REFLECTIONS
in poetry and prose
2014
Welcome to the 21st 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 Lospensuso; 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
RTC Chapter Leader

Gerri Herskowitz
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 21st 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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Emerging from the hexagon
sweetness of my home
hum of sisters all around
urging on my tome.

Mother calls me to her side
“Your line is royalty
embarking on your maiden ride
take thoughts of loyalty.”

I kiss her hand, make a glance
there is no trepidation
being here is not by chance
sworn subject of the nation.

I rev my wings, spin about
listen to the roar
my house it sings, without doubt
I head out for the door.

What life is given, length or breadth
the challenges I know
take me to the sunlight
where honeysuckle grow.
ROSE IN WINTER

ROBERTA ANN AFFLITTO

Rose had always stood up in the 1960’s, against the war in Vietnam and for civil rights legislation. She stood up to bullies for herself, then for her children. Yes, Rose had walked through life, back straight, spending each day trying to make the right decisions on matters great and small. She was tall with honest blue eyes, pretty, smart, the person to go to for advice.

Now Rose’s eyes saw men and women wearing blue scrubs, a brown vinyl tiled floor and neatly made beds with white linens in sterile rooms as she was wheeled into Fairview Nursing Home. Just another aging body to be fed, washed and put to bed.

Rose always lived by the rules; she believed in them. The rules here were to stay in the wheelchair if you were at risk of falling. As she looked down at her legs, she felt as though she could get up and dance on the beach at dusk to the rhythm of the waves sparkling with shades of pink from the setting sun. Rose could climb the lifeguard chair, watching the ocean until the sky turned a deepening blue.

Rose had volumes of ideas, observations and life-lessons to share, but no one asked questions anymore. Her children now lived out of town and worried about her safety, so she had to leave her beloved home. It was not a place you would find in Martha Stewart’s Living, but simple, clean, warm and a part of her. Rose’s children were born in this house, going through teething, toilet training and teenage trauma within these nurturing walls. A home she and her adoring husband, Julius, saved up for week by week over six years, a sanctuary that gave her comfort when her loving husband of forty years suddenly left the physical world.

The wheelchair stopped, the bed was by the window. The tall young man smiled at Rose asking, “Will you be all right, Ma’am?” She gave a reassuring nod. Staring ahead, a video tape played before her. First steps, little league games, recitals, proms, family vacations and weddings. When the tape stopped, here she sat alone. She sat, sat and sat. Rose had always stood up.

Dedicated to our grandmothers, mothers and aunts; may their love, hard work and contributions to our lives never be forgotten.
AUNTIE

Roberta Ann Afflitto

I still have the card you gave me at five.
Didn’t know six months later, you wouldn’t be alive.
You died in winter of the Asian flu.
There are many things I remember about you.
In childhood you fell playing a game.
When you woke up, you were not the same.
Your spine was broken, you improperly grew.
The handicap resulting didn’t stop you.
Some say you couldn’t have a “normal” life.
Wouldn’t have children or be someone’s wife.
You worked, had friends, your manner was mild.
Your gentleness and kindness strongly touched this child.
I learned no obstacles should stand in my way.
The lesson sustains me until this day.
Auntie, your life is not a distant memory.
The strength of your spirit lives in me.
TRAYVON’S POEM

Ariana Ami-Holback

I am cleaning.
that is what I do when grief is upon me.
My kitchen counter will sparkle,
As if to clean off the stench of justice denied.

Trayvon could have been my son
Walking home in the dark with junk food
In his hand, the worst thing being that this junk
Wasn’t good for his body.
Walking home,
In a land that purports to be the home of democracy,
Justice for all, so forth and so on.

You called and said “not guilty”.
Was I surprised? – No.
But the weight of that injustice almost made me faint
I had to sit down, propelled by the pure, unadulterated
Grief of knowing that parents, family, friends, allies
had to swallow
The bitter truth,
That there is not justice for all in the land

Of so called democracy, of stand your ground,
of thinking that all black
Boys and men are up to no good
When they are just walking home with junk food
To watch a sports event that they never got to see,
Will never see.

And so it goes.
What will change this awful truth,
That hypocrisy lives in the “land of the free.”
Where the victim becomes the guilty party
And the guilty party the victim,
In this “land of the free.”

I mourn with Sybrina and Tracy,
Yes, their son wasn’t perfect, he was young
And had his flaws,
But didn’t he have the right to “stand his ground” too,
The right to grow older and wiser and mature into
A man who understood what it means to truly be free.
RIP Trayvon.
You will not be forgotten.
THE ROCK IN THE WARWICK STREAM

Ariana Ami-Holback

Standing on the quaint wooden bridge
I look down at the moving stream.
I want to be that rock in the water,
The rock that changes the course of the flow.

In that place and time, that rock causes turbulence.
on the other side, to the right of that rock,
ary a ripple, just the usual peaceful movement of clear, clean water,
Which finally meets the churning foam further down the road.
They merge, and become one, once more, turbulence gone, smooth
sailing from then on.

Whenever I have spoken up, challenged the status quo,
I have been that rock,
I have helped to make changes that had meaning and purpose,
and so,
I wish to be that rock again.

(November 2009: Annual trip to see the autumn leaves)
Daddy always said that it is important to be a member of a union. “Why, Daddy?” I asked when I was seven years old. He said, “A union helps workers and makes sure that even when your boss doesn’t like you, he has to treat you right.” He was in a union. I think it was the Teamster’s Union, and every Thanksgiving, we got a turkey from them. When Daddy died some men from his job came to the house, and one of them was the union representative. He gave Mama a check and told her about the things that she was entitled to from the union.

In 1987, I started my career at the New York City Board of Education and joined the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). I joined it on the strength of what Daddy had told me. During my career, there were few occasions that I had a reason to call upon the union. Certainly, the UFT fought for our rights, increased salary, better working conditions, but somehow I took it all for granted.

When I started thinking about retirement, I read in the UFT newspaper that an eight week workshop called “Ready or Not” would help me with this process. I signed up. The classes provided us with experts in each aspect of retirement such as money issues, health issues, leisure time, social security, etc. Then my anxiety about retiring dissipated.

Next, I went for my pension consultation and was given an estimate of my retirement allowance, along with the suggestion that I attend the pension workshops offered by the union. I thought that I knew everything that I needed to know; however, I decided to follow the union’s suggestion and attend the pension workshops.

So one day after work, though very tired, I rushed to 52 Broadway. I was half listening to the speaker, when I heard something that made me sit up straight. After the workshop ended, I rushed to the speaker. “Did you say that if someone worked for New York City in any capacity that they would be entitled to buy that time back?” He confirmed what I heard and suggested that I contact the agency that I previously worked for immediately to start the process of obtaining documentation. Little did I know that things would get even better. Upon investigation, I discovered that I was previously a member of the NYS Pension System in Tier 2 and, therefore, was eligible to transfer from Tier 4 to Tier 2.

When I finally transferred my service time, I calculated that I had more time than the Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS) said. Now I knew to go straight to the union. They investigated, but still the verdict came out the same. The UFT told me not to worry, and to go on and retire. They would investigate again, and if it was found that I was due additional time, it would be corrected even after retirement. My friends told me not to retire until it was all straightened out, but I made a decision to trust the UFT and retired in 2007.

During that year, I had surgery. It was then that I learned that the UFT could be called upon when you have questions about anything. During my hospitalization, the UFT Social Worker called me every day. I learned then that the union would help with any problems or refer you to someone who could. I also learned that if you are traveling in another country, you can call the union collect if you need to. Recuperating at home from my surgery, I received a letter from TRS.
The letter stated that they had made an error in computing my service time, and that they were correcting it to reflect the difference, which would increase my pension. In addition, they had calculated what I should have received and were sending me a check for the retroactive money with interest. I screamed with joy, and I am sure this wonderful news helped my body heal faster. My union was right again.

There are so many things that the UFT offers, such as legal information, updates on the political situation, and a wealth of information. Last Wednesday, rushing to Madeline Eller’s Brooklyn Creative Writing Class, it occurred to me that the UFT is a haven, a safe place to continue my life journey, to grow and develop. It is there that I meet old and new friends, and we laugh and cry together as we celebrate our lives. So today, I smile and thank God silently for my union, The United Federation of Teachers.
TABLE

Marcia Barnett

Having served four kitchens,
This butcher block table was
First tucked in an apartment nook
Small enough to render moot
Fears of Sassy Seat tumbles
And cowed by shining walls reflecting
Vertiginous webs of wild orange daisies
With insomnia-inducing intensity.

Later grounding grander space,
It fielded first grade questions
Or grandparents seated to celebrate
Birthdays young and old
With cake, song and video
Recording singular moments.

Based beneath a new bay window,
Below the retro globe
Rescued from a school trash heap
Awaiting “Sanitation,”
Few visuals remain.
Homework done alone,
Privacy replaced inquiry.
Bowling alley birthdays,
Family forfeited for friends,
Time etched new patterns
Deleting the past.

Sliding French doors offer outside views
Of ochre leaves at peace on ripe grass
Where a shroud of flakes had earlier been.
Now tired and small,
At rest beneath the Murano fixture,
Crossword carved patterns
Belie all that was lived
Across and down this table.
PING

Marcia Barnett

I miss the soft “ping”
When the cut stems of the spring bouquet
Tap the bottom of the empty vase
before it’s filled with water
And the magic powder
Whose contents keep the buds in bloom
Forever.
A QUESTION
Muriel Bart

My body is the luggage
I take along with me,
Not: Louis Vuitton:
big, broad bones
short-waisted
hypo-thyroid.

Still ..........
it has served to bring me
to my ninth decade
with just surface erosion
and one internal repair.
Brava!

(Exercise? I hate doing that stuff.
Massage? I had lazy lovers.
Lotions/creams? I look down my nose.)

Soon ..........
I will choose a crematorium.
My body will become ashes
which can fertilize the flowers
in my garden

What will become of me?
IF
Irene Bauer

If everyone were sugar sweet
And people got along…
If teams would play and not compete
And all were hale and strong …

If soldiers didn’t have to fight
And crimes were in the past …
If no one felt the slightest slight
And love would always last …

If every day were sunny
And there never was a cloud …
If everyone had money
And no whining was allowed …

The world would be a different place
From that which we know well,
A tonic for the human race
And tedious as hell!
FOR EVERY

ILENE BAUER

For every cup, a saucer;
For every hat, a head.
For everyone who’s tired,
Both a pillow and a bed.

For every book, a reader;
For every foot, a shoe.
For everyone who’s sad,
A chance to freshen and renew.

For every song, a singer;
For every play, a stage.
For everyone who’s trapped,
A key to open up the cage.

For every cut, a Band-Aid;
For every tear, a kiss.
For everyone who’s stressed,
A month when nothing is amiss.

For every bee, a flower;
For every breeze, a kite.
For everyone with things to say,
A chance to sit and write.
CONUNDRUM

Vivian Bergenthal

a secret admirer
seems
to follow me everywhere
as soon as I step outside
    his whistles assail me
left, right

clever must he be
as I cannot spot him
    try as I might
he remains elusive

whistle, whistle, whistle

what does he want
if he came forward
    we could arrange a date

something casual
    would do

was it really that long ago
    when sounds of that sort
were common

who let time get in the way
DEMANDING
Vivian Bergenthal

mom ninety-seven
grand-son twenty months

she, I want to go HOME
  HOME
  HOME
when can I go HOME

he, I want a COOKIE
  COOKIE
  COOKIE
where is my COOKIE

so far apart
and yet so close

two different worlds
  reflecting each other
  fixations
    repetition
  insistence
both ends of the spectrum

in sync it seems
  is that our destiny
is that the path
  we all take
    in the cycle of life
Sometimes the children liked to stand out in the rain and lift their faces and open their mouths, but this rain, which was so hard and driven, it hit the front windows at a ninety degree angle, scared them a little, and then the sky became dark as night, and they were really glad they were safe inside with their mother, who heard the pounding on the top-floor skylights all the way down the stairwell to the ground floor, where she was thankful her children were with her and not outside as they had been just a few minutes ago or in the third floor hall where she feared the glass from the skylight would come crashing down any minute. When the children heard a roar, they left the front windows they’d been looking out and ran to the middle room, the one without windows, and hugged their mother, who put her arms around them and considered wildly whether they should run for the cellar, then thought better of it because the cellar was so awful and surely a brownstone in the middle of a block wouldn’t lift off like Dorothy’s free-standing farmhouse in *The Wizard of Oz*. So they stood, huddled and stunned, while a self-contained, self-centered mini weather system, a vicious swirl of wind and water indifferent to the rest of creation, raged out of the sky and up the street, ripping up trees and decks and dropping them in pieces.

And then the beast was gone, howling up the slope in the direction of the park, and the air cleared and the sun peeked out and the children let go of their mother, the boy remembering that he was too old for such fearful behavior, the girl savoring the embrace that had included her brother, who had lately avoided displays of affection towards her. The children returned to the front windows, and the girl put her hand over her mouth, and the boy called out, “Look, our tree is down!” The mother went with them to the front door, and the three went out to look at the tree, which was not merely one among many in a forest of trees, but their very own maple, which the mother’s father had chosen and had watered in the dry summers of its youth before it was well established and had kept after the Parks Department to prune, their very own maple, which had stood beautifully formed and preeminent among the younger trees on the block and which now lay across an unfortunately parked SUV, its roots ripped out of the tossed-up sidewalk.

A big boy with boots ran up the street and jumped onto the trunk. The children crawled up behind him, happy to be his playmates in the wreckage, their mother distracted—and, truthfully, she knew herself to be a bit careless compared to some of the others with young children—by everyone flowing out of their front doors and down the stoops to the sidewalks, exclaiming and greeting each other as though celebrating a victory over disaster, thrilling even the 300 Block itself, which hadn’t experienced such a heightened sense of community since Victory-in-Europe Day, when pianos were hauled onto the sidewalks and people danced in the street.
“Now, you follow me to that curtain and leave your bag here,” said the policewoman as she separated me from the rest of the passengers.

We were in the transit section and I saw that there were other similar “privacy cells” in the large room as well. I noticed that my two friends were also directed to their respective corners. I was dismayed that our children were also told to follow another “lady” wearing a similar uniform.

Behind the curtain, I was told to take off all my clothes, except my underwear. It was February, so undressing took a while.

The policewoman’s fingers carefully explored the seams of my skirt. Then she went through my pockets, from my winter-coat to the one on my blouse. She unfolded and examined long-forgotten wrappers of candies, used bus tickets, crumpled Kleenexes, until she came to a folded piece of paper that she spread out on the bench in the “cell.” The paper had strange designs with various arrows, circles, squares and signs.

“What is this? What kind of a map?” she asked with suspicion in her tone.

I was never good at lying, but especially now, under these circumstances.

“It is my horoscope,” I said.

“You have a tourist visa for two weeks for a vacation and you need a horoscope? That is bizarre!”

“It has been in my pocket for years and I had forgotten about it.” Suddenly I panicked, because the peculiar signs of the horoscope could be subject to all kinds of interpretation to the paranoid mind.

The lady with the blank face continued her search. Now she was inside of my boots.

Then I heard some repeated commotion outside the “cell” with increasingly loud arguments and yelling. Finally, a forceful voice shouted in French, a language I speak: “This is the last time! You either give me those passengers right now or my plane is leaving!”

The next moment the policewoman pushed me out of the cubbyhole, luggage and clothes dangling as we rushed. We gathered the children, trying to keep up with the French pilot holding the door for us, the six passengers under the “Exit” sign. A private bus took us on the tarmac to the AirFrance plane, with engines already running. While we finished dressing on the bus, the pilot kept cursing in French about the Hungarian authorities. Then he motioned us to hurry up to the plane.

All heads turned there as we went through the narrow aisles, luggage in hand, shirts unbuttoned, shoes untied. A moment later the plane slowly moved, then quickly ascended.

We planned this escape for years and we were finally free. I was still in a daze when we landed in Paris on February 12, 1976.
THE APARTMENT
Phyllis Bowdwin

Now I’m a peaceful person who doesn’t go out of my way to look for trouble, but trouble seems to follow me like a shadow. Take my old apartment in the Bronx. I managed to ruffle feathers by asking that they paint the insides of the musty-smelling kitchen cabinets the same way they’d painted the kitchen and the rest of the studio I was about to rent.

“You tink you high class!” snapped Gorguy, the building superintendent, clad in a work shirt, old belt and pants sagging below his boxers. “I like to see where you come from! Give back her money,” he told Mrs. Beale, the secretary. With a cigarette dangling out of the corner of her lavishly lipsticked mouth, she lowered her eyelids and raised a portly finger, signaling me not to respond. I took the hint, kept silent and waited. When Gourgy rushed out of the shabby office to handle some emergency, she gave me keys.

“Enjoy your new home, dear.”

“Thanks!”

I rushed to my apartment on the top floor of the tall, elegant white building, took in my northern view of the Grand Concourse and collapsed on the floor with a squeal of joy. From that day Gorguy and I were silent enemies. When I passed him in the hallway, he wouldn’t speak. If we came face to face in the elevator, he would snort a greeting, and then turn his massive body away from me.

I appreciated the doorman who held packages for me and the convenience of the cleaners and video rental business on the first floor, but I began to notice the once-luxurious building that people were clamoring to live in was declining due to negligence. When the water fountain in the lobby began to leak, Gourgy simply turned it off. When the beautiful marble-clad walls began to crack, he patched them with the wrong materials leaving ugly, tell-tale white lines. Every repair was a cost-saving lick and promise. In spite of this, I enjoyed my new place and settled in. Everything went well for a few years.

Then one day I read a newspaper article about the Attorney General fining the Hanover Management Agency for rent overcharges and forcing them to reimburse their Manhattan tenants. Hanover was the name of the agency.

“Is it possible that we’re being overcharged too?” I asked Mr. Higgins, the president of our tenants’ association.

“Oh, no! This has nothing to do with us in the Bronx,” Higgins assured me, pocketing the article and making a dash for the elevator.

But shouldn’t we at least look into it?” I asked the sole of his shoe as he disappeared behind the closing doors. A muffled “I’ll let you know” was all I heard as the doors slammed shut. I waited. Weeks went by with no word from Mr. Higgins. I made eight more copies of the article and posted two in the lobby on the north and south sides of the building and one in each of the four elevators. Within the hour, the copies disappeared. I wondered what was going on. More deter-
mined than ever, I made two hundred copies, took a day off and folded and pushed as many as I could into my neighbors’ mailboxes. That evening I stood in the lobby and handed a copy to each tenant who walked through the door.

“Please read this, copy it and share it with the neighbors on your floor.” By the end of the week, the building was buzzing. Several people demanded that Mr. Higgins call an emergency tenants’ meeting to discuss the article.

“There’s no need to be alarmed,” he assured us. “This has nothing to do with us here in the Bronx.”

Mr. Lake, a tenant who was also an attorney, suggested we all request rent histories from the city’s Rent Control Board.

Mr. Smith and I volunteered to work with Mr. Lake, get the forms signed by each tenant and submit them as a bloc. We learned that Hanover Management had indeed been overcharging more than half of the tenants in our twenty-four story, two hundred unit apartment building for several years. Hanover was fined and forced to reimburse tenants in amounts ranging from five thousand to eighteen thousand dollars per apartment, plus interest and penalties. This came to well over a million dollars. Mr. Lake pointed out that Mr. Higgins represented the company that provides our building’s cable service, which was a conflict of interest. Mr. Higgins was voted out of office and Mr. Lake became our new president.

As Judy is fond of saying, “No good deed goes unpunished.” A few weeks later, someone went up on the roof and sent a rusted hatchet sailing through Mr. Smith’s window, barely missing his designer wife Emily, who was working on a wedding gown. Mr. Lake’s apartment was mysteriously flooded while he was at work, soaking his brand new furniture and carpeting. And me? Someone fired a high-powered rifle through my window one night, missing me by two feet. It turns out that I was not being overcharged and never recouped a cent. Would I do it again? In a heartbeat.
THE MEETING

Arthur Cajigas

It was a meeting of friends, memories, and talk of old places.
The salutes with swift handshakes brought smiles to our faces.
We agreed what once was, was now blur.
Time was not cruel, but we were. Then I saw her.
She was still beautiful and had kept her form.
What had been a cool day had suddenly turned warm.
I watched her as she walked across the room.
Damn it, I hate fate. It usually means doom.

Oh God! We were the classic case of the opposites.
Don’t do this to yourself, “Stop it! Stop it!”
Remember, people would clear the room when we got together.
There was never any of this light talk about the weather
I photographed stench, poverty, and pain.
She wrote about the rainbow after the rain.
My photo froze images and time.
Her words were lyrics, the rap, the rhyme.
I captured issues in black and white.
She shoved a pen in my face “Well I can write.”
It puzzled friends how we got or stayed together.
Like I said before we didn’t talk about the weather.

She wanted a place where we could be alone and quiet.
I wanted to be downtown near the blood, the fire, the riot.
She wanted the “American Dream” and to be a mother.
Inside was anger, to be mean I said, “Go find another.”
The divorce was bitter, both of us got scarred.
What once was, was now marred.

While I was having my flashback she never saw me.
Her friends were serving conversation and tea.
I walked to the sign that said “Libations.”
Maybe, a chance, a hope for a quiet conversation.
Something drew me across the room, fear made me numb.
That voice inside me said, “This is dumb, dumb, dumb.”
My mind froze “Where do I begin?”
She had just turned around and said “Well, hello again.”
RETIREMENT FROM TEACHING

A mountain peak reaching
Release any last tension
And enjoy the monthly pension

Looking back into my past
The teachable moments in my memory last
The spark ignited on a child's face
Is like winning an Olympic race

There has never been room for boredom
In the classroom forum
Animated students' interactions
Calling for speedy teacher's reactions

Educators and parents make a good team
In shaping each child's self esteem
Never give up hope when problem arise
At the end of the tunnel there awaits a grand surprise

My only regret has been
Missing out on "colleague lunch sit-ins"
I always felt I had something in class to do
At times I even forgot a meeting or two

Enjoy all that teaching brings
Set free each child's wings
The journey you will mutually enjoy
Think not of toil and strife, but joy

I've got other mountains to climb
With no set schedule of time
Making a difference still is my goal
As I live life's new role

I gladly hand the reigns over
New teachers are springing like clover
I feel a sense of completion
As I close my "Reflections" rendition

REVIEW OF TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

In poetry and prose

Rosalie Calvaruso
BLUE SAMBO

B. LYNN CARTER

“Please God, not Little Black Sambo again,” she said much louder than she’s intended. Mrs. Clune fixed her with a long cold stare, turning up her nose like she smelled something stinky, before quieting the giggles in the 4th grade class with a slight hand gesture. Mrs. Clune had read Little Black Sambo to the class every day for the last three weeks. She always made a flourish of showing the offending illustrations. Sambo’s dark face jumping off the tattered pages. His inky black skin hurtful and mocking.

Laney squirmed, slipped down in her seat as far as she could, wishing to disappear. Why little ‘Black’ Sambo? Why not Little ‘Brown’ Sambo or, even better, Little ‘Colored’ Sambo? Before, Laney had never really felt particularly “dark,” or gave color much thought. But every time the word ‘black’ was shot-out aloud, reproachable eyes focused directly on her.

Seeking an ally, she looked to Fake Jimmy who quickly turned away. Laney wasn’t surprised. Fake Jimmy always avoided her eyes and never spoke to her. This was in staunch contrast with Real Jimmy who had never treated her that way.

Real Jimmy was her friend and partner. Not because they were the only two colored kids in the class. Not some brown on brown attraction that drew them in like a magnet. No, Laney had many friends in school, little girls of all descriptions. In the school yard, boys and girls playing together was a bigger taboo than for them to play with kids of varied colors. But Jimmy was the exception. He just fit right in. He could play double–dutch or hopscotch with the best of them.

Laney and Jimmy ate lunch together. They argued about who was the best hula hooper and which song would remain on Motown’s top ten, Smokey Robinson’s “Shop Around” or the Marvelette’s “Mr. Postman.” Jimmy would re-braid Laney’s hair when it came loose and never complain about the greasy Dixie Peach pomade.

Sometimes, Jimmy would draw blue finger paint lines on his face and girl-wiggle around, shaking shoulders, one wrist limp, impersonating Mrs. Clune, ‘Blue Sambo’. Not so much because of those drab blue smocks that she always wore in class or because they mimicked her steel blue eyes. But more because of the fine blue veins that branched throughout her papery translucent skin. After awhile, Laney started calling Jimmy “My Blue Sambo.”

On the block, things were different. Laney could happily play ‘tea party’ with the girls or jet off to play stickball with the boys. After a while her freewheeling versatility rubbed off on Jimmy who proved to be as skilled at stickball as he was at jump rope.

Laney especially valued her friendship with Jimmy, in the classroom, when Mrs. Clune did things that made her feel ‘uneasy.’ There was something about the way Mrs. Clune never looked at her, smiling, the way she did with other kids. She rarely called on Laney when she raised her hand but always called on her when she didn’t. After awhile she’d stopped trying. That’s when Jimmy would do something to make her laugh. Whenever Mrs. Clune read black Sambo, Jimmy would grin and do his Blue Sambo shoulder shakes and they’d both crack-up.

Mrs. Clune’s treatment of Laney was nothing compared to how she treated Jimmy. He got
yelled at or sent to the principal for the smallest infraction. She’d sit him in the corner wearing a
dunce hat. Once she marched him around the building wearing a red rubber nose and a sign that
proclaimed he was a clown. Jimmy just grinned his big broad ‘you don’t hurt me,’ and bowed to
his audience.

One day when his parents were called, instead of his weepy mother coming in as usual, his huge
mountain of a father appeared. With his jaw set, his pulse thumping in his temples, his eyes ablaze,
he growled at Jimmy from the room. Jimmy winked at Laney. He mouthed the words, “I got this.”
He shook his shoulders, waved his wrist and grinned at her as he was dragged away. But Laney did
not laugh. She doubted he really ‘had this.’

Jimmy wasn’t in school the next day, or the day after that, or the week after that. Mrs. Clune said
that Jimmy’s family went down south because his Granma died and that they would return soon.
Laney missed her friend. Everyday she’d turn in her seat willing him to be there, missing his grin-
ning face. After two months had passed she stopped looking for him. The sight of his empty desk
hurt her heart.

Then one day, when Mrs. Clune was taking attendance, she called out his name as she did every
day. But on this day a small voice replied,

“Here.”

Laney spun around and almost fell off her chair. There in Jimmy’s place sat a stranger. A colored
boy who wasn’t Jimmy at all! He had similar skin tone to Jimmy, though this boy seemed slightly
lighter and somewhat smaller. Something about him looked like he could be related to Jimmy, but
his eyes were dull and resigned and he was completely devoid of any big broad grin. Clearly, not
her cherished Blue Sambo.

And as if this, alone, was not enough of a shock, looking around the room, she realized no one
else seemed to notice! Here sat an imposter. He sat at Jimmy’s desk, answered to Jimmy’s name
and no one batted an eye, not the teacher, not her classmates, not the principal or the kids in the
schoolyard… no one.

It took a while for her to corner him, confront him. He was skillful at avoiding her. But when
she finally caught up with him, she whispered,

“You’re not Jimmy. Where is Jimmy??!” To this he hissed, a fierce sharp-edged hiss. He was a cat
all puffed up and fearsome, a dull eyed rattlesnake threatening to strike. He spat out these words,

“Mind…your…business!!!”
LOOKING BACK

Harold Cohen

My friends are almost nearly gone
The years have not been kind
They started dying years ago
I never paid it no mind.

That someday I would look around
And Danny was no more
Nor Artie and his brother Stan
And also fat Seymour.

And how I miss my cousin Joe
A truly noble soul
As were Mike and David
Whose passing left a bitter hole.

I paused to try to picture them
When we were teens, and then
The sweet and sour nostalgia
Erupted all over me again.

How alone I felt right then
I shivered in my bones
That thrilling, silly crazy life
Now has left me all alone.

It’s really been a joyous life
As happy as could be
I pray that someone else out there
has such sweet memories of me.
HOME IS WHERE THE BEACH IS

SUSAN COLLENDER

The serenity of the sea,
The seagulls fly so free,
Silvery waves pounding upon the shore,
Then I know, I’m home once more.

The boardwalk where people walk
and cyclists ride,
Summertime fireworks celebrate
our country’s pride.

In Fall, the beauty of the beach and peaceful days,
In Winter, snow glistening in the sunshine’s rays,
In Spring, renewal and promise of summer’s fun,
In Summer, the surfers ride waves and joggers’ run.

I hear the music at the shore,
Long Beach, I’m home once more.
AFRICAN VIOLETS
Joanne Concannon

No matter what the year,
As long as my African Violets bloom
Contentedly sitting on my kitchen window sill
I am holding on to my mother

Delicate shades of lavender and deep purple
Over forty years since my mother gave them to me on my wedding day
Their dainty flowers sitting sweetly looking for my attention
I am holding on to my mother

How did my mother care for them?
How did she feel as she nurtured them?
So special they make me feel
I am holding on to my mother

Super Storm Sandy came threatening their essence
I silently wept as I wrapped and nurtured their fading flowers
Now they sit again like precious jewels on my window sill
I am holding on to my mother
EVENING CHANT

SHEILA CONTICELLO

Evening chant at sunset
Stained glass splinters fading light
Hooded brown robed monks
Intone Gregorian notes.

Acappella sounds ascend
Ancient Latin, rhythmic waves
Cadence of sound
   Echoes on cathedral stone.

Incense of blessed tones
   drift heavenward
Transport my soul
   to realms divine.

Prayerful silence of sacred sounds.
THERAPY

Charlotte Crawford

As he shaves my face
shapes my hairs
plucks my ears
my barber sits without rising

He puts himself on equal plane
to whisk my worries and powder my mirth
while he trims through events
since we last sat together

My barber sits still, he makes me twirl
as he hears and repairs all sides of me
while I, from my revolving perch
view the angles of his mirrored world
WINTER WIND
JAMES CUNNINGHAM

Winter wind comes fast and furious like a lion pouncing on her prey

Roaring, Swooping, Twisting, Twirling
Announcing winter’s arrival

She takes you by surprise
Blowing her bone-chilling breath

Suddenly slapping you in the face
Pushing you backwards
Turning you around
Knocking you down

Surrounding you
Engulfing you
Devouring you

It’s Nature’s way
THE NOVEMBER TREE

JAMES CUNNINGHAM

Oh cold, cruel November
you have stripped me naked
and left me here to waste away.

I was once mighty and majestic
filled with life and topped with an array of
glorious
leaves of yellow, orange, red
and gold which adorned me like a crown of
jewels.

Your gusty, chilling, wintry winds
shook me and my heavenly leaves
of splendorous hues were blown away
scattered like sheep without a shepherd.
Others lie lifeless at my feet
trapped by passers-by beginning
their busy day-rolled in by little children with
nothing to do.
Eventually bundled and buried
never to be seen again.
A November death.

December snow and winter ice
weigh down my barren branches.
January frost grabs hold of me
gripping me tightly
freezing me to the bone
it won’t let go.
February winds relentlessly
rock me back and forth.

My roots are strong and
cemented firmly in God’s earth.
Eagerly my sterile limbs
stretch out to the sky.
The warmth of the sun caresses my
bark and embraces me.

I am engulfed in love and
in the radiance of spring.
My body feels rejuvenated.
My limbs bring forth new buds
and soon new leaves.

A beautiful green veil
Is now alive again.
More glorious than before –
New life.
SPRING’S RESURRECTION.
Renatta and Pete had been friends since high school, but it was while they were in college that their friendship turned to love. They knew they wanted to be together but nothing formal was actually discussed.

After graduation they pursued their careers. Renatta became a math teacher in a local high school, and Pete did an internship in a law firm and decided to go to law school. They wanted to live together but their family values, instilled from day one, would not let them go down that road. Their huge Italian Catholic families were looking for a wedding to solidify this relationship. When Pete proposed a tour of Italy together, it was amazing neither family said a word. He and Renatta went to a travel agent in their town and looked through all the catalogs. They settled on a 15 day journey through Italy; Rome, Florence, Venice, and places in between.

The tour group was composed of mostly middle aged and older folks, some of whom had made many trips over the years. It was most unusual for a couple in their 20’s to join such a group. The ‘kids,’ as everyone called them, were welcomed by all. They joined in all the group activities and were always delightful to be around. Of course, everyone wanted to know about them, were they married, where did they live, ethnic background, jobs, etc. It was amazing how the ‘kids’ put up with all the scrutiny and always with a smile. It was in Venice that everyone was apprised of Pete’s plan. The tour itinerary included an evening gondola ride on the canals. It was arranged by Alonzo, the tour guide, that Renatta and Pete would be alone in their gondola. The other members of the tour group would be dispersed among the remaining boats. Pete was going to propose during the gondola ride.

What fun. Alonzo assigned seats to all the group members, making sure the young couple was last. He apologized to them that they would be on their own. Did Renatta suspect anything?

They embarked on this romantic journey. The gondolier sang as the gondolas sailed through the dark canals, lit mostly by moonlight and a few lantern type lamps. The scene was surreal as the entourage floated on the gently undulating waves of the canals. Street lanterns cast light and shadows over the group. Everyone was excited. When would he ask her? Would she accept? Did he have a ring to give her?

The entourage continued on their way, and finally, the gondolier who was rowing the young couple passed word to the next gondolier that Pete had proposed and Renatta had accepted. They had shared a long romantic kiss. The message passed from one gondolier to the next.

Everyone was ecstatic. What a romantic proposal. It would never be forgotten by Peter and Renatta and also by all the members of the tour group.

The gondola journey came to an end and the boats were docked back at the same place they had started. The young couple stood waiting for the tour group to come up to congratulate them and wish them well. Only in Venice could such a precious love story come to such a beautiful conclusion.
SITTING AMONG THE BEST OF THE BEST

LOUIS A. DeFreitas, Sr., Ed.D.

It is like being at the Olympics and sitting among the greatest athletes in the world, sitting among champions who have proven themselves in battle in rings, on courts, on fields, in gyms and in pools.

The champions I sit among have proven themselves in classrooms, for 20, 30, 40 and some for 50 years. Day after day, year after year they have guided our young, preparing them to be able to go around, go under, go over or just break through the many obstacles that await them in their journeys called life.

It is an honor to sit among the best of the best. That is why I attend meetings that are held for retired teachers.

They are the champions who have kept the flame of education alive. They are ones who have kept our young on the right paths, the paths that leads to a better and stronger America. I await the next meeting.
we dwell in a world without wires
entangled together in a web
as wide as the world
intermingled without the internet

without hands we touch each other
holding the thoughts
of all the peoples
of the planet

in the matrix
of the collective unconscious
I dare to think
that we can see remotely

the past intermingled
with the future
in the present

and we can dare to view
the near from far away
and make what we want
a wishful reality

we are all reflected
in the mirror of each other
entangled in the entourage
of evermore
galaxies gather at the furthest edges of space
glittering globes of gases cooling
condensing
spattering silky gossamer
strands
milky murky skyways
across the sands of stars
around them
smaller spheres
of similar substance
heaving themselves
forward
each one
revolving
around another
struggling to assert
itself
along the vast
vortex
dimensioned
around a
distant
highway
light years
away
from earth
the Hubble
sees
but does not comprehend
their import
its lens
focused
on
a tiny
grain of sand
along
the beach
and as the telescope
microscopizes
down to size
it looks
and sees
the denizens
of its discovery:
seven billion
moving bodies
buried beneath the clouds
its mirror
reflected
back
upon itself
it views
its universal
Doppelganger
an echo
boomeranged
booming
back
from earth to earth:

We are such stuff as dreams are made on
And our little life is rounded with a sleep
INNER WORLD

Kathleen Devlin

Is it the sea so close by – perhaps
Is it the silence ever present – perhaps
Is it the song of birds early mornings – maybe
Or is it the meeting of friends – possibly

Our hearts and minds have many avenues
Down which to venture easily
Can one say that all are of equal import
Or does one place take precedence

In the final analysis my answer is yes
For while these several forms are chosen
It is the world of music that rules supreme
Whether Bach, Bartok or Brahms

In that place, the aura cast over me resounds
Peace, calm and joy – its elements
Creating a singular beauty of its own

Escaping there replenishes my being!
SCHOOL SNAPSHOT
Debbi Dolan

Mom snapped a photo of her four freckle faced girls before they set off for school. She had set our long brown hair in rollers the night before so we’d have bouncy kielbasa curls. Our green and grey plaid uniforms were pleated, and met our white knee socks with barely a sliver of flesh showing. We wore starched white blouses under the uniform vest, which bore the school insignias SHS for Sacred Heart School. Forest green berets were fastened to our hair with bobby pins. Our vinyl book bags were set down beside us on the driveway, our arms held rigidly by our sides. I doubt if she detected the glint of mischief in our eyes as we smiled for the camera.

Then we hiked the rolling hills of Yonkers for a mile, and the transformation was well underway. Our curls would have straightened, and we’d tilted our berets to the side for a jaunter look. Most crucial before reaching our destination was to hitch up our woolen skirts by rolling them up over our knees. This was an ephemeral pleasure that Catholic schoolgirls shared before the inevitable appearance of a nun in the hallway. She’d yank the skirts down with dismay back to the requisitely chaste length, and admonish us with the familiar refrain as she wagged her finger—”Woe betide you if I have to do this again!”
Mr. Flynn. He wasn’t exactly my arch-nemesis as Sue Sylvester is to Mr. Shue on the TV series “Glee.” There the hapless glee club advisor is relentlessly tormented by the cheerleading coach. Yet I was a brand new, 21 year-old student teacher, so green with idealism that I was sure Ferlinghetti’s poetry would resonate with my high school juniors. I was being supervised by a fairly hip 31 year-old cooperating teacher, who gave me reasonable free rein in the one English class I was teaching. He took copious notes from the back of the room every day, to be discussed at our daily conferences, after which he had a weekly powwow with Mr. Flynn, the English chairman.

One time he caught me off guard with his flippant comment, “Oh, and try not to reach up when you’re writing on the blackboard.” He didn’t have to explain; I often crafted mini-dresses from garments that were intended to be long blouses. Now I was self-conscious about what he had seen. And that meant a roomful of sixteen year-old boys had seen the same thing! Had I now lost the one iota of credibility I had worked so hard to gain? The next day I arrived in a sensible pantsuit.

A spirited English major, I was fired up by the Beat poets, so I thought, now that I have a captive audience, wouldn’t it be wonderful to share some of their works with my students? I made copies of one section of a Lawrence Ferlinghetti poem from the collection, *A Coney Island of the Mind*. When I handed out the xerographed copies, the kids pressed the purple-inked papers to their faces and sniffed deeply. There was something about that duplicating fluid that attracted like flypaper. There was no evidence that they were getting high, so I just called it idiotic. Thinking I was being really witty, I announced, “When you finish hallucinating, please read the poem.”

A day or two later I had already run out of pantsuits and I was back in a mini-skirt. Suddenly I was summoned to see the English supervisor before leaving that day. What could he possibly want? Maybe a job offer once I graduated? I fixed my hair, applied a little lip gloss, tugged at my skirt to lengthen it and off I went.

With a fragrant cherry tobacco aroma, his office impressed me as being so academic. The distinguished gray-haired, piercingly blue-eyed Ernest Flynn sat on his swivel chair, pipe in mouth and immediately addressed the “problem” minus all cordialities.

“Miss Grisham, you taught a certain poem by Lawrence Ferlinghetti to our students this week,” he began.

“Yes, I did.” Now I was perplexed. I had been taking an American poetry course as a college senior this same semester and thought to incorporate what I was learning. I knew my cooperating teacher appreciated the Beat poets, so what was the problem?

“Are you aware of the kind of material you were teaching?”

“Uh-mm, I think so. It’s in the collection called *A Coney Island of the Mind*.”

Pointing to line 14 in Part IV, his attack continued, “Well, what justification do you have to be teaching phrases such as ‘nutless Nagasaki survivors’?”

A FLING WITH FERLINGHETTI

MELINDA EHRICH

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“Uh-mm, I think so. It’s in the collection called *A Coney Island of the Mind*.”

Pointing to line 14 in Part IV, his attack continued, “Well, what justification do you have to be teaching phrases such as ‘nutless Nagasaki survivors’?”
Indeed it was an antinuclear war poem, but he could not get past the fact that some of the survivors were sans testicles. Should Ferlinghetti have used “castrated” instead? Totally intimidated, I had no recourse. The students were probably clueless anyway, as I hadn’t explained that line to them. Red-faced in front of Mr. Flynn, I lamely apologized for teaching something “so inappropriate.” Having lost every shred of dignity, I turned to walk out, teetering as I continued down the hall. I was probably a little teary too.

I was rapidly learning that you must always know your audience and this English chair, or Lord High Executioner, could make or break me. For the rest of the term I tiptoed around the curriculum, more paranoid each time I saw him. I completed my student teaching assignment a few weeks later with a satisfactory rating, but was not offered a job at that suburban school.

September 1971, I landed in the largest school system in the country – the New York City Board of Education. There I thrived for over 30 years and, unlike Robinson’s “Richard Cory,” I did not go home and put a bullet through my head. I taught a lion’s share of great poetry – including Ferlinghetti.
SUMMER IN THE NORTH COUNTRY

Judy Fritsch

*Summer is green*
the maples fully leafed after their bare winter
grasses and bushes brilliant in the sunshine
frogs and grasshoppers heard but seldom seen
newly planted farm fields just beginning to show
snap peas and green beans newly picked
and little green apples ripening toward autumn harvest

*Summer is red*
raspberries, cherries and strawberries
from the farm down the road
tomatoes from our own vines
carefully started indoors in the spring
the ruby throat of the hummingbird
at the sugar-water feeder
the robin's breast as he worked the lawn
for a meal of tasty worms

*Summer is yellow*
goldfinch at the thistle seed
yellow warblers nesting in the tree
the sweetest corn picked just before boiling
summer squash and peppers
fields of goldenrod, sunflowers and buttercups
and long days of sunshine

*Summer is blue*
the sparkling back yard pool
the lake reflecting cloudless skies
bluebirds and bluejays
and a great blue heron
wild blueberries from the bushes out back
and the brilliant chicory flowers brightening the roadside

*Summer is orange*
daylilies amazingly growing wild
monarch butterflies nectaring the milkweed
before embarking
on their epic migrations
carrots newly plucked from the garden
orioles fleetingly glimpsed
as they forage for berries

*Summer is white*
puffy clouds imaging into animal shapes
as we lie in the grass staring up
cattail and thistle fluff
floating on gentle breezes
daisy petals signaling love — or not
clover and Queen Anne’s lace
mushrooms popping up after a rain
fireflies frantically seeking a mate
during their short lives
and cabbage whites over the clover

*Summer is black*
the night sky without any ambient light
except the abundance of silvery stars
and the occasional meteorite
the angus cows grazing the pasture
blackberries and black-eyed susans
and the blackbird showing off his sexy red shoulders
storm clouds building in the west
foretelling the blackout to come
when the power fails

*Summer is a rainbow*
in the east after a late summer rain
over the fields of varied-colored flowers
wonderland

Diane Pankian Geiger

we stand at the edge of a tranquil glade
bright arrows of sun warm is as we watch one tiger trout covering another in the crystalline creek

moss softens the rocks encircling an oak tree a squirrel overturns a cracked pod for inspection while we breathe the fragrance of ripening berries

bright urgency flowers we sink into a carpet of clover your mouth shaping my name as you unloosen me caught in a whirlpool I hear you cry and my heart beats quiet
alien

DIANNE PIANKIAN GEIGER

her world was warm
and quiet
but she yearned
for some adventure
so she left her crystal
household
for a distant
galaxy

now she misses
wine red oceans
and the scent of
spiky flowers
pines for copper rain
and bright turquoise
vegetation

craves her
spicy lover
who knew just how
to touch her
with his elongated
digits
in the dusty
afternoons

hoards hot humid
images
of smoky neon words
and the giddy
weightlessness
of stardust
morning dances

slipping back
to cool existence
she contemplates
the sky
then reaches out
her arms
and filled with longing
cries
escape
Dianne Piankian Geiger

shedding our
mark time lives
we spill into
the night
it’s so quiet
so still
I hear stars
scraping the sky

our exchanges
are hushed
unhurried
I’ve saved
ten thousand
secrets
and whisper them
to you

laying it
all out
this bare
and simple
love
I fill with
electric sharpness
falling
into the sweep
and surrender
of desire

and awaken
soft
smooth
new
DAWN ON THE GREAT PECONIC BAY

Cyndy Gilbertson

Awakened by a trumpet call of light,
I venture outdoors
to stand at attention
under the lingering moonlight.

Luminescence whiter than white,
sparkles along tiny wedges of brine
that crest one after another
in fierce succession,
pressing hard against the sand.

There is no room for an ebbing tide.

My feet feel their way
over moist wooden planks,
cool sand and sharp biting pebbles,
crossing the bulkhead with smooth steps.

Facing eastward
I sit cross-legged and
catch the scent of the surf
as it slaps the shore.

I cradle a large angular stone,
caramel colored with gold mappings,
accept its damp gift
of early morning dew,
and shout aloud,
“This is why I wake -
to feel the earth in its raw form!”

Weighty bands of grey stratosphere
wrap around the horizon
blocking the sun.

Yet the neon orb persists,
penetrates the density,
and in one salt spray,
sky, bay and shoals are awash
in a rosy vibrancy.

Sea terns announce the arrival of the sun,
and the moon has vanished.
INTO THE LIGHT
A. GIORGIO

I love Christmas Lights
They light up my Spirit
They light up my Childhood
that God keeps in me
they light up my hope
that the better angels
In all of us
Will fly down
And bless us
And most of all
They light up our love
For each other
As we huddle together
Out of the darkness
And into the light…
The Brooklyn ladies tile away the hours, playing mah-jongg by fours at smallish tables in windowless rooms. 
Syncopated beats, 
like Asian metronomes, 
tap out the time 
with an endless repetition, 
both comforting and regular. 
The Brooklyn ladies rarely speak, 
save for the tiles shouted out, 
but eye each other warily 
from behind the fortresses 
of the racks sitting before them. 
The Brooklyn ladies play on and on, 
marking small victories and defeats 
while holding back the advance of years 
until all their tiles are turned over forever.
I stood at my Grandmother Bella’s grave with a large bouquet of roses in my arms. Since I had just come from my retirement party, I was dressed in a festive shocking pink dress with matching heels. I was there to honor my grandma. As I placed the roses on her grave, my mind wandered back to a day ten years before. On that day I stood in the same spot accompanied by my loyal mother-in-law Lilly. I had sought out Bella’s grave for the first time that day even though Bella had been dead thirty years.

You might wonder why it took me so long to visit this grave. Well, let me fill you in. Bella died on an icy cold December day in 1966. She was eighty-nine and I was twenty at the time. At that point I was a junior at the University of Buffalo. I had two final exams that day, and I called my mother in N.Y.C. in a state of high anxiety. Since my mother sounded strange, I asked: “What’s the matter? Why aren’t you more concerned about my tests? Did Grandma Bella die or something?” My mother replied in a curt voice: “As a matter of fact she died an hour ago!” I heard the words but was unable to comprehend the scope of what my mother had just said. Now, I had loved my grandmother with a whole heart. She was my champion and I was her favorite. She was always proud of me. But in the fear and concern of the moment I responded: “I’m not going to the funeral! I’m going to take my two exams today and then I’m going to Canada with some friends!” Somehow, I figured if I didn’t go to the funeral, Bella wasn’t really dead.

I was able to pass my exams that dreadful day, because I tended to compartmentalize my feelings. The initial shock had worn off. However, I was still determined to go to Canada. The funeral occurred the next day and I was not in attendance. Two days later I had calmed down and decided not to go to Canada. I called home and told my parents that I would be home in time to sit Shiva for Bella. I took a plane and returned home later that day. As I entered the house and saw all my elderly relatives, I thought to myself: “Why hadn’t one of these women died instead of my grandmother.” It was a difficult five days and nights. Although I mourned the death of Bella more than anyone else, I never went to her grave in Brooklyn. It felt too final.

The years passed and I moved to Brooklyn, got married and eventually got a job in a public school that was a few blocks from Washington Cemetery where Bella was buried. Thus twenty years later, on a sunny day in April, I visited her grave for the first time accompanied by Lily, who was almost as great a fan of mine as Grandma Bella had been. I stood before Bella’s grave feeling the raw emotions of loss all over again. I still missed her very much. I visited Washington Cemetery about once a year after that initial visit.

Now on June 24, 2005, at sixty years of age, I stood before Bella’s grave with a bouquet of flowers. I was celebrating my retirement and the beginning of my pension years. I might have wanted to share my joy with Bella anyway, but I had special reason for this visit. Bella’s wish for me was that I’d become a teacher and get a pension. On a sunny day in June, I was honoring that wish!
THE WOMAN WITH THE CORN-SILK HAIR

Irving A Greenfield (PhD)

The woman with the corn-silk hair -
    I saw her,
and because I am old and withered
    and she young and beautiful
standing in the summer's sun,
    I think about her.
I wonder what grief,
what disappointment,
what calamity will change her hair to gray?
Will her wedding ring always be the same?
Or will a gift from another man grace her finger?
Will her breasts now so proud,
with nipples that bloom under her husband's
    caressing hand,
sag like mine do?
Will her bones grow soft
and bend her the way a strong wind bends a tree?
How will life abrade her beautiful body?
But I am not Tiresias,
who could see into the future,
    knew the past,
and lived in the present.
What I know,
    I know
because I have been held against the grinder's
wheel,
and know there are as many wheels as people,
each for each.

I wonder if our puny lives
are nothing more than prelude to our graves,
to which we give purpose,
give meaning
beyond the nothingness of the end
to stand the pain of the grinder's wheel,
invent a mystery for ourselves
    and call it life,
    and tell ourselves
it's all worthwhile,
and know in the deepest depths of our being
    it's the lie that lets us go on living.
The secret all of us share
    and never speak about,
    the lie I mean.
But I am old and withered
and I think about the woman with corn-silk hair,
and remember when I too stood proud in the
    summer's sun
and had corn-silk hair.
AN ENDURING HEART

Yvette Hains

It’s easy to find faults in life
That extinguish the joy inside,
But a heart that has faith
Will make faults wait,
And mount the surging tide.
It’s easy to dismay
Over a cloudy day,
And drown in a river of tears.
But a heart that has hope
Can ascend the slope,
And descend the mountain of fears.
It’s easy to envision changes in life
As pain the soul cannot bear,
But a heart that can see
Will let change be,
And know it’s forever there.
It’s easy to curse
The day of your birth,
And choose to lie down and die,
But a heart that is strong
Will dance right along,
And smile at the dark, blue sky.
PROFILING
Eunice Harris

Do not look at me suspiciously.
I am not who you think I may be.
Looking at you,
A Middle Eastern Man,
But have Japanese Mother,
And Father African.
Ready to declare war
On someone you do not know.

Outer features do not truly show,
The real person.
So much mixture
Among the races.
Do not categorize faces.

Hey!!

Did you check out DNA,
Before coming to a conclusion?
Ignorance causes heaps of confusion.
Walking around with traces of races,
ever knew you had inside yourself.

America’s cities of different ethnicities melting together.
Pedigrees rearing, disappearing.
See clearly the true picture, a mixture
Of all complexions, shapes and sizes,
Made into one HUMAN RACE.
In totality REALITY is

INDIVIDUALITY.
MALALA

ANN KASLOW

Out of a surging sea
 of prejudice, ignorance and hate
Arose Malala!

The inner strength of a warrior
The courage of a lion
The soul of a saint
 Steel and grace

Bullets could not kill her
Her voice just became louder
Heard by people the world over
Her words were sourced
 from a well of wisdom
Words seemingly so simple
Yet so profound

“End all wars.
Use the money to educate all children,
 everywhere.”

Who would have believed
That a prophet would appear
In the form of a sixteen year old
 Pakistani girl wearing a headscarf

Whose voice would pierce through
 the cacophony of the 21st century
In total clarity and purity

Bringing an ultimate message of love.
I wanna cry. Can’t. Can’t make any sounds. Why is…?

At three years old I didn’t know there was a world out there. My world consisted of my mother’s smooth round face, swirling brown hair, and distinctly robust voice; and my father’s sad blue eyes, his darkly tanned features, so quiet-spoken; and my baby sister’s unblinking brown eyes, crying with great wails or smiling with angelic bliss; and the blistered wrinkled faces of my grandfather and grandmother – my grandfather especially because he handed me chocolate kisses and his pressed lips made a soft buzzing sound as he watched me pop the chocolate into my mouth. At three years old I was content with that. That was my whole world.

Can’t feel my arms or legs. I hear “Bigboy Bigboy Bigboy Bigboy.”

Mama brought me there, a concrete wading pool in a park. Later I learned its name: Willets Park. I’ve been there often since that day. Baby Sis was home with Gramps and Grandma. Dada was working. Mama watched me as I sat beside a water spout, delighting in filling a plastic pail with water and spilling it out again.

A big boy in swimming trunks perhaps nine years old, with swelling round cheeks, a thatch of unkempt black hair, and small eyes wide apart, waddled over and began talking to me. “Small fry,” he called me. He grew annoyed when I didn’t look up or answer him back. What did I know at three?

What did I know of others who enjoyed watching someone in distress? Or enjoyed squashing the helpless underfoot? What did I know of those who purposely caused pain? I didn’t know of such things at three.

At three, I didn’t know I should be afraid.

Trees and sky swirled and came together. Mist drizzled over them and they were gone. Mama! I wanted to scream but couldn’t. My throat was stopped. Something deflated within my chest, something that pushed out my final air. I gave one great heave of arms and legs. Then I was nothing.

“Boy! You okay? Boy!” I didn’t recognize the speaker. He spoke hoarsely, as if straining to keep his voice low but wanting to jolt me awake.

I felt a rumbling deep in my chest. It rose until I started coughing. My throat had opened and tears streamed down my face. I was lying on my back on the grass beside the wading pool. I stared up into the small eyes of an unfamiliar man. His face was pear-shaped and he had long wet streams of black hair. Black hair covered his chest and shoulders as well. His eyes were so far apart I could see only one at a time above me as he moved his head.

“I wan’ Mama!” I cried out – almost screaming it.

“Shh,” the man said. “Right here.”

Mama’s pale round face came into view. Her eyes were dark-rimmed and her lips quivered. She
tried to form words but seemed unable to speak.

“Alex?” she whispered finally.

*Don’t cry,* I wanted to say but couldn’t. I made a weak attempt to smile.

“He’s okay,” said the man. “No water in his lungs. He’s okay.”

I wanted to tell Mama about Big Boy. Big Boy had lifted me up, his thick fatty arm wrapped around my neck. I couldn’t breathe. I couldn’t find the ground. He held me there in the crook of his arm until –

“Mama!” I cried in gladness and tears.

“You’d better go!” she said urgently. Not to me. To him.

The stranger with the soaked black hair came close to Mama. His face, one bead-like eye, melted into Mama’s face. They . . . came together. Then rushed apart.

“Go!” Mama said to him, brushing her slender fingers across his bare shoulders.

The man looked around and called, “Jaimie! Let’s go. Now!”

I rolled onto my side and watched Big Boy run off with the man.

“Mama?”

“What, Alex?’

“Big Boy hold me. He holds my head up. My feet high over the ground.”

“Alex?” she said and hesitated. She looked toward the trees as if she was trying to remember something. She looked down at me. “Alex, nothing happened today. You played in the water with your pail. You didn’t see any ‘Big Boy.’ Okay?”

I was confused. But Mama repeated it, so earnestly that it seemed maybe it was true. Nothing had happened. There was no Big Boy.

But I remembered.
THE POET’S WAY

William Lemmon

Poets join the Harry Potters of the world
But use their pens instead of magical words
To interact with the world around them.
The ordinary is transformed into the extraordinary
By the skillful use of words.
Using the five senses the poet creates a poem
That focuses on some aspect of life.

Some poems explode on the scene
Like a powerful volcano.
Some poems touch our emotions
Like a calm flowing river.
others paint a picture like
A magnificent landscape or portrait.

Metaphors, similies, alliteration and many
Action verbs are the tools of the poet.
Some poems use rhyming patterns
While others use free verse.
Sometimes a topic is dissected and put
Under a microscope to focus on details.
Some poems, like Haiku have syllabic patterns
That capture a moment in time and space.

Poems are crafted and perfected
And leave something for the reader to ponder.
Poets reflect on life and surroundings
To interact with the hearts and minds of others.
this is the poet’s way.
AN ARTIST’S LETTER TO THE WORLD

Helen Levin

This is my letter to the world
That rarely wrote to me.
And when it did, it often said:
“You’re not our cup of tea.”
And so I took those messages
And forged them into songs.
I danced to them,
And wrote them out;
I said, “You could be wrong!”

My paintings said: “I speak to you
In colors, shapes and lines.”
“That’s eloquent,” and answer came.
“Go on; you’re doing fine!”
The voice was from within my soul.
It told me I could share!
The message that I send the world is this:
“Please know I care!”

DEVOTED DAUGHTER: BEHOLD

Janet Lieberman

Archaic Mother, hovering in shadow land;
Thin lips sucked in, dripping nose, emaciated limbs
Classic profile, eyebrows arched in surprise
Deep brown eyes mirror/mimic love, despair, reproach…
Weakly whispers “feed me, come here, I want, hurry up” …
Clasping hands, you fold back my fingers caressing…
Fragile as tissues you crease, bend, fold.…

Behold life slowly punctured, puckered balloon
My frail child, burping puréed food …
Swollen wrists, spastic movements, stammering …

Agony of witness; powerless, immobilized …
Life lingering—survival or travesty.
INWARD TRAVELERS

JANET LIEBERMAN

We stand together on the terrace,
Minds cluttered with accumulation of detail
Shoulder to shoulder, holding wine glasses…

Dark warren of streets below
Traffic sounds, fumes swirling from street
Gazing at open sky, stars peeking from haze
Counting planes in distance,
Clouds ripping silently above…

Two travelers dismounting,
Distant breeze caressing us…
My head resting in silence,
Nestled in your arms…
Moment furrowed in time.
I’m free…finally…to decide what to do…or what not to do.

Should I wander into the garage and rummage among the boxes of my well-packed keepsakes, and find a place to display an uncovered treasure?

Or will I settle into my overstuffed yellow couch within feet of my youngest son, and amuse myself with him, and the endless, familiar clicking sounds from all of his selections on the remote?

Maybe I should cast off my sweater, as well as the air conditioning, and open the windows to embrace the warm breath of summertime, and pick up spring’s unfinished book, and make a cup of strong iced coffee.

Perhaps I’ll just sit and stare into space like I so often dreamed of doing during the endless routines when I was working, and put away the thawed-out chicken legs and go out for dinner. I don’t think I’ll pick up the newly delivered newspaper with its front page news to rock my karma. I’ll muse instead back to a time when my mom was well, and we talked at the beginning and end of each day.

Riding my newly acquired bike like I did when I was I child might be a good choice.

I am ten years old again, pedaling into the alley way and down the big hill behind the houses on East 29th Street in Brooklyn thinking that I’ll fly into the air gripping steel handlebar wings before I reach the bottom and realize that I had been imagining being airborne speeding alongside a group of sparrows.

I am free…free to think what I want…to do what I please…finally…I am retired
WHY ARE YOU TELLING THE STORY YOU ARE TELLING? WHY THIS? WHY NOW?

Madeline Mandel

Very much like the yellow sponge with the rough, blue back that sits astride my kitchen sink, I absorb, take in, am pulled here, thrown there, and am forced to glide over, under, and through countless comfortable and uncomfortable surfaces and situations. I am stretched, shoved, and sometimes pushed to the limit, as well as being able, at times, to bend into hard to reach and very strange places. When I am swollen to capacity and ready to pop, my contents are emptied, wrung out by the twist of multiple fingers or the force of two whole fists. Resilient and renewed, I return to the status quo and resume an endless cycle of saturation and release.

This build-up is why I write. Prose and poetry have become my vehicles for emotional release and expression. My need for expression started many years ago as a gnawing deep in my gut, first appearing as a sort of melancholia that would grab at me when I was a freshman at Kingsborough College waiting for the M29 bus. Once I was comfortably seated for the bus ride home or to school, I began scribbling inside one of my new three subject notebooks. I first recorded poetic images, later constructing well-tooled lines that found air in emotionally charged verses or stories. My feelings had a voice, as my 18 year old experiences and thoughts found their way to paper. For me, the process was and is both difficult and satisfying, painful and rewarding. Quite individual and pressing, I create my own personal journey through life.
GRATITUDE

Annette Amelia Mandis

An autumn breeze comfortably caresses my face,
As white cottony clouds gently move,
In the glorious evening blue sky,
Mysteriously shifting, entirely covering the moon.

While figuring out my own agenda,
G-d's plans are hidden from me, a mere human,
Not comprehending what's being orchestrated next,
Enhancing or disrupting future life goals.

After a particularly difficult event,
Serious, totally unexpected cardiac illness,
Denial, shock, acceptance,
Now gathering up pieces of my life.

Thanking The One Above,
For the miraculous fact that I 'm alive,
Enjoying simple wonders of creation,
Invigorates me with feelings of gratefulness.
LITTLE GREENHORN

Ted Mieszczanski

In my mind I still see him in front of me as clearly as if it were today. My mother has told me that he, she and I are all related. Was it that he is my mother’s uncle or maybe only a distant cousin? Either way I’m just to call him Uncle Joe, but neither one of us, he nor I, believes that. That’s made very clear to me as he moves around the house treating me as if I were a misplaced piece of small furniture.

I can see him sitting there in the living room alongside the same window every day. What is it he’s looking for? It can’t be anything alive because what’s outside could be a painting on a wall for all the movement there is in the street. But still, each day he sits there, unmoving, staring out and thinking.

Sure I’m young, but even at my age, six; I know he isn’t seeing anything with his eyes. No, he’s looking through a different window at another time, one in which I don’t exist. He’s there wandering in his past, living another life over again. Here, in this room, he’s only waiting.

I’m just a very little boy, left at home exploring the possibilities of a large empty apartment. Each day it is he and I, alone with only each other. There he is. A bent over bony old man sitting with his hands clasped one over another, waiting.

Still, as I trace the rough lines and ridges of those folded hands with my small fingertips I have to wonder about the stories that are attached to the many bumps and calluses. He brought us here from out of despair in Germany right after the war, but he never says anything to me. All I get is an occasional pat on the head before he turns to stare out the window again.

Each day is the same. I amuse myself by playing with his scarred hands and he lets me do that. Then he ignores me to stare out of the window listening to his voices from the past. I wish that just one time he might have told me one of his stories. It might have taught me something I needed to know, or maybe, possibly, given me some much needed comfort. But Uncle Joe was who he was, a quiet man who didn’t share his life with six year olds. Apparently that is one more thing I haven’t quite gotten over. But that was then, and this is now. Here is part of my story, and perhaps it may help you.
Sitting on the B11 bus traveling toward Flatbush, about 9:00 a.m.

Passenger #1: ‘Hello! Hello, Marge! … Of course it’s Mary! Who did you expect?’… Five months! Don’t show it! … Just like that? … The bastard! You don’t say! … A secret! Not a soul… Promise! … Uh! Huh! She didn’t! … She wouldn’t! … I don’t believe it! … Wait till I tell Shirley … Not Shirley? … Marge, I have to go! … But Marge … Bye! … Thanks! (click off). (Click… click) ‘Shirley!’

Passenger #2: ‘Yes, it’s Max! How’s the market today? … That bad? But you said… How much will it cost? … That much? … What happened? … Right now? … I can’t get to the bank… I’m on the bus… Uh! Huh! … What the hell of a bookie you are! But you said 100% sure! … Accept it! Accept it! S--t! … I’ll curse if I want to! It’s my money! By the way, how does Belmont look today? … S--t!’ (snap phone closed).

Passenger #3: ‘Father Mike, here! Tell Matthew to wait. I’ll be late getting to the seminary!’ (click).

Passenger #4: (Bzzz, buzz) “buenas dias! … Si, Pedro! Como esta? … Que pasa, Orlando? … Wha ju mean? … Si! Cuanto? … Magnifica! … One hunred dawlas? Si! … Manana!” (music click off).

Passenger #5: Moshi! … Hi! Ohio go-zai-masta, Fumikosan! … Hi! Hi! … Ah so! … So desukah! Hi! … Wa-kari-ma-sen! … Hi! … Dozo! … Hi! Giggle Ah so! Ashta-tabum! … Syonara tomodachi!’ (click).

Passenger #6: (Ring … ring). “Darcy? Get lunch ready! … The baby blues with the lace trim… We have until 6:30, baby… Can’t wait either! Soon! baby ‘D’. (click).

Passenger #7: (Ching… ching… ching). “Yo! Mama! Wha’s happening’? … Din’ I tell ya not t’ call me at work? Damn!” (click).


Driver intercom): “Bus B11, Nostrand Avenue, nextstop. All off! transfer to the B13, B16, B30 to Sheepshead Bay. (click, click). Bus 11 calling in… coffee break… 10:30… 10-4.”

Passenger #9: “Boobeleh! I have to go! Getting off last stop! Change to B16?” (music, click off).

“Cell phone Pax de Deux” was recorded on bus B11, April 1, 2013

“La Comedie et finite!” – Pagliacci (The Comedy is over!)
HEDGES

Teena Miller

hedges so high
hiding laughing children
splashing in the pool
or lonely people
quiet
in their backyard
even hiding you
but I will trim
those hedges
little by little
until I find
your essence
then I will see
you
FOGGY PERCEPTIONS

Teena Miller

a foggy, dreary day
some would say
but I would not
powder puff sun
barely seen

a dog barking
at disappearing prey
traffic moving
on an unseen highway

dense fog softening
covering, smoothing
edges of buildings
barbed fences

pale, faded
trees and shrubbery
diaphanous shapes
nature in hiding

horizon obscured
and I like to believe
there is no sharp line
between
heaven and earth

I could drift up or down
with no hard landing
free movement
just floating

an unfinished painting
with muted hues
endless dreams
for me to color
NEGLIGEE
Constance Mitchell

The gift arrived one chilly winter day
Inside, a pale new negligee
So soft it seemed to billow
Like the clouds over head
“Suffice it to say…”
the small card read
She was seventeen that year
“Not appropriate,” her father said
That surprising afternoon
“No good will come from it
He’ll make you pay”
She hid it in her bottom drawer
Wrapped in tissue paper
If not today, she thought
Perhaps a little later
At twenty eight she put it on
And danced around the room
But he had waited long enough
And was some other’s groom
At 49, she unfolded it again
And tossed it, faded, wilted
In the garbage bin
My granddaughter, Nola Skye was born on March 29th of this year. As I held her in my arms I recalled, like it was only yesterday, holding Nola’s mother, my daughter, thirty-six years ago, in this same hospital.

It was 2:30 in the morning when my wife awakened me with the words, “It’s time.” ‘Time for what’, I thought until I realized I was about to become a father. It was 1975 and birthing practices were changing. Husbands would no longer be relegated to the waiting room, nervously pacing while our wives did all the work. I had been trained to assist in the delivery, coaching, reminding my wife to breathe, comforting her, holding her hand. We would forever be linked in this life altering moment. By 5 AM we had settled in and everything was going according to plan, except my composure.

I thought I was a new age man, strong but emotional, manly but willing to partake in parenting. But being a part of what had long been exclusively a woman’s domain was not as easy as I anticipated. The contractions were painful and her screams unnerving. By 6:50 the nurse, noticing my discomfort, said, “You need a break. The cafeteria opens at seven and this baby is not coming for a while. Go down and grab some breakfast.” Eggs, bacon, and coffee seemed to be exactly what I needed to regain my equanimity.

Sitting down to breakfast I looked around the empty cafeteria. The only other patron was a nurse rushing through the door. As I picked up my egg she ran up to me, looked at her paper and said, “Are you Mr. Moinester?” “I am.” “Then you better get upstairs. They need you quickly!” Swallowing the egg and gulping a burning sip of coffee I raced for the elevator wondering, ‘Is everything all right? Has something gone wrong?’ As I nervously waited for the elevator, a security guard eyed me warily. I thought, ‘Appear calm. Don’t look suspicious’. I stepped into the elevator, “Ninth floor please.” Suddenly a nurse reached in, handed the elevator operator some papers and said, “Hurry. It’s an emergency. Get these to the ninth floor.” ‘Oh no’, I thought as my heart sank.

Reaching the ninth floor, I raced down the hall and burst into the delivery room. The midwife and nurses, all in scrubs, looked up at me quizzically. My wife lay on the delivery table looking harried but fine. She said, “About time. I’ve been trying to keep this baby on hold until you got here and I am tired of blowing.” Someone grabbed my arm and hustled me out saying, “You can’t be here in street clothes.” Haphazardly, I threw on my scrubs and ran back in.

At 7:23 AM that miracle occurred and my daughter entered this world. When that living, breathing being cried out for the first time, you have experienced one of the supreme moments of your life.

And now that baby has become a mother herself.

I know how privileged I am to experience anew the implausibility of birth, of my daughter becoming a mother and myself a grandfather. I also know how fleeting these times are, how quickly it all passes, how fast Nola Skye will grow. But right now, she is beautiful beyond belief.
EDGE WARY

Tom Murphy

The deconstructive sharp-edged beauty
of a sharply greying gray city,

edging across an unconnective wake
sinuously diminishing the ferryman’s toll,

consigns to buoyant seductiveness

a foreign yearning for edifying stones

of sharp, despair-tinged hopefulness.

A blue slate hazed vision
touched on the horizontal edges

with duskful epiphanies
of lighted incandescences

[leaving aside the sharp affrontery

of urbane greenlessness]

ennobles the vesperal receding memory

of noise-coloured baseness.

Softened utterances of the winded harbor’s still sound.

The vision, in evoluted refractions

of the sunsetting sky,

Is moored wayward

by S – turning navigations.

Now lights peer plaintively star-like

on architectural towerings

undemarcating the garden-drawn barriers

of a city weary reconstructionist

softly enticed back by softened edges.

On the 8pm ferry – May 29, 1991

Revised September 2013
THE JEWISH MINORITY IN THE BRONX

Selma Reva Newman

I was born in 1941 in the section of the Bronx called “Fort Apache” before it got that infamous name. It was a predominately Jewish neighborhood when my parents moved to 1142 Intervale Avenue, between 167th Street and Kelly Street in 1938. There were still some kosher butcher stores and bakeries, as well as dwindling synagogues when we moved to Brooklyn in 1959. However, Jews had become a minority in the neighborhood.

My mother told me that my elementary school, PS 99, directly across from our 2nd floor apartment windows, had been under construction the year of my birth. I had always thought it was built just for me. My father died after a fatal heart attack a month before my fifth birthday, so it was just my mother, eight year old sister, Arlene, and me in a three room railroad apartment with a large kitchen, painted forest green to make it appear smaller, a large bedroom painted rose to make it look pleasant, and a small bedroom the same color as the large bedroom to use up the paint. Arlene got that small bedroom, and I had to share the larger one with my mother. My sister decorated the walls of her room with pictures of handsome movie stars from the covers of the magazine section of the Sunday Daily News. I do not recall when the paper stopped printing those wonderful full page portrait photos of actors. She managed to practically wallpaper her small room with John Derek, Jeffrey Hunter, Audie Murphy, Roy Rogers, Kirk Douglas, Tony Curtis, Eddie Fisher, Ricky Nelson, Robert Wagner, Rock Hudson, to name a few. What pleasant dreams Arlene must have had!

Having a school across the street had its pros and cons. I often waited until the last minute to fly down two flights of stairs; and with my mother indicating from the window when it was safe, dashing across the street into the school yard where classes lined up to be led into the building by their teachers. Sometimes, I was late. I could come home for lunch. Once, when I was in third grade, absentmindedly, I took my “Howdy Doody” book bag home at lunch time. Seeing me with the book bag, my mother asked if I felt sick and, ashamed to admit my mistake claimed that my stomach hurt. Unexpectedly, I had the afternoon off, rather than the embarrassment of returning to school carrying the book bag. I had excellent attendance usually.

There was ethnic and racial diversity when I entered kindergarten, but by fourth grade, I was the only Jewish child in a class of thirty. The neighborhood had changed. I felt the stigma of belonging to a minority group. My mother was no help in distinguishing my apprehension; instead, she enforced it by telling me to conceal that I was Jewish. She feared anti-Semitism. One time my homework assignment was to write a composition describing a favorite holiday. I wrote about Easter although I did not celebrate it. It was a great surprise when I moved to Brooklyn to find many Jewish children in my class.

Since then I have learned both pride in my heritage and tolerance for others.
As the ferry maneuvered its way into the tiny port of the small Greek island of Alonissos, I marveled at the simple beauty. The cool blue Aegean Sea darkened with the setting sun. Lining the shore were fishing boats teeming with the day’s catches. The mouthwatering aroma of grilled octopus and swordfish wafted through the air. It was pure paradise! Grabbing my knapsack, I anxiously made my way down the pier. I had been warned that by arriving on the last ferry of the day, finding a room might be difficult. Echoes of “Domatio…Domatio” eased my mind. I approached one of the wrinkled Greek women who had been waiting impatiently for the passengers to disembark. “Ehete domatio,” I asked in my limited Greek. She nodded and I began following her through the maze of curvy cobbled streets. Though I understood almost nothing, she chattered nonstop and greeted every person we encountered with a hearty “Yasou.” About ten minutes later we turned into a tiny alley, stopping at a pretty handmade sign indicating Domatio Ntina. After checking out the miniscule but immaculate room which boasted an even smaller private bath, I dropped my bag on the bed and headed back to port. Although I consider myself to be a seasoned and savvy traveler, in my haste to fill my belly, I forgot to note the street name.

I wove my way through the whitewashed buildings and souvenir laden shops, and in a few minutes found myself back at the port. I chose a restaurant and found a table outside where I could people watch. Sipping my glass of homemade Greek wine, I nibbled on some pita bread and marinated octopus as I waited for my grilled swordfish and Greek salad. Watching a few wizened old Greek men walking by fingerling their “worry beads,” I smiled and thought to myself, “Wow, those aren’t just souvenirs, they really use those things.” My dinner came and I began savoring every tasty morsel. Some friendly Greeks at the next table told me about some sort of fair that was going on. “Travelling alone has its good points,” I thought to myself. “I can do whatever I like.” After dinner I decided to check out the fair.

It was a beautiful night, and I felt at ease as I strolled along the winding streets. I admired the artists sitting by their easels capturing the beauty of the white of the buildings contrasted against the blue sea. I bought a little postcard size painting which came with its own little easel, and a pretty, ceramic, blue and white set of worry beads.

Around eleven, I decided I was getting tired and should call it a night. I turned up the curvy cobbled road only to find there was no alley leading to Ntina’s. “No problem,” I thought adopting the relaxed Greek way of thinking, “I must have turned up the wrong street.” I retraced my steps. Then I retraced my steps again. Now I was getting worried. I tore the paper off my new treasure and began fingerling the worry beads. Though almost midnight, the streets were still full of Greeks chatting, drinking retsina and ouzo and playing backgammon. I tried to ask for directions, but no one seemed to have heard of “Domatio Ntina,” and I didn’t have an address. I started thinking I would never see my knapsack and passport again, and the “no problem” Greek way of life had now become a problem. It was after one a.m. and wandering the curvy cobblestoned streets had lost their charm. I was tired and worried. I saw the same group of men I had asked for directions still playing backgammon. “Lost still?” one asked in broken English. Not trusting myself to speak for fear of bursting into tears I nodded.
“Domatio Ntina”? I tried again. A young man who hadn’t been there before smiled at me. “Ntina is my ‘yaya’,” he said in perfect English, “I will take you there”. I followed Dimitri for a few minutes and looked at him quizzically when he stopped at a white door I had walked by at least half a dozen times that night. As if reading my mind, he smiled. “You must have been looking for the sign. My silly grandma hangs it on the inside so when she closes the door no one can see it. She says when the door is closed she doesn’t want anyone to bother her for a room.”

I shook my head and nodded. “Efkaristo poli,” I thanked Dimitri as I took out my key and opened the door. “Seasoned traveler indeed!” I thought to myself. “I guess travelling alone has its drawbacks too, but what a story I’ll have to share.”
AUTUMN PERSIMMON

Kyung Park

The fruit
At first sour and green astringent
Trees with ebony and white cup shaped flowers
Everybody keeps looking up that tree and
Imagining delicious fruit with impatient smiles

When white clouds push and push
blue sky up so high
Whole valleys are green and yellow
Some orange-red leaves start to fall
Autumn sun changes them fire red and gold
We are happy and ready to eat
Edible sweet persimmons

My grandmother would prepare something special
the peeling would start many harvest persimmons
Whole house would be filled with sweet fragrance
Bright sun dried them up for a few weeks
Sweet and brownish, chewy dried fruits
during the long cold winter
Children had something to nibble
My childhood memory…
A PLATEFUL OF MEMORIES
LORRAINE PEARSON

Perhaps it was just the naiveté of childhood that made me think that everyone lived as I did, but in the 1950’s on West 11th Street in the Gravesend section of Brooklyn there was surely a sameness in the style and pattern of our days. Every child had a mom and a dad, with the exception of the three teenage girls whose mother had been long widowed. Our fathers labored in small businesses of their own or as carpenters, asphalt pavers, house painters, or jewelers—honest, steady workers whose sweat earned them their own homes and harvests from their small, carefully tended gardens. Hidden among these typical breadwinners was a professional jazz musician who gigged regularly with Louis Armstrong, and yet no one regarded him as anything special—maybe because he still lived on this middle class block with the rest of us. Like us, he shared his home with his in-laws, traveled to the city by train, and sent his kids to public school.

While our dads traveled away from home to work, our moms were rooted firmly in their domesticity—tools of selfless nurturing. They cooked hearty, well-balanced meals, cleaned our homes, swept the stoops, bought fresh fish and produce from itinerant vendors in horse-drawn carts, and tended to our school needs. When we arrived home from school, our moms were always on hand to welcome us and serve as our homework helpers. After satisfactorily completing our assignments, we were allowed to go out to play—but only after we made our daily trip to Harry’s Grocery to buy a loaf of freshly baked Italian bread for the evening meal. My friend Fran and I relished this task since we inevitably returned home with half-eaten loaves, carefully turned in the brown paper bags to conceal our indulgences. Thank God, our moms were forgiving.

At the end of the week, we looked forward to our Saturday foray to 86th Street, where we’d browse at the clothing stores and eventually stop at Reliable Bakery with nickels and dimes in hand to purchase just-out-of-the oven square pieces of Sicilian pizza. Dark-haired ladies in their starched uniforms, crisp embroidered handkerchiefs protruding from their breast pockets, wrapped wax paper around our sizzling slices before handing them over to us. Ah, that combination of thick red sauce sprinkled with parmeggiano, white clumps of melted mozzarella, and green specks of oregano on thick crusty dough sang the praises of Italian cuisine—and with the colors of its flag to boot! Food was definitely a pleasure of an Italian childhood!

On Sundays we could anticipate the zesty aroma of meat gravy chock full of fennel sausages, chunks of beef, braciole, meatballs, and pork spare ribs simmering on the stove while we went to Mass at St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Church. As Church rules required, we fasted until after Mass and then consumed the fresh cheese buns we had bought at the bakery on our walk home. By 3pm the whole neighborhood was seated comfortably with their families at tables laden with the abundance of their lives: an antipasto of salami, prosciutto, pepperoni, provolone cheese, and olives; a bowl of fusilli drenched in tasty redness; a platter of tender, slowly cooked meats; salad dressed simply with olive oil and wine vinegar; baskets of seasonal fruits and nuts; and dainty cups of espresso for the adults. Thus, this afternoon meal stretched into the evening, ending with the offer of cold cut sandwiches, should anyone still be hungry, and the amusements of television’s poker-faced Ed Sullivan, the only Irishman who would be entering this Italian household this evening!
haiku for my seventieth birthday

Dorothy Prideaux

young poems flowed freely
now i dig deep for seasoned words
old wood plays richly

****

time writes on my face
leaving inscrutable lines
a poem of aging

****

body wears and tears
seven decades of birthdays
yet i don’t grow old
MEDITATION - A FATHER’S PRAYER

Dorothy Prideaux

Hold still my daughter
While I trim from your heart
The tangles of remorse
The knots of guilt
The endless attachments

Hold still I say
As my miraculous scissors snip away
Caring what others think
Sadness from past years
Fear of aging, illness and death

Daughter don’t move
My scissors will do the job carefully
Removing your flaws
Slowly, Snip by snip
Leaving my blessing of peace

There, daughter
You are lighter now
Stay in the stillness
HOW IT ALL BEGAN

SARAH QUIGLEY

If men of science disagree
On how the cosmos came to be,
Why ask me?

There was, some say, a great big bang.
No one was there to hear the clang.
How it rang!

Perhaps it was a lot of gas
That got itself into a mass.
Then…? I pass.

The splinters that were so far flung
Over eons somehow clung.
Must have rung.

So much later somethings came
One celled creatures without a name,
Who to blame?

One day they walked out of the sea
And so there began you and me.
Oh whoopee!

Creationists will see god’s hand
In all that’s here. They say he planned
Sea and land.

And all the time sure in God’s plan
Always since the world began
There was man.

There are discoveries frequently
About how we all came to be,
You’ll agree.

But still, sometimes it gives me pause.
Was there at first an Uncaused Cause?
Wait and see.
TODAY AT AGE SIXTY

Stephanie Reingold

still the dawn of opportunity.
still the excitement of each awakening.
still the quiver of the unknown.
still the eyes well from Tchaikovsky.
still the awe from nature’s bounty.
still the warmth from kindness received.
still the love for all existence.

still the dance ’tween man and woman.
still the anticipating chance meetings.
still the hope of being left one’s dignity.
still the need to create the world anew.
still the yearning for truth to be told.
still the desire to be seen.
still the sacrifice of all for love.

still the relief of ending worn friendships.
still the march through crisp leaves of fall.
still the trace of hourglass torsos.
still the twinkle of mischievous eyes.
still the curve of lips in a smile.
still the comfort of being a human.
still the joy of being alive.
THE VISIT

Terry Riccardi

“Fish and visitors smell in three days.”

The day my friend came to stay with me
I was very glad.
I cleaned up my room especially clean
And made my bed.

She slept in my room, so we were
Together then,
But somehow I found I was
Crying a little.

She came in the morning, so we had time to play
Before lunch.
We ate together by ourselves and then went out
To play some more.

We had the next day to ourselves, but she only
Played a little.
When she wanted to take a nap, I played
By myself.

We stayed in the yard all afternoon.
My heart felt
As if it were out in the cornfield, swinging
From one sunny tassel to the next.

In the evening we read quietly
In my room,
Not speaking much until my brother
Bounced in.

My brother came home later, so we had to
Include him.
I was annoyed, but my friend seemed to actually
Like him.

She went to sleep before me, so I lay and
Watched her breathe evenly,
And I wondered why I felt
Lonely again.

My brother came home later, so we had to
Include him.
I was annoyed, but my friend seemed to actually
Like him.

The third day she was to leave, and I watched
Her pack.
I offered to help, but she said,
“No, thank you.”

She fell for his act of cuteness and manners,
But I hoped
He would forget and betray his true nature
To my guest.

When she left, she said she’d invite me
Over soon.
I said That’s good, and hope you had
A nice time.

He knew I was mad, so he stayed
All afternoon,
And at dinner he grabbed the chair
Next to her.

The third day she was to leave, and I watched
Her pack.
I offered to help, but she said,
“No, thank you.”

She was gone; so I played with my brother
Till supper time.
Then we sat together, as we always
Used to.

Finally he went to bed, and I had a chance
To talk,
But now there was too little
To say.
THURSDAY AFTERNOON POETRY
WRITING IS WHAT WE DO!

Frances Rosenfeld

Looking at the Ladies
Attending class
Papers covering the table

A time zone
Grips me
“King Arthur and the Knights
of the Round Table”
Enters my thoughts

Turning around - bringing me back
I see my fellow Poets as
“Fair Ladies of the Long Table”
Waiting to share Poems
With our leader
to critique each Poem
Advising us to use verbs
fewer pronouns

Angelina Spero - Queen of the “Fair Ladies
of the Long Table”
Installing inspiration

Be not frightened of what you write

Our Queen Guinevere
YOUR BASEMENT--------MY CELLAR

Nathaniel Rosenfeld

It was in the mid-thirties
That the Depression began to ease
Friends and neighbors soon busy
Improving their homes,
Acquiring finished basements.

But I loved my cellar,
Low ceiling, but I could stand.
Dark corners, yet I could navigate in the dark.
At one end, a big furnace, hot water boiler, a little stove.
Winters, I loved to “shake the stove,” haul ashes.
Grandma and I picked through grey ashes, extracting unburned coal.
Summers, I tended the little stove, made hot water.
Coal bins extended back to granite-grey wash tubs,
The new Thor washer with mangle at the top,
Two clothes line stretched from front to back.

Each year, when Babe was in heat
I’d line a box with an old blanket
Set it in front of the coal bin.
When she knew she was ready
She dragged the blanket into the bin.
Next day, five blind pups.

So, Sonny had a pool table in his finished basement
And Jackie had a ping-pong table with a stand-up bar,
Keep your pool table, Sonny—your ping-pong table, Jackie
I loved my dark cellar, made heat, hot water
Watched puppies being born
Real life!
There’s a fly in my soup. Well, not in my soup, thank goodness, but everywhere else in my house. For two and a half days and two full nights a little fly has been bugging me. It has followed me wherever I went—to the kitchen where I was to enjoy a quiet cup of morning coffee, to my computer, where it flew all around and on me, causing me to misspell words and lose my train of thought, to my dining room table where I have been trying to open and sort last week’s mail.

Not enough trouble-making for this quick flying little thing, it would not let me sit in the living room for a look at TV, or for a good read. There has been, as they say “no joy in Mudville.”

I even confess, like a desperate toddler, it has followed me into my bathroom, making a royal nuisance of itself. I did notice that it would not enter the shower and this gave me the idea that perhaps I could drown it. In the toilet. After quite a few tries I did manage to get the seat down, locking it inside.

“Drown,” I said to it. “Drown!” This was about midnight on the first night. But in the morning—no. There it was, waiting, dry and seemingly unperturbed by its imprisonment. It just started up again on its routine habits. Robert Louis Stevenson’s Shadow had nothing on it!

Desperate, on the second evening I put a small bag of garbage open by the back door. “Surely,” I thought, “this fly would find this attractive and crawl into the bag.” I am embarrassed to tell you, it still preferred me.

Finally, today, after brain-storming with myself, I opened the back door wide. There for the taking was its true habitat, flowers, trees, fellow bugs-- I expected that it would rush out into its real world.

Let me tell you, it took its sweet time, gingerly finally went out as far as the door.

But far enough for me to pull the screen closed, to keep it out.

This part is really strange. Like a monkey or a cheetah who has spent its infancy with humans, that fly looked confused and tried to get back in. I could not believe it—it did not go away.

A friend who is well versed in Eastern philosophy has suggested it is not really a fly, but a friend, reincarnated and trying to contact me. But its behavior is more like that of an enemy and I intend to have nothing further to do with it. A friend, I’m sure, would come back as a cuddly kitten, or a soulful little dog.

Since I put it out several hours ago I have checked to see—it is still hovering about, waiting for its chance to fly back in. I worry, how many days and nights will I have to leave my back door open? This is, after all Brooklyn.

But for now I will take my chances. I just hope it leaves before the weather changes and I find it, shivering, but determined, half dead on my doorstep.
We all wear masks, burying them deep in closets of our minds, hidden—until we dig them up, like dogs retrieving bones buried deep beneath hardened ground. Ghosts fly around at night as we sleep. Secrets: laying low beneath the surface fearing discovery.

tossing, turning, all through the night.

Crushing soft pillows into shapeless beings holding unto sadness, pain, disillusionments, lost dreams, passions—spent; left dying in dark misty foggy air.
Mornings creep up forcing vampires to flee. Seeking safety in tightly closed coffins without a key.

Rising sun, peeping out.

Bringing with its colors: pink, burnt orange, gentle blue, clearing a way for a different view like a window washer, leaves glass sparkling, squeaky clean, brand new.
Tangled sheets, and bedspreads come off baring truths.

Halloween eve, unmasked.

Giving candy to innocent, masked, goblins, children—giggling, free, unburdened. 
Cinderella holding hands with a werewolf, Little Red Riding Hood, leaning on Count Dracula, fearlessly reminding us, Once, we too, were unmasked.
LIFE’S GARDEN
CASSANDRA SMITH

Blooming flowers
don’t move me
to write poetry.
Peeping from
beneath the ground
faces rising
in different shades
and hues
filling the air
with sweet perfume.

blooming flowers
pointing out my mistakes
don’t motivate me
to opening packets of seeds
or writing poems,
listening to birds
snickering
on my barren terrace
knowing I only pretend
to not care.

No, blooming flowers
don’t move me
to write poetry.
Instead,
I grow children,
who produce more children,
romping around in gardens
tasting life as it blooms…

Blooming flowers
lifting fragile slender
arms to the sun
mocking me and
laughing
because my green thumb
refuses to produce
fruit or vegetation.

Blooming flowers
playing in the cemetery
remind me of the
empty flower pots
on my window sill, and
of beautiful dreams dying
before they even have
a chance to breathe air,
smothered by
over watered beginnings.
THE DAY WE LOST OUR INNOCENCE

Christine Soper

For those of us old enough to remember, there are questions that still haunt us about the death of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Putting aside the conspiracy theories that abound 50 years later, we look at it from a personal point of view. Where were we when we first heard the news? On this 50th anniversary of his assassination, while we have different memories of the moments before, those that followed are the same for all of us as we watched his slaying and its aftermath unravel before our unbelieving eyes.

I was in the audience at a Broadway play, the name of which escapes me. There was no stage manager to interrupt the Wednesday matinee as there had been at the local movie theater in 1945 when I learned of FDR’s death. I was 11 years old then and not fully aware of the gravity of the occasion. But when they canceled the rest of the movie and sent the audience home, I found out. My parents behaved as if a close relative had passed away and I spent the rest of the evening listening to the radio as they mourned their beloved Franklin.

But FDR had died of natural causes and we were prepared. His pictures showed a tired old man, exhausted from his unprecedented three terms in office and not able to embark on a fourth. This was different. Jack Kennedy was in the prime of his life and, we believed, supremely ready to handle the presidency and all its challenges.

November 22, 1963, seemed an ordinary day and I expected an uneventful ride home. Blissfully ignorant, I flipped on the car radio expecting to hear the five o’clock news. Instead, I heard the unimaginable: an announcer telling his audience our president was dead. I looked out the windows and saw passersby crying as they pushed grocery carts and baby carriages along Broadway. Was I imagining all this; was this the first stage of a nightmare? I found it impossible to drive so I pulled over to the curb and found a phone to call home. No one answered and I made another call to a friend who lived nearby.

“Peggy, is it true what they’re saying? Is Jack really dead?” We both adored our handsome young president and sobbed as we spoke. “May I stop by? I’m in the neighborhood and don’t think I can drive any further?” I was having a panic attack but managed to find street parking, for which I received a ticket the next morning. Rushing upstairs, I was greeted by a tear stained Peggy and her mother Helen. Without further words, we moved to the couch where we sat transfixed as the sad spectacle played like some crime drama on television.

It was a foretaste of the World Trade Center catastrophe with families frantically trying to locate one another. I was finally able to reach my husband at his office. He was relieved to find me safe and urged me to stay put for the night. When I called my parents, I could hear my father’s stifled sobs as my mother consoled him. Daddy was so proud of Jack, the first Irish Catholic President, and I could see him kneeling before his picture in the bedroom. Later, in the spring of 1964, we all went to the gravesite in Arlington where JJ paid a final tribute to JFK, his hero.

The assassination was a turning point for me and millions of Americans. We no longer felt safe. If a lone gunman could kill our president, what did it mean for the future of our country? I thought of how close I’d come to Jack and other presidents in the past. I’d watched from my bed-
room window as FDR drove through The Bronx to cheering crowds. Ike gave me his autograph as he and Mamie waved from the back of a train in Philadelphia before a campaign run across the country.

When I lived in Kansas City, I visited nearby Independence on the day of Margaret Truman’s wedding. Harry came out on his porch and not only thanked us for coming, but apologized for not having a big enough house for all of us. His friends, to sit down. Only a year before that fateful day in Dallas, while he’d been at the height of his popularity, I had been close enough to touch Jack who, along with Jackie, Ike and Mamie, Harry and Bess, LBJ and Lady Bird, Nelson Rockfeller and Adlai Stevenson entered St. James Church in Hyde Park for the funeral of Eleanor Roosevelt.

Like my countrymen, I spent the next few days in upheaval. As I watched the Texans welcome the presidential motorcade, I wondered how such promise could end in such tragedy. I held my breath as I watched the shooting, how the president slumped over in his seat with his head in Jackie’s lap, how she reached out for the secret service agent’s help, how she stood in her blood-stained pink suit aboard Air Force One as LBJ became our 36th President. I stared in disbelief as Lee Harvey Oswald, the alleged assassin, was gunned down before my eyes by Jack Ruby in a Dallas police station.

I was awe struck at the pageantry of the funeral when JFK’s rider less horse passed by mourners lined along Pennsylvania Avenue. And of course, there was that timeless moment when little John John saluted his father. Never mind that Jackie had choreographed the entire occasion with a historian’s eye on our other great assassinated president, Abraham Lincoln. This was our history and we were living through it and would never be the same.

Today, my children don’t appreciate what we went through and don’t fully understand our grief. “What was so special about Kennedy?” my daughter Linda once asked. She was referring to the many scandals which were later revealed and the serious errors of his short term in office. All I could tell her was he brought a new spirit into the office and gave us hope for the future. We’ll never know his true legacy because he was never allowed to finish it.

“Jack, we hardly knew you.” And isn’t it sad we didn’t.
ITALIAN AMERICAN CULTURE -- TRANSPOSED

Angelina Spero

Lights dimming on the charter busesounding raindrops against the windshield	tic-toc of wipers in a metronome beat
soon induces a drowsiness in me:
I'll put aside, for now, recollection
of today's programs, panels, professors
at the conference — an intellectual smorgasbord
of contemporary Italian American culture.

I soon awaken
to the strumming of strings
from Sammy's mandolin,
as Tina takes to the aisle of the bus
clapping her hands, swinging her hips
her face on fire in a lively polka,
when un signore steps up
leads her in a tantalizing tango
reaching, bending, swaying
his eyes in a seductive stare.
POETRY AT THE BEACH

Angelina Spero

In sedately styled swim-wear
knee-length shorts
light cotton slacks
perhaps fetched
from the storage bin,
we toss aside our sneakers
squeeze into sexy sandals
to gather at this place
of wind-swept grasses
leaning over quaint cottages
at Breezy Point in the Rockaways.

Sharing our verse
we speak in a language
as if painting
on a spattered canvas:

of childhood memories
loves lost and found
flowers and forests
delectable moments.

Together
we surrender to our senses.
THE ROCKING CHAIR

FRAN STEIN

No matter how the pendulum plays
As long as my rocking chair swings
To the tune of someone’s delight or fancy
I wish to carry on my own tales
Of longings, desires, hopes and dreams
With the swaying of the curve

As it kisses the floor
And then sprints away
Like a small child’s whimsy
I will dream some more

Eighty years and counting
I’ve been told
This chair has rocked
Who might it have cradled or caressed or disappointed?
What cherished lives has it nurtured or detained
Before it became my own?

So special, so it seems
So much history, I am sure
I will continue in its course, in its muse, in its dreams

For I will dream the dream that now only I can form …
ATTENTION MUST BE PAID

FRAN STEIN

Attention must be paid
To how we wear our day
A smile, a nod, a reassuring glance
A simple “thank you” would suffice
“I’m sorry for that mistake”
Is all that’s needed

We dress ourselves in bangles and jewels
And yet we are unadorned
If we don’t take the time
If we don’t show concern
If we walk away
Without stepping back
For attention must be paid
CIRCLES UNDER MY EYES

Madlyn Epstein Steinhart

Seasons
Styles
The earth’s rotation
All move and change
Some people don’t
Circumstance and experience
Play a great role in that
When you break through
realizing that you have the power
to be happy without explanation
to anyone
that is when things really happen
I have done things your way just to avoid confrontation
Just seems to be your way
I have hit the highway
You can take it or leave
Hence the circles under my eyes
BEAUTIFUL HEART

Madlyn Epstein Steinhart

Such a beautiful heart
Has a roadmap for life
No matter the detours
Things seem to turn out right
Such a beautiful heart
Beating with a message so pure
Always remembering you can never be sure
Magic and miracles abound
Just listen you’ll hear the sound
Such a beautiful heart
Heals really fast
Makes amends today
So pain doesn’t last
Such a beautiful heart
Walks a straight line
Being your best means being kind
Such a beautiful heart
quiets the soul
knowing things change
and so does your role
Such a beautiful heart
TOO YOUNG TO BE OLD

Florence Strauss

When did my future become my past?
How did my life happen so fast?
What will I be when I grow up?
When will life let me drink of its cup?
Why is my body not doing my bidding?
I’m too young to be old — whom am I kidding?
When did I acquire these extra pounds of fat?
My reflection in the mirror — do I really look like that?
My head was once aflame with hair of red,
Now the color is strange and bottle fed.
I used to tweeze my eyebrows of unwanted hair,
Now I check my chin for the ones I find there.
My mind always functioned with skill and sobriety,
Now I’m a charter member of the Forgetting Society.
For forty plus years, it was my husband and me,
It’s hard to get used to not being a “we”
What happened? Why didn’t it stay the same?
I really don’t know how to play at life’s game.
Age brings wisdom? That’s a laugh!
But I’m not ready to write my epitaph!
I WEEP MY WIDOW’S TEARS

Florence Strauss

I weep my widow’s tears alone at night,
When mundane cares and pretexts are at rest
And strength has ebbed away. There’s no more fight
Within me. I have passed the daylight’s test
The world has seen me devoid of tears,
All think my mourning’s done and I am healed.
They see dry eyes, no evidence of fears,
That lie untamed and evermore concealed.
The fear that I will cease to know his voice,
Forget the feel of his touch upon my skin,
That this leaden heart will never more rejoice,
Or know of love again, and play to win.
These fears and tears abound with scant relief.
The night bears witness to my endless grief.
THE COB FAMILY

DOTTI ANITA TAYLOR

We can’t stay around much longer
since the mercury’s dropping fast
It’s been a wonderful season
for as long as we could last
Per usual we have provided
variety for all
Yellow, white or mixed wrapped up
in warm green coats till fall

The experience we have each year
is really very neat
We germinate until the date
when we are picked to eat
They then begin to peel our coats
that kept us oh so warm
boil us, poke us, butter us up
that always is the norm
AN INTERESTING RELATIVE
Gloria Taylor

Mrs. Bertha White, lovingly called Aunt B, was a very interesting relative. She was a devout member of the Presbyterian congregation in her community. Despite her agility and apparent physical strength, she constantly complained of physical weakness and was unable to conduct many of her basic household duties.

After marrying John White, she moved about fifteen miles away from the rest of her seven siblings. However, they all maintained close relationship and made regular contact with her. One of their primary concerns was to ensure that her health did not deteriorate.

Aunt B’s husband was a farmer who also reared many farm animals including mules and donkeys. These mules and donkeys were the chief means of transportation and communication over the craggy mountainside where they lived. The large supplies of fruits and vegetables from John’s extensive cultivations were laden on his mules and donkeys to be sold at the town market some distance away. Aunt B also made use of those beasts of burden almost every day to send a messenger to family members whom she needed to contact.

Aunt Bertha’s strange ability to accurately foretell events that would eventually happen in the community or within the family was the quality that made her an interesting relative. The members of her community likened her to the prophetess ‘Hulda’ of the Old Testament. There was hardly any announcement she made that did not come true. She would send a farm employee on a donkey for miles to an individual for whom she had “received” a message.

A peculiar incident happened when Aaron, one of her brothers, died. She was selected by the family to conduct the proceedings at the ‘wake’ which took place at Aaron’s home. Aunt B selected the songs and ‘tracked’ the words of each verse with various slurs and intonations that lent an extra melodic quality to the songs. The people seated inside as well as those outside sang with gusto to the accompaniment of the guitar and tambourines.

Suddenly Aunt B stopped singing and began spinning around as if she were in a trance or under a spell. There was a strange look in her eyes and an “other worldly” expression on her face. She stared at no one in particular, shook her head and shouted, “Yes, within two years there will be nine deaths in this family and I will be one of them. Yes, I will be one of them!” For about five minutes stillness pervaded the crowd. There was skepticism, smirking, groaning and shaking heads. Someone shouted, “Aunt B, how do you know all that?” Her only response was, “Yes, within two years there will be nine deaths and I will be one of them.”

On the day Aunt B died she had not complained of any unusual illness. She accomplished her daily chores as usual. Soon after the housekeeper left that afternoon she went outside to collect the clothes that had been hung on the line to dry. She was in the process of folding the clothes to put them away when suddenly she got up and went to the rear door. She shouted to her husband who was working in the field across the ridge, “John, come on over; I’m going to die.” John did not hear what Aunt B said, but something in her tone told him that he had to act with urgency. Instinctively, he told his field workers to stop working for it was time to go home, because his wife had just called him.
When he got home Mr. White called out, “Bertha, I’m home. What did you say?” He walked into the kitchen and then the living room, but he did not see or hear her moving about or sitting in her favorite chair. He went into the bedroom and was surprised to see her stretched out in bed. “Are you gone to bed already?” he asked. She did not respond and so he went over and gently laid his hand on her arm. To his shock and dismay he felt the cold and stiffness of her lifeless body. He shouted for help, but neighbors and farmhands who ran to his aid could offer no help. It was too late.

True to her words, within two years nine close family members — her brothers, nieces and cousins — passed away and Aunt B was one of the nine among them. If I had not known Aunt B personally and the strange incidents surrounding her life, I would think this story was a fable or an urban myth. However, Aunt B’s story makes me wonder about the amazingly rare gifts with which some people are blessed.
‘til

Adrianne Toomer

love me
‘til
i sing you
a dance
‘n
dance you
a song

bathe me
in lovelight
strong bright deep
hug me in
your warm arms
‘til
eden is
where i sleep.
MAGGIE

Adrianne Toomer

Maggie don’t lie no more
to people who ask her
if she is all right
to herself when he treats her good
after those nights
Maggie don’t lie no more

Maggie don’t hide no more
her body graffitied
with blueberry bruises
hidden beneath the
chaste clothing she chooses
Maggie don’t hide no more

Maggie don’t try no more
assuring their children
Daddy’s just upset
forgiving their daddy
who cries with regret
Maggie don’t try no more

Maggie don’t hope no more
to love him away from
his rages his pain
got to leave him right now
just broke down from the strain
Maggie don’t hope no more

Maggie don’t cry no more
serenely silent
no tears on her face
no fear now inside her
laid out dressed in lace
Maggie don’t cry no more
As a native Staten Islander, I can attest that some fifty years ago, this island was a very different place. It was the unheard of borough, except for its notoriety as having the second largest garbage dump in the world and a ferry that offered to bring us “country bumpkins” to the excitement of Manhattan – the greatest “city” in the world. Though just one borough, the world focused its attention on the cultural, financial capital of the world as if it were the whole city.

Though I loved all of its amazing entertainment offerings, I was always pleased to come home to my peaceful borough. I was much happier hanging out in the parks with my friends and hiking the woodlands. We had beach bonfires and pig roasts and climbed meandering trails to toast the moon with various libations. Blissful times.

One of my favorite places was, and still is, Moses Mountain. This spot was named after Robert Moses, dubbed the “master builder of the 20th century.” Favoring parkways instead of public transportation, he is responsible for most highway systems in New York State. Though honored for his accomplishments, at times environmentalists had to fight his proposals to save woodland gems.

That was exactly what happened on Staten Island in the early 1960’s. The project had been started before it could be stopped. Ironically, wanting to cut through our precious Greenbelt, his excavations were used to construct Moses Mountain which became the habitat for much Staten Island wildlife. With its breathtaking views, we came here often, especially in the autumn. The foliage was an artist’s canvas come to life, magically dancing in the vibrant sunlight. Stunning in every season it always offered astonishing sensory delights.

We carried all of the necessary equipment for the journey which usually began in late afternoon, just in time to reach peak before sunset. We stuffed our backpacks and coolers and gathered kindling for the fire we would later huddle around when the chilly winds would bless us with scents of pine, wildflowers and the last blasts of lavender. We picked bunches of stag horn sumac berries for later when we would delight in their lemonade flavor.

The conical trail displayed a different view at every turn. The maples trees, first to change color, were flames of orange and red. Others presented a lemon yellow hue when Mother Nature began her nightly display. Upon arrival the rocks beckoned us to climb up and get comfy.

Usually about a dozen of us performed these almost ritual observances. “Who has the cameras?” Gregg said, and out they came.

“Never mind the pictures,” said Ed, the most practical of all of us. Let’s get some wood for the fire or it’s going to get real cold up here later.”

Boom boxes blasted Led Zeppelin’s “Stairway to Heaven”—what could be more appropriate! Soon WNEW night DJ, Alison Steel, “the night bird” would fly in with her soothing voice.

The sound of cameras clicking began. Wine, cheese and bread were passed around this celestial dining spot. Mary Ellen pointed down the trail. “Steve’s here, looks like he has his guitar.” We saw the unmistakable blonde mop head, guitar case strapped over his shoulder, heading up. “I heard he...
had an audition for the Eagles. How cool would that be?” she mused.

We watched as the sun began its descent, majestic in its exit. “Wouldn’t it be awesome if we could all meet here in exactly fifty years!” said Gregg. “I mean exactly,” he said with great emphasis on the last word. He was the dreamer and planner of the group. That began serious discussions on how we would all come from wherever we were in the world at this precise date and how nothing would stop us. We would meet at 3:00 PM right here and resume the party. Ahhh—the dreams of youth! The endless possibilities that existed!

Long after the sun had faded and the moon kissed us with its’ light, we began the trek back, flashlights keeping us on trail. Conversations continued as we laughed about a friend who thought that Moses Mountain had been named after the biblical Moses who had been called to mountain-top to receive the Ten Commandments. The laughter echoed in the silence of the night. I thought how much nicer it would have been if such were the case.

“Yes, exactly fifty years” someone said. Agreements and pledges resounded down the line as we headed toward the bus stop.
WE SIT

Marilyn T. Walker

Baring all
flaws apparent
emotion exhibited, dissected, probed
assets and liabilities on parade
blessings, ravages
promenading down life’s walkway
exhibitions of poverty and success.
Minute details, unmasked thoughts
luring us into
private recesses.

We sit
mesmerized, awestruck
by beauty or brazen nakedness?
We sit
listening, pondering
the memoir’s purity, its nudity
indecent exposure or
just the naked truth?
If only time passed slowly
And good times were unending
If friends could age like wine
And we were still pretending

If parents lived forever
And grandparents never left
Laughter lasted always
And we never felt bereft

If only childhood memories
Were captured in a jar
Then we could relive those young years
Though we had journeyed far

If only adult burdens
Could vanish...be postponed
And we could hold eternally
The youthful joy we owned

Alas..."if only's" but two words
The moving hand writes on
The plan was written long ago
We age...too soon we're gone

What's heaven like I wonder
Is hereafter real...or phoney
Could we recapture innocence
Be kids once more...if only!
SUMMER SERENADE

Florence Widmer

At dawn, seated in my garden
Slowly sipping tea
Suddenly spot a robin
Who has come to call on me

   Exploring his surroundings
   Undecided if he’ll stay
   He spots another robin
   Soon both fly away

Now alone, I listen
Such music do I hear
Birds—playing a symphony
I brush away a tear

   So glorious a morning
   Soon I forget all strife
   Pondering all the music
   Which has so enriched my life

Great halls ‘round the world
Man’s music we all share
But music of God’s creatures
Is still beyond compare
ANDREA BOCELLI

FLORENCE WIDMER

For a little while
I close my eyes
Attuned to the magic splendor
Of your voice

Spellbinding flow
Thrilling, trilling, spine-tingling cadence
Casts a spell
Lingering long after lights are dimmed

In your darkness
YOU light up the world
Growing up in Harlem, Langston Hughes’ “Harlem,” introduced me to the world of music and adventure. Every Saturday, we teenagers would venture across town to the world famous Apollo Theatre.

The Apollo Theatre was the preeminent showcase for the most popular and famous African–American entertainers of the day; singers, dancers, comedians all came to the Apollo. It was at the Apollo that I heard and saw Flip Wilson, Redd Foxx, Pigmeat Markham (my favorite), Jackie Wilson, James Brown, Marvin Gaye, and the Supremes among others. Aspiring acts came too. They came for Wednesday night Amateur Night. If their act wasn’t excellent, a ditty of a tune would play while Sandman (the arbiter of good talent) would use his long necked cane to pull them off the stage. The audience was an integral part of determining who was good and who was not. We would boo, hiss, scream, squeal or yell our approval or disapproval. But for us teenagers, the best part of going to the Apollo was the opportunity to see our favorite singers, usually male, up close. They were young and handsome, and we girls couldn’t get enough of them. We started out in the balcony in the morning. When the first show was over, we would sneak downstairs to the next lower level. By the time of the third show, we were sitting in the front row. My best friend Abigail and I oohed and aahed while grinning like Cheshire cats. At the end of the show, all of the entertainers who had performed would come back on stage for a finale. This was our chance. Before the security guards could stop us, a crush of young teen girls moved like lightning onto the stage, greedy little hands ready to grab the first star we could get to. The startled performers tried to get away, but there were too many of us pubescent teens hoping for a piece of the performer’s shirt, a handful of hair, a touch, a hug or even a kiss, anything we could get. As the music continued to play, the stagehands and security personnel finally got us off the stage. We were exhausted, sweaty and happy. The jarring lights in the theatre would come on to announce the end of the day’s performances. We slowly walked out of the theatre, not because we wanted to, but because there were so many people ahead of us. When we finally got outside, we dashed around the corner to the backstage entrance, hoping for one last glimpse of our favorite singer. Like hungry beggars on a food line, we waited and waited. When someone finally came out, we screamed and swooned. We never noticed their bored and condescending looks as they dashed away.
At some point they must have been
Good boys
Good German boys
Good American boys
Just boys
Flying kites
Throwing balls
Teasing girls
Having fun
Just being boys.

But then evil took over.
Told them to hate
The Jews
The Blacks
And all of those
Not like them.

So the violence and mayhem began.
Mobs of boys and men
In starched brown shirts
And white hooded robes
Attacking the shops and homes
Of their neighbors
Fellow citizens
Whom they once worked with
And talked to, or spoke to in passing,
But whom they now hated.

Kristallnacht, yellow stars
KKK raids, church bombings
Nights of broken glass and broken hearts
Fiery crosses lighting up black nights.
Children crying, women screaming
Mobs racing through town
Jewish towns
Black towns.

A brick is tossed through a shop window
Broken glass everywhere
The occupants dragged out,
Standing in silence praying to God.

Humiliated, beaten, sacrificed, killed
Concentration camped
Surrounded by barbed wired fences
and dead-eyed soldiers.
A bomb is thrown into an Alabama church
Ending the children’s Sunday school lesson

Killing four little girls who were praying
Children crying, women screaming
Amidst smoke filled debris,
Fires raging, people running
Calling to God for help

Kristallnacht, night of broken glass
16th Street Baptist Church bombing
Both designed to instill fear
And terror.
Hate on a rampage
While too many good citizens were complicit
And quiet.