Welcome to the 20th 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, Kathleen Giannou, Jo-Ann Hauptman and Carolyn Lambert-Givens; 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  Gerri Herskowitz
RTC Chapter Leader  Director, UFTWF Retiree Programs
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 20th 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
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INTERIOR DECORATING ON THE FARM

By Muriel Bart

There were 8 doors in our farm kitchen:
1 to the summer kitchen
2 to the dining room
1 to the outside
1 to the hall
1 to the cupboard
1 to the “little” kitchen
1 to the secret staircase behind the refrigerator

There also was a 19th century, temperamental clock -- it worked when it felt like it-- set in the front wall between two windows. It was my job to wash all of this woodwork every March or April. In our New England neighborhood this was called spring cleaning. I said it was child labor: mine.

I protested in vain. I complained it was dangerous for me to climb ladders holding a pail and a brush. I claimed the walls weren’t dirty, anyhow. My mother’s rebuttal was totally effective. She clenched a fist, muttered a “right now,” and….

exited with unheard fanfare to the sanctuary of her vegetable garden.

During the seven or eight years I did the wall-washing, I came to enjoy it. There was immediate, positive feedback: the white surfaces did become whiter. The ritual was also somehow soothing: I wet a cloth in warm, sudsy water, rubbed the cloth along a wall, and then repeated the process with non-soapy water. Best of all, the work freed me from the eternal question, “What are you doing?” which was preliminary to the assignment of a chore. Now I could dream/plan/fantasize without interruption. On the farm you had to keep your hands working. What you did in your head was your own business.
Everybody’s noodle pudding’s  
Baked a different way.  
If you lined them up, you’d find  
A real diverse display.

Mine, which is delicious,  
Has two different kinds of fruit —  
Orange slices from the can  
And pineapple, to boot;

Sour cream, vanilla, butter,  
Eggs and cottage cheese.  
It disappears so fast, there’s not  
A piece left I can freeze.

My friend makes hers with cream cheese,  
Also pineapple and milk!  
She bakes it half as long as mine  
And says it’s smooth as silk.

Some recipes have raisins  
And use cinnamon for spicing,  
That combination, to my palate,  
Isn’t that enticing.

In spite of the ingredients  
That they’re concocted of,  
All kugels* taste delectable  
If they are made with love.

Yet every cook who makes one  
Would be proud to take a test  
Just to prove what she knows in her heart —  
Her noodle pudding’s best!

*Yiddish for noodle puddings or other baked dishes
A POET’S GARAGE SALE

By Ilene Bauer

I’m having a garage sale
Though I don’t have a garage.
Come check out all my offerings –
You’ll see a strange montage.

I have similes and metaphors
So old that they’re clichés.
There are sentences and verses
Budding writers can rephrase.

From a stack of nouns quite towering
Are so many you can choose;
Mix and match with all my adjectives –
You simply cannot lose.

There’s a vat of verbs just waiting,
Some with adverbs still attached;
And a box of prepositions,
With its lock no longer latched.

There might be a spare conjunction
Hiding underneath the rhymes;
As for interjections – Ha!
They’re rare as Mercury-head dimes.

Yet if you pay me a visit,
You might find the words you need;
I’ve been cleaning up my clutter
And there’s good stuff, guaranteed.

So come pick through my possessions
‘Cause I’m lightening my load.
Then feel free to write a sonnet
Or a limerick or ode.

For garage sales held by poets
Are, to me, the most inviting,
Since your purchases may point you
To the pathway paved with writing.
SANDY

By Vivian Bergenthal

Mother Nature has once again come
knocking
but this time her pleas were heard
round the world
corridors of rancor
    waves of destruction
screams of despair
filled waking and sleepless hours
paths to reason
    salvation
    hope
remained obstructed
    light seemed years away
when we turned back the clock
in which century did we land?
    a time without all we had taken
for granted
until now
JUXTAPOSITION

By Vivian Bergenthal

picture this scene
purple, pink, lavender
hydrangea
sprouting their blossoms
regally elegant
quietly in their element
they reach out in
all directions
scents wafting in the breeze
continuing their
normal trajectory
after all
it wasn’t their fault
that green, gray and blue
trash receptacles
intercepted
what should have been
their sacred space
looking out my window
at this unseemly
juxtaposition
causes dismay
to slowly
seep through my limbs
“The reason I don’t drive anymore is because of blurred vision. Like that truck up there – I see two of them but I don’t know which one is the truck.” I don’t say there is no truck.

“I’m turned around – I wish I could help you with directions. I get confused because we’re travelling from St. James instead of Stony Brook. It’s happened ever since I moved.” Once on Route 25A from Edgewood Road, it is the same road she’s driven west on since 1962.

“Did you take your pills this morning, Mary?”
“Of course I did.”
“Mom,” my niece Annie says, “You didn’t. That’s why I’m here. You’ve run out of your medicine.”
“Oh, maybe I didn’t.”
“Mom – you didn’t take them Thursday morning either.”
“I’m sure I did – I’m very good about that.”
“They’re here in the pill box” – the one with two compartments for each day. “You can take Thursday’s now while I drive to get your prescription refilled.”

I drive her to see my other sister – Ann -- two years younger than Mary. My other sister has no cane, no recent knee surgery, no cataracts, maybe no pills. Ann stays with Mary for a night or two at least every two weeks.

On the way, Mary says she is worried about forgetting things. “Remember grandma?” I do. Grandma lived with us for a while but in time forgot our mother’s – her daughter-in-law’s – name.
“She was a horrible person. She was nasty to Ceil” – our aunt who was Mary’s age – “even after she married Ed. I introduced them, you know.”
Later, my wife Barbara tells me Mary mentioned that sometimes she forgets to take her pills. “If I realize I forgot, I throw them away. Annie will be annoyed with me.”

She is puzzled by the timer on the stove – “It only goes to 10 minutes.” I believe her. While she showers, I mind the muffins and notice the oven timer isn’t counting down.
I show her that it does go to more than 10 minutes – the colon in the middle separates minutes from hours.
I point out that I’ve written this on a little piece of paper that she will find, a paper Annie won’t notice when she comes with the pills.

Mary will never be nasty like grandma – it is not in her. But always a worrier, she will continue to worry – about her husband in the VA home, about finances, about forgetting. My oldest sister, 12 when I was born – always kind to me and my family.

I continue practicing being kind so as I grow ever older, I am more like my sister than like my grandmother who, oddly, was always kind to me. Maybe I just didn’t notice her unkindnesses. Or maybe she just forgot how to be a horrible, nasty person. Or maybe – just maybe – Mary doesn’t remember what grandma was like.
No – that 4th one is an E.”
“Read the next line please.”

Because of years of practice, I can see the misalignment of two elements in a page design if they are off by a 72nd of an inch.

“T – Q – E – N – S”
“Can you make out the next line?”

One Sunday, I told my wife that the NY Times had changed the trim size of the Magazine. ‘No, they haven’t.’
‘Get last week’s and compare them.’
‘It is smaller, but not by much.’
‘I didn’t say by much; I just said they changed the size.’

“It’s hard to read. I think the second letter is an A.
And the fourth one is an O . . . no! It’s a D.”
“Very good.”

“Your cataracts are a little worse. But the glaucoma is stable.”
“And what’s the third thing again?”
I can never remember; the third thing complicates any cataract surgery.
“I really want to put off any surgery until your quality of life demands it.”

“Our Aunt Ceil had glaucoma, you know. Mary and I both take drops for it.”
Perhaps if they had told me sooner, I would have caught the badly elevated eye pressure sooner – what are older sisters for, anyhow?
Instead, the lovely doctor over on Flatbush – with the two to three hour wait . . . it just became too much so I went 19 months, knowing the pressure was rising and needed to be watched.

Suddenly it strikes me – I can make out many of those fuzzy letters because I’ve trained myself – 45 years of working with graphics, serif versus sans serif fonts, picas (six to an inch) and points (twelve to a pica) – but this isn’t the DMV!
I’m not trying to pass the eye test – the doctor wants to know how well I see.
So next time, I don’t struggle to make out the letters –
   I just don’t read the fuzzy ones.
It makes little difference –
   “We want to wait on surgery . . . “
So whose fault is it anyhow?
   My genes? My sisters for not warning me?
   The nice woman ophthalmologist whose degree from Yale
      I could read from across the room? (Could I now?)
   My unwillingness to wait in her waiting room with a bunch
      of children who should have been in school?

So I take a magnifying glass to the polls so I can read the ballot
   in lousy light. And buy a 24” external monitor for my laptop
      and roll the chair in and out from the desk
   as my vision changes from one time of day to another.

I move my book closer and further away until finally
   I bring some words into focus,
   hoping that the next few lines will stay in focus a while.
And take brief naps every 10 minutes when my eyes get weary.
   and watch re-runs of Law & Order or such like in the evening
   when my eyes tell me that it’s time to go to bed way too early.

I make myself content to read a book (maybe two)
   and a few articles a month, plus only small parts of the Times,
   to conserve eye energy and avoid fatigue.
I enlarge any music where the text is on the small side
   and send files of the enlarged music to others
   in the community chorus to justify the time it takes.
      A few of them actually use it.
And I make sure, if I am asked to lead the congregation in singing,
   that I have copied down the hymn numbers from the board
   that is across the nave.

I wonder if that is enough, if I need more change
   in the quality of my life? If I should risk the surgery if it is offered?

No – that’s not a B; it’s an E.
But I only know that because I know how to set type.”
“Oh – but you’re doing really well.”
She’s new, this technician, and encouraging – and young.
“Let’s go do the vision field test. You’re due for that with this visit.”
LOST LAND (HUNGARIAN HISTORY)

By Marianne Bongolan

Up on the hill this tiny village
bearing the seal of passing ravage
moving closer with burning image
wounded houses full of holes
barely standing on their soles
crooked balance with bombed-out walls
and fading spirits of grieving souls

My tiny village up on the hill,
Faintly yellow house with rosebushes around
giant oaks and pine trees in the front
inviting branches waving to lost souls:
come inside.

By the end of the house is the workshop.
My uncle, the beloved carpenter of the village,
With wood chips and sawdust in his hair,
exuding the intoxicating smell of cut wood
holding the tiny dollhouse he just made for ME!

My aunt’s in the kitchen hunched over the blue pan
debating whether the roast is tender by now,
as my mother stirs the clove-scented plum sauce.
then fills the tin-box with THOSE cookies...

And then the bomb hit the roof!
The German bomb was followed by more visitors
and some were taken away
until the Russians arrived and took whatever...

My village became a casualty, redistributed land
to another country, culture and language
by the BIG THREE in Yalta.

Where are you now?

The winding road to the church still open to
believers of any faith and the cemetery behind
accepting all bodies. But those trees fell and my house is crumbling.
That bomb burst the bubble but I am still holding that dollhouse.
With eyes closed, I still smell the sawdust, the sweetness
of the cookies and the fragrant plum–sauce,
while pretending to hide behind the rotten roses.

And now, you want to buy my land
and ask me for the price...

Up on the hill this tiny village
bearing the seal of passing ravage
moving closer with burning image
wounded houses full of holes
barely standing on their soles
crooked balance with bombed-out walls
and fading spirits of grieving souls
During this year I devoted most of my time to cataloguing, organizing and scanning the correspondence, photographs and official papers documenting the lives of a large Hungarian artist family in Budapest. At one point during the early 1960s, I became an extended member and lived with them over 17 years, although that time frame seems like a tiny spot in the lengthy history of this group of artists. The letters cover a period of about 126 years, from 1881 through 2007, allowing a rear view to the historical, cultural and artistic lives and struggle of a group of creative thinkers. By default, as the last survivor, I became the guardian of this rich testimony to history.

The letters, like petals of a rose, open up, allowing a view to the core of the violent history of Europe’s twentieth century, and specifically, to that of Hungary. Across the prism of the micro-history of this family, we get a glimpse of the lives caught between the two World Wars, forced labors, holocaust, hiding and death, then following by Stalin’s oppressive regime after the Second World War. The documents recapture familiar sequences of being forced into internal or external exile, separations and reuniting of family members as well as moving and repatriation while trying to simultaneously survive and remain true to one’s core belief. All members of the family were progressive intellectuals, who, despite being caught by the dictatorial winds -- or rather, storms -- of the times, attached themselves to the humanistic spirit of modern art without compromise.

I found it very difficult to draw a family tree and mapping the connection of the family members for posterity. Family tree! What a metaphor for disappearing leaves belonging to some unknown branches! Following the cultural trends of the early twentieth century, the deadly ill met with shame, sons did not know what happened to their fathers who just disappeared. Some members who felt the wind of fascism fled in time to safe havens, while the Nazis took care of the ultimate cleaning job of the fallen leaves, leaving hardly any trace behind. Of course, passports, birth certificates, photographs and papers were lost, yet somehow the collection of these nearly 2000 letters bear witness to the unwavering faith and human spirit against all odds.
DR. DAVIDSON
By Phyllis Bowdwin

The summer of 2010 was memorable for me because I was unable to walk due to a medical misdiagnosis. Throughout the ordeal I’d say:

“If Dr. Davidson were here, this wouldn’t be happening to me!”

Dr. Ronald Davidson, son of a medical doctor, was an internist. This brusque, attractive doctor who spoke and walked quickly with his head high and chest out, lacked any semblance of a bedside manner, yet his office in an elegant old house in Brooklyn was usually overflowing with patients. He was the first medical doctor I’d met who connected nutrition to good health. He actually read the twelve page medical history and put me on a regimen of exercise, supplements and a shake in the morning with a banana, Irish moss, pumpkin, milk, orgeat powder and agave syrup. I told him I was allergic to bananas.

“How do you know?”

“My nasal passages clog up and I can’t breathe,” I said.

“You’re not allergic to bananas, you’re allergic to wheat,” he snapped. “No more cookies, cakes, pies, doughnuts, pizza, bagels, pasta, or bread!”

I thought he was crazy, but I omitted these items for two weeks and my nasal passages cleared up completely. A miracle! Before entertaining any new ailments, all subsequent visits began with a recitation of my regimen of vitamins, meals and exercise and ended with his mantra: “What we need is your willingness to participate in caring for your health.”

Dr. Davidson screened films about health, nutrition and tai chi in his waiting rooms. A favorite was The Road to Wellness, about Dr. John Harvey Kellogg who ran a sanitarium in 1894 and developed Kellogg’s Corn Flakes. He also shared videos of visits to ethnic markets, showing how to shop for non-traditional root vegetables, which he felt were pivotal to good health. He taught meal preparation and sponsored monthly trips to restaurants to demonstrate how to survive restaurant food. He rarely wrote prescriptions, relying instead on herbs, vitamins, nutritional supplements and acupuncture. He wasn’t a quack, though, and readily made referrals to other medical experts as needed. He referred me to one of the Directors of the American Cancer Society for a lumpectomy. The doctor, an African, said, “Just pay me $200,” then quickly amended that to “Pay me whatever you wish; I owe this family so much.”

Dr. Davidson advised a friend of mine to check herself into a hospital immediately to address a lung infection caused by mold from a sewage backup in her basement. She declined and died three months later.

When he diagnosed a pain in my left arm as bursitis, his assistant brought in six thin, two-inch needles with finely coiled stems. Before I could mention that I didn’t like needles, Dr. Davidson, in a ninja-like move, placed five needles in my left arm and one in the middle of my right knee. He had me recline on the examining table then circled each needle with heat and smoke from a smoldering sweet-smelling stick. He called it smudging.
“Relax here,” he said covering me with a lightweight blanket – needles exposed. He turned off the light, left the room and closed the door. His assistant woke me from a sound sleep to remove the needles thirty minutes later. The pain vanished over thirty days.

When I injured my left knee, a sports doctor recommended arthroscopic surgery to see if the cartilage was torn; if so he would cut it back to prevent additional damage. He sent me to Dr. Davidson for a preliminary exam and approval. Dr. Davidson tore the papers into pieces and threw them up in the air. “No surgery,” he said. “You’re going to have acupuncture, a vitamin B12 shot and a trip to a tropical island where you will spend four to five hours each day exercising your legs in the sea. The balance of your time will be spent baking your bones in the sun, adding extra sea moss to your shakes, and doubling up on your liquid yeast and cod liver oil.”

“Will you commit that to paper?” I asked, unable to mask my grin.

He did. My supervisor, who had had arthroscopic surgery a year earlier and was still using a knee brace and a cane, refused to approve the leave. A friend who had the surgery two years prior still needed a walker and gained forty pounds because she couldn’t exercise. I combined sick days, personal days and President’s week to spend fourteen nights in a guest cottage near a beach in St Croix. I returned kicking, dancing and pain free.

Dr. Davidson was also a visionary. When he learned I was a Life Skills Facilitator, he melted a bit and shared his dream of an island retreat with a team of healing experts who would offer support services to people suffering from various illnesses, addictions and trauma, including drugs, alcohol, nicotine, HIV/AIDS and Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome.

Dr. Davidson died of an undisclosed illness at the age of 57 in 2006. Some patients believe he succumbed to contamination from the fallout at the World Trade Center site during his tireless efforts down there. His office referred me to his colleague, who had me fill out a long questionnaire, which he didn’t read. He was very cordial though; delighted, I imagine, to have inherited so many new patients. I noticed at least a dozen people in designer suits, wheeling sample cases, coming, going, smiling, and shaking hands as they left large quantities of drug samples. I realized he didn’t share Dr. Davidson’s philosophy. I never went back. I sorely miss my doctor, appreciate his genius and the lessons he taught me over the 23 years I had the privilege of being under his care. Before I knew of Dr. Mehmet Oz, I knew of the remarkable Dr. Ronald W. Davidson.
I remember. I would sneak through the halls holding my breath. I’d peak around the corners to make sure he was nowhere in sight. If I saw him I’d dive into the nearest girls’ bathroom, my heart beating in my ears, hoping he hadn’t seen me. It’s just that he always wanted to talk about my future. That dreaded word always made me feel all squirrely in my stomach. He had some crazy idea, some dream he had for me that I definitely didn’t share. He wanted me to reach for things that I knew good and well were way beyond my grasp.

Don’t get me wrong, Mr. Anderson was a great guy and probably the best English teacher that ever taught at Evander Childs High School. I just didn’t know how to make him understand about all the problems in my house.

“Lynn” I remember him saying. “Did you go down and sign-up for that new program for college? I’m sure with your grades you could get in.”

“Yeah, I did Mr. Anderson, thanks for the tip,” I lied, swallowing hard. I couldn’t bring myself to tell him that I’d just had a “career conference” with the guidance counselor and she told me in no uncertain terms that college was not in my future.

It was back in the day. I was a senior at Evander Childs High School in the Bronx. I still remember the counselor’s exact words:

“I see you’re taking a straight academic program,” she said, staring down at the closed folder that I assumed held my transcripts. “You know, that’s for college bound kids?”

“Yeah?” I said in a so what’s your point tone.

“Is that wise?” she continued. “You should have been practical and taken a clerical program or at least a general program. That way you’d have something to fall back on when college doesn’t work out,” she said. Removing the eyeglasses from the tip of her nose and looking directly at me for the first time, she said, “Grace Dodge is running a class in business machines after school. You might want to take that. It’s not too late for that.”

I left her office with the certain understanding that that was that! It was official. I was not good enough for college! My head throbbing, I fought to hold back tears as I rushed out of her office. The tears were angry tears, frustrated tears. How could I have let well intentioned teachers like Mr. Anderson get my hopes up; I should have known better. No one in my family had ever gone to college, and it was silly for me to think that I could be the first.

I enrolled in the business machines class after school.

I graduated that June. In September I finally got a job working a bookkeeping machine. I made $65.00 a week. After taxes I had $50.00. Car fare and lunch left me with about $30.00. I couldn’t afford an apartment so I was living with my friend and her parents. I had to contribute to the rent. The job was boring. I sat all day putting numbers into a machine (the machine became obsolete in three years). Even so, I just figured that I was living the life I was meant to live.
One day in December, the phone rang. It was a woman named Ann Cook from City College. She wanted to know if I planned to attend college. She said they could hold my seat and I could start in January, otherwise they were going to give my seat away. I was confused. What was this, some kind of joke? I told her I hadn’t even applied for college. I tried to make her understand about the counselor and how I wasn’t good enough. I tried to tell her that I had put that dream to bed and was moving on. But this woman was insistent, annoying. She said I should go there and speak to her. I explained that I had to work. I had rent, bills!

I couldn’t believe the nerve of the woman. She didn’t know me, about my life, about my problems! And this was a mistake or some cruel joke! It had to be! I never applied for anything! I knew better! Nevertheless, I decided I would go there, if for no other reason than to straighten this woman out!

I arrive to find a pleasant looking black woman with a closely cut Afro. She flashes a bright and knowing smile and shows me to a seat. I start to tell her there had been a mistake but she stops me.

“Before you say anything, I want to tell you a little about the S.E.E.K. program. It stands for Search for Education Elevation and Knowledge.”

So I’m thinking, “Oh please, spare me,” but she goes on. She’s saying stuff like “political climate,” and “opportunity” and “future” and “success.” All the old familiar buzz words. Loudly, chewing gum, I yawn and lean back in the chair. I’ve made a mistake coming here. I just want to go home and lay out my clothes for tomorrow. Then, I hear her saying, “You would live in the SEEK dorms at no cost. Also all your tuition, books and supplies would be covered.” Then she pauses and says, “Oh yes, and there’s a weekly stipend of 40 dollars.”

I almost fall off the chair and choke on the gum. Did I hear right? A place to live? No rent? College? Me, college? My mind is racing. I don’t know what else to do with the gum so I swallow it. I need to think, figure this out. I know it’s a mistake, but this woman doesn’t seem to know that. Maybe I can go into the program. Would that be a crime? Would I be a criminal? I think I could probably pull it off. If I do really well before they find out that I’m the wrong girl, maybe they’ll let me stay. Yeah, they’ll have to let me stay. Won’t they? Or would I be arrested? I need to take a chance. I need to breathe. I need to be calm. I need to play cards right. She is waiting for my reply.

“Can I see my application?” I squeak as calmly as I can manage.

She hands it to me. There is a name signed on the bottom of the application. My head’s whirling. My vision blurs. I am looking through frosted glass coated with Vaseline. This is probably a crime. I am a thief, stealing someone’s education. I can hear my grandmother’s voice vibrating throughout the room, bouncing off walls. “In this family we don’t abide no rogues!” Banishing Momma back to her permanent place in the lower left quadrant of my conscious, I make a concerted effort to focus on the document in front of me. Finally, I make out the name. It’s my name! My name, first initial and all! There on the signature line, my name is signed in bold and beautiful European letters. It is not even an attempt to mimic my chicken scratch signature! I recognize the handwriting immediately. It is Mr. Anderson’s! What did he do? How did he know?

Ms. Cook just smiled pleasantly and never questioned the obvious difference in hand writing. The rest is history.

I never saw Mr. Anderson again. I never thanked him. I used to wonder what he saw in me that made him reach out and literally change the entire course of my life. Once I became a teacher myself I knew the answer to that question. I understood.
MY HOME

By Jeremy Comins

from the outside
just a few windows
and a door.
but for me
very much more.
fulfillment,
watching a family develop
protection from an unfriendly
world
a place to carve wood and
fabricate dreams.

yes,
just a few windows
and a door
and indeed,
very much more
BIRD WORD

BY SHEILA CONTICELLO

It comes now, a little slower every year
Tip of tongue word forgotten once again -
Small concession to so many years on earth.

So much cerebral matter stored
Hunt word down labyrinthine paths
I find first letter of the word -
On that score always right.

Hope restored!
Brain flitting word alights upon my lips!

How long before bird words cease flight
Stay hidden in their nests?

COLLECTIBLE

BY SHEILA CONTICELLO

“Antiques Road Show” old is good
Denotes history, endurance, desirability.
Unlike people old -
    aching muscles, brittle bones, memory fading, loneliness
Death sometimes a pleasant option

These days her phone is silent
Few friends left to ring her
Halting movements, turtle slow,
Stop her socializing.
A stroll outside’s a big event
No everyday occurrence.

Even so, oftimes forgets
Appointments she has made
Wonders why she’s so alone.
Longevity has cheated her
Of friends and pleasant memories.

    Fine old collectible
    Only to her God.
GIFTS

By Charlotte H. Crawford

They hug they kiss
expressing pleasure
the space between
seeing each other
closed and forgotten

oblivious of the gift she gives
the woman crowned
looks around
from her wheelchair
uneaten cake in her lap
bright wrappings at her feet
asks
“Why are you all so happy?”
LOOK! WE’RE IN THE SUBURBS

By Charlotte H. Crawford

We peer from windows of the slowed school bus
and there’s wide sidewalks – level, no cracks
prissy clean and nobody out walking
Oh! and the quiet lawns bordered with timid flowers
that no birds, bees bother
Today the sky is cloudless and it all seems like an
opening scene ready for a movie, or book
or TV news story

just waiting
before the story begins when
someone appears
or a sound is heard
or a car or plane crashes in or the sky breaks open

we wish the bus would stop so we could get out and
write the story
fill it in with all our crowded street existence
bring the scene to changes

but there’s not enough time
we’re on our way to live the country life
for the next ten days and
anyway

when we come back by here
they tell us
we’ll be different
so it all really doesn’t matter
THE SECRET MONARCH

By Bette Cyzner

While the moon still glows in the black pre-dawn sky,
I descend to my subterranean kingdom,
Where mechanized subjects await my bidding,
Their Cyclops eyes embedded in stainless steel bodies.
I reign supreme, in splendor and solitude,
With no plebian neighbors to interfere.
In the linoleum-floored “throne room,” mine alone
At this early time, secluded as a deep dungeon.
A privileged ruler’s choice: hot, warm, or cold water?
Vigorous, permanent press, or gentle cycle?
Royal blue detergent, morphing into
The pure white of ermine-trimmed regalia.
Machines whir, singing imagined paeans of tribute,
To my ears, acknowledgment of my dominion,
As they strive to fulfill imperial commands.
And now, other drones channel tropical heat
Evaporating moisture like a summer drought
Making clothes dry as a sirocco-parched desert
My hand, extended in a gesture of grace,
Not elegantly yielding a jeweled scepter,
But in wry exchange, a pink plastic clothes hanger.
Finally, my stately robes pristine and fragrant,
I wave farewell, like a condescending noble,
To a crowd of adoring commoners.
I take leave of my fantasy domain,
Where pretending can lighten an odious chore,
And time rockets by on flights of fancy.
I’ll renew my sovereignty next week, as
The 6 AM Queen of the building laundry room!
A TRANSFORMED PERSPECTIVE

BY BETTE CYZNER

Sharply turning away from the roller coaster
With a terrified shake of the head
The ride that once rocketed me past my limits,
And made me soar with the wind on my teeth,
The rush of speed induced pressure between my eyes,
And the illusion of invincibility
As fleeting as the wild journey’s duration.

I close my ears to the music whose notes once
Sent my spirit soaring towards the sun
As my heart beats wildly with thoughts of love
And laughter rose in my now silent throat.

There are no deep breaths in the brightly lit bakery
Although I’m surrounded by aromatic displays,
Oblivious to the heavy, warm air
Suffused with the sugary fragrance of vanilla,
The strong, bitter-sweet perfume of chocolate,
And promises of calorie-induced bliss.
I focus only on buying my sour rye.
THE GIVING GIFT

BY KATHLEEN M. DEVLIN

Throughout the years it happens
As natural as one’s breathing
Giving in many ways
Regardless of feelings, plans, ideas
Needed here, there, everywhere
Sometimes all at once
Matters not that self is denied
That plans change often
That life’s cares weigh upon
Body, mind, heart.
Giving constantly of self to others
Becomes a way of life.
What is this phenomenon?
None other than the giving gift –
The marvel of Motherhood!
ON DEMENTED MAGICAL THINKING

By Edward Dladla

(What) anguish forces a dog to orbit
In such furious tailspins
(When) obviously it has not been wounded?
It is behavior peculiar to dogs.
I have agreed to monitor your quest
To shelter your nakedness.
Is it love or selfishness that makes you
Wonder about the reasonableness of this pursuit?
No one is immune to visions of grandeur
So stay with me for the duration no matter
How narrow the boundaries are or better yet
Let us not be manipulated into beliefs beyond grappling points.
For, with the signs “no dogs allowed”
Lying all over, it had to be deliberate.

PERMISSION GRANTED

By Edward Dladla

Apparently,
Not so long ago
You roamed all by yourself.
Your intention to be left alone,
A shield from violence
Verbal and otherwise.
What was that in aid of?
Cut offs and cut-aways don’t wash
You see!
There’s been no let off
So, welcome back.
“No more than your usual. C’mon sit down, I’m starving.”
“No more than your usual.”
“Ha ha. Touché. What kept you this time?”
“I was having a panic attack.”
“Really? What about?”
“Infidelity. I think Stan is going to cheat on me.”
“I doubt it. Last week you were worried about bed mites. The week before you were sure you had Lyme disease. And…”
“All right, I get your point. I can’t help it. Lately I’m always afraid.”
“You have no reason to be.”
“I know it’s in my head. But every time I go out the door, I get this sick twisted feeling in my insides that something is going to happen.”
“What exactly is it you think is going to happen?”
“Oh, I don’t know. Bankruptcy. A car accident. Herpes. I don’t know…something. I walk around waiting for a knockout.”
“Have you thought about therapy?”
“Only for twenty years.”
“Well you managed to meet me for lunch here. Obviously your appetite isn’t affected.”
“Only because I’m more afraid of you than of my other fears.”
“That’s a start.”
“I’m messed up, aren’t I?”
“A total shipwreck.”
“I can always count on your support.”
“What are best friends for?”
“Sometimes I wonder. I’m looking for suggestions. Get me out of this funk.”
“I suggest you stop watching television. It’s messing with your head.”
“How can I miss Dr. Oz?”
“I think you’re driving yourself crazy trying to buy all the supplements he recommends. It’s not natural. Who wants to be that healthy?”
“You’re missing the point. It’s all natural. We’re being poisoned. Five year olds are developing breasts.”
“There you go again.”
“Really. The world is a toxic dump. There are bacteria that can eat you alive.”
“They’d get quite a mouthful in your case.”
“You need to work on your Pilates. I never realized there was so much to worry about. I’m turning into a quivering mass of Jell-o at the idea.”
“Bitch. You can leave off the sarcasm.”
“I can’t help myself. You make it too easy.”
“You have no sympathy. I don’t know why I bother talking to you.”
“Because I’m the only one who will listen to you.”
“There is that. Don’t you ever worry about anything?”
“Sure. I worry about whether I’ll fit into this pair of jeans if I order lasagna. Now that would be a crisis. You know how much I paid for them? There’s no room for the Holy Ghost if I put on another ounce.”
“You can be so superficial at times.”
“Glass houses. I noticed the flesh eating bacteria haven’t stopped you from getting a pedicure.”
“I bring my own kit.”
“Think what the polish remover fumes are doing to your lungs and your brain cells. Talk about toxic. And those framed certificates on the wall; I saw a Do-It-Yourself certificate kit on sale at Staples.”
“Thanks a lot. Now I’ll have to be afraid of my manicurist. Are you trying to ruin my life?”
“Not at all. I’m pointing out a few flaws in your logic.”
“What a pal.”
“It’s a gift. What are friends for?”
“Well, it’s been such fun. Next week? Same time, same place?”
“Sure. Don’t step on any wet manhole covers as it might frizz your hair.”
“I never go out of the house without rubber soles.”
“That’s my girl. Always hope for the worst.”
“See you next week?”
“Looking forward to it.”
“Me, too.”
VULTURES

By Judy Fritsch

ey they wait for death
hovering, soaring, circling
high in the sky
or sitting ominously on branches
smelling the decay
of dead things
ugly bareheaded
nature’s sanitation squad
squabbling for bits of flesh

in the city
cars seek precious
parking spots
hovering
circling the block
waiting for some car
to pull away from the curb

on sale days
throng of shoppers
hover near the door
of their favorite store
waiting for opening time
to be first at the bargains
snatching a prize
Each year,  
Sometimes between  
Licking the last leftover  
Turkey bone  
And turning the calendar page  
To the last month of the year,  
The miracle of Christmas  
Cruises through the heavens  
Of our hearts  
And lands lightly on your nose.

Now we can see it  
But it was always there  
Right in front of us.

We wanted all year  
To smile at a stranger  
We smile at him now  
And perhaps add Merry Christmas.  
All year we deny  
The impulse of snaring  
Now this miracle month  
Grants us  
The great gift of giving.

What can explain  
This miracle of changes?  
Perhaps the simplicity  
Of the birth of a baby  
Pries away all pretentions  
That stand between us  
And the truth in our souls  
Perhaps it’s the warmth  
And the closeness  
Of people who huddle together  
In the darkness  
Of their long winter world  
Searching for the spark  
That will let them survive  
With more than survival  
And finding once again  
The innocence of love.
EARLY MORNING, MAY

By Eric Glaberson

Starting in first light, we walk from an inn beneath the cliffs of New York’s Shawangunk Mountains. On the inn’s lawn we watch the stately progress of a turkey, a tilting triangle with a head and legs. Then a cardinal presents his bright red body and black face for admiration before he flits away. Heading down a country road, we encounter two Canadian geese standing guard over a pond and Mr. and Mrs. Mallard waddling down the road ahead of us until we follow too closely and, in a flurry of blue, brown, white, they propel themselves into the air.

The fields and woods are waking up, as the sounds of birds build to a cacophony, a storm of coos, warbles, caws, honks, quacks, trills, chirps and screeches. So different from the city’s din, those noises we tolerate as the price of urban living, this avian cacophony makes me feel alive and connected.
THE BUS IN THE WOODS

By Mel Glenn

Draped by hanging fingers,
captured in the clutches of forest leaves,
the orange school bus sits alone and empty.
Wasn’t the charge a generation ago
to carry safely its cargo of children?
Did the kids decide to hijack bus and driver
to forsake formal education
in the one room rural school house?
Did they seek the knowledge of nature,
the wisdom of the wind?
And after the children disappeared,
did the bus refuse to leave its sentry post
to await the lost children of the woods?
Even now, when the moon is high,
the locals claim they can still hear
the children laughing, playing,
in the endless years of innocent recess.

WRITING SMALL

By Mel Glenn

I wish to write small, to cast a nearsighted eye
at the sad disturbances of man, the quick glance,
the suppressed sigh, the pang of jealousy when
he sees her with another on the streets of Avenue U.
I wish to paint with a thinner brush,
to catch the smile, the wistful look,
the hope in a young man’s eyes
when he goes on a first date interview.
I wish to type out the song in a minor key,
to capture the moan of a missed opportunity,
the pain of a lover leaving ’round the corner.
Forgive me that I can’t write larger,
that I feel more at home with a smaller font.
Pardon me, too, that the sweeping saga
lies outside my grasp or vision.
I am more intrigued by what is said in parting
between ex-girlfriend and boyfriend
over coffee in an all-night diner in Queens
than lofty and unresolved philosophical rambles
into the true and lasting nature of love.
THE FIG TREE
BY LINDA GREBANIER

In a corner of the kitchen –
I stand –
Lashed to the mast of anxiety.
Bonds tight –
Heart pounding –
Breath suspended.
Just beyond the kitchen window –
A fig tree has begun to bloom.
Baby buds beckon.
My eyes focus outward.
Slowly my bonds begin to slacken.
Arms outstretched –
I reach for the back door handle.
The powers of early spring give me strength.
I turn the handle and the door opens.
I walk haltingly on newly freed legs toward the fig tree.
The promise held within the small buds unlocks my mind.
Anxiety dissipates –
I am free to wonder –
To hope –
To dream –
To escape the dark corner of the kitchen.
QUESTIONS

BY Yvette Hains

In search of peace
Off to the lake
To watch leaves
Sway with the wind
Smile as waves
Ascend the steps,
Amused as fish
Leap out and dive in.
This peace disturbed,
As I tread the mound
And scan a mansion below
The aged meticulously
Tends the ground
He stumbles but goes
On with his show
The man inside the mansion
Draws the shades,
The man who tends the ground
Falls to his knee,
Is one man blessed?
Is the other cursed?
Or is their place
One of destiny…
And from these thoughts
Emerge a heart of pain…
Why, why…oh, why?
A continual refrain,
Questions with no answers
And no gain,
So be the human
State of man!
GOOD-BYE

By Eunice Harris

First day of school for toddler
Anxious crying moments occur
GOOD-BYE

Leaving for college going away
Empty nest syndrome day after day
GOOD-BYE

Going on trip to far away land
Hesitate leaving attachments as planned
GOOD-BYE

Tears flowing at grave site
Loved one buried before night
GOOD-BYE

Having a great time with family and friends
Does this wonderful occasion have to end?
GOOD-BYE

GOOD-BYE does not always mean forever,
GOOD leads to utmost precious times to treasure.
Standing by my third floor window, I watched storm clouds gather. Rolling dark gray masses engrossed the sky above our Brooklyn tenement. Suddenly electric blue flashes split the atmosphere, sending bright rays of light throughout the apartment. I was mesmerized and wanted to feel the storm. I wanted to be a part of it. I placed both of my small hands on the pane of glass and pressed my nose to the window. A roar started deep in the air. It growled through the sky and I felt the window shake. I could feel the rumble in my body but couldn’t see where it was coming from. Wind rushed down our street. The one tree on our block, across the street near the lumber yard swayed with the power of it. Fat rain drops splattered the asphalt turning it shiny black. Water sloshed down on the street and hit the window pane making curly waves in front of my eyes. I touched the window pane with one finger trying to race rain drops to the bottom of the sill, but they were moving too fast for me.

My father came up behind me, gently touched my shoulder and drew me away from the window. He eased down the wooden blinds and ushered me into the living room where the rest of our family was gathered. My older sisters, Eva and Carol, were sitting on the sofa. Gean, my younger sister, was leaning on Eva, who was rubbing her back. Momma sat in her chair holding Michelle, one of her twins. A white cloth diaper was draped over her left shoulder where Michelle’s head rested. She gently rubbed the infant’s back in circular motions soothing the fussy babe. Marshall, the other twin, slept in a wicker basket by her feet. Nothing seemed to bother him.

Daddy sat down in his chair next to Momma and told me to go find somewhere to sit. The room was quiet and stormy dark. Irregular lightening flashes sliced the darkness from time to time. The only sound was the raging storm outside. Harris, my older brother, held out his arms to me, and I went to sit next to him on the floor. He hugged me and put his finger to his lips indicating that I should be quiet. But I could not be shushed.

After a few moments, I said, “I wanna watch the rain.” Even though I whispered, the words sounded loud in the semi-dark room. Daddy said in a quiet southern way, “No child. God is talking.”

“But I wanna see the storm.”

Then Daddy said more sternly, “God is doing his work. When God is working, be still, be quiet and listen.”
I was upstairs, but I could hear Blackie meow. I knew right away what had happened – one of those wild cats was after him. My Blackie, our six-year-old male cat, was as big as a small dog but was a scaredy cat. If anyone came near him, he would jump.

In the summer, I liked to feed him outside because the smell of the cat food would make you keel over. Where all the feral and abandoned cats came from in our neighborhood I don’t know, but the number was increasing every day. Being a cat lover, I could never understand then or now why people abandon their animals. The fights at night in the alleyways in our urban neighborhood were just terrible. Even the air conditioning couldn’t drown them out.

The condition of these poor cats was appalling. Even the young kittens, often times, had closed eyes – visibly infected. Some of the older cats had missing ears and scars to show the many fights they were in – most likely fighting over food. Many had injuries to their legs that made it almost impossible for them to walk. Even Blackie’s big size didn’t scare these cats who were starving. One day a lovely young mother cat was killed by a car leaving a litter of five newborn kittens under my porch.

What could I do? Something had to be done. I called the A.S.P.C.A. (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty towards Animals) in Brooklyn. I spoke to someone about the situation and was told of the difficulties in catching feral cats. They said, “Why not send for traps from Tomahawk, Wisconsin. They are safe and would not hurt the animal.” Thirty years ago, I paid $45 for a trap, but to me it was well worth it if I could catch some of these stray animals. Boy, did it work.

To begin with, I was surprised at the size of the trap. It was quite large and evidently used to trap raccoons. It was made out of metal and on each side of the trap were doors; one was closed tight, the other left open. The bait was placed in the middle of the trap. Once the animal went in to get the food, the other door would slam closed and the animal could not get out. On top of it was a handle to make it easy to carry. Of course, we laughed when our Blackie was the first cat to get caught in this contraption. He didn’t seem upset. He knew darn well we would release him immediately. One cry from our beloved cat would make everyone in the family run.

Once the cat was caught I would take it to the ASPCA. This was quite a drive for me, at least 50 minutes from my house to downtown Brooklyn. After awhile, the men at the shelter got to know me. So many times I would be tired after a full day of teaching, but I would never keep the animal in the trap longer then the day it was caught. In fact, I kept the trap in my garage with the front door open so that the trap would not get wet. We often wondered what cat would be caught next. Of course, I always checked to see if any cat had an owner.

We had names for these abandoned cats. One of them we called “Uncle Jack,” another was “Tiny Tim,” another was called the “Bullfighter,” and other “Slanty Eyes,” and the king cat was called “Hitler.”

He was by far the biggest cat. He was black and white and over his lip was a black spot that looked like a mustache. That’s why we called him the “Hitler Cat.” He was also the “King Daddy”
cat by the number of black and white cats that were in the neighborhood. I thought, “Oh, if only we could catch him.”

One day I came home late from school. I was hoping there would be no cat in the trap because it was late. Unfortunately, there was a cat. I called the ASPCA and asked if they could come to the house for a pickup. About 5:30 that day the truck came. The man saw the cat in the trap, and he said to me, “Lady, where’s your permit?”

I said, “What are you talking about?”

He said, “You are not allowed to trap animals without a license.”

I said, “You people told me to buy it. How would a girl from Brooklyn know about Tomahawk, Wisconsin? You told me that it was fine. I was never told I was doing anything illegal.”

The man did take the cat, but I was upset by what he said. Two days later who should be in the trap but the king cat, the “Hitler” cat! I couldn’t believe it! My Dad put on heavy gloves to pick up the trap because this was a snarling cat. I couldn’t get to the ASPCA shelter fast enough. When I came to the shelter, who should be at the counter but the man who had come to the house the week before.

I thought, “Oh, he’ll give me such a hard time when he sees the trap. I bet he will confiscate it from me.”

He didn’t say too much, but he accepted the trap and took it into a back room. He seemed to take an inordinate amount of time before he appeared out front.

When he finally came out he said, “In all my years, I’ve never come across a more ferocious cat.”

I thought, “Oh boy, I’m in for it now.”

With a slight smile he said, “Lady, keep up the good work.”

I left immediately. My Blackie now could eat outside without having to worry. The number of stray cats in the neighborhood declined significantly and many of my neighbors were very appreciative of my efforts. When we moved to New Jersey, I thought we should get rid of the trap because we would not need it. There we discovered we had woodchucks. How we got rid of our woodchucks would be another story.
At fifty-seven, I’m completely out of shape. But it wasn’t always that way. In high school, I was very athletic, especially good at handball. I would have been the best if it wasn’t for Bobby O’Hara. He was exceptional. Nobody could touch his game – except that I came very close.

These days, I watch the players at the handball courts in my neighborhood. I brought my eleven-year old daughter Katy along the other day. She was less interested in the games than the boys playing them.

On one of the handball courts a teenage boy was creaming another. Every time the second boy fouled up, he’d say, “Sorry, Tony.”

Katy shouted, “You’re the worst player ever!” I shushed her, but the two boys stopped playing and looked at us.

Tony turned to his friend and said, “She’s right, man. You suck at this. I bet that old guy could play a better game than you.” Tony was pointing at me, and I drew back, startled. Tony went on, “You care to try it, old man?”

Tony’s friend, eyes down, walked off. I knew then that this was serious.

“Go on, Dad,” Katy urged.

“I don’t think I can . . .”

“Come on, Pops,” Tony called. “I’ll take it easy on you. We’ll play for eleven points. Show your little girl what you got.”

I walked slowly onto the court. Tony tossed me the handball and let me serve. The small black ball felt heavier than I remembered. I stood behind the short line, bounced the ball, and smacked it. Good shot. Tony returned it far to my right and I ran for it, barely getting fingers on it. Out!

Tony – one point. Me – nothing.

My left knee ached. Tony slammed the ball low on his serve, and I couldn’t get to it. Two – nothing, his. We went on like that until I managed to get one point to his six.

“Dad,” Katy cried out, “you’re not trying! Come on and take him!”

Katy wasn’t aware of my throbbing ankles or the pain shooting through my leg.

“Ready, Pops?” Tony called from the short line.

I nodded. He slammed the ball to the far right, but I was ready. I hit it so it bounced high off the wall. He returned it and I ran in for it. The ball hit the wall dead center. Tony ran in and slammed it. I was right there and slugged it back. It hit the bottom of the wall, and Tony didn’t have a chance in hell.

“Good man,” he said and slapped me gently on the back.

I had two points to Tony’s six. We played on. I returned a tough near-ground slam that made
Tony whistle his admiration. Three points for me. I served high to make him run out but my ball went over the line. His serve.

Moving back, I wiped my sweaty face on my sleeve. I didn’t want to think about the pain in my legs. We had a back and forth that ended when I hit it high and left. Tony thought it would land out of bounds, but he was wrong. Point to me. Tony started sweating, and that made me feel really good. The game got to ten points all. We would have to play a twelve point game for the win.

“Your serve, Pops,” Tony called.

I hit it so it returned close to my right. Tony got it with his left hand. The ball warbled and I didn’t think it would make the wall. It did, and I was slow to respond. I ran and tapped it with the side of my hand. The ball fell short. Eleven to ten, Tony.

He took his position without a word. My left ankle twisted. The pain was sudden and excruciating. I winced. I could have called time out but I didn’t.

He served and I returned it easily. It put me off-balance though. Tony sent the ball back at me. It was heading directly toward my midsection. Pain shot through my ankle as I stepped to the right. The ball struck my elbow and dropped to the ground. Twelve points – Tony’s win!

He came over and shook my hand. “Good game, Pops. You had me goin’ there.”

“Thanks,” I said. I hobbled over to Katy, and we headed home.

Katy didn’t say anything. She took my hand and smiled at me.

I grinned from ear to ear. It wasn’t so bad being second best.
THE SUMMER GARDEN

BY WILLIAM LEMMON

Many varieties of flowers reach out to greet me
With magnificent petals and dark green foliage.
They wear the colors of the rainbow
And create a calm harmony.
The sweet fragrance of the roses is
In sharp contrast to the strong scent of the marigolds.
The roses lure me to come closer.
Dense petals form a swirling tunnel
To the center of the flower.
Sharp thorns on rose stems remind me
To look, smell, observe, but “don’t touch.”

The deep orange coloration of marigolds
Reminds us that autumn is near.
Bumble bees flutter from flower to flower
Showing off their magnificent yellow jackets.
The warm, gentle wind slowly moves
Flower stems back and forth like the bobbing ocean waves.
The laughing faces of the pansies bring
A carefree, jovial atmosphere to this garden area.
They put me in a light-hearted mood
And say, “Lighten up – don’t be so serious.”

Some flies and mosquitoes create a buzzing noise
That breaks the stillness of a summer’s day.
Mingled in-between the flowers are a few new weeds
That are striving to survive and spread.
They weave their way through the garden,
Demanding respect and recognition.
The yard, beautiful to behold —
Tranquil and busy at the same time.
A snapshot in time of nature’s handy-work
At its very best.
FLUTE AND KEYBOARD MAGIC
(During a presentation of “Ode to Joy”)
BY William Lemmon

Feelings begin to rise as the
Keyboard and flute introduce melodic notes.
The intensity steadily builds
And I feel light and airy as if I’m
Rising to the starry heavens above.
My body tingles with inspiration
And love as the notes lift my being
To new heights of musical experience.
I’m energized and refreshed
As the music surrounds me.
Smiling, I wave my arms like
A master conductor.
For a few moments I’m in
Another dimension of glorious sounds.
As the piece concludes, I’m left
With optimism and hope
For all the future tomorrows.
RELINQUISH
By Janet Lieberman

Wheeled in from the shadows…
So weary, shaking in mute assent,
Trembling hands caress folded tissues…
Tears welling, fall on hallowed temples,
Thin lips curve sweetly,

Breaking my heart.
My prayer for Mother…
Be released into afternoon sun soon ending…
Skip on sand by seashore,
Inhale salt air,
Run through tall grasses,
Stare at stars in deep velvet night…
Grasp my hand,
Embrace your child.

Relinquish.

CAREGIVERS
By Janet Lieberman

Helpless hospice patient,
Withered great grandmother
Ravaged by senile dementia,
Spirit suspended by invisible thread.

Observing faces peering at her
Like a silent endless dream…
Succumbing to gentle ministrations
Washing, feeding, dressing…
Series of daily ceremonies.

Earnest Grena, cropped shiny hair
Quizzical black eyes,
Kindhearted apprentice Sophia
Gentle pragmatic Rebecca…
Dedicated vigilant caregivers

Consoling caregivers,
Sharing rationed moments in time
Monitoring the long goodbye.
THE HOMELESS MAN

By Barbara Levitt

He died in an empty and silent parking lot
This sad homeless man
A victim of violence and cruelty
With mortal wounds ending his life
Alone and abandoned
Amidst his meager, shabby belongings.
His daily existence faced
A series of closed doors
And yet he remained
Always polite and gentlemanly
There was no family to mourn him
As he entered eternity.
But there were others who cared
Unselfish and decent human beings
Who fed him when they were able
And determined to give him a proper burial
A ceremony to honor and remember him in death
Since he was much forgotten as a live human being.
May his soul finally attain peace
That eluded him in his lifetime.
THE OLD HOUSE ON THE CORNER

By Barbara Levitt

The house on the corner is silently weeping
Its once vibrant essence now fading away
Past ghosts from within are forever sleeping
No more to encounter a welcoming day.
Built as a three tiered Victorian place
Whose architect carefully planned it with pride
Large, boisterous families loved sharing the space
As newborns to grandparents gathered inside.

Surrounding wild land now encumbered with weeds
Plus a lawn quite neglected for so many years
Baring row upon row of spindly brown reeds
While the home’s wounded spirit just disappears.
Time passes and wood shakes have crumbled to dust
Precious memories erased with each sad broken wall
Metal piping revealing erosion and rust
To replace this doomed scene is a sleek shopping mall.

Poor Victorian house is demolished at last
I feel desperately sad at the loss of the view
Modern civilization finds fault with the past
Tearing down what is old to then build something new.
COMPASSION

BY ANNETTE MANDIS

Walking on Jerusalem Street
Aromatic flowers, alive, calm…
Picturesque, beautiful scene,
Feeling so serene.

Suddenly, explosion
BOMB!
Horrific bloodbath,
Crowd in shock!

Destructive, callous terrorists
Swatting us down like flies!
unfortunate victims, maimed, grievous wounds
Some victims tougher, others more fragile…

Good hearted surgeons at Hadassah*
Compassionate, famed survival skills,
Assisting Arabs and Jews – without strife!
Humanitarian, cherishing life.
Preserving life – a mitzvah**
Compassion surpasses malice.

*name of hospital in Israel
**good deed
SWIRLING MERRY-GO-ROUND OF SEASONS

By Annette Mandis

Breathtakingly beautiful breezy autumn day,
Hair blowing, cheeks flushing, amusing merry-go-round
Enjoying soothing motion, circular sway,
Marvelously colorful earth-tone leaves upon the ground.

Wonderfully white freezing winter day,
Fantasizing, frolicking, fun merry-go-round
Snowy picturesque scene, children at play,
Laughter, gratifying energetic sound.

Rejoicing, relaxing, radiantly rainbow-colored spring day,
Smelling stimulating scents, swirling merry-go-round,
Feeling life renewal, rapturous sun ray,
Appreciative awesome wonders astound.

Satisfying scintillating sunny summer day,
Exciting daringly hot merry-go-round,
Transparent sweaty ride, worth price through, willingly play,
Extraordinary pleasure, happiness abounds.

Arriving full circle, transforming seasons, day by day.
Achieving completion, riding merry-go-round,
Nature’s serenely flowing patterned way,
Each season perfection, unique, deserves being crowned.
BETWEEN THE LINES

By Carmen Mason

There were no lines when I was growing up
to read between, no writings
on walls, in caves, hidden in trees
No one said what we lived was a sham.
No one named it, mummy, a sister
little laughing me putting jewels inside
my belly button, keeping rolls and soda
beneath my bed, a make-shift orphan
who would always feed herself
(sometimes I flattened bread to wafers
and stole the wine glass from the cabinet
to make His blood from Classic Coke
anointing my dolls with His sweet
bloodshed for me for thee) not that we
ever, ever talked about such things:
religion was smells and bells, not flesh and blood
that was for the masses, mummy said
she thought the masses sloppy
Remember, we’re the originals
amongst the copies.

So on we went and waited for the light and
cursed the bread – oh stop, you silly laughing
girl, that’s Richard Cory, silly girl, and Lizzie Borden took an ax,
gave her mother
forty whacks, when she saw what she had done –
stop it, silly, stop having fun at our expense.
Don’t you ever take anything seriously
or are you like all the rest, a copy cry baby
a poor, poor me, who can’t take it now that
Daddy’s dying, your sister’s checking out
and mummy’s got to put her hat on and go
find some work so we don’t all die ‘cause
you father’s left us nothing and after all,
if we squeeze the toothpaste tube and shun all
paper products, we three will go to Europe once
your sister snaps out of it – she’s so difficult right now.
here’s a dollar for your – The Red Shoes and
Samson and Delilah’s playing, they don’t get
better than that and here’s left over for a big
milk shake, you skinny sweet girl. Its fine, it’s great!
I blame the wife.

I’ve done enough twelve-step work to know that playing the blame game is a character defect if ever there was one, but sometimes I get into that old stinking thinking and work up a huge resentment. Talking to my sponsor helps. He points out that I was taken in by her, a mere mortal, whereas she succumbed to the temptations of a wily immortal. Talking it out lifts me out of my pity party to the point where I no longer feel bitter about leaving the garden and actually start feeling sorry for Eve.

A lot of people surmise its sex that got us kicked out of the garden. They should read more closely. The serpent tells Eve that eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil would make us like God. And he was right! No sooner did we eat than bliss evaporated and self-awareness took over. In shame, we covered our nakedness and hid from God. A lot of good that did!

At first, living outside the garden wasn’t half bad. For the first time ever, we had to go to work, but that whole first year we worked together. Every night we made love. Life had become an adventure. Then the kids came along. After that, Eve couldn’t help me all that much. She indulged the children and ignored me and my feelings. Often we were both too tired for love-making. Don’t get me wrong. I love my kids, but the chaos they brought with them was all new to me. I began yearning for that old bliss in the garden, and looked for it in all the wrong places.

Meanwhile, Eve’s behavior wasn’t all that upstanding. We both hit bottom, each sought out a program and began working it and life got better. She, of course, has always gotten the rap throughout history for humanity’s sorry situation and that’s been hard for her to come to grips with. Recovery is an inside job, we remind each other, don’t look to others for self-esteem, don’t trot to the hardware store for oranges. With all this self-awareness come feelings, and they can be hard to manage, as hard to manage for us as they are for God.

Because of those two bites of apple, we have in us a spark of divinity similar to the dot of humanity in God—picture the cosmic principle of yin and yang. God is love, and we have become capable of compassion. Indeed, only compassion for ourselves, for other human beings and for God can settle our restless hearts.

So, I’m not sorry about having to leave the garden for the real world. It was indeed a Felix Culpa.* And when I start to lose sight of that fact, I know serenity is only a prayer or a meeting or a phone call away. Today, I’m a grateful member of the human race. When I look around at this beautiful world and all the lovely people in it, I’m so full of gratitude I have to pinch myself.

*happy fall
LOVELY PHOTO

By Kathryn Mets

There’s a lovely photo
of a ramshackle shack
tin roof strapped down
with metal bars
on a floating island
with rolling hills
pale flowers in the foreground
green trees in the back
clouds above
water below
and in that water
a mirror image
of that lovely photo
of a ramshackle shack.

It’s hard to tell
where reality ends
and reflection begins
except for the ripples
in the water.
I saw the young man
sitting on a bench
half hidden by high bushes
as I walked the path around the lake
and would have passed him by
but for the scent of his cigar
streaming across to me

Then, I knew of him
I had been told there was a day
he tried to end his life
and I could feel his parents’ pain
in addition to his own
a son who never spoke to neighbors
a son who never smiled

I hope I always see him
sitting by the lake
whenever I walk by
A TREE IN SUN

By Teena Miller

I love to see a tree in sun
its moppy head of leaves dancing to the wind
angled rays of light creating shadows on its trunk
standing tall in the Florida sun
giving me needed shade

I love to see a tree in sun
but this time is bare leaves
branches are glistening boughs
after a mid-winter ice storm
a crystal chandelier
a tinkling I can almost hear
along the New York, shore

I love to see a tree in sun
but none grow above the timberline
on this cold Alaskan mountain
I seek them out with all my strength
looking down I find some sustenance
mass with small pink wildflowers
I know I will survive
SNOW

BY CONSTANCE MITCHELL

At 5:30 A.M. she woke up to the radio alarm. The room was dark and quiet. Nora lay in bed listening for the usual morning sounds — nothing. No trucks headed for the East Side Drive, no buses screeching to a stop as folks got on and off on their way up First Avenue. It dawned on her then; it must have snowed during the night. The snow always muffled the sounds of the city. She walked across the shag rug in her bare feet. Snow covered everything for as far as she could see from her fourth floor apartment window. Damn, she thought. It’s only January and this was the third snow storm in the New Year. There had been a time when she loved the snow. She hadn’t given her ice skates away until she was forty and continued skiing until she reached fifty-five. But now, she walked gingerly in the snow, afraid of falling. Breaking a hip at sixty-four wasn’t the best idea.

Nora turned on the TV to hear if school was closed. She made her bed and listened. Schools would be open but an hour later than usual. It really didn’t matter one way or another. In forty years of teaching, she’d been absent just once when she broke her leg one year and had to be out from June to the first of October. She showered and dressed in a wool sweater and skirt. Then, she had a glass of juice and a cup of tea with a slice of dry toast. All the while, she was planning the day’s lesson in her mind. She would begin the eighth grade English class with descriptive adjectives. She became engrossed and was alarmed to notice how the time had flown. Because of the snow, she wanted to leave home by 7:30 in case of delays. Nora rinsed the dishes and put on her boots, a heavy knit hat and her coat with the deep pockets in which she put her Metro Card. On the bus, she decided that she would use the day’s snow as an introduction to the lesson: cold snow, wet snow, beautiful soft snow, etc.

The school yard was covered in deep snow that was untouched except for one pair of footprints that led to the side door. The prints were large and made deep ruts in which she put her feet. This made her passage a lot easier. Upon turning the corner of the building, she saw Mr. Colby, the custodian. “Ms. Payne,” he said, surprised. “What brings you out on a day like this?” “School’s open, isn’t it?” Nora said.

“Why, yes it is, Ms. Payne, but…”

“Well, if it’s a school day, the children will soon be here and the teachers should be here to greet them, don’t you think?”

“I’ll sign in and go on up,” Nora said, walking ahead of him.

“Go up where, Ms. Payne?” Mr. Colby was confused.

“To my room, of course, 203. Whatever is the matter with you this morning, Mr. Colby? Snow got you snowed?” She giggled at her own cleverness.

Mr. Colby looked down at the ring of keys that he held.

“Ms. Payne,” he mumbled. “Ms. Payne, you don’t work here anymore. You retired two years ago. We gave you a proper send-off-party, and speeches and gifts and….” He looked up at her, but she had backed away through the doors, into the yard that had only one set of prints in the beautiful, soft, white snow.
EVACUATED

By Daniel Moinester

On the second day of the conflagration that became known as World War II, the British government, in an attempt to save the children of London from impending German bombs, ordered everyone of school age evacuated. Classmates, along with their teachers, were told to report to the local railway station where they would be transported to the countryside. Safely removed, the children would be “adopted” by a local family for the duration of the war.

My mother was 14 years old, her brother 12, when she was brought to Victoria Station. The confusion and crying of hysterical women, some who would never see their children again, made it difficult to understand her mother. As they embraced, she managed to hear a final admonishment, “Don’t let them separate you from your brother.”

“I will try,” she responded meekly. With this caution ringing in her ears, she boarded the train.

Arriving in Taunton, a small farming village in southwest England, the children were escorted to the auction house, a dilapidated building with a dirt floor surrounded by wooden bleachers. In normal times, it was here that livestock was auctioned to the local farmers. On this surreal day it was the children who would be auctioned. As each child stepped forward villagers ‘volunteered to adopt’ that child. (They were actually required to take a child and were paid by the government for the service). But in times of war who would listen to the entreaties of a young girl. My mother and brother were separated, and she soon found herself walking ‘home’ with Mr. and Mrs. Smith whose only comment was how fortunate it was that they had not gotten “one of those Heebs.” Unbeknown to them they had. Thus began her years ensconced in this sleepy helmet.

Each morning began with fear; fear that her name would be called during morning lineup. It was in this manner that children learned if a parent had been killed in the previous night’s London bombings. My mother recalled one occasion when a young girl in her class, upon hearing her name, fell to her knees and refused all exhortations to come forward. A frightening new world awaited her, and she did not want to walk through that door.

Fear of revealing her heritage forced my mother to feign being a non-Jew, eating forbidden foods such as bacon and ham. But attending church on Sundays, kneeling and reciting Christian prayers proved too much, and she resisted. Physical punishment forced her to comply but gubernating raised fears in her mind that she would suffer eternal damnation for discarding all she was raised to believe.

In London, the Germans, intent on destroying English morale, intensified their bombings. During the day, Londoners, in the face of the previous night’s carnage, performed their war duties and acted as if everything were normal. But at night, they slept fitfully in air raid shelters, in the underground, in basements or under stairs, fully aware of the randomness of those bombs. Churchill labeled their courage in the face of this danger “their finest hour.” My grandfather was not of that ilk. One night, German incendiary bombs forced my grandparents from their basement shelter. Running into the street, they found every building engulfed in flames. With bombs still falling, they ran for their lives, as heat from the fires singed their skin and hair. Fortunately they escaped with relatively minor burns. But my grandfather no longer had the fortitude to face these dangers,
so he and my grandmother left London for the safer confines of Taunton, reuniting my mother and her parents.

By 1943, American soldiers had arrived. In preparation for D-Day and the invasion of France, they trained in the English countryside. My mother, now 18, volunteered to help these young men, some away from home for the first time, feel more comfortable by serving them tea and biscuits at social gatherings. At one such event, she served a particular American corporal. At war’s end that corporal, soon to be my father, returned to Taunton, asked for her hand and led my mother on her second evacuation, this time to America.
CONÉY ISLAND, MY CHILDHOOD PARADISE

BY SELMA REVA NEWMAN

I remember well the summers of my childhood. I lived in the South Bronx where my apart-
ment was a helium balloon filled with hot stagnant air and outside it was no better. An open
window invited no relief; instead, it provided my sister and me small winged pets that we found
entertaining. My sister demonstrated to my disgust that flies can survive headless, like chickens.
Sans air-conditioning or fans, the light summer sundress I wore clung to my skin like a damp wash
cloth wrung out with tepid water. My home was a combination steam room and sauna.

We escaped from the prison of Bronx heat to the paradise of Coney Island breezes. Taking can-
vas bags we had stuffed tightly like subway cars during rush hour with bathing suits, shorts, tank
tops, sundresses, sandals and other essentials, my mother, sister and I set out to our annual summer
oasis, my grandmother’s home in Coney Island. It was an hour and a half train ride. A fan circling
overhead like a strange four winged bird provided slight relief from the stuffy subway car filled
with the odors of perspiring humanity.

Suddenly, I awoke from my daydreaming aware of a sweet fragrance in the air. I knew this
meant we were almost there! Looking out of the dirty window, the familiar open acres of vacant
fields appeared. I wished that I could run like a deer through the tall grass, a novelty for an inner-
city child. The train slowed as it prepared to enter the last stop, Stillwell Avenue, and my anticipa-
tion peaked as I breathed in the fresh aroma of golden sands and salty ocean air. Soon I would be
building castles with moist, dark sand and frolicking in foaming, white surf. Summer days were
never-ending in my Coney Island paradise.
SEARCHING FOR MEANING

By Kyung Park

Once
There was a hurricane named Sandy
Knocked out power of many New York
And New Jersey areas
Lost homes
Shivering
A week later
Another snowstorm on top of them
Searching for hope
Through the rubble
Searching for meaning
Through gas shortage
Even though it was November
Feels like January coldness
Creeps in to hundreds of powerless homes
Without answer
Team up to help here and there
Merciful God trying to give us messages
Remembering
Be good to earth
Still trying
Searching for meaning
This will be another history
somewhere in time

By Dianne Piankian Geiger

you led me to your meadow
we watched the pale moon rise
you covered my still body
with painted butterflies

bathed me in your river
dried me with soft cotton
taught me how to dance
all abandon shame forgotten

you dressed me in bold colors
I’d never thought of wearing
and kissed me in a language
I’d never dreamt of hearing

fed me ripened peaches
entranced me with your songs
lay with me in moonlight
and held me all night long

you listened to my stories
gave comfort when I wept
shared with me your history
and watched me as I slept

when we climbed atop your mountain
I reached out to touch the sky
we stood in starlit wonder
watching mystic fireflies

my time with you is over
but my memories won’t expire
I’ll caress them in my day dreams
warm my body with their fire
FRANCONIA FALLS, SUMMER 2012
By Dorothy Prideaux

cloud-floating blue skies over mountains
and a one acre waterfall of whale rocks
we sit on your stone-grey skin
unwrapping lunch eaten joyously
soaking the sun and squeals of dare-devil teens
sliding down your water shoot
into the bubbly laughing pools under your belly

a frisky puppy splashes and happy children swim
then pose for dad to preserve summer vacation 2012
reluctantly we leave to re-enter
the green gloom of the woodland path
but we’ll savor the shining sunlight, water,
happiness and laughter
in the memory folds of our hearts

SILENT REFLECTIONS
By Dorothy Prideaux

a small simple pond
in thin glassy silence
circled by a sentinel
of rigid rocks
oblivious to
the sandy seed casings
of a humble bush
reflects

a proud blue sky
haughty burnished leaves
and a herringbone of dusky tree branches

until ripples from
a lowly wood duck
splinter the peace

releasing
shards of silence
HE DOESN’T MEAN IT

By Sarah Quigley

He said he will go away and never come back ever again.
He said no matter how much I ask him to come back, even if it’s hundred times, he won’t come back.
He said I don’t know how to do anything right, I buy him the wrong clothes, the food I cook is disgusting.
He said I’m old. (That hurt.)
He said even though he told me he liked the present I gave him for his birthday he hated it.
He said he never wanted the blue paint I put on his bedroom walls because I made it “baby blue” and he is not a baby.
He said he is not a baby because eight years old is not a baby.

I said he could say whatever he wanted but he still wasn’t going to have a cell phone until he was ten.
THE PUPPET

BY FRANCES ROSENFELD

The puppeteer shows his strings
His puppet glances at the strings
Feeling sad, forlorn, outwitted
Dark heavy clouds
Creeping toward him

No escape
He accepts his fate

The puppeteer
Pulls the puppet’s strings
Causing him to bounce
Up and down
Up and down

He is caught in a web

Everyone laughing
MY BACK YARD
By Nat Rosenfeld

Each year little bugs
Would suck the life from
The peonies bush.
Each year the birds would eat
The cherries before we
Could get to them,
And the little peach tree
Leaked sap from its bark.
No peaches again this year.
In 1942 president Roosevelt
Asked for victory gardens.
I turned over a patch of soil
And planted a seed packet of radishes.
They were so thin, so scrawny,
I thought we’d lose the war.
But because I was just a kid,
I called it MY back yard
And I loved it.

ANTICIPATION
By Nat Rosenfeld

I think I see it
I’m sure I see it
here it comes
there it goes
It didn’t stop
It didn’t even slow down

I’ve waited and waited
Watching tanker trucks
Go by
But they never stop here.

Why complain.
A hurricane
Nowhere to go.
FORBIDDEN LOVE

By Donna M. Rubens

They met as planned under the grape arbor. He was there first, listening for every sound. The wind made the leaves whisper. A small animal, the household cat he supposed, cracked some twigs. Until she came, floating softly in ballerina slippers (soundless in the house, he knew) and looking, he thought, like a princess in her shimmering cloak, he was taut with anticipation and anxiety.

What if they were caught? This had been running the whole time through his mind. But there she was, leaning gracefully under the cascading grapes and smiling with hope and ardor.

Wordlessly they embraced; no words were necessary. They kissed, they hugged, they petted. They sat together, two outcasts, hopelessly involved in a forbidden romance. Leaning into each other, they huddled for warmth, and exhausted they slept. The breaking dawn woke them both. Real danger was in the approaching light; they had to tear themselves apart.

But first, they partook of their solemn ritual, signaling that they would go on until they found a way or until they were forced apart. Reaching above to the purple bounty, he plucked a grape and put it to her lips. She ate, the juice squeezing onto his fingertips. Then it was her turn. She pulled the most lovely, succulent fruit she could reach and held it to his lips.

For one more night, they were one.
SEEKING SILENCE

BY CASSANDRA SMITH

Shattered sounds of
Ground-breaking drilling
Punctuating the air
Like fingernails
Scraping across
A blackboard

Reaching up towards
My terrace window
The bursting ground
Seeking solace at noon

Retreating workers
Reaching for lunch
Giving us peace
For but a moment

Hoping to view
Just a glimpse of
Completion I wait…
But the holes in cement
Peeking through are
Not open to previews

Pulling the respite
Away like gum
They start
All over again

Working hard hats
Beneath my window
Hammering to a wild
Wild tune

Rup pa pa pum
Rup pa pa pum
Closing windows
Slamming shut
Waiting patiently for
Silence…
CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

BY CASSANDRA SMITH

Slouching in the roasting
Sun on the stoop
In a wooden creaky chair
Watermelon juice
Trickling down
Her fat brown chin

White whiskers
Peeping out like
Baby chicks waiting
To suckle

Raspy voice
Cackling like hens
In a barnyard
Whispering secrets
And not calling
It gossip

Eyes and ears
Everywhere
Listening and seeing
In unison

Not a child safe
From mischief
Without consequences
Floppy straw hat
Sitting unafraid
Covering up her head

Ice water in
A glass-jar
Like the one she
Spat tobacco in
Through yellowed
Teeth

Yet somewhere
Deep inside her
Sat a glimmer
Of hope
Lost years ago
When we children
Didn’t know
The young
Ms. Williams…
NATURE’S ART
MAINE

BY E. MILDRED SPEISER

Wind splashing
yellow lichen shaded rocks

Growing gusts –
lofting leaves from treetops

Flowing winds
floating gull sounds

Lightning strokes
broken bisque birch

Startling
Stark dark rocks

Swirling
Whirlpool sculpted rocks

Slabs of
Granite geometrical

Surrounding
Surreal black, white

Sowing seeds
Hoeing seaweed haystacks

Misting coast
Drifting ghostly sea scenes

El Greco’s Toledo
Van Gogh’s sky
Cezanne’s sylvan setting
Spotted Seurat stones
Millet’s farm of the sea
Winslow Homer, rower

A tripod easel
balances
The camera’s wide eye.
An accordion bellows box
Records nature’s art.

The writer’s brush paints word visions.
COUNTRY IMAGE

By E. Mildred Speiser

Copper streaked skies
Burnish the landscape

Lines of gold speckled geese
Glide through lime algæ

lingering shadows
summer sunset
AT THE DRAWBRIDGE IN LATE SUMMER

By Angelina Spero

Streams of indigo stretch
across a graying sky
as the drawbridge begins to open;
My car comes to a halt,
and the rest of the road goes silent.

Soon, bright, colorful lights
from the ocean below,
sounds of trumpets and
trombones, drums and saxophones
people disco-dancing
on the party boat
approaching the draw-bridge.

I jump out of my car
lean over the rail, call out.
“Wait for me
I want to come
to your party!”
MOMMA AND MY TEACHER

By ANGELINA SPERO

Swishing, swirling suds
on the linoleum floor,
she swings her hips
as in a tarantella dance.

Scattered throughout
her cotton housedress
are prints of red roses
like those American beauties
from Poppa’s garden
wrapped in newsprint
to take to my teacher,
Miss Stone,
straight, stiff like starch
who stroked my hair, asks
does my mother
soak it in olive oil?
TOUCHED BY MUSIC

By Dotti Anita Taylor

Here I am like a rosebud
Night preventing even a shadow of light
from entering my space
It’s tranquil, peaceful, warm
I rest sheltered by a blanket of lavender velvet
I am awakened
The crescendo begins as each petal eases away
Snatches of sunlight begin to peek through
bringing warmth to my soul
The magic continues
tingling feelings commence
Excitement builds within me until that moment…

The sun beams down
I’m free as the wind on a summer day
Smiles are upon my face
I shout with joy in my heart
JERUSALEM ISRAELI ORCHESTRA

By Tillie Thall

My heart melts like butter
No words do they utter.
Yet its music makes my eyes swell with tears.
They stir up my emotions
Like a magic potion.
Is it the cello, viola or oboe
That makes me feel so?
or is it the story of a nation
That creates this sensation
Of sadness and beauty together
That bind an unforgettable tether.
WATCHING

By Paula Thesing

I wandered into Straus Park yesterday
To read
I found a bench
Near an old man in rolled pants and sandals.
I checked out the flowers
Took in the sounds of the fountain
Watched the birds watching the children
Seeking an opening to splash
They soared and zoomed overhead
A lot
There were two parents
Talking
And two kids three or four years old running faster than the birds
could soar
Around and around the fountain.
They crouched low
To remove shoes and socks
I waited to hear what the parents would say
I wanted drama
I didn’t get
A peep
Except for the birds.
Those kids treated that fountain like Orchard beach
And it wasn’t even warm
They got all soaked and wet
I wondered if I would have allowed my own two such leeway
Forty years ago in this same park
When it was run down and overrun
But
Weren’t we all the same?
The old man
The birds
The kids
The over sixty ladies with hats and magazines
Watching
NOT EXACTLY

By Adrianne Toomer

not exactly
what she wanted
not precisely
who she planned on
not absolutely
all she hoped for
yet resolutely
the one she chose
to treat herself
the way it needed
he
no more perfect than she

GIFTS

By Adrianne Toomer

Ladylike leaves
look about demurely
showing off painted dresses
from ‘neath fading coats of green
choreographing
their dances
with fluttery flair
swaying slightly
in bashful breezes
spinning in spurts
aglide on gusty winds
rushing, floating
settling softly
in finale
fall upon the ground and
rest ‘til rustled beds abound
engaging rolling rompers
elating sassy stompers
life worn leaves
gathered with grumbles
all bagged and bundled
garbagemen’s gifts
in autumn
CAN I GIVE HIM AWAY?

By Steve Tullin

Quick flicks of a warm tongue
Eight pounds of downy white hair
On my chest
Before dawn
First of five walks
Rain, wind, sleet, blistering sun
Responsibility.

Jump, twist, pant, grab a toy
Circus dog on hind legs
Hop, hop, hop
throw his birdie
Run, clamp down, retrieve
Over and over and over
Until he tires on the rug.

She said, “NO DOG!”
I didn’t listen
Or I didn’t hear her
Companion, buddy
Hobby in retirement
But need to come home
To walk, to feed, to play.

Cost of food, shots, visits
Not to mention
Boarding at the Vet
From time to time
And during long vacations
Take out a mortgage
So happy to come home.

Black olive eyes
Staring into mine
Looking for love,
Kindness, care
Licking continuously
Following me from room
To room, curling at my feet.

How can I give him away?
He’s family.
THE MUSIC

By Sally Turner

It was the music that drove her –
She couldn’t skate
Without the music.

Loop jumped* up to the stars
Came down on the side of the moon
With a sit spin.*
Caught on to a flying camel*
Hooted with a back inside rocker.*

Risked all she was with the death trap.*
Propelled through the desert
On a reverse delayed axel.*

Reached a crescendo
Inside Mohawk*
Finished
A triple toe Wally.*

*Names of jumps and spins in figure skating.

GRIEF

By Sally Turner

She danced dreamily in his denim shirt
And awaited his coming.
The sages told her the five steps
But she refused to accept acceptance,
Waiting, waiting for a sign.
The pendulum in the banjo clock
Began its timeless swing –
He appeared as a shadow
but by his shadow he was known.
It was his breath she breathed
And by his breath she lived.
MEMORIES OF SANDY

By Patricia Valles

Thursday, October 25, 2012. The weather reports were becoming ominous for Staten Island and the New Jersey shore. “It looks like a direct hit and both weather models are agreeing,” the Weather Channel announced repetitively.

We methodically began to organize supplies as we simultaneously prepared our costumes for the Halloween Ball. Everything was tied down and secured. Flashlights, candles, lanterns and batteries were replenished and strategically placed. We were prepared. Now it was in the hands of the Fates.

The Weather Channel was becoming sadly addictive as we watched the storm heading right for Staten Island. Last year’s nor’easter having reeked destruction the past Halloween, made it surreal. However this was a “never before” weather situation, they reinforced continuously. The storm’s energy together with a full moon, promised to bring a much worse a toll. It had been dubbed “Frankenstorm.” Their love of such occasions had them dancing from map to computer models. Some of them seemed as if they had been awake for way too long with way too much caffeine.

We felt the energy as we headed to the beach. “It is perfectly still,” my husband Bob observed, as he looked up at the clouds. They were turning a threatening shade of gray. Our dog was in total vigilant mode. Her senses seemed wildly alive as she threw herself to the ground, as if to blend in. She did her wolf pose atop the hill, her snout saluting the sky.

“We need to get back and get into costume. We’re all set and now we celebrate Halloween and wait. It feels strange…knowing so long in advance… you know?” I took pictures of the wild grasses, glowing shades of yellow and orange and red. We headed home, not knowing that by our next visit, many of these trees would be lying on the ground with the trunks snapped as if they had been bitten off by some monstrous creature.

We mused about costumes but looked suspiciously at the sky as we left. It was incongruous. Going home to dress as Lady Jane of Henry the VIII fame, accompanied by Friar Tuck. Through a series of mishaps with glue, wigs and mustaches, the previous plan of Vampira and Rasputin had been transformed into a much more likeable pair.

The night was spectacular and we danced and ate with unicorns and fairies and the Mad Hatter who spent the night looking for Alice. It was a wonderful party indeed. Al Roker took backstage to ghouls and goblins, at least for that Saturday night.

Sunday morning, my daughter and her fiancé were evacuated. I put Lady Jane’s garb and Kremlin slip away, turned the coffeepot on and said, “Good-morning” to Al. Our boarders had made themselves at home and barricaded in, blinds tightly shut.

We peered through windows, our awe of nature stirred and I watched our 70 foot bamboo bowing to Mother Nature in 90 mph winds. Flexibility, I thought, as the evergreens snapped. Soon we would get hit … not a question of “if” but “where.” We headed for the first floor. The lights blinked twice. Third strike and we were out. Cell phones were dead. We huddled around the radio. We listened as reporters told of Seaside Heights, N.J., boardwalk destroyed. Fond memories...
of my summer vacations. Our own boardwalk and shore communities were also being destroyed. News was slowly coming in. Many Staten Island people were homeless and some lost forever.

Bob said quietly, “It’s over,” as we ventured out. He picked up wind chimes that we had never seen before. I hung them on a branch.

One neighbor’s flag waved untouched. Many others had all trees down. Emergency service workers were cordoning off the area.

Power back after four days. Reality hit hard. We ambled through the wastelands that had been neighborhoods, bringing clothes and supplies. The shore was totally battered. People stood in horror looking at the remains of their homes.

“That used to be Andersons Annex,” someone said. I pictured the old bar that had sat there forever. I saw tattered signs and piles of rubbish of what was once an integral part of the old shore community. Sadly, I knew it would never be the same. Another great cultural loss like so many devastated communities along the east coast.

A terrible situation had given birth to the beauty of neighbor helping neighbor. Volunteers came to help collect and distribute supplies. Humanity prevailed. Now we rebuild. We are survivors.
THE DRESSMAKER

By Hannah Vinegar

The foot pedal’s flying, Mama sits and sews
I watch and ponder, curiosity grows
“Eine kleidele für meine maidele, Hanale,”* says she
My heart sinks within me—a catastrophe!

Black cloth, like black death, opaque night
Serge cloth, stiff stuff, repulsive sight
From Papa’s pants a dress will emerge
Left side’s out to hide shine of the serge.

“Oh Mama, from PAPA, must that be?
Can’t it be Bubbe’s or nice Tante Lee’s,
Their fabrics bend softly and never an itch,
If trimmed and tinsel, t’would look so rich.

Mama, NOT THAT, please, I’ll be good
I’ll carry the coal, and shoulder the wood
Out of the cellar with spiders and snares
Up the tenement’s five flights of stairs.

I’ll carry the ice from the factory tossed
And drag so fast, not a drop will be lost,
I’ll iron Papa’s shirt, smooth as you taught
Spit on the bulka**, to be sure ‘twill not scorch.

Oh Mama, dear Mama, my childhood has flown
Dreaming of the dress that would be my own
When on my toes I could pirouette in glee
My own, all mine, can you see, this is me!”

Mama has finished, not a seam can be found
She’s braided the skirt with rick-rack around.
Fashioned after her favorite dress
A matching frock stitched with true finesse;

She holds it up gently, so tender a sight
Her dark eyes shining, know ing, and bright
My Mama, my dressmaker of artful design
How golden, my dress, Mama, mine!
*A dress for my little girl, Hannah
** bulka – flat iron (made of cast metal)
STILL BIRTH

By Marilyn T. Walker

Pregnant with hope
that creativity, in sperm-like
coursing had pierced
the uterus, my mind
I reveled

revelation reversed
hope aborted
the pregnancy false
thoughts terminated
expectation eliminated

now barren, unable
to bear fruits
of my laboring
to produce, reproduce
give birth to

embryonic ideas
seeds of my
genetic generating
offspring
resembling…

reflecting me inside
if not out…
growing, maturing into
prolific progeny
named Poetry
GEMS

BY MARILYN T. WALKER

Seeking that laurel wreath of recognition

lustig for luster plunging for wisdom pearls to string an heirloom worthy of descent, celebrational for generations yet unborn

I drove too deeply into the well of academic acclaim disparingly by-passing common but cherished penny-for-your-thoughts

poignant penning opuscule ponderings neither noble nor Nobel yet oh, such irrefutable riches bejeweled jargon dazzling dialectic

diamonds in the rough