The words we were speaking were in English, but were unfathomable to non-dancers, for example: Cross to a Diamond. "Centers cross-over circulate while ends slide together and hinge." Who but a square dancer could make sense of that?

We danced and workshoped several nights a week and almost all weekends, traveling to New Jersey, Long Island and Westchester, arriving home late and having to wake up early the next morning for work. We braved closed lanes and slow traffic on the George Washington, Tappan Zee and Whitestone Bridges, got lost on dark back roads, and even traveled thirty or more miles from our summer home in the Adirondacks of New York State.

One of our favorite weekends was an annual, invitation only, top level dance during the New Year's weekend. In between dance sessions, people brought board games to share, and there was a gala buffet to celebrate the New Year. This was a highlight of the year, with dancers coming from all over the country and Canada and occupying a wonderful old inn along the back roads in the New Hampshire countryside. On the last day of the weekend, one year, there was a major storm and when we were attempting to leave the following day the roads were a scary sheet of ice. Neither plows nor salters had yet reached this isolated area and we had to drive several miles to the main road. My heart was pounding the entire distance, certain that we would end up around a tree or in a ditch.

After suffering these horrible traffic conditions, impassible roads and bridge congestion, we gradually came to realize that the fun of dancing was tempered by these traveling problems. The New Jersey Turnpike and the George Washington Bridge were becoming more and more of a nightmare, and one night we even tried to avoid these problems by going many miles out of our way to cross at the Tappan Zee Bridge. We arrived home even later than usual.

Little by little, we gave up driving when the weather was predicted damaging or the destinations were too inconvenient. As we danced less and less, we found that we could not keep up with the demands of learning the new moves. And as people retired to Florida or gave up dancing, there were fewer and fewer people with whom to workshop.

And around this time, my husband began suffering physical problems which made him slow down his movements. Sadly, we finally made the decision to discontinue square dancing. It had been a major occupation for more than twenty years, but it was now the end of an era.

ESCAPE

BY DIANNE PIANKIAN GEIGER

far from the trappings
of civilization
we hear a loon
on a Minnesota lake
walk in wagon wheel ruts
on a trail west of Dodge City

watch a herd of buffalo
thunder into South Dakota's
Custer State Park
breathe in sweet
honeysuckle air
delight in the dance
of iridescent blue
dragonflies

lightheaded
we're caught
in a whirlpool
of desire
bathing in starlight
we dizzily embrace
in the silent silver night

we dream in
the same language
softly slowly awaken
to buttercream light
the air cool clear
tranquil

your face is etched
with tenderness
as you gently kiss
my eyelids
my mouth softens
we shine

i still savor
the bittersweet ache
of love

the weaver

BY DIANNE PIANKIAN GEIGER

using smooth
silken threads
of crimson and azure
intertwined with strands
of shimmering silver
she weaves
a tight shawl
of hopes
and dreams

she fastens a topaz here
an emerald there
next sews in
a handful
of translucent crystals
then wraps her hope
in white muslin
and places it
in the mahogany chest

after years and
a slow steady
deferral of promise
her life parcels out
she opens the
chest and unwraps
the pale covering

the tapestries
threadbare
glistening stars dulled
blushing flowers faded
gemstones loosened
crystals undone

cloaked in despair
she shivers

LOOKING FOR CLAUDE MONET

BY FRANCOISE GEWIRTZMAN

At dawn mist and clouds in a blue purple haze
encircle the river.

Poplars align in a fog, stand steadfast, shadow reflects in river, haystacks
disperse on field of wheat their gold color. Silence and beauty merge.

Slowly marching toward his house,
tapestry of flowers erupts: red, pink, blue, purple, yellow.
Arched path leading to studio.
It's a world of reflection, viewing gorgeous landscapes.

Japanese blue and yellow prints adorn the house,
Claude Monet's inspiration everywhere. Across the street
his Japanese garden, green bridge overlooking pond where
water lilies float, weeping willows surround, mysterious and sublime.

I live near Claude Monet's house. At all times I am struck with awe and a sense of
infinite splendor. To live nearby comforts and elevates my soul.

ODE TO THE REFUGEES

BY FRANCOISE GEWIRTZMAN

The President rages about illegals, calls them murderers, rapists, thieves. But who are they? Abroad for a better life and freedom. Ordeal prolongs stress. Perpetual fear, dread of that knock on the door. Fight to preserve family, avoid separation. Ready, proud, courageous, heroic to work and survive. Reaching for brass ring of citizenship. Searching for the American dream. Sometimes one asks and wonders are they, maybe better off in their countries of origin. Who are they? What a noble cause to pursue, survival. Bravery, stamina and prowess entwined. Liberty spreading her wing. Magestic mountains of renewed hope.

DAWN IN THE BERKSHIRES - AUTUMN

BY CYNDY GILBERTSON

The crisp autumn air astir
jolts my lungs
forewarning of winter's impending chill

Tall tree tops brush the sky with wide strokes
layers of dark branches cross and beckon below
just outside the window

A young maple sashays to and fro
scattering golden russet leaves
in a playful inviting arc

I nestle deep under the warm comforter
cover my ears
catch a stray tear

On this day
do I dare grab a sturdy arm and
venture into the dancing forest?

DAWN IN BROOKLYN

BY CYNDY GILBERTSON

The Norfolk pine presses
its uppermost branches into the ceiling
drapes its lower half
covering the glass panes
The philodendron
traverses two windows
its broad elephant ears stretching
to capture the morning light
Elongated rays
challenge the lingering dark
filter through needles and leaves
make their way across the room
looking to play
with the knobs on the coral rug

flitting from dark ambers to pale pinks
their fiery tongues lap at my bare toes
recede momentarily

then set the room afire
defy ceilings and window panes
with battalions of flickering flames
that dare me to follow
dancing through walls

TO THE MOON

BY JOAN GILGIN

Rocks, dead volcanoes, craters
Not even a pale glimmer of light
Peeks out from this multitude of
Crannies, cracks, and crevices.

A joke...A Falstaffian whooping,
Side splitting, ear piercing, belly laugh
Resonates throughout unperturbed
infinity.

Even still the subconscious conjures up
A phantom, an archetype from an
Antiquated, collective past, and a
Forgotten, inner choice chides...

Do not scoff at the moon that hides
Her head behind the sun at twilight
And from his golden chariot, stealthily steals
his left-over brilliance.

Do not think her tight-fisted because
She sparingly spreads her moonbeams
into the corners of the earth and mind
Blurring all distinctions.

Do not belittle her because she
Cannot drench the earth with garish light
That scrutinizes with merciless precision
The interminable emptiness.

For she is as self-sacrificing as Prometheus
And more benevolent as she faithfully comes
At twilight to shade her children's eyes from the
Blinding merciless truth of the hijacker's gift.

With great intuition, she spreads
Her radiance in measured proportions
Dispensing into crooks and crevices
Just enough to spark creativity.

MY DOUBLE LIFE

BY ERIC GLABERSON

For a few years now, my wife and I have divided our time between an apartment in downtown Brooklyn and a condo in the Massachusetts Berkshires. I have become especially aware lately of how different the rhythms are in each of these places.

In the Berkshires, where we spent most of our summer this year, our days often revolved around a hike in the woods or a walk on a country road or on the rail trail that crosses three towns. After that we might sit on our deck and read or admire the view of the mountains across the valley.

Our major excitement was caused by our sightings of wildlife. Premier among the animals we saw were the beavers of the Audubon Sanctuary in Lenox. In many years of visiting the sanctuary, we had never seen them as we did on two occasions this summer. On one late afternoon we watched an adult beaver paddle through a pond, carrying a large leafy twig in his mouth which he deposited on the shoreline about three feet from where we were standing. Shortly, he was joined there by his partner and their child and all three snacked for many minutes on the twig's bark as other beavers swam by.

At the far end of the pond, we also spotted a great blue heron treading slowly on these stilt-like legs as he searched intently for fish. In the pond, a three-foot-long turtle moved by underwater.

Our condo community in the Berkshires is surrounded on three sides by woods and there is a dirt road with houses above us. So it didn't surprise us that many critters wandered onto the grounds. One day a deer, ears upright, stood stock still as I walked twenty feet up a hill toward her, snapping photos as I went, until she finally dashed off. My wife and I saw, a few times, our resident chubby woodchuck. And rabbits would freeze for long seconds; they scamper off, their cotton-tails flashing bright white.

Following these experiences, we returned to our two bedroom apartment in Brooklyn. We live there in a sixteen-story building which fronts onto the approach to the Brooklyn Bridge. Standing on our corner one day, I counted, coming off the newly renovated bike and walking paths from the bridge; twenty unicycles with their acrobatic riders. I found all this exciting, but in a very different way than seeing animals in the woods.

On the evening of 9/11, we went down to the Fulton Ferry Landing and saw from across the river where the World Trade Center had once been; two beams of light climbing far into the sky. Viewing these beams was a powerful emotional experience, but I also found that the lights of Manhattan and the Brooklyn Bridge dazzled in their sheer volume and array of brilliant colors. New York seems always able to overwhelm.

Down the hill from us in Brooklyn is Dumbo, a neighborhood which for the last fifteen years has been continuously reinventing itself. I recall twenty years ago walking there before it acquired its present name and finding cracked windows and streets littered with broken glass. Now it seems that every time I walk in Dumbo, I discover something new: a café, a condo, hi-rise, a gallery, a trendy store. On weekends, models in stiletto heels balance on the cobble-stoned streets as photographers click dozens of photos of them. As I watched them, I thought: this is wildlife too, of the human variety.

REFLECTIONS

in poetry and prose

Brooklyn in its recent explosions of energy has become for me a place of constant flux and change. The Berkshires in the course of each year changes as well, but I think of these changes as recurrent and timeless.

Thirty or forty years ago, I would have reveled in all that the new Brooklyn represents. But now I am a senior, and I find more appealing the forests and fields of the Berkshire Hills.

Q TRAIN ROMANCE

BY MEL GLENN

"We were together, I forget the rest."
Walt Whitman

Two teenagers,
wrapped around each other like vines.
The world,
for the moment, for the night,
disappearing into the space of a kiss.
Gone for now,
past longings, future worries.
All existence had coalesced into this moment.
Who cares
if the sun doesn't rise tomorrow,
or the rivers overflow their banks?
No talk here
of politics, of religion, of friends, of money.
They will
keep this embrace as long as time allows.
I look
at the teenagers together,
and remember.

THE FOUNTAIN

BY MEL GLENN

I love to see the children
splashing in the fountain,
running through liquid curtains,
wishing to get as wet as possible.
Cranky adults, including me,
eschew the water, secure in the knowledge
there is always an umbrella nearby.
When do we decide we must all grow up,
forsaking the pure pleasure of jumping
through sun-soaked drops?
Can I just lay down my burden and papers
right here on this park bench, peel off
my socks and shoes for a quick dip?
Do I need the permission of five year olds
to join in their revelry? Nobody
told me that old age would be this hard,
that it is a continual matter of
giving up hopes, body parts, and romps
in the fountain where the children play.

LOST AND FOUND

BY YOLANDA HARDY

My mother always took my sister and me to the beach in Coney Island. My aunt usually joined us since dad rarely went on our pleasure trips. I never understood why my father chose the staggering summer heat with a broken fan over the soothing sunny shores. He was, after all, a Pisces and a very good swimmer at that.

I remember riding the 'D' train from Manhattan to Brooklyn, while carrying blankets, towels, coolers, sandwiches, beach toys, and even a folded chair or two. The fun and excitement of reaching our destination intensified when we saw The Parachute Jump, an artifact of Steeplechase Park, and the huge Ferris Wheel looming above the buildings.

My sister and I would run to the water's edge to wade in the cooling waves. We'd play tag, build sand castles, and attempt to bury ourselves in the sand. I was about nine years old when my older sister and I decided to hop barefoot on the very hot sand to the concession stand for her favorite Nathan's French fries. One minute she was standing on line to pay and then without warning she had disappeared from sight. I was left all alone, lost among the sea of people, umbrellas, and chairs. Paralyzed yet shaking like sea creatures out of water, my eyes searched unsuccessfully for her. Then a river of tears followed until security officers found me and safely took me to my family.

On another trip to Coney Island at age ten or eleven, I was simply playing in shallow water when a big wave came rushing towards me. Its powerful force pushed me down, covered me with water, and I couldn't get up quickly enough before the ocean's undertow pulled me back into the waves. My whole body was under water and as I flailed my arms uncontrollably, only divine intervention saved me. Somehow I managed to grab onto a rope in the water and slowly pulled myself back to shore. Frightened by the experience of almost drowning, my family was nowhere in sight when I finally reached solid ground. I ran through the beach trembling and crying until a concerned woman took me to a "lost and found" area. This time there were no security officers who helped me find my family. Instead, I had to stay in a room full of other lost children waiting to be claimed by their families. Waiting for my family felt like an eternity, but they finally arrived and I held onto them for dear life.

For strange and unknown reasons, every subsequent trip to Coney Island ended up with me getting lost and found, but being lost was not as traumatic as almost drowning. I presume that's why I developed a fear of water and wandering off, hence, a fear of indulging in great adventures!

THE LAST DANCE

BY EUNICE HARRIS

Jimmy danced and pranced through life
Using his own unique individual steps
Gliding to his own beat

He put so much liveliness in every move
Stepping on a few toes
Along the way of life's groove

Jimmy had a quick step with the ladies
Up down across and then a gentle bend
Such graceful moves
That could leave them wondering
What happened?

Forward to the side a twirl
Watch out for that back kick
We've all felt like
We had to hold on tight
To the light footed Jim

For over forty years
Jimmy kept in step
Working for NYC Mass Transit Authority
He shimmied from the bottom
As a bus driver
He went to the top
As a Superintendent

Jimmy as you dance in eternity
Of heavens sweet song
Your gregarious fun loving
Effervescently high spirit
Will too keep us dancing on....

TREASURED FRIENDS

BY EUNICE HARRIS

Many decades have passed,
At the time,
Who knew it would last?
Our FRIENDSHIP

Trying to find our way in the world,
Not knowing what to expect.
We met a CHEYNEY.*
Magnetized before our very eyes
With likenesses and differences
Bringing us together,
In an unbroken BOND.

Riding down various career paths,
Continuing to meet at byways,
Where old memories
Are embedded in our souls.

For as we melt away,
One by one,
Our treasured FRIENDSHIP,
Shall forever more,
Remain EVERLASTING.

*Cheyney – College in Pennsylvania

TECH SAVVY AND SOCIAL MEDIA FRIENDLY

BY SHARON HAWKINS

I may not be as text savvy as millennials, but I am well connected to the world at large. Skype, email and Facebook are essentially free modes of communication. And our President tweets his thoughts with/to the American people at will. I never go to banks or to the post office. I don't know anyone's phone number by heart. I record all of my daily medical stats in an app that sends me encouraging alerts throughout the day regarding my progress at staying healthy. After a workout on a machine at the gym, I snap a photo of the readings on its display – the time spent, the miles covered, the calories burned; and by the time I get to the next machine I have gotten an email alert saying that, "The capture was successful". This means that these stats had been logged into my/the gym's app, on my phone, and linked to my other Health app.

As a writer, my head is in constant conversations with my heart, my brain, my soul and my spirit, so thoughts need to be captured instantaneously or I may not remember them later on and then they will be lost forever. And even now I'm writing this in my Notes app, which is represented by a tiny legal pad emoji, and I'm using the dictation feature, also. I'm talking into a microphone emoji that turns into sound wave pulses on the screen at the sound of my voice, and my words appear typed on my very intelligent iPhone! So at any time...say in the middle of night, when I have a musing I can just feel around in the dark for my phone, press the button that not only turns my phone on but also unlocks it — because it recognizes my thumbprint at the touch. That is the only way the phone can be unlocked, for security's sake. I tap the tiny yellow legal pad amongst the other app emojis on the screen — which happens to be one of my photos that I have assigned to it. And again...thankfully...another wonderful thought has been captured, in real time, and all of the words are spelled correctly, minus the punctuation.

I have a Nook app and a Kindle app so my entire library is digital and is available on all of my devices: my iPhone, my iPad Mini and my Mac Book Air. The Bible app is extremely convenient for reading the Bible in any and every translation with the Copy, Paste and Forward feature, essential for quoting and using Scripture while writing my book.

I have been using social media to my emotional advantage, especially over the past few months. I don't have to rely on the television network news and be inundated with police blotter trash of murders, rapes, home break-ins, people being mowed down in the streets or slashed, horrific terrorist bombings and other unmerciful international strife, before I can find out what the weather is going to be on any given day. If anything of monumental importance happens locally, nationally or any other place on this planet, or beyond, I get news alerts on my phone from the New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, CNN and Fox News. And if I am so inclined I simply tap the "alert" and the entire article appears for me to read. I can tap on my weather app and get an up-to-the-minute local weather report. Or, I can tap the "f" on my home screen, scroll through my Facebook account and read funny antidotes or the rantings and ravings of my FB friends on the present state of our nation. And Facebook is so "Big Brother" that upon opening the app it reads, "Good morning, ShaRon!" and there is an emoji or meme illustrating my local weather. Today there was a bright beautiful sun partially blocked by a cumulus cloud.

Not all of my two hundred plus friends and family members on Facebook post all the time, nor

do I, but I have used social media to find folks from my past. This year will be my high school's 50th reunion and Facebook has been instrumental in reuniting our class, selecting a venue, and creating the various planning committees for the event.

Last year, I was thinking about my childhood best friend, Mary. She had moved out of state and I hadn't seen her in many years. I saw her once when I went to Maryland and she came to New York, back in 1985...we had dinner at Junior's. Although my childhood friend's last name was Smith, she had married an African gentleman but after divorcing him she hyphenated Smith with his name so it was relatively easy to find her on social media. I typed her name in the FB search box and, voila, her photo came into view. I "messed" her with my phone number and within an hour my phone rang!

Here's another great "Finding Friends" on Facebook story. My creative writing instructor gave us a writing prompt, "My First Date," and I remembered this guy named Robin that I dated when I was in high school. Like my childhood friend, Mary, Robin also had a unique last name, so when I searched his full name, a photo of an older likeness of the face that I remembered appeared on my computer screen. I "messed" him: "My name is Sharon and I am from Brooklyn, NY. I believe that I know you from 1966 when you were in the service. If this is you please respond and let me know. I have a funny story to share with you and your family." I signed my maiden name.

Robin was obviously able to recognize the many photos of the now-matured-me and accepted my Friend Request. So then I wrote: "I'm a retired teacher now and writing a book in a genre that I've created called a Poetry, Pros, and Photos Devo (devo is an abbreviation for devotional). I take a creative writing class at the UFT center and my instructor gave us a prompt to write about a first date. I remembered that you had come to visit me in the hospital after I had an operation on my dislocated shoulder. I was 17 at the time and totally in awe of this very tall handsome serviceman, in uniform, carrying a bouquet of flowers! I remembered your name and have found many old friends on FB and now I have found you! What a hoot! When I write the story about My First Date I'll be sure to send you a copy. I have had several of my stories and poetry selected for publication. I pray that you and your family are blessed and living an enchanted life! God bless."

His response: "Thank you for your fine introduction. Congratulations on your most impressive poetry career. I wish you the best. I joined the Air Force in August 1964 and retired in 1989. I then became a Correction Officer and served 20 years supervising Federal and County inmates. I am retired now and gardening is my hobby. I raise chickens and sell brown fresh eggs. I live in the country on five acres. I am a farmer now. Sometimes I hold hay straw in my mouth. There are fifteen fruit trees that require my attention. Life is great. Well, that's all for now. Have a great day. God bless you and your family. Robin (Rob)"

The world has gotten smaller because of the advances in technology and conversely my world has gotten so much larger because I am adequately tech savvy and definitely social media friendly.

ODE TO A CANDLE

BY WILLIAM LEMMON

Oh, structure of wax and wick,
Created in many colors and dimensions
A special challenge to select and pick,
But depends on individual's own intentions.
Is candle used only for decorative display
Or for healing or meditative activities?
Perhaps it's simply to provide a source of light.
Whatever its use, it will brighten your day.
One candle in a world of drab, dismal, darkness
Spreads hope to a tired and weary earth.

As candle consumed, its size is diminished.
Drippings ooze over top and trickle down side,
Creating snake-like streams racing to be finished,
With wax in bottom holder, they all collide.
Candle shrinks amidst flickering flame
That looks like theatrical dancer preparing us
For grand finale before curtain descends.
Completes the cycle like a well-played game.
Although we're left with a pool of wax and a short charred wick,
Original, strong moving flame will be remembered and honored.

THE MAN I KNOW

BY BARBARA LEVITT

Where is the man who I thought I once knew
As my memory falters, simply fading away
His image appears, just too clear to be true
It's eroded by thoughts slowly passing away
A companion I valued, devoted and treasured
Our lives joined together as the years flew on by
Those good times and bad times can never be measured
I am now left alone, sadly wondering why
Remembering him as my eyes fill with tears
And the past comes to haunt me while I cry all alone
Reflecting on memories of our golden years
But now I'm expected to thrive on my own
We grew old together as our family increased
And our children matured, but then moved far away
True reality may resemble a beast
When expectations fall short any day
But I'll never forget my wonderful spouse
May his spirit rest in peace within our house.

MY LOST ANDROID

BY JANET LIEBERMAN

*Sammy, oh Sammy my heart aches!
You vanished/swiped in internet stratosphere
Where oh where did you go slim Sammy...

Cherished companion to Google gossip
You compelled, enchanted, mesmerized me,
Captivated my subconscious with myriad images...

Your garish pinkish purple cover still coerces
Please squeak our muted private messages
Peek out from your cracked casing buried deep...

Toss your shattered pink purple shadows, surprise me!
Bequeath some token voicemail images to social media
Relieve my heartache, lasso my sincere regrets...

We betrayed each other, my android phantom!
Lips forever locked, baffling enigma unresolved...
Your pulse silent/eternal as rain on the silver screen.

*Sammy – Samsung Android

JUVENILE LOGIC

BY JOCELYNE LINDOR

Driving with my grandson we spotted
an old Cadillac, a behemoth of yore
Eyes opened wide marveling at the sight
he shouts 'awesome look at the size of that'
Yep I said "gas guzzlers" they're called
Granny he asks why are cars so small now?
Economy my dear – maintenance too costly
See, one of these monsters would make
two of your dad's car – And at once
the teacher in me sees a math lesson
Now suppose this big car is a pizza
and your cousin Felix wants some
"I'd share with him we'd each get one half"
he interrupts eagerly – Great trying to be slick
I wanted to expand the lesson...
Here come Lukie and Melie how will you solve...
did not let me finish my sentence
"I've already eaten my half he replies tersely."

DISCLAIMER

BY JOCELYNE LINDOR

My poetry has no theme
nor does it have a trend
It rather follow it seems
my thoughts any way they bend.

Do not compare them to Shakespeare's
or other poets' of the realm
my capricious rhymeless verses
For they'll never make the team

But I write them for a reason
They are fruit of observations
So if you laugh or frown at the lot
frankly I don't give a dot

Masterpieces they'll never be
Because I write them just for me

LITTLE LEO

BY MADELINE MANDEL

“Maybe he’ll be feisty,” I thought as I got my first look at one hour old Leo, my third grandchild. Leo was lying on his back in an incubator, a bright light turned on overhead. A nurse quickly and adeptly undressed him for his first sponge bath. Little Leo was howling, his whole body a dark shade of crimson. He shook violently, finally exhaling the breath he was holding in the heat of crying.

“Is he angry, cold, afraid?” I asked myself. My guess was all of the above. After all, he had been nestled for nine months in a cozy, dark haven without any kind of intrusion. Aiden, his six year old oldest brother, reached out and stroked one of his feet affectionately. Sammy, a toddler, and now the middle child, put his hands over his ears, moving closer to his mother and father who were looking more and more upset as Leo’s howls grew louder and longer.

At last, Leo is dressed and calms down magically when he is lifted. The nurse heads with him in my direction, somehow reading how anxious I am to hold him. As I cradle him down in my arms and get a good look at him; he opens his eyes, and tries to focus in front of him. He can’t. Repeatedly, he closes his eyes and opens them to try again.

“You are born under the sign of the lion, an August baby just like me,” I whisper under my breath.

“I wonder if you, too, will be ruled by your heart. I pray you’ll have the strengths of being a Leo – confidence, ambition, generosity and loyalty, and are spared its weaknesses – vanity, stubbornness and the need to dominate.”

It will take time for all of us to get to know you, Little Lion. What a wonderful thing we have to look forward to!

Have drive. Shawn was so easy to rise. The best son parents could ask for. You could be chill like your momma...cool, calm...and so compassionate. I wonder, too, if you will be as easily comforted as you were today when it comes to a wet diaper or a demanding stomach? Or will you wail mercilessly with soaring impatience and throbbing tension even when your needs are being met?

It will take time, Little Leo, for all of us to get to know you – to get just enough of a glimpse into your soul. It will take time, and how wonderful it will be when we do!”

WHY WRITE?

BY MADELINE MANDEL

Why do I write? You ask with a grin;
It's my way of releasing, I respond, all the stuff that's within.

I started writing in high school with articles & papers to compose,
And it's since grown in all directions to include poetry and prose.

Sometimes, I'm swollen with life, and the contents must spill out,
In a private cycle of saturation and release channeled in a small or large amount.

Sometimes muse-inspired by a thought or a word,
I am ready to create my own interpretation of what I've seen, felt or heard.

I find comfort in the lilting pattern of rhyme and the search for a word to fit,
To be able to create what someone else hasn't - motivates and challenges my wit.

Yes, there are times that I'm dry, when it seems nothing comes my way,
These are the times that I observe, and relinquish the pen for another day.

Some people express on a canvas - others on the dance floor,
Many become gourmet cooks, and there are those who relish an encore.

But my favorite thing is writing - it's the voice that my feelings have found,
Paper provides the place where my thoughts are safe, and I can be successfully unwound.

ZIA O SORELLA
AUNT OR SISTER

BY LUCILLE MATTIOLA-BARON

The nurse writes a curt remark on the resident's chart: PATIENT REFUSES MEDICATION.

Today and perhaps many other days, Grazia Agnello is a challenge for the nursing home staff. She is assertive and uncooperative. She wants solitude, not celebration. Not even the ice-cream cake, inscribed HAPPY 100th BIRTHDAY, has an appeal. At this age who could deny her prerogative?

Grazia's life is seemingly conventional and unremarkable. She and her brother migrated from their home in Sicily to New York City. She married Vincenzo, a sanitation worker. I always remember his pleasant smile and strong, massive hands filling gift bags of luscious tomatoes and pole beans. These were always the perfect addition to any dinner. He and Grazia have four children and six grandchildren. Life was kind to him. He was spared the sorrow of seeing three of his four children dying. Grazia had to endure those traumas without his comfort or support.

Her brother, Tomaso, raised two sons who enjoy a very comfortable life in Montclair, NJ. During a visit, her nephews tell her they are going to Sicily. They want to discover their ancestry. They promise when they return they'll share all they learn. Their journey unmasked a devastating betrayal!

Upon returning home, they rush to confront Grazia. Full of rancor they ask her one question: "How could you live such a lie?" They discover she is not their zia (aunt) but their sorella (sister). Grazia is their half-sister. There was an entire family their father left behind in Sicily. The only one he took to America was his daughter Grazia. "Why?"

Grazia explained her parents wanted to come to the U.S.. Finances necessitated they do it separately. Her father never kept his end of the bargain. During the journey he made a simple pronouncement to Grazia. "Until today you were my daughter. Once we arrive on the shore of our new country, you are my sister." She never revealed his secret.

"Why didn't you tell us?"

"When should I have done that? When your father died? When he was still alive? When you were children? Adults? I never felt the time was right. When Tomaso died, I asked myself did I lose a father or a brother? What sorrow! What confusion! We are all betrayed."

The angry brothers decide never again will they see their newly discovered "sorella." Although suffering another hurt she lives on with the feisty strength that her long singular life requires.

So, on this her 100th birthday, I don't think she is being unreasonable or difficult. The scene between the nurse and Grazia triggered an incident in my mind. When my mother passed away in her nursing home, someone comforted me by saying, "Now your mom is in a better place." I wonder if after 100 years, perhaps Grazia just wants to be in that better place.

LOSING COUNT

BY EDITH MERLE

Going home in twenty-one days. Counting. Leaving behind echoes of the resounding
Bombs and explosions. Lighting up the sky. Eclipsing the moon. The bloody sand
Mirroring the footprints of my fellow marines. The night patrols. The loneliness...
As fear takes on a scent of its own. Twelve days or is it ten. I'm losing count.
Milagros had the baby. She named him Santos. He has her beautiful brown eyes.
Four days left. I'll see him soon. I ran out of days.
Mother is crying. Milagros by her side. Holding Santos sobbing softly.
Tio Manuel is here from Santo Domingo. What is going on? Those strangers?
The local Congressman? The crowd silences.
We are here today to grant Enrique Rodriguez citizenship of these United States.
For his ultimate sacrifice for his country. Milagros was handed the flag.
Mother did not understand what they were saying. She felt so alone in her grief.
The crowd disperses, leaving behind sadness and emptiness.
I, Enrique Rodriguez am no longer the illegal immigrant to be taunted
By my fellow marines. I was a legal resident waiting for my final papers.
But I was the one to enlist and fight for my country. Serving it with pride
But I ask myself: Why did I have to die in order to belong?

GROWING UP BX

BY TED MIESZCZANSKI

I always loved reading. Maybe it's because all we had at home was a radio and that wasn't enough of the world to satisfy me. So I'd go to the library at least once a week and take out five books every time. Then one day my world experienced a disaster. It was earth shaking as far as I was concerned. My library, the Melrose Branch on Morris Avenue was suddenly closed.

Why, you ask? Well, so did I.

It was closed for renovations. But, my teacher said, there was another library in the next neighborhood over, Highbridge. Unfortunately for us that was a forbidden country. The journey there began when you crossed a giant boundary line, the Grand Concourse.

My other problem was this other library was also up on a high ridge only reachable by climbing several flights of stone steps. And, unfortunately for us, these steps could only be approached from one direction, 169th Street. Any other way was five or six blocks in either direction. But this wasn't the whole problem. The kids in our neighborhood all knew Highbridge was a tough place for us. Because hanging out near the steps was a gang of bullies who'd pick on kids if they dared to trespass down, "their" street. But "their" street was now the only way to the public library.

It wasn't fair!

But that's the way the cookie crumbled.

I just wanted my books. So I decided to risk sneaking those forbidden blocks crossing my fingers that "they" wouldn't be around. That idea did work for a while. If I saw their gang coming, I'd cross the street, then try to make myself insignificant. I'd even try to think small thoughts!

That worked until this one time. I got careless.

Big mistake.

My mother had told me over and over, "Never leave your little brother. Always take him with you!"

So, across the Grand Concourse, straight down 169th Street we went towards the steps. I remember strange looks from a bunch of guys sitting on top of some cars, but so what?

Hadn't I made this trip safely five times already?

I was feeling overconfident. That was another mistake. I repeated the words I'd heard my father say on many occasions;

From your mouth to God's ears! Yeah, right!

So then there we were. My brother and I were coming down the steps from the library. We were busy talking about what we'd taken out. Each of us had an armful of books, not thinking getting home wasn't going to be as simple as leaving had been.

At the base of the steps four kids stepped out and blocked us. First, they just surrounded us.

Then they closed in and yanked all the books from out of our hands.

Their ringleader was a tall bully I knew from the schoolyard. One at a time, he held each book up high reading its title out loud: *The Black Stallion*, *I, Robot* and so on. He laughed, then threw each book into the street. Then he kicked them one by one underneath a parked car.

I was so scared I couldn't move a muscle to save my beloved books.

As if by signal they started punching us. All I could do was put one arm up and keep my other arm wrapped tight around my brother. I could feel his heart pounding up against me.

Maybe that icy lump of fear deep in my chest mixed itself with the pain I felt in my heart because something happened. I felt something new. A terrible burning anger was spreading. Rage had discovered me. But at the exact same time I felt I was also being held tight in an icy fist. I'd discovered hate and I'd never known anything like it. It drove away all the crippling fear.

So this is what it's like not to be afraid, a voice whispered. Don't you like it? Let them be afraid of you!

At that moment I could've killed someone. I'd begun crying hot tears, but this new coldness stopped them instantly. Only their dried trail was left.

The anger changed me. I'd never hit a person with a fist but now I was ready. I must have hit him hard, because I saw something awaken in his eyes I'd never seen before. But that thing in his shocked stare was very familiar.

I'd just never seen it in someone else's face...

SINGAPORE BEFORE DAWN

BY TEENA MILLER

the plane's
sounds become
almost a whisper
as it glides
slowly seamlessly
soothingly
down before dawn
on invisible lubricated
tracks in the sky
this quiet landing
awakens me sharply
from the window
multiple multicolored
jeweled lights
sparkle below
I am a traveler
in Flash Gordon's spacecraft
approaching
an ultra-modern
metropolis
only imagined
a century ago
the sun rises
on buildings
tilted, curved
whimsical
defying gravity
continuing the magic
in daylight
on the ground
through
the rest of my journey

THERE IS NO BAD WEATHER

BY TEENA MILLER

There is no bad weather
I can imagine
rain, fog, snow or sudden freeze
it's just the clothes that must be right
assorted changes always ready

I love to see the rain come down
straight drops with no wind around
or slanted hard to hit my face
to refresh and cool as in a spa
it leaves drops glistening on leaves

Fog is the magic carpet
moistening and hiding
tops of trees and houses
not knowing what is covered
I look for faded contours
and sometimes am surprised

The heavy softly falling snow
muffles the city sounds of traffic
as I walk on sanitized streets
enclosed in a pure white cocoon

A sudden ice storm creates
melted plastic coated branches
glistening as the sun returns
on rails and roof edges
forming hanging icicles
now Victorian designs

Forecast is for rain tomorrow
I will raise my new umbrella
light as a feather
hold it high to the sky
there is no bad weather

ONE MAGIC MOMENT

BY YVONNE R. MILTON

*Magic **isn't** real*

Feelings of pain, yearning, hopelessness, less-than-ness and failure **are**

*Magic **wasn't** real*

Anxiety, fearful expectations and many disappointments

Doctors poking, prodding

Tests and more tests **were**

*Magic **couldn't** be real*

In vitro, surrogacy, adoption, childlessness and possible divorce **could**

*Magic **can't** be real*

Try after try

No signs – month 1, months 2 or 3

But then ---- fullness of breasts, a firmness of belly and a tiny, unexpected flutter
life

*Magic **became** real*

ON THE KNEELING BUS

BY CONSTANCE MITCHELL

The snow is piled high at the bus stop. Boots get submerged in deep puddles of dirty water. A wheelchair rolls on twisting and turning at the command of its owner. Sorry folks, we need these seats.

Why is the air conditioning on?

Seventeen school children come on board flashing their transit cards. They carry large backpacks that knock, hit and swipe those standing in the aisle as they head for the back of the bus. God is good, a woman wearing white robes shouts. She looks straight ahead.

A small child is brought on by a nanny. They get a seat. The child is eating an ice cream cone. It is dripping down under her wool jacket. The nanny wipes the drippings with a paper napkin. A man in a fur coat carrying a Bloomingdales shopping bag gets on the bus. He maneuvers past the wheelchair and those standing, but his coat sleeve knocks the ice cream out of the cone. The child screams and the nanny tries to comfort her while attempting to pick up the ice cream. Someone says, serves her right. Shouldn't of brung it on the bus in the first place.

Marty, I'll be home in 15 minutes. Did you pick up the broccoli? A woman speaks into a cell phone.

You a damn liar, one of the school girls yells from the back of the bus. Yo mama a liar, someone answers. Everybody laughs! A woman reading the New Yorker magazine, shakes her head, rolls her eyes and wets her finger to turn the page.

God is good, the robed woman shouts again. Why is the air conditioning on?

The driver lets the bus kneel when it's time for me to get off because there is a slick patch of ice at the curb. Even so, I slide into the arms of a man trying to get on. My glove drops on a runny glob of dog excrement. I don't pick it up. Mincing my way home, I say softly, God is good! Then, I memorize the number of the bus so that I can report the driver for keeping on the air conditioning.

THE BEACH HOUSE

BY EVA MORRIS

The scent in the room was that of wood, water and waves
sitting still by the window of an old-time place
the sun glowing and beaming its warmth on my face.

My mind remembers the same glow from long ago.
At a time when my feet were far from the floor
and my small hands barely reached the knob of the door.

Summer after Summer, Season after Season
as the time passes the warm woody scent of the room
remains, deepens into its crevices; as the Hummel transforms into an heirloom.

Just as I return to this special seaside place of old
my perspective has altered; not only by the view out the window
but within my soul, as I now have my crevices and lines to show.

Thankfulness overcomes me by the metamorphosis,
not only for me from within
but this room that I'm in.

For each time, I revisit through the stages of my ages
I see the same wood, water and waves
and anticipate what my future road paves.

MY FANTASY DATE

BY SELMA REVA NEWMAN

Together a short span a little more than four years
nothing could destroy that special bond of ours
when you disappeared from me, I shed no tears
too young to realize the limitation of my powers.

No worldly wishes would bring you back
time marched on, summer sun, winter snow
I found no recipe to remedy the lack
no new memories of you would I know.

In many a vivid dream you came home
Why did you stay away so long? I said
I need you here at my side, not to roam
to console me over things I dread!

Let's make a date to meet on a soft sandy shore
where there are white foamy ocean waves galore
a photo shows you held me there once before
Daddy, please embrace me just once more.

Tell me everything about your life
before cruel fate pulled us asunder
were you happy? did you have much strife?
about you dear father, I always wonder.

My fantasy drifts away with the receding tide
and drowns in the depth of the living ocean
I have lived without a loving father by my side
but his spirit has guided me with undying devotion.

ENCOURAGEMENT

BY SELMA REVA NEWMAN

One day while standing by the window, hoping to glimpse one or both of my two sons walking home from school, I came to a decision. It was time for this stay-at-home mother to do more with her life. That evening I discussed this insight with my husband.

“Should I get a job?” I asked.

“You could apply at Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Since you worked there before, they would probably hire you again,” he said.

“I couldn’t wait to get pregnant and quit that place. No way am I working there again!”

“Why don’t you go to college? You always say you regret never having had the opportunity. You will get a better job.”

With my husband’s encouragement, I applied for the Lehman College Adult Degree Program. I was required to send a written essay explaining my reasons for applying to this program designed for people over the age of twenty-five. Next, I was given an appointment for an interview with the Recruiting Counselor. He said that my essay was excellent and I should immediately apply to take the writing exam students need to pass in order to graduate. The benefit of passing it at this time would be not having to take it again, nor having to take required English classes. However, I was assured that I could take desired English classes for credits. I took his advice and happily passed the college writing exam at the very beginning of pursuing my dream. Finally, I was a college student and, at forty years old, I felt I was where I wanted to be. I was living a fantasy!

It happened through the encouragement of my husband and the Lehman College Counselor, that my life took a new path. I began a very welcomed endeavor, the role of college student, in addition to my other important roles of wife, mother, and homemaker.

Every September for the next four years, I would ask my husband, “Should I get a job? We could use the extra money.” And, he would reply, “Keep going to college; you will get a better job when you graduate.” He was so right!

UNREACHABLE STAR

BY EDMOND PAUL NICODEMI

*"I was born like this, I had no choice.
I was born with the gift of a golden voice."*

Leonard Cohen
Tower of Song, circa 1987

People in every walk of my life will tell me that I will never amount to anything as a singer. Imagine! No karaoke club will have me. No friends or colleagues from my former dental practice offer me any level of encouragement. Such fools!

That Leonard Cohen, his voice reduced to a croak, died a superstar rock hero. Late in his life, he filled huge stadiums in all major cities around the globe. Then there was that Dylan, who invented the '60's with that horrid set of vocal chords. Maria Callas had a wobble even bigger than that nose of hers.

But me, Sid Fox. A man with taste, a consummate stylist and witty raconteur is greeted by a wife who glowers when I sing joyfully in the shower.

"Will you knock off that bellowing, Sid! You make a more pleasant sound on the toilet!"

What does this woman know? She still puts a vinyl slipcover over our sofa, even though we are now empty nesters and our kitty cat has long expired. Norman was over the house the other night. The wife slipped out to attend her book club meeting after she had whispered.

"Don't sing, Sid. Let Norman show you his drawings that at least look like something."

I thought my vocal prowess would be impressed by the artist in Norman. So I tried to wow him with my rendition of "The Impossible Dream." He listened patiently, maybe a bit fidgety. Jack Jones had nothing on me as I was crooning so sublime along with my Music Minus One CD.

Then Norman abruptly shut off the CD player.

"That's not how the tune goes, Sid."

"What do you mean, Norm?"

"Well Sid, I'm not the consummate musician you are. But I could tell that you're off-key. Not keeping the right beat, not singing the right notes...I don't know. Something."

"That's right, Norm. You don't know."

"Sid, we all know that you're great. But I myself don't know if you're any good!"

"What if I try 'My Way,' Norm?"

"Sid!"

Still, I'm undeterred. I didn't just retire from drilling teeth; I retired toward my new, budding career as a singer. Forgetting what all of those mediocrities think of me.

"I will reach the unreachable star!"

THE EMPTY ROOM

BY DEBORAH PALMO

The empty room in my Aunt Eileen and Uncle George's home was not always empty. There was a time when every Christmas was spent there, filled with family, food, presents and even Santa Claus. My grandfather whom we called Pop-pops dressed as Santa Claus. He looked so much like pictures of the supposedly real Santa that a lot of the younger children really believed he was the real one. He would come down the long, narrow stairs leading to the room at the bottom of the house ringing his bell and shouting, "Ho, Ho, Ho."

Everyone would get excited at his arrival, children as well as the adults. A chair would be waiting for him in the middle of the room and my Uncle Henry would be waiting with a big movie camera and big bright lights to record every moment. In those days, there were no cell phones that could take pictures and videos or else everyone would have had them in their hands ready to use. My uncle's lights were so bright that they were almost blinding. You felt like you were a movie star as your name was called to sit on Santa's lap.

Everyone had a turn to sit on Santa's lap, have a little chat with him as you received a present. It was the greatest time. After Santa was finished he would wave goodbye and ring his bell as we would all wave goodbye to him too. He would climb back up the long narrow stairs and disappear. After he left, everyone opened their presents to share with each other. Of course, my grandpa would then magically appear to come down and join the festivities. Then, it was time to bring out the grab bags. They were mainly filled with inexpensive household goodies, socks, shaving cream etc. for the adults and separate bags filled with coloring books, crayons and other small items for the children. This was a wonderful tradition that my family always shared.

Afterwards, we would go to the large table filled with different kinds of food to eat and pile them on paper plates. As time went on and Pop-pops passed away someone else had to take his place. My uncles and even my aunts took turns. Eventually more and more of the family passed away or moved away, the amount of people became less and less. After a while, the celebration was moved upstairs as we no longer needed the bigger room. Soon there would be only eight of us to celebrate; still keeping the traditions of a Santa Claus, gifts and grab bags.

When I went to visit my Aunt Eileen and Uncle George one Xmas, I went down to the empty room that was once filled with family, joy and laughter. I climbed down the long, narrow stairs that Santa had climbed many times before and put on the lights. How eerie, quiet and lonely it was now. I looked around the room and envisioned in my head, as if I was watching a movie, picturing all of the family sitting around and the fun we used to have. It made me feel sad that those times were long gone, never to return. But I am so happy to have had those moments and so thankful for my Uncle Henry who took moving pictures to capture them. I once received a video of our family get-togethers from my cousin. As I watched the video and saw so many of my family members brought back to life on the big screen, it brought tears to my eyes. But I am forever grateful.

EXCEPTIONAL REQUEST

BY SUNI PAZ

*“There are richness and metals under the earth
And a loving Yaraví song under the stars”*

Atahualpa Yupanqui

It was around midnight when I arrived home, exhausted after a long day working two jobs. I opened the door softly. My four and two year old children were surely sleeping but I had hardly crossed the threshold when Juan Cruz began calling my name. I dashed upstairs skipping two steps at a time, knelt down beside his bed and enfolded him in my arms. Another day spent without seeing my two children and it hurt my soul. The boys were growing up away from my presence, in the hands of strangers, their mother always absent except for weekends.

My child's eyes shone so brightly, I thought he might have a fever. But, he didn't. His excitement at seeing me was palpable. He wanted to ask me a big favor. He had lying there for hours, fighting drowsiness, afraid of not hearing me arrive. He knew by the following morning, I would be gone again at dawn, well before the children awoke. In the next bed, Ramiro, the youngest, slept like an angel.

I need for you to buy me a sword, Mama, as soon as possible. Please! You won't forget! Will you? It's very important!

He repeated the request several times and with such fervor I wholeheartedly promised him I would get one for him. Why would my boy want a sword? He gave no explanation. To calm him, I cradled him in my arms, remaining at his bedside singing soft lullabies until I made sure he had fallen sleep.

A few days later, in a neighborhood toy store, I found a beautiful sword just like those I'd seen in children's theaters. It was painted with a silvery powder. The handle was golden and the blade was constructed with thick wood that couldn't cause damage. When I gave it to Juan Cruz, he was so pleased with himself that he paraded about the room, jumping and singing. Then, he hid the sword under his pillow and there it remained for the rest of the day. The sword was not for playing. That night, I fell asleep, relieved to have made my son so happy.

It was nearly four o'clock when I awoke to the sound of strange noises. Someone was up. What could the boys be up to in the dead of night? Just as I prepared myself to get up to investigate, two barefooted figures in pajamas passed in front of my door. The taller child carried a sword. The shorter one trudged behind him, eyes half closed, still enveloped in sleepiness.

I stood up, walked to my door and peered down the corridor. As my youngest son left his golden thread in the bathroom, the eldest stood guarding, sword in hand, to make sure neither people nor ghosts could harm the innocent. With patience, Juan Cruz waited. Then, he escorted his brother back to the bedroom. I watched them return: a tottering figure with tussled hair followed by another, strutting forth with sure steps and hoisting a wooden sword.

Quietly, I peeked in to their room. With the tenderness of a mother, my eldest son was wrapping his little brother in blankets. Then, climbing back into bed, Juan Cruz returned his sword to its sheath, placed it beneath the pillow, covered himself with a quilt, and fell instantly asleep.

REFLECTIONS

in poetry and prose

In the morning, I would return to my jobs. I would go where I would go and I would do what I must do. But at that precise moment my daily absence from their young lives was revealed to me with piercing clarity.

RED PEN ENCOURAGEMENT

BY LORRAINE PEARSON

My tenth grade English teacher, Mrs. Kimmelman, was the most sophisticated woman I knew when I was fourteen-years-old. She was worldly and cultured, unlike the local females I encountered—mothers, aunts, grandmothers, neighbors—who all seemed to be dutiful housewives in floral, cotton housedresses that bore the stains of nutritious and fragrant tomato sauces, which simmered gently on their white porcelain stoves. I could not picture Mrs. K. preparing a meal (I was sure she dined in a fine restaurant nightly) or attired in the utilitarian garments which filled my mother's closet. She wore seamed, dark nylon stockings and high-heeled shoes that often dangled from her feet as she perched seductively atop a gnarled wooden desk in room 234. How I admired the dramatic cape that topped her black woolen suit and added to her mysterious aura as she read Romantic era poetry with confidence and precise intonation. And when she laughed, it was with the heartiness of a man. In addition, she smoked, but her expensive musk-scented perfume obliterated the slightly foul tinge of cigarettes that preceded her into the room. It is this woman I thank for the unforgettable red-ink scrawl above my forgettable portmanteau in a required essay. She wrote, "When you are a famous writer, you may create your own words."

Wow! Did this goddess intimate that I was on the road to fame? That I had the talent to become a renowned author some day? That I, too, might be a woman of substance rather than sauce? I gloated; I was flattered beyond measure by this bold, red comment. It affirmed my early belief that writing was, and always would be, a precious outlet for feelings of all kinds, secret or otherwise. To this day, my desk holds a photo of a very young me, intently scribbling with fountain pen in hand and crumpled papers beside me. (How lucky to have realized the need for rewrites even then!) My early love of writing was revealed in a pink, gold-edged diary that still tells of endless days of boredom endured as I sat demurely on the front stoop with my two best friends. I chronicled our patient wait for our bosoms to swell, for our bodies to grow shapely and desired, and our longing though futile wait for the boys of summer to notice us. Yet, somehow, writing made this waiting easier. It became "real" when cursive letters gathered to bemoan or celebrate my fate. My writing was proof, and still is, that I have lived and loved and suffered and endured despite it all.

So, I thank all those who oversaw the laborious task of teaching me to form letters with a pencil held between my right thumb and forefinger, and to make sense of those twenty-six various squiggles in all of their glorious combinations as they appeared in books I have learned to cherish. And because of you, Mrs. K., I have become adventurous enough to create my own words and to believe in their power and mine. Because of you, I have continually sought that latent author in college classrooms and extracurricular venues for like-minded adults who retain their eagerness for learning and sharing stories that depict our universal delights and travails. I'd like to think that I shall be writing until the day I die—and, perhaps, my family will find my spirit in the words that remain behind. I owe you a great deal, Mrs. K., for wielding your mighty red pen and granting me immortality. How can I ever thank you enough?

GIFTS GIVEN/GIFTS RECEIVED

BY DOROTHY PRIDEAUX

How did I get to be 75
Where was I while it was happening
In my 50's, at 65
Not here then
Not now then

I am the age my parents were back then
They were healthier it seems
Not many aches, pains
Some tiredness, sadness
Over life's letting go of counted breaths

Then a decade and a decade and half
They had their turn
Dad's was a five day process in the hospital
Moaning and agitated
Conscious, but not aware
He didn't know
all four of his kids came to his bedside
three from 500 miles away
I cry today when I think of the loneliness
Mom's was quick
Being cared for at my brother's
She asked to lie down after breakfast
And then died just like that
Engulfed in peace

I remember my aunt's gift
Last December
She on her bed
Waiting for death
Calm, quiet, peaceful
cheerful with family visitors
She recalled her father
My grandpa's death vigil
He told her not to worry about him
"Go home and take care of the kids"
She passes this memory – gift of him on me
And leaves me an example of peaceful surrender
Still we are forever
Receiving gifts
From the living

From the dying
From the long gone

At my turn
I don't think my gift will be silence
The wrapping will be different
I hope I will not be too anxious about the
Unknown
I hope I will want to talk of love all my life
Like angels' wings brushing
The surface of my heart
God's visible and invisible, gentle arms
Throughout my life
Holding me in the longing
The pain, the suffering
The joys, the beauty of it

There I've said it
Here and now
That's best
Lest I am called
Before I know it

O my family
O my friends
Love
Pass it on

first day

BY DM RANKINS

I hear the whispers
they crawl up my back
press across my shoulders
pushing down
increasing the weight of this book bag
my head bends
eyes stare at tattered sneakers
daring them to run
I hear the whispers
they pull at the front of my cap
forcing me to hide
not be in this place
hallway packed
fashion on display
price tags hanging proudly
new skinny jeans
stylish kicks
purchased confidence
I hear the whispers
they sneak between
the pages of my textbook
written notes of distractions
attempting to erase dreams
keep me chained to this locker
I hear the whispers
the sounds of fear
I no longer keep them here
they became the steps
to the ladder I climb
finally finding the space that is mine
pushing myself back on track
shouting out for me

ON STARTING MY MEMOIR

BY TERRY RICCARDI

How should I start this memoir? The more I learned about writing one, the less I knew how to answer that question. At first, I thought I should begin at the beginning, so I wrote an essay about my maternal grandparents' flight from Czarist Russia to America and freedom. Then I looked at the personal essays I had written over the past several years. "Here's the material I should use," I said happily. "All I have to do is put these pieces in chronological order and voila! There's my memoir!"

But a dozen short essays about a dozen incidents scattered throughout my life did not begin to tell my story. If I were a piece of Swiss cheese, perhaps they would have sufficed. I am no such thing and for those who I hope will someday read this; I want them to come away with a sense of how I spent my time on this earth.

"Okay," I said, "it's like a patchwork quilt. All I have to do is write more essays to cover everything these didn't." Easier said than done. Not only do I not recall anything about the first five years of my life, I've forgotten chunks of time in all the years thereafter. When I wrote of what I could remember, people wanted more specific details. "I don't know, I can't remember," was my constant reply. "Make it up," I was advised, but I didn't like that idea.

Another problem arose. Each time I wrote about something, I realized that I had not connected it to what came before, nor what came after. "My readers will be like the three blind men who touched different parts of an elephant and came away with three very different conclusions," I sighed. "This is turning into a really big project. Maybe I should just go back to writing essays. I could always stick them in a nice folder and label it 'My Memoir.' The thought pleased me.

However, as luck, fate, or whatever it is that pushes us toward a certain path would have it, the focus of my writing class at that point was on... writing a memoir. "OK, I'm supposed to do this," I said. "So, back to square one—how should I start?" The answer began to materialize when I looked at a class handout one day. It was a list of helpful points about the overall process. Tip #4 jumped out at me: don't write a chronological, boring account.

Suddenly, I remembered a story I had shared with one of my fourth grade classes. We were participating in a writing program and I planned to give a mini-lesson on how not to write a story. I then read them a piece about my cross-country trip that I had deliberately written as an "A to Z" story—first I went here and saw this, then I went there and saw that, then...etc., etc. When I asked if the children liked it, they all said yes. That was not the response I had expected; I'd forgotten that they loved any piece of personal information their teacher shared with them.

Quickly, I came up with a plan to salvage the situation. "I'm glad you liked that," I said, "but now I'm going to tell you about that same trip in a different way." I told them how I'd seen a giant tarantula at one particular site. When I finished, they all sat in silence, then started applauding. There was no question which version of the trip they enjoyed more and the point of the mini-lesson was made.

REFLECTIONS

in poetry and prose

Which brings me back to that pesky square one—what particular non-boring, non-chronological incident shall I start with? Would you like to hear more about that tarantula? Or shall I just begin with my grandparents' flight across Europe? Grandma had a wooden leg, and an infant strapped to her back. I'm quite sure it was a very interesting journey...

MAILSTROM

BY JANE ROSE

I have a little secret that is hard to confess. I have a paper problem. Although my friends say I am so organized, although my home looks pretty neat, I continue to be stressed by the mess of paper that accumulates every day.

This mess includes the lined paper pads I use for my UFT class notes, the index cards that I write shopping lists and daily chores on, the bills I must deal with, but most of all it is the mail that I retrieve every day from the gray box in my lobby vestibule.

I think mail clutter is an inherited problem. My father used to say, “Oy, do I have piles,” as he tackled the paper on our kitchen table. I thought his pun was so clever. Now, I understand how frustrated he truly was.

You see, mail never excites me. It never says, “Welcome home, I’m so glad you’re here, you’ve had such a hard day.” Instead, it exasperates me. It weighs me down or falls on the ground as I tackle it each afternoon. I consider it a lucky day if I don’t scrape my hand prying the mail out of the box, or drop anything on the way to the elevator. I heave a sigh of relief if I make it to my door and a few pieces don’t cascade onto the floor as I take out my keys. I often am reminded of Hansel and Gretel as I retrieve lost pieces of mail that have fallen on my path to the kitchen. I am already exhausted, as I get ready to attack and sort the mail. One pile is for important bills and notices I must attend to immediately. Another is for the few magazines I subscribe to. Most annoying are the catalogues, supermarket pamphlets and requests for charitable donations.

This pile can get particularly unwieldy due to the coins, charms, personalized pads, and address labels that are contained inside. If I see another pad with a cute winter snow scene, I’ll scream! I know these piles should be dealt with on a daily basis, but life gets in the way. Often, I find myself dumping everything into a large LL Bean tote bag. This usually happens about an hour before the lady who cleans my apartment arrives. It has to look neat for her. After she leaves, I briefly forget the contents in the bulging bag. I stay happy until the piles begin again with the next day’s mail.

Lately, a new and growing pile has arisen on my kitchen counter. It contains neatly labeled manila folders, books, pamphlets and scraps of paper for the de-cluttering class I will be teaching next week. I wonder where that contact number is? Maybe I’ll find it inside the tote bag... that is, if I can lift it onto the counter.

GRUMPY

BY DONNA RUBENS

I do not like my hearing aids
Nor my purple walker
I do not like being old
I do not like the front door stairs
For I need an elevator
I do not like being old
Being careful not to fall
Makes me wary all in all
I do not like being old
At night dreams take me back in time
Some so soothing – I like them fine
But I wake up each new day
To find I cannot run and play
I do not like my hearing aids
Nor my purple walker
I do not like being old
And my glasses bother my nose
I have trouble putting on my clothes
I do not like being old
I do not like my little walks
I do not like that I have to stop
I do not like being old
I'd like again to walk the city
That I can't feel such a pity
I do not like being old
I do not like my hearing aids
Nor my purple walker
I just don't like being old

LONELINESS

BY PAMELA SALMON

silence covers you like
a fresh blanket of stars
while you are still
dreaming
about footsteps
a solitary man
has taken to
walk across the moon
you just went on
your walk with him
because he said, he knew you,
but his dreams
are getting too close to
yours now, sticking to you
until you're covered
in them and they're
so close, coming even closer so close
to you so
his silence is sticking to
you and it sneaks up on you and
steals what you were about
to say and you had
just the right words
to say to him
to be free from this imprisonment
you shared while you
started digging your
way out until you felt
like your old self
again walking all alone
on that lonely
moon covered in your
own silence

WHO WOULD HAVE KNOWN

BY BETTY SAMUELS

A friendship stolen so soon
Who would have known as we sat in your kitchen
Like weather women forecasting our milestone birthdays to come
“Aren’t we lucky we had a life?” a common refrain of yours

Days pass...coast clearing ...fog uplifting
Your color returning...pink as blush
Grey skies disappearing
“Do I look better?” You did
Who would have known?

Missing your smile
The enthusiasm in your voice
“Hey, it’s me Kathy
Let’s have dinner...see a play...attend a rally”

Bubbling over with joy
Echoing “This was fun”
So happy to have a friend so near...so close”
A friend in the building...

Today I stand in your ballet space
Feeling myself in your skin
Wearing your leotard
Your colorful high socks
I dance with you. I dance for you
In your favorite spot

Who would have known?
That I would miss you so...

THE CAT WHO WAS AFRAID OF MICE

BY ROSEANN SARACINO

Once upon a time there was a cat named Cookie who was afraid of mice. She was so scared her legs would start to shake and her hair would stand up on edge. Her mother wanted to teach her to be a good mouser so she could keep the farm free from mice for her master. Cookie wanted to please her mother but she was so filled with fear at the thought of hunting or killing a mouse.

Heaven forbid! The mouse looks so menacing with long teeth that looked like daggers. Cookie decided to try to talk to the mouse and convince him to play dead so her mother would be proud of her.

Now the mouse was a clever little fellow who knew all about the big bad cat. Who ever heard of a cat being scared of a mouse he thought. How absurd! When the cat went to talk to the mouse her voice was cracking after the cat told the problem to the mouse The mouse said, "Why should I do this for you?" "What's in it for me?" I will get you the biggest piece of cheese I can find from the master pantry. I want to get it in advance the mouse said. Ok, you will get your cheese by tomorrow.

Early in the morning, before anyone was awake Cookie tip toed on little cat feet into the kitchen. He took the biggest and smelliest piece of cheese she could find.

That day Cookie gave the mouse his cheese. He had decided he was not going to play the cat's game after all. He was just going to run away with the cheese. But the smell was so strong and the cheese looked so good that the mouse could not wait to eat it. This is his favorite cheese, gorgonzola, and he gobbled it down. After eating the cheese he felt so full and contented that he fell into a deep sleep. Just then Cookie's mother came by. Cookie was so amazed that the mouse did as she asked and Cookie's mom was so proud of her.

Cookie was not a scaredy cat anymore. She felt so good that her mom was so pleased with her. When the mouse woke up a half hour later, he felt so refreshed and happy. Everybody won!

CHILDREN'S FIRST HOLIDAY
IAN AND ALAN'S FIRST THANKSGIVING DAY PARADE

BY ELLEN SCHWARTZ

The first holiday that both my sons enjoyed together was the Thanksgiving Day Parade. It was a sunny day with temperatures in the 70's. Sam and I took our sons Ian and Alan to 72nd Street and Fifth Avenue to view the parade. Ian was seven and a half and Alan was approximately four years old.

Ian and Alan enjoyed a lot of the balloons. Their favorite was the Ninja Turtle Float with Donatello, Raphael, Leonardo and Michelangelo. Their next favorites were Bullwinkle, Snoopy, and Ronald McDonald. There was the traditional Santa Claus at the end of the parade. However, I felt too warm to think about the North Pole. Watching the parade on TV does not compare to seeing it live. The colors are so vivid and the balloon characters come to life. It was so great to hear the live sound of the marching bands instead of listening to it coming out of an electronic box. It was less crowded at 72nd Street than 34th Street which gave us an unobstructed view of this magical parade. Sam and I didn't go to the Thanksgiving Parade when we were children and if we did, we don't remember. We also were just as fascinated as Alan and Ian.

After the parade, the boys went to play in the one of Central Park's playgrounds. They played for over an hour and had a really great time. Of course, they were now hungry, so we went to the McDonald's on 80 something at Third Avenue. We did not get home until 5:30 p.m. and I still had a turkey to roast. It took hours to cook and we did not eat until 9:30 p.m.

I started to chide myself for not staying home and making the turkey and letting Sam take Alan and Ian to the parade. When I look back at the day, I do not regret eating at 9:30 p.m. on Thanksgiving. This is a cherished memory of time well spent with Sam and my two sons. They grow so fast and you have to embrace the special times with them.

ARISTOCRACY

BY LESLIE SELBST

There is a great dispute in the garden
It's happening in the flowerbed
between the roses and the golden rod

We're planted here with love and care—the roses do declare
You're just an opportunist—a squatter for the day
Despoiler of the neighborhood—a weed one might even say

I come from aristocracy, from a hundred years of breeding
You are a ragamuffin—a wayward street bum of a seedling

My father graced the halls of kings—my mother the breasts of queens
While you're from fields and vacant lots—keep company with weeds

Be gone from this garden—only purebreds here allowed
The likes of you could never be—are always disavowed

The goldenrod says not a word but stands there strong and tall
Ignores the prissy nagging voice that thinks it knows it all

Then suddenly there should appear a tiny shiny bug
which flies and lands upon the scruffy goldenrod

It takes a nibble and spits it out so bitter our hero tastes
And moves on to white bread aristocracy—a better meal to make.

BULLYING FIFTIES STYLE

BY GRETA SINGER

When I was a girl in Brooklyn in the 50's, there were many positive and productive things going on: school, music lessons, street games, family outings and friends. But there was also an underside of subtle bullying that parents were only vaguely aware of and didn't pay much attention to or even think of it as bullying. I know only the female side of this bullying, being a girl and not having brothers.

The "slam book" was a notebook that every girl in junior high school carried. It was set up by the owner with pages for all of her friends and acquaintances. There were questions each participant answered, some trivial and simple, and some devious and potentially very hurtful. The name "slam book," was probably meant to imply the secrecy of the filled-out and folded-over pages. But, of course, everyone knew what the other girls had written: "Want to read my slam book."

The questions ranged from simple likes and dislikes (your favorite color, your favorite teacher) to more insidious ones. Who would you like to invite to a party? Who is the most popular girl in the class? Who do you avoid in the school halls? Who wears weird clothing? Who would a boy never go near? Who do all the boys think is fast, loose? Teachers and parents didn't read the slam books but all the kids did. Boys found out who liked them even if the girl had confided that information to the recipient as a secret.

The other more ostentatious means of subtle bullying were the clubs that groups of girls formed. There seemed to be no purpose to these clubs rather than forming one and picking two colors for a club jacket. Of course, the clubs had to pick a name also: the Charms, the Chicklets, and the Gems. So each new club would order sweater-type jackets with the club name on the back and the girl's name over the left breast. When the jackets arrived (\$25 each; quite a lot for 1952), the girls all wore them to school on the same day. They paraded around making the other girls not in this club, or not in any club, feel jealous and left out. Adolescence is a time when kids are worried about themselves, their bodies and their place among their peers. Being the girl without the jacket could be very damaging.

This kind of bullying goes on today although I haven't seen a club jacket or slam book in almost sixty years. I remember the pain of reading about myself in someone's book and watching various groups of girls arrive at school on a Monday wearing their new, perhaps maroon and yellow, club jackets. Today Facebook and Twitter, and others I don't know about, take the place of those slam books and jackets. And somehow these new electronic bullying methods are worse. We have all heard of the tragedies caused by mean and destructive girls using the internet to hurt another girl who feels bullied and left out.

SILENCE IS

BY VIVIAN SKINNER

Speak when spoken to, surely doesn't apply in this day and age.
Many speak too quickly now and usually out of a sea of rage.

Words spoken that never can be reclaimed
Vicious attacks, seeking someone else to blame.

Can you see the need to just sit still?
Quietly pondering life, and developing that skill.

THE ESCAPE ARTIST

BY CHRISTINE SOPER

Daddy had a bad habit: giving people the slip. When I was twelve, Mom asked me to watch him for a few hours so she could get out of the house. This was no enjoyable father daughter afternoon, looked forward to by both participants. Daddy was getting over a terrific bender and I wasn't happy being his jailer. But my mother was no one to argue with so I reluctantly agreed, promising not to let him out of my sight.

At first, things went well with Daddy asking me about myself. It was so seldom we sat down together, I was pleased to be his center of attention and innocently rambled on about school, friends, family, all the important things in my life. If I'd been more alert, I might have realized his increasing agitation as he paced the floor, constantly eyeing the door.

"How would you like to go for a walk?" he interrupted. I knew this wasn't what was supposed to happen and my brain raced to find a suitable answer. "Daddy, you know how Mom feels about you going out without her. Can't we just stay here and talk some more? You could tell me about your own childhood in Philadelphia."

"Naah. I want to forget those days. Right now I need some air and a little exercise would do me good. I'll buy you an ice cream if you come with me." What was I to do? I couldn't let him escape and there was no way to reach my mother. I agreed, vowing to keep up with him no matter where he went.

The Wakefield area of The Bronx had its share of corner bars where men like my father could find companionship with fellow drinkers and escape the guilt they suffered when they returned home to nagging wives and needy children. We had only a block to walk to Cullen's Tavern, a favorite watering hole where he was welcomed with a hearty, "Hi Jim, where you been keepin yourself?"

"Aah, me old lady has me babysitting while she goes out on the town," he laughed, pointing at me and ruffling my neatly combed hair. "Set 'em up Joe and bring a coke for the young lady." I stood in a corner, angry at the lies he told but helpless as I watched him with a brandy in one hand and a beer in the other. This was the beginning of another spree and I felt responsible for letting it happen on my watch.

When I was little, I'd had many such afternoons, perched on a bar stool, blowing the foam off beer mugs passed along by Daddy and his cronies, happy to be his accomplice as he made me promise never to tell my mother where we'd been. "Did you have a nice walk? Where did you go?" "It was fun," I answered with a smile and a hug, not wanting to lie but not wanting to get him in trouble.

Intervening years had taught me not to trust my father. I grew to understand that beneath his charm and wit laid a serious illness: alcoholism. I became my mother's ally in her determination to preserve our little family and our pride. So we never spoke of this thing that changed him from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde.

"Let's go to Coney Island." I was startled to hear Daddy challenging his drinking buddies to leave the dark cave like gin mill and take the subway too far off Brooklyn. "Perhaps the sun and

ocean air will be good for him,” I thought but what if I were to lose him on that vast, overcrowded beach. My mother would never forgive me. Muttering became bickering and before I knew it, we were outside, alone, a slightly inebriated leader with a single follower, me, headed for a great adventure.

I tried to talk him out of it but only made him angry. “What, are you against me too?” He’d been hurt when his grand plan met with derision and he stubbornly refused to give up. “Let’s just go and get a little something to quench our thirst,” he insisted as he walked unsteadily across White Plains Road to the nearest liquor store. I searched the passersby hoping to find my mother but she was nowhere to be found. And I was still in charge. After he’d paid for the requisite bottles of Christian Brothers Brandy, he looked at me remorsefully. “I’ll make it up to you on the Boardwalk, kid.” With that, we headed up the stairs to the el train which whisked us through The Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn.

During the seemingly endless ride, he closed his eyes and I composed a series of alibis I would present when we got home. Nothing worked except the truth and I began to relax, dozing off for a nap. When I awoke, I looked around, wondering where I was and remembering, looked across at Daddy. But wait. He wasn’t there. I rubbed my eyes in disbelief and searched again. By this time, we were moving at high speed through one of the city’s dark underground tunnels and I was surrounded by strangers. I got up and as an elderly woman thanked me for my gift of a seat, I nodded and asked her if she’d seen my father. Before long, fellow passengers were briefed on my search and earnestly began looking for him but he was nowhere in the car.

I walked the length of the train, talking to all who would listen. Most people shook their heads and went back to their newspapers or conversations. Some suggested I call the police but I felt responsible and needed to find him, with or without help. When we pulled into Stillwell Avenue, I hoped I would see him among the crowd heading for the beach but still no sign of him. Where could he be? What could have happened? I tortured myself with unanswered questions as I tried to put myself in his place: a drunk on the run.

I must have been a sight: a scruffy teary twelve year old, on the verge of collapse as I stumbled toward an unoccupied bench facing the ocean. As I sat there, too weary to do anything but watch the waves in their endless movement, I thought of happier times. Mom and Daddy had brought me to Coney Island, the poor man’s resort, on many such summer afternoons. We’d enjoyed Feltman’s outdoor beer garden where we watched silent movies as we ate bratwurst and German potato salad. Daddy told us of how he’d been a young singing waiter there and how the audience threw small change after he’d sung one of his Irish melodies.

As if on cue, I thought I heard a familiar tenor competing with all the raucous noise surrounding me. I strained to listen and there, coming from below me, was a man’s voice, not just any man but my father singing “*My Wild Irish Rose*.” Somehow, I summoned the energy to jump over the railing and crawl through the sand to find a bedraggled group of revelers whose private domain, under the boardwalk, “far from the madding crowd” included Daddy. It was his secret place, a spot where he found anonymity and privacy, unquestioning loyalty and companionship, all with the ocean nearby. For an Irishman, one generation removed from its wild coastal beauty, this was his sanctuary.

Was he glad to see me? Yes, as he introduced me to his companions. “This is Tiny who I named after Tiny Tim. Isn’t she lovely?” We sat in a circle, making small talk as if we were old friends. I

REFLECTIONS

in poetry and prose

didn't want to embarrass him and made it seem natural to have found him in this place, among these drifters. As they passed the liquor around, I politely declined, desperately wishing for a drink of water or can of soda.

When the party came to an end, and there was nothing left to drink, I stood up and held my hand out to my father. "Come on Dad, it's time to go home." And we did. As we wound our way to the subway and the long ride back to The Bronx, we hardly spoke. He was ashamed and I was in turmoil. I was relieved to have found him but hurt that I meant less than the derelicts he chose to befriend. Yet, deep in my heart, I loved him and continued to protect him. I began to understand my father a little more the day he made his escape.

HOW I BEAT THE ODDS

BY E. MILDRED SPEISER

Not everyone can boast that he or she was saved by a bag of baby carrots and a Lesportsac shoulder bag. Swimming and skiing played a peripheral part, too, in this curious saga.

Living in the fast lane can be exciting and dangerous, particularly if one believes she is in the tame lane.

The sun was bright, the day warm for April, and all was well or so I thought. It was the perfect time, about 3:00 PM, for a customary walk to make the supermarket grocery rounds. From the vendor on the northwest corner of Broadway and 97th street, my first purchase of the day was a package of baby carrots. Thrust into my Lesportsac bag slung across my shoulder, it bulges out at stomach level.

I continued my blissful reverie, crossing over on the same side, for a brief look-around at the Gourmet Garage. The Associated on 97th and Amsterdam was the next goal. Traffic had stopped, lights were in my favor. I stepped into the street quickly making my way to the nearby pedestrian crosswalk. What occurred next was so surreal and so unexpected.

Suddenly coming from the north, driving straight towards me is a yellow cab. As I stare in disbelief, the taxi is surging forward rather than slowing down or braking. The driver totally oblivious that in but a few seconds; he would reach me. In those few seconds – I'm Indiana Jones running, escaping the coming boulder – thundering hoof-beats nearing, faltering – flashes of flesh rush through my mind. Superman, Spiderman, do something. I become my own Wonder Woman... with a very loud thud; the brunt of the cab's right bumper has knocked me down. I land hard on my backside. With super-human strength, my arms have reached straight back, palms firmly gripping the ground. The taxi abruptly stops.

Sounds of passersby, bystanders yell and shout, "Don't move. Don't move." I actually feel – I can get up and walk away, but I don't. I heed the voices. Near me, a woman is using her cell phone calling 911 giving them essential information – where, what, who. Then I hear her say, apparently in responses to a question, "She's in her early 60's." I beam inwardly, if only she knew. But she made my day, considering my current position. She even hands me a slip of paper with her name and phone number. Another good Samaritan gives me a used Dunkin' Donuts napkin with the time of the "incident" – 3:10 PM and the taxi cab's license plate number. Someone asks if I want to notify a friend or family member. No, I don't want to scare them half to death. Traffic has started up. I want to edge myself away from oncoming cars. I don't want to be struck again. The people staring down, say I won't be. They assure me that EMS is on the way. Hmmm, EMS those are my initials. How do they know? Everything now is in still motion with stopgap scenes – the errant Caucasian cabby, T-shirted, leaning against a nearby car, his passenger exiting the cab, quickly disappears. Reassuring people seem to be all-around me.

At last, the ambulance and police arrive. The EMS duo readied me for placement on the gurney. One, a sweet, petite, light weight female, the other, a brusque burly guy. With each on opposite sides, I'm lifted lopsidedly into the ambulance. Scary stuff. Surely, I will roll off and be injured. I thought, now I will need an attorney. I hear rhymes in my head – attorney/gurney. Has the tinnitus hissing

ended? Maybe the jolt straightened my disjointed leg. Am I light-headed and just don't realize it yet? Meanwhile, I'm perfunctorily checked and key personal information taken. The police officer comes to take a statement. My one sentence: I had the light and was crossing with the signal.

The ambulance takes off for a hair-raising ride to St. Luke's Hospital. In a horizontal prone position, as I am, I'm bounced frighteningly, up and down, as we speed through potholed streets. By the time we arrive, I know, without question from where all the bruises had come.

Immediately, I'm taken to the fast-track Emergency Room. The medical verdict: blood pressure and bones are O.K. Palm gashes are scrubbed antiseptically, Band-Aids are placed. And as if I am in an assembly line, I'm handed walking papers and dismissed.

I stroll home into the sunset, just about the same time my usual walk would end, but without completing my supermarket rounds. Well, tomorrow is another day.

Afterthoughts:

No, I haven't forgotten and I'm not about to leave you in suspense as to why I beat the odds. The key components to my success:

1. The bag of baby carrots in the Lesportsac shoulder bag protected my midriff as the cab and I collided.
2. Swimming had strengthened my upper body. Thus, my arms rigidly held in place. The result: no whiplash, and eyeglasses never moved.
3. Skiing had trained me how to fall. Instinctively, I fell into that mode. My backside, taking the brunt, and my bones being left intact.
4. At the moment of impact, all the above came together simultaneously.
5. Let's say, it was very Good Luck.

Final observations on causes of the confrontation:

Advice to the driver:

1. Don't ignore the specific traffic sign stating: On making left turn, yield to pedestrians.
2. Do, after the left turn, go to the required nearest lane.
3. Remember the maxim:
Two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time.

Advice to the pedestrian (me):

1. Don't step out to the street to reach the crosswalk.
2. If you do, be prepared. Someone or something out there may be out to get you.

Moral: Drive safely. Walk safely. Buy carrots.

P.S. The most lasting effects were the paper work that followed.

THE BOX

BY SYLVANA SWINBURNE

Seated under an
Old willow tree
Not far from an old house
Holding a beautiful carved wooden box
I opened
The Lid of memories of my life

Faces of people
Long gone
And not yet gone
Starred at me

Old photos
Grandparents dressed
in old style clothes
my sister and I holding hands
my mother and my grandmother
and the most painful one
of the father I never knew
Spoke to my heart
Of laughter and tears
Of love and hate
Of what it was
Or could have been

Slowly I listened
To the ghostly voices
as memories flowed
To my heart and to my mind
Wishing that for a moment
The clock of merciless time
Could be turned back

Slowly I replaced the lid
Of that old carved box
Closing the voices of my memories
Silencing my heart
Once more

LOVE'S THE KEY

BY DOTTI ANITA TAYLOR

I got the news a while ago –
my daughter and grandson are coming
I even have a souvenir –
an email while the internet was running

The date was set – March thirteenth –
arriving on a very late flight
From the moment I knew I just couldn't wait –
I was filled with such delight

I immediately started to make my plans
for trips, for visits, for meals
My mind was consumed with choices to make
including trips with special deals

It's hard to explain the feeling within
perhaps my heart bursted with joy
It's seldom I get a visit like this
from my daughter and one of "the boys"

The day of arrival kept piercing my brain
I'd count how long till they'd come
My planning all aspects of what we would do
became more and more so much fun

I'd think oh so often of how it would be
with both of them here in my home
I'd think of how there'd be so much more energy
and how, for days, I'd not be alone

My thoughts were flooded with my daughter and grandson
coming to stay with me
The feeling I had then exists still now –
They're here and I know love's the key

A SONNET

BY DOTTI ANITA TAYLOR

Her view was unobstructed 'cross the lake
She's watch him tend his garden – twelve till two
When he would gaze at her a smile would break
And then she'd turn away – to give no clue

She watched him daily hoping that one day
he'd come across the lake so they could meet
She was not bold enough to shout out “hey”
So patiently she waited till he'd speak

But Saturday at noon she took her stance
She looked across and found he was not there
She turned around as if she was to dance
And saw him face-to-face – she had no fear

They spoke with hearts wide open – love had grown
A unity presided – 'twas their own

HUMOR TECHNIQUE
SECOND OPINION

BY GLORIA TAYLOR

Ever since childhood, Thomas McBean had a fear that there was someone underneath his bed. This phobia bothered him tremendously for years. He was now a young adult and so he decided to seek help to overcome this fear. He eventually found a 'shrink' and said to him, "I have got a big problem especially at night. Every time I go to bed I have a fear that someone is under my bed. I am so scared that I think I am going crazy." The shrink told Thomas to put himself into his hand for a year. "Come and see me three times a week and surely we will put an end to all those fears."

"Doctor, how much do you charge?" asked Thomas.

"My fee is one hundred and fifty dollars per visit," he replied. Thomas shook his head and told the doctor that he'd think about it. Six months later the doctor incidentally met Thomas on the street. He asked Thomas, "Why didn't you come back to see me?" Have you given up on those fears you were having?"

"Well Doc, after I left you I considered that for one hundred and fifty dollars a visit and three visits per week it would amount to twenty three thousand, four hundred dollars for the year. I talked with my bartender and he cured me for ten dollars. I was so happy to have saved all that money that I went and bought a new mini-van which I desperately needed."

"Is that so?" Doc. asked. With a bit of an attitude he continued, "And how did that bartender cure you?"

"I told him the entire story of my fears as I sipped ten dollars' worth of beers. At the end, he told me to go home and cut the legs off the bed. I did exactly that, and now there's no room for anyone under the bed. He further said, "It's always good to get a second opinion."

HAIKU REVERIE

BY ADRIANNE TOOMER

asleep on the rug
first time in his apartment
my spirit at peace

“my gift” he called me
love fun joy were us, mostly
he’s gone without me

his destiny far
away in another place
now too far away

it was better and
it was worse, but it was, and
that is good enough

sleep loving spirit
complete peace at last to be
yours to keep always

you’ll still kiss my lips
in the moonlight of my mind
I’ll not be lonely

read over my shoulder
read some words that you’ve inspired
even gone, you are

my song

BY ADRIANNE TOOMER

some yesterdays
so glad they're gone
others should have
lingered on

we all know about
ups and downs
but happy to be here

won't pretend i've
figured out
what this life is
all about

i've fumbled through
my ups and downs
still happy to be here

i live in a space
where i like to be
especially since
you've been loving me

so happy to be here

growing older
feeling bolder
as i go along

life's melodies
will play in me
until the end of my song.

ODE TO BLUE ROSES

BY LINDA TORRES

Blue roses are on that vine. Four to be exact.
Swaying and bending to the weight of the breeze.
And so I bend to caress them and feel the natural velour of their petals.
I do not choose to pick them.
To pluck them from the very essence that gives the life.
Blue roses are on that vine. Four to be exact.
Each one unique, not just in color.
Each has its own formation of petaled fullness. One is merely a bud.
As I reach for them my hand moves up and down to accommodate the quad of heights
they have been raised to by the same natural gift that offers them
their own time and age.
Four blue roses are on that vine and through the dew of morn and weight of rain
and heated air, they remain connected.
They remain connected and continue to share the vein of life that allows them to continue.
Continue until grandma's wish, their wish, is beyond the wish to be caressed.

MY ROCKING CHAIR

BY LINDA TORRES

I am tired and I am stiff
The day has taken its toll on me
I need to sit and rock
I need to sit and rock, and immerse myself in the swirling solitude around me
The squeaking and the sighing and the moving air,
That passes the sides of my face, as my body is propelled back and forth
Distracts and comforts me
I need to sit and rock and be comforted by the curve of movement
It has its own quietness, its own calmness
That allows me to escape from present discomforts of life, for now
And so I continue to rock, in my chair.

THE MYSTERY WOMAN

BY WENDY TRONTZ

Find a box once belonging to my mother.
Open it, find personal papers and a faded photograph.
Who is this woman staring back at me?
Standing in front of a palm tree.
Wearing clothes circa 1920's.
Broad- brimmed hat tilted jauntily.
Large purse that would be fashionable today.
Why is she wearing a fur jacket in a tropical climate?
Is she one of my relatives?
Did she just get off a boat from Europe?
Where was she, waiting for a chance to come to America?
Sadly, I will never know her story
Some believe a photo captures a piece of a person's soul.
If that is true, somehow I hope she knows that she is welcome in
my home.

THE WHISTLER

BY WENDY TRONTZ

I was watching my grandchildren playing on the front lawn of my house, when I started to think about where I played at their age. When I was their age I lived in a building in the Bronx. I had no front lawn to play on.

From 1951 to 1964 I lived in a fourth floor walk-up apartment. Everyone I knew, including myself, were poor. None of us realized it back then. When we wanted to play we asked our parents if we could go outside. Often our parents didn't come out with us. Back then everyone in the neighborhood looked out for each other's children. We would play hopscotch and roller skate on the sidewalk. Sometimes we would play handball against the apartment building wall, until the old lady who lived on the first floor chased us away.

I always knew when my mother wanted me to come home. She didn't have to come outside to get me. She would open a window, that faced the sidewalk, and instead of yelling out my name she would whistle a special tune that meant it was time to come home.

WRITER'S BLOCK

BY ANITA WEISENFELD

I'm without inspiration
I haven't a clue
An assignment is looming
So what do I do?
To write about something
Gee, where do I start?
An idea, a topic...(sigh)
The hardest part.
I'm not much for diaries
Don't Facebook or Tweet
The headlines are scary
I'm facing defeat.
I stare at the blank page
And it just stares back
Why can't I get started?
What is it I lack?
Has my ego failed me?
That's what others might say
But I choose to think that
It's just not my day.
I envy those writers
From whom the words flow
They make it look easy
But deep down I know.
Some days it's a challenge
And that's when I say
Today I don't have it
Tomorrow's a new day.

THE SHAKESPEARE INCIDENT
(A SKIT IN TWO SCENES)

BY SARAH WILLIAMS-HARRIGAN

Cast: Ms. Williams (Teacher), Mary, Joe (Students), Ms. Perry (Program Director), office staff
Setting: Adult Education classroom, Administrative office

Scene 1

(The action takes place in the classroom. Students are seated quietly as the teacher begins to speak.)

Teacher: Today we will begin a new unit on one of the most famous, most widely read authors in the English language. Does anyone have an idea of whom I am referring?

(Students eagerly raise their hands; however, before the teacher can call on someone, Mary blurts out the answer.)

Mary: Shakespeare. Everyone knows it's going to be Shakespeare. *(Looking around to her classmates)* You guys are too slow!

(The other students glare at her, but say nothing; they are used to her loud and rude behavior.)

Teacher: Joe, your hand was raised first. Who do you think it is?

Joe: William Shakespeare. *(He looks over at Mary and smiles triumphantly.)*

Teacher: That's right, Joe. Very good.

Mary: *(angrily)* I already said that!

Teacher: Yes you did, but you didn't raise your hand and wait to be acknowledged. You know the rules of this class. We are all adults here. Let's respect each other.

Mary *(under her breath but loud enough for everyone to hear)* Hmphh. You never call on me.

(Snickering is heard in the background)

Teacher: OK, class. Let's get started. Make two columns on your paper. I want you to write down as much as you know about Shakespeare in one column and in the other column write some things you would like to learn or questions, if you have any, you'd like answered. I will collect them at the end of the class. At the end of the unit, you will make another list of what you have learned. I will return your original list; then we will compare the lists. As a special treat, the program director has gotten us tickets to *Shakespeare in the Park*. Stop by the office to pick up the tickets.

Mary *(blurts out):* That's great. I have always wanted to see *Shakespeare*.

(Teacher ignores Mary. Several students nod their heads agreeing with Mary. Teacher then distributes a packet of materials on the Shakespeare unit.)

Teacher: Take a few minutes before the end of the class to look over the materials. It will give you an overview of what we will be doing.

(Students begin looking over the information. Mary surreptitiously takes out a magazine to read; she uses the handouts to hide the magazine. The class continues for a few more minutes before the class ends.)

Teacher: Ok everyone. I'll see you tomorrow.

(Mary dashes out of the classroom and heads straight to the office.)

Scene 2

(Teacher is seen walking toward the office. Loud voices are heard coming from the office. The teacher recognizes the loudest voice.)

Teacher: Mary!

(As she enters the office, the teacher hears Mary arguing with the program director.)

Mary (angrily throwing the tickets on the counter): What is this? I came to pick up tickets to see *Shakespeare*, and you gave me tickets to *Macbeth*! What happened to the Shakespeare tickets?

(The program director can barely hide her disbelief. The teacher thinks aloud, "If she had read through those handouts, she would have known that." Before Mary could say anything more, the teacher pulls Mary to the side and whispers in her ear.)

Teacher: Those tickets *are* for Shakespeare. *Macbeth* is one of his most famous plays.

Mary's mouth opens and closes in surprise. Embarrassed but not contrite, Mary grabs the tickets and storms out of the office.

Teacher (looks at the Program Director and smiles) As Shakespeare said, "The common curse of mankind, folly and ignorance."

(Loud laughter is heard in the background as the lights fade.)

Quote comes from *Troilus and Cressida*, Act II, Scene 2



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