



Reflections

in poetry and prose

2016



UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS • RETIRED TEACHERS CHAPTER

REFLECTIONS

in poetry and prose

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 23rd 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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Welcome to the 23rd volume of Reflections in Poetry and Prose. *Reflections in Poetry and Prose* is a yearly collection of published writings by UFT retirees enrolled in our UFTWF Retiree Programs Si Beagle Learning Center creative writing courses and retired UFT members across the country.

We are truly proud of *Reflections in Poetry and Prose* and of the fine work our retirees do.

Many wonderful, dedicated people helped produce this volume of *Reflections in Poetry and Prose*.

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

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

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



Tom Murphy

RTC CHAPTER LEADER



Gerri Herskowitz

DIRECTOR, UFTWF RETIREE PROGRAMS

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MY YOUNGER SELF

ILENE BAUER

I cleaned my closet out today
And this is what I found:
The remnants of my younger self,
Both touching and profound.

My Beatles dolls (just Paul and George)
And matching magazines,
Two plaster molds I'd painted
Well before I hit my teens.

Some programs from the football games
At which I used to cheer,
A datebook filled with Sweet 16's
I went to that same year.

A bunch of souvenirs from trips –
West Point, D.C., the Zoo
And photos posed with family
Or friends that I once knew.

I traced my life through greeting cards
From when I met my spouse
And found a thank you from the agent
When we bought our house.

My children's shoes, in boxes,
Are among the things I saved –
First sneakers, bucks and sandals,
Even snow boots – how depraved!

I threw away a bunch of stuff
But most I put right back,
A neater version waiting for
The next time I attack.

An afternoon revisiting
The life I used to lead
Made me realize that the younger me
Has disappeared, indeed.

THE GRAVEDIGGERS

ILENE BAUER

Patiently they waited,
Watching each of us exert
Just a modicum of effort
As we shoveled up some dirt.

Every toss drew all attention
As the soil came raining down,
'Til the coffin top was covered
With a blanketing of brown.

Then the diggers picked the pace up
But they paused while words were said,
The familiar farewell speeches
To a person newly dead.

Next machinery took over
As we slowly walked away
And the workers did the job
For which they earned their weekly pay.

How bizarre to be a witness
Every day to people's grief.
When the grave is filled and patted down,
It must be a relief.

SEEKING ANSWERS

By VIVIAN BERGENTHAL

I continue
scrambling
to salvage
those
scraps of paper
scattered
here, there,
everywhere

filled with flickering
flash
thoughts
words

sentiments
slithering by

moments
encapsulated

never to be forgotten

as I go down memory lane

softly, sensually

seeking answers

FRIENDSHIP

BARBARA MCGILICUDDY BOLTON

A sheep upside down trapped
On her back is a cast sheep
Her short legs kicking helplessly
Her overgrown wool fixed to the ground.

When you are cast down
I am the vigilant, caring, rescuing shepherd
When I am cast down
You are my salvation in an upside down world.

THE RACE

PHYLLIS BOWDWIN

Jenna's nephew Tyrone came to live with her after a fire that left his family homeless. Jenna was concerned that "T" spent too much time watching television and playing video games. When he shared that he enjoyed racing, she took him to the track at McComb's Park. A coach from Boy's Harbor Academy told her about an upcoming competition. She signed T up.

"Can I get new sneakers and a running outfit?" T asked, excited.

She took him shopping. When she picked up a pair of \$19.99 Athletech's, T whined:

"Skippies! I can't wear Skippies, the kids will laugh at me!"

"Skippies?" she asked dumbly.

"Generic brands - no name sneakers, ma'am." The salesman smiled. "These Air Jordan's are only \$150....very popular."

"For a child?" she recoiled, clutching her purse.

"These are the last pair, so you can get them for \$145," he said handing them to T, who tried them on immediately.

"They fit, Aunt Jenna!"

She hesitated, looking around for a cheaper alternative, while a woman hovered in the background. "Pleeease?" T begged.

The woman stooped down and began helping T remove the sneakers.

"What are you doing?" Jenna asked the woman.

"It's the last pair, they're in my son's size, and you obviously can't afford them, so I'm helping him get them off so I can buy them. I gotta get back to work!"

"No you don't!" Jenna shouted. "We'll take them!"

"Thank you! Come again," the salesman purred.

"A little heads up like a mask and gun would have been helpful," she muttered.

Jenna and a grinning T left the store with two pairs of sneakers, two designer running suits, four matching tees, four pair of socks, and a sticker shock headache.

As the race drew near, the enjoyable pastime morphed into a painful chore, with T evading practice. Jenna felt she'd been had. She packed up the new designer outfits.

"What are you doing?" T yelled watching his Air Jordan's disappearing into the bag.

"I'm returning everything to the store."

"But whyyy?" he whimpered, tears massing in the corners of his eyes.

“You’re not interested in racing anymore, so why keep these outfits in the closet for the moths? I might as well get my money back.”

“No! Please!” T’s face contorted, “I’ll race Aunt Jenna! Please!”

On racing day, coaches and teams from the PAL and Boy’s Harbor streamed into the park in matching tee shirts, along with parents and children. Aunt and nephew watched as they did their warm-up exercises. “Don’t you want to warm up?” She asked her young man, sporting his new blue running suit.

“No!” he said, staring at the ground, hands clasped together like a captive.

“You look like a winner” she said, “I know you can do it!”

T’s brow wrinkled into thunder clouds as his lip sank so low it almost touched the ground.

A mother barked instructions through a pink megaphone to her chubby daughter, wearing pink sneakers, socks, running suit, and barrettes. At mama’s coaxing, she did her warm up.

Two scrawny boys with ashy skin and linty hair jogged their way into the park. They stopped at the registration table, had a few words with the registrar, who shook his head, then shrugged his shoulders. The older one, about twelve looked around, jogged over and spoke to T.

“My friends have no one to register them – could you sign for them, Aunt Jenna?” T asked.

Both boys wore dingy white cotton tees, dusty jeans, and tattered, loathsome, skippies spurned by T! She agreed.

“I want to win!” the older boy declared, elbows bent, small fists balled up in front of him as he jogged in place.

“I want to win!” the younger boy echoed, jogging with tinier fists and scrawny arms in place. They left to compete in their age-appropriate races. The girl in pink got off to a good start, but stumbled and fell. “Get up! Get up!” her mother yelled. Stopping to examine her skinned knee, she became disoriented and started to run the wrong way. “Wrong waaaay! Her mother shrieked, waving her arms wildly. Confused, the girl stopped, took a few steps, sat down on the track, and didn’t budge. “Oh Nooo!” Mama screamed.

“Come ooon T!” “You can do iiit!” Jenna jumped, shouted and clapped as T competed half-heartedly in two races, winning nothing.

“We won! The boys yelled in unison, their six medals – gold, silver and bronze– flying as they jogged past them out of the park,

“Can we go home now?” asked T.

DISAPPOINTMENT

PHILLIS BROWN

How do you know disappointment?
Is it something that you let simmer like old stew?
Old brew
Old shoe
Can you taste disappointment?
Sour grapes by the hour
Taste the power
Lips pursed and twisted up, poking out
You cannot shout
You are too disappointed.
Cannot have it your way
You want to say "Hey, I am disappointed!"
Someone says "Who the hell cares!"
That's what life is about!
Grow up.
You will get over it.
SMILE.
LAUGH
There is always tomorrow!

FIRST LOVE, THE BALL

CRAIG BUCHALTER

My father, Sidney, taught me how to throw and catch a ball when I was about six years old. Our game of catch started with Sidney saying, “Craig, if you don’t throw the ball to me I’m going back into the house.” Sidney would throw a variety of fielding situations at me to practice. Ground balls, one-hoppers, lined drives, and my favorite, the fly ball to chase after and catch on the run. If Sidney felt I needed to learn something he would hold the ball, then wave me over to him. Without ever raising his voice he would say, “Craig, on slow moving ground balls you must charge the ball, and not wait for the ball to come to you.” Over time the games of catch with my father came to an end. Sidney told me, “Craig, I am too old, and you throw too hard for me to play catch with you anymore.”

I joined the local little league team. Being around other kids that loved to play ball as much as I did made me feel at home. I learned that kids with blistering speed on the base paths, tired easily late in the game. I was not a fast runner, but I did not tire easily. I found a new strength, endurance. Somehow without instruction, when I hit the ball I instinctively knew to turn my hips into each swing. Some of my hits would knock the glove off of a fielder’s hand. My favorite hits were the shots that roared and soared off the bat, and forced the opposing outfielder to crane his neck backwards to watch the flight of the ball. When I hit a home-run it made me feel as if a million bubbles had popped inside of me at the same time. As I rounded the bases I remembered to keep my head down, I had to, that is the way Mickey Mantle ran around the bases after he hit a round tripper.

It was Parent’s Day at Rolling Hills Day Camp in the summer of 1965. I was eleven years old, and thrilled that both of my parents, Beatty and Sidney came to watch me play. The final activity of the day was a game of softball. The game started and I was on the home team. I ran out to centerfield and lowered myself into the “ready position.” As the innings passed by, our team was losing by a score of 5-3. The bottom of the seventh inning had arrived and our team had “last licks.”

Our first batter hit a pop fly ball to the opposing short stop that he caught without having to move one step in any direction. The next two batters both hit singles, and the batter before me drew a walk from the pitcher. I walked towards home plate. I heard people whistle, yell, and clap their hands. That is what I heard, but my eyes only saw the ball, nothing else mattered. The first pitch to me was high and outside, and the umpire said, “Ball!” The next pitch was going to cut home plate in half, until I swung the bat and the ball took off like it was launched from a cannon. The ball maintained its height and distance as it passed over the center fielder’s head, who had become a spectator, just for a moment. As I rounded second base and was heading for third base I heard one of the adults say, “What a shot.” I passed third base with my head down, and my eyes were on home plate. Then I heard my father’s voice say, “That’s my boy!”

After I touched home plate my teammates mobbed me, our camp counselor congratulated me, and the other parents were clapping their hands. I made my way through the herd of adults and other campers to my parents. Beatty’s smile was as sparkling as the sun reflecting off of water, she hugged me and said, “A grand slam! I am so happy for you!” Sidney shook my hand and put his arm around my shoulders and said, “You hit that ball like Mickey Mantle.” I never thought I could feel pure joy by doing what I loved to do, playing ball. My love affair with “the ball,” had just begun.

THE CANDLE

B. LYNN CARTER

I am freezing. I wrap my hands around the warm round belly of the candle encased in glass. The small square table between us serves as a barrier. Its red-checkered cloth ensures our propriety . . . Too many lines to cross. He sits opposite me stoic. His stare is steady yet indiscernible. I find myself returning his stare, trying to read his thoughts, his intentions.

Abruptly, I turn away; stare instead through the picture window at the life passing by. But for the way they move, I'd assume they are people. But people don't glide like that; don't float in and out of misty fog. The strange beings shiver and hold tight to the garments that shelter them. Some glance my way with knowing little smiles. They nod and wink, reading my thoughts, gleaning my secrets. Others look concerned, shout warnings, and push questions into my head. They don't ask why I'm here. They ask, "Why is he?"

Flustered, I turn back to the table, to the cool eyes watching me from the other side, to the candle cradled in his hands.

The waitress brings our drinks. The Margarita is so cold. I take two sips. Then, craving warmth, I yearn to resume my embrace of the glowing orb that is now in his possession.

"It's chilly in here," he says, removing his hands from the candle.

"Yeah," I say. He stands up. My panic rises as he crosses the barrier. He is now on my side of the table. He cloaks his jacket around me. His hands gently brush my shoulders and heat rises in my cheeks. The warmth from his jacket radiates through my body.

Avoiding those ambiguous eyes, I turn back to the window, preferring the knowing smirks of conspiring entities.

"That better?" he asks rubbing his hands together.

I'd like to say 'Yes that is better, so very much better' but I'm not supposed to speak of how much better it feels, speculate on how much better it could feel. I'm not supposed to presume he is being anything but chivalrous. I doubt he has a hidden interest in anything else.

I repossess the candle.

This is, after all, a business meeting. . . a covert business meeting. That's what we call it when we school staffers get together in the evening to plot a coup against the principal. It's just that, for the last two meetings, he and I have been the only plotters. Exactly what's being plotted is no longer clear. I'm fairly sure we're not plotting along the same lines.

"You should warm your hands on the candle," I say, afraid he might hear my thoughts. He accepts my offering, reaches for the flickering bulb. I watch his hands approach. They are sturdy hands; long lean fingers, nails trimmed neatly to the skin-line, a smattering of hair barely visible. Just above his right knuckle an angry red bruise has the shape of a crescent moon. It is beautiful and captivating and I want to stroke it and kiss it and make it better. The ring finger is naked. A prominent tan-line attests to the recent removal of a band. Did he take it off just to come to this

‘meeting’? Or, does that silhouette speak of an extended union that now, is no more. A union that, like my own, has dissolved in the middle of his life.

I let my hands linger on the shimmering ball for a moment, indulging the fantasy, imagining the sensation, my hands captured under his, strong and ardent, the candle warm and round and smooth.

Not daring to presume, I withdraw my hands just before his reach the candle. Unsure exactly what to do with them, I grab my drink, take several long greedy gulps and regret it two seconds later. The frigid liquid rushes cold fury up through my brain as the alcohol rages hot, ignites sparks, pulsing heat down through my body. I fall deeper into the comfort of his jacket, deeper into his scent.

“It’s really cold in here,” he says dropping his hands from the candle. “Wanna get outta here?”

I do. I want to leave this cold place and go with him to someplace warm and secluded. I glance at the beings outside. They are cautioning. They speak directly to my conscience.

“How do you even know if he’s interested in you, in that way?” they ask. “He’s never even touched your hand.”

Dismissing them, I turn back to the radiating globe and am instantly mesmerized by its flames. They are undulating, a spastic dance. They flutter and waver and quiver. They throw off spears of gold and blue and amber. Their spasms are compelling. I reach out to capture them, to tame them. I encircle them in my palms. And now, I feel it. Now, I know. He slowly slips his fervent hands over mine.

WU CHEN

BARRY CITRON

It's only a reproduction,
Why am I getting so involved?
"Bamboo in the Wind" it's called;
Some leaves, a stalk, space,
A few lines of calligraphy.
The stalk is bending gently with a breeze
that is in this reproduction.
Listen – can you hear its dry rustle, can't you
feel the twitter of the leaves?
Each shape is perfectly defined. Just so.
And the time is set, for all eternity,
And the space is open, to forever futures,
And the mist of the past is there, yet floating by.
There is an I seeing this, being there;
The hand moving with the artist's from inner chambers,
A kindred spirit at the extremities of sight.
I know that bone who cupped the fingers.
I know that skin who moved the handle
of the brush.

What a landscape there, to represent all
time.
The fresh blackness of the leaves closest to the
eye, the fading grey further from the view.
Clarity and focus as we near the source,
The hazy picture coming close as we depart.

Wu Chen, Chinese, 1280-1354, where are your
hands, in the tip of my pen? May I kiss your
presence with these lines?

HUDSON RIVER WALK-WAY

SHEILA CONTICELLO

We'd hoped for chilly air
As we strolled across
The mile-long river bridge.
Instead, we baked
Above the Hudson
In a too hot mid-October.

Sweating in my poncho
I pushed along
Grandson's stroller,
Catching up as best I could
His mom and dad
Long strides ahead
Chasing small daughter
Who'd climb along the metal fence
When river boats went under
Short pause for all
On the other side
Before we started back.
This time I chased or shouted at
My leashless puppy grandkids.
Despite sore feet, aching back

And humid weather
I trudged beside athletic folk
On baby-watching walk
Kid's parents yards ahead
Me pushing baby stroller.

Push stroller! Watch tots!
Slight chance to savor sights
Of sailboats on the Hudson.
For me, I had stepped a million times
For all the rest, a hundred.
I'll do the walk again one day –
When they are off to college!

MOUNTAIN TRAIL

JAMES CUNNINGHAM

Trekking mountain trail,
walking stick in hand
like a modern day Moses
seeking the Promised Land.

Enjoying Nature's wonders
along the way –
 Fields of green, grassy knolls
 Brooks and streams,
 Rocks and stones
 Cascading waterfalls,
Tall trees crowned with leaves
of yellow, red, brown and gold
like kings and queens
of ancient days.

Breathing brisk, clean air,
Clearing my head
Of cares and problems there.

Travelling further toward Majestic Mountain
looming high in sky
glistening in sun's rays,
I am filled with expectation and excitement
like a child on Christmas Day.

Climbing higher and higher
on precipitous path,
Leaning more heavily on my staff.

Ascending to mountaintop,
I stand in awe and stop.
Viewing Nature's tapestry –
a work of art,
Renewed, rejuvenated
Reluctantly I depart.

LEWISOHN STADIUM, 1963

BETTE CYZNER

The setting sun's rays tint the sky magenta, sapphire,
And in glorious finale, ebony
As the stringed theme of Scheherazade
Floats up to meet the golden perigee moon.
Enchanted by darkness and woodwinds,
Drab college buildings morph into exotic palaces,
And the surrounding Harlem neighborhood becomes a desert kingdom –
Images evoked through the magic carpet of imagination and lilting melody.
The silvery notes anaesthetize our young bodies
Against the pain generated by impossibly hard concrete bleachers
Unyielding as the Sultan's evil decree, proclaimed by trombone and tuba.
Sinbad, princes, bazaars all blend
Into the tapestry of Scheherazade's fascinating stories,
Cleverly woven together by brass, percussion, and strings.
Cool summer air, perfumed with the suggestion of jasmine,
Cloak the audience, so entranced that even one thousand and one nights
Would you seem but a few moments as Rimsky-Korsakoff's genius
Transliterates the narrative into rapturous song and magical memories.
Like Persian Esther of Purim fame, Scheherazade
Survived a tyrant's will by dint of beauty and wit,
And, through her tales and the liquid notes of her symphony,
Achieves immortality.

MUSEE RODIN

ELLEN KITZES DELFINER

The heat of Paris drips,
bead by bead
down my face.
I feel the pain of his perfection
whose lovers kiss on molten rock –
Adam and Eve created from dust,
their veins throb through burning stone.

In a garden of sculpture
the Burghers of Calais greet us
swathed in green bronze.
Gathered together to share the town's secrets
they do not gossip about the giant
who lived in this castle
with his mistress Camille,
gone mad for loss of him,
sent to bedlam without a key,
her genius smashed to marble chips.
What remains, stand pedestaled
three paces behind the master.

plain geometry

JOHN DESANTIS

my heart lies perpendicular to my soul
my brain is parallel to my heart
the circles of my soul converge
concentrically while all the while
tangents to them veer off vectors
into different planes of existence

I see my soul arising in a vortex
spiraling through a point
moving into a line in space
traversing parallel planes
of my existence

which one is real
which is illusion
one must command
my attention to fix
a purpose for my life

but just as I cannot
avoid looking at the sun
asquint lest focusing
my eyes on its divergent rays
I risk my sight

my distraction lets me try
to see as many planes
as I can view together
so my focus scatters
landing nowhere

and being everywhere
I am nowhere fixed
would that my heart
and mind and soul
and spirit intersect

in one point
on one plane
so that the rest
invisible be

recurring nightmare

JOHN DESANTIS

the cellar
dank dark dusty
one room
walled apart
well-lit
organized
tool shed
the rest
vacant
foreboding
past a stained
forgotten wine-press
into a far-corner
where a door opens
there
in the recesses
a skinny old hag
and a serving man
await me
with scythe in hand
to carve me up
am frozen
cannot move
always the same
sound awakens me
my grandmother
moving past
my bedroom
getting up to go
to the bathroom:
is she the old hag
of my nightmare
naah: Gramma's fat

SPRING LILACS

LYNN EASTON

I am in the garden, pruning the rampage of honeysuckle vine.
Winter's grip is gone in exchange for green and growing.

The lilac, transformed from its gangly, weedy state,
Spills exquisite blossoms over the fence,
Creating a canopy above the sidewalk.

Two walkers stop there.
They reach up; palms cupped, and inhale the unmatched fragrance.
We smile at one another.

I do not know these spring strollers.
They are strangers to me.
Yet, without words, we share:

The demise of frost.
The softening of earth and air,
The gift of my lilacs, making us kin.

SEEKING TO DEFINE GRIEF

LYNN EASTON

It lies in a kitchen drawer;
A useful tool for scooping out perfect orbs of flesh....from a melon, perhaps.
I don't know why, but for me it evokes grief.

Its edges are sharp and cold.
It cuts into the skin of the lush fruit tearing out the meat inside, cleanly and fast,
Bringing with it the sticky syrup that gives it sweetness.

Over and over the tearing and bleeding happens
Until only the shell remains.
Life that was within becomes a hollow space.

Yes, I have known some grief.
But not so much as others.
Not the kind that rips the heart from its sinew or clouds the seeing eye.

So....
In truth,
I know nothing of grief.
I cannot define it.

AS SOON AS SHE SAW HIM, SHE WANTED HIM

STANLEY EDELMAN

She slowly stirred in the bed and her first physical sensation was one of pain. The greatest throbbing pain started at her belly button and stretched to her thighs. As more of her senses came alive her whole body throbbed with a pervasive dull pain. Her tongue wasn't telling her about particular taste in her mouth as much as a sense of last night's as yet unwashed residue.

She didn't quite remember where the bed she was in was and needing to know where she was she decided that the only thing to do was to open her eyes. The early morning light was coming in through the window and she shuttered with the shock of recognition of where she was and what had happened last night. As she looked around the room she thought to herself, 'damn I really hate the color of the walls'. She had always been a sucker for cool pastels, and these walls spoke of a cheap and institutional looking, white. Whoever decorated the room was at the other end of her color spectrum.

Turning her head she saw him. The suddenness of his coming into her field of vision and her immediate reaction to him startled her. She had a previously unknown and visceral feeling of immediate desire. Looking at him she felt a fullness in her breasts that she knew she had never felt before. Her body felt aroused in a way that was totally unknown to her, there was no previous feeling that she could remember like the exquisite sensations that now coursed through her body.

She knew, without qualification or equivocation that he was someone she wanted, and right now. She felt weak, and despite the immediacy of her desire for him the words wouldn't come, she could only lift her arms and reach out to him as a supplicant in need.

The nurse picked up her newborn son and brought him to his mother for his first meal of the day.

TOTO, I'VE A FEELING WE'RE NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE

STANLEY EDELMAN

The whirlwind subsided and the stillness came. Dorothy's feet were on the ground but her head was still in a whirl. Slowly her feet and head arrived at the same place. The landscape was beginning to come into her consciousness, but her thoughts were crowded out by terror; 'where was Toto' and 'where was she'?

Quickly glancing around she spied her little dog. "Toto come here; thank goodness you're here, but I don't know where here is." At least that was what she said; Toto heard blah, blah, blah, Toto. For some reason Doro seemed to think she could get his attention whenever she included Toto in her totally incomprehensible blah, blahs. He often wished he could understand what Doro was saying, but that never seemed to happen. About the only word he got, and only because it was probably the one word she used most often when she looked in his direction was Toto. He finally understood that it was Doro's way of getting his attention, and it was usually worthwhile to go along with her.

Toto looked around and thought, 'what the ...' He couldn't finish the thought because he had an urge to pee, but he couldn't see any area that he had previously marked as his. It all seemed new, but that didn't make any sense because he knew they hadn't gone for a ride in the truck, or even a long walk. Toto was beginning to get very antsy and couldn't be bothered with locating a familiar spot; his bladder was pressing him into immediate action. There, along the side of the yellow brick road was a single, stand-alone post that would do just fine. He ran over with a quickness that surprised even him; he quickly lifted his leg and immediately felt better.

Now that all was well, or at least better, Toto looked around at the surroundings. There was Doro, confused as ever. Toto believed that Doro was always confused. He could never figure out what she was saying, what she wanted to do or even why she always wanted to do the silly things she always seemed to be doing. For example throwing a stick, pointing to it when it landed and saying, "blah Toto." Toto could never figure Doro out. She never listened to him and she always seemed to want to be in charge, her voice sounding authoritative and seeming to want to direct him to do things. Toto could never figure out what those things were. Doro was just a sweet girl who fed him and was always good at petting him and rubbing his belly. Well, he guessed, he had to take the good with the bad, and it really wasn't that bad. And the best part was that she never really bothered him or gave him any grief.

Actually what was bothering him at this point wasn't Doro but the long and seemingly endless yellow brick road that was in front of him. Toto didn't like brick roads, yellow or otherwise. He found that the cracks between the bricks always seemed to be a nail trap, his nails. The seams between bricks caught his nails, and after a short while made it difficult and painful to continue to walk the roadway. Looking ahead from his vantage point on the road he thought that he might be at the beginning of a long, long journey on this yellow brick road. And he guessed that he would have to take Doro along especially since she was beginning to blah, blah again and there was the Toto word, still again. Oh well he knew he was in a new place and maybe at the start of a new adventure. The fun part could be just ahead.

NATURE LOVER

JUDY FRITSCH

How in the world did a city girl from the Bronx grow up to be a nature lover? I had no background in animals; the only pets my mother reluctantly allowed into our apartment were some goldfish, an occasional turtle, and a few doomed parakeets. None of them lived to old age except for one goldfish which my father fed and which grew long silver fins and rose to the top of its tank whenever my father tapped on the glass. The parakeets succumbed to a number of various mishaps, one of them drowning in the fish bowl because someone (me?) had neglected to refill its water dish, and another burned its feet when it flew out of its cage and landed on an unshaded light bulb. The third and last of the parakeets flew out of the open window into the park across the street, never to be seen again.

No more pets.

Maybe I acquired my feeling for nature when my family would spend a week or two with my mother's Tante Shani in Chester, Connecticut. She lived along a back road outside of the tiny town, had a large front yard and what seemed to me a huge garden in the back. I loved to go outside before breakfast, which shocked my mother, but I relished the feel of the dewy grass under my bare feet. I loved the taste of vine-ripened tomatoes, carrots where we had to wipe off the rich soil clinging to those orange spears, and I still remember how the corn tasted when cooked within minutes of picking. I yearned for that taste all winter and eagerly awaited our next visit to the farm. Much to my surprise, and education, we were there in early July and the corn was not yet ripe. That was my introduction to "everything in its season."

When my husband and I married and had our babies, we lived within a few blocks of the Bronx Zoo. It was a great place to walk with the carriage and stroller and I became familiar with the Zoo's wonderful collection of strange animals. I bought one of the Zoo's books and learned more about the lifestyle of those animals when they were in the wild. When we bought our first television set, I loved to watch nature programs.

I became a teacher and enjoyed introducing my first-graders to the wonders of the animal world. When I was eligible for a sabbatical, I was accepted by the Zoo and spent the year there, helping to write a new manual geared to early childhood, and teaching classes that came to the Zoo. I was taught to properly handle the animals used for these classes and to teach about what made each animal special. The city girl was showing snakes, owls, parrots, lizards, guinea pigs, chinchillas and ferrets, even hissing cockroaches. (The cockroaches were shown inside a clear plastic case, not touched by my hands). In our city apartment, cockroaches were to be squashed on sight.

When I retired, I used this knowledge to volunteer with the animal collection at the Greenburgh Nature Center in Scarsdale. I still go there once a week to help clean the exhibits, show animals to the public, and explain what makes each animal special. I still handle snakes, lizards, tortoises, ferrets, chinchilla and guinea pigs. There are hissing cockroaches there also, but I don't touch them. I'd rather handle a tiger. I do explain the value of knowing about these insects, how they are a wonderful example of survival and being able to exist in many different habitats, as opposed to animals on the endangered list, which require a narrow and specialized selection of food and places to survive.

Since my husband and I were both teachers, we had summers free and wanted to escape the heat of Bronx summers. We bought a tent and sleeping bags, threw our children into the car and took off camping throughout the United States and Canada. We loved the nature we found in our wonderful country and delighted in seeing wildlife in their natural state. After several summers traveling, we realized that we were spending too much time in the car and not enough time outdoors.

“Let’s buy a piece of land in the country and camp on it,” we decided. We looked at various properties and finally located 26 acres in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains in rural New York State. We camped there for a summer and then decided we needed more comforts. The three things we most yearned for were a shower, a toilet, and a refrigerator. We were tired of driving to a nearby campground for occasional showers and hair washes, relying on the nearby lake to swim away the daily sweat. The “girls’ bush” and the “boys’ bush” which served as toilets were getting disgustingly overused, and the 30 mile trip to Utica several times a week for food and to replenish the ice in our cooler was a grind.

So little by little, we built ourselves a three-bedroom bungalow and have spent the past 40 years summering there. We are in the midst of farm country inhabited by deer, turkeys, coyotes, skunks, porcupines, many different kinds of birds, bats, reptiles and insects. Frogs swim in our pool and mice have discovered the comforts of our home. We throw them out when we catch them, but have realized that it is we who have invaded their world.

This city girl from the Bronx has become a summer resident of the now-beloved natural world and has traveled to many places around the globe experiencing nature and wildlife found there. Africa was thrilling, Australia showed strange animals, Iceland’s geology fascinating, Brazil contributed families of capybara, those huge, harmless nightmare rodents. The Galapagos specialized in huge tortoises and amazing lizards, and everywhere there were varieties of birds not seen in my native Bronx.

So I will continue to explore and appreciate nature wherever I can find it. I can proudly call myself a nature lover.

finale

DIANNE PIANKIAN GEIGER

choked by dust
and desperation
she lives on lies
and longing

lingering memories
of rapture
lie in ambush
then puncture
her pincushion
heart

she wanders
through streets
littered with
dead newspapers
they cling to
her feet as
saltwater streaks
sting her face

wrapped in
a carapace of
solitude
she's lonely
in her darkness

unmoored
she contemplates
a drifting leaf
and is fleetingly
distracted

forty fifth

DIANNE PIANKIAN GEIGER

she remembers
strolling hip to hip
holding hands
along a leaf covered
trail
his ring nestled
in the hollow
of her neck

birds descended on
a chinaberry tree
and ate its
yellow berries
while a bejeweled
hummingbird hovered
nearby

they gazed
at each other
and smiled
she felt his heart
beat under
her fingertips

now he's settled
in his recliner
remote in hand
canned laughter
fills the room

she treads softly
on the Persian carpet
then heads upstairs
to read
their eyes don't meet
sharing the same house
they walk different floors

happy anniversary

PASO SÓLIDO (SOLID STEP)

RITA GELLER

This was the name of a poem I wrote
when I was young, smart, beautiful and
only twenty.
It was dedicated to my strong friend Ada, from Israel.

Now fifty five years later,
Who is "Paso Sólido?"
Me.....
This poem I dedicate to myself.

Almost eight months ago I lost my beloved husband and my best
friend, Gerry.
But he's with me in spirit and soul.
It will always be thus for me.

I'm sad, yes
I miss him, yes
I will always have a place in my heart for him, yes.

Today I saw our park we used to walk there, together.
I say together because we used to take most of our walks
separately. He with his camera His no. 2 companion.

Today I'm here
Alone, yet with him
My memories, will
live as long as
I do.....

I'm strong today
I'm "Paso Sólido"
he made me thus
He could stand alone
I couldn't for so long
Now I too, can stand alone
I'm "Paso Sólido"
Now and forever...

THE WAR

FRANCOISE GEWIRTZMAN

Born during World War II
No concrete recollection, I
glide in spirit through
horrific times,
experience the devastation
spreading all over Europe
a bad dream indeed not to
be believed, what was
happening? Surreal

My parents scurry for food
streets deserted, people look for
shelter, for peace from the bombs –
no safety anywhere

After years of suffering my
entire family is alive, with
a profound sense of guilt
for surviving but grateful for
The cunning, the bravery of
my parents and their friends

MY SEASON'S GIFTS TO YOU

A. GIORGIO

Life can be so hard
Even when things look
Like they're doing so well

You have a job
Or even a career
You have a home
Or maybe two
You have a family
And a few good friends
You even have time
To relax and get away

Yet it still seems so sad
When life appears glum
And you find yourself searching
For that burst from the sun

And for some kind of meaning
To make it all right
Like a ship lost in darkness
Just hoping for light

Then the crisp winds of winter
Whistle through the cold air
And the sounds of the season
Whisk away your despair

Once more you're reminded
That what gives meaning to life
Is as free as the air
And as simple as a smile

It's the sound of friends' laughter
And the sharing of our doubt
It's the exchanging of our wounds
Knowing that we are all sisters
We are all brothers

Now as that joyous season
Settles in our souls
And we leave that land
Of lost content
Let us open our presents
As we open our hearts
To find the eternal gift
Of friendship, peace and love

MISSION: ALASKA

ERIC GLABERSON

The CD arrived in the mail. When my wife Joyce and I played it, a voice told us, “This mission, if you choose to accept it, will take you deep into the wilds of Alaska. You will face many dangers and risks in the course of your mission.” The CD ended and within seconds disintegrated. We considered the hazards for long moments and then chose to accept.

In Vancouver, Canada we stowed our gear on our expeditionary ship which we had chosen for its low profile, since the Grand Princess was only sixteen stories high and held only 3,000 passengers. Shortly after the ship left port, the dangers became apparent when we witnessed the buffet counters and realized that we were at serious risk of expiring from bloating and indigestion by eating the unlimited quantities of food available.

We were at risk as well at each port – Ketchikan, Juneau, Skagway – of using all of our available funds buying gift shop items like Alaska sweatshirts, native jewelry, and stuffed moose, dolls with antlers, tiny tee-shirts and shorts. I did buy a woolen Alaska ski cap after the first time I got close to a glacier and found out that it was in fact cold.

After disembarking at Whittier, we soldiered on, traveling in deluxe motor coaches and glass-roofed trains. We roughed it, staying in Princess Lodges with their in-room TVs and coffee makers and their on-premises hot tubs. We did some hiking through the temperate rainforest, our knees knocking at the thought of encountering a bear on the trail. I almost jumped out of my skin when I came across a large furry animal in front of me. But I realized quickly that it was a golden retriever at the end of a leash and that the only harm it could inflict on me would be to lick me to death. When the woman who owned the dog heard that I thought it was a bear, she burst out laughing and said, “He’d be the world’s first blond bear.” Yet later in Denali National Park we actually saw a blond grizzly, along with moose and caribou, all from the safety of a tour bus.

One of the great dangers of our trip was exceeding our grandeur quota. In Alaska everything was bigger and more amazing than anything we had seen before. The Marjorie Glacier in Glacier Bay was a mile wide, twenty-five stories high with pinnacles of ice, and many miles long. We risked losing the power of speech seeing something so awe-inspiring. On our journey, we saw mountain after mountain after mountain; so many that large numbers of them have not even been named. In Denali National Park, which is big enough to fit inside it any three national parks from the lower forty-eight states, the tundra stretched on beyond our capacity to imagine it.

We somehow managed to survive all this grandeur to finally meet the enemy: not the grizzly bear, but the fearsome Alaskan mosquito, of which there are thirty-four separate species. We were armed with bug-spray which, however, attracted rather than repelled these mosquitoes. Courageously we fended off their aerial attacks with slaps and claps until the field of combat was strewn with the wings and bodies of enemy fighters. We came through our battle with the bugs bitten but unbowed.

We successfully completed our assignment and look forward to our next mission.

CROSSING INTO MANHATTAN

MEL GLENN

Steel gray cocoon, with matching coats inside,
crossing into Manhattan over the bridge.
Winter inside too, as people huddle
compartmentalized by hearing-aid music
pumped into their ears, isolating them further.
Two lovers sit together, closely packed,
their hands in each other's lap,
each wanting to fondle forbidden parts.
They touch noses instead, a poor substitute.
Mexican musicians stroll through the car,
out of rhythm, out of season,
and in the corner, a graybeard hassid
pours over his prayer book.
Cold sunlight slashes through the bridge latticework
prompting an earnest student to don his shades.
A mother checks her toddler in the shrink-wrapped carriage.
The subway suddenly stops mid-bridge,
(garbled conductor loudspeaker voice offering nothing,
a chance to see the bright cold water below
before the plunge back into tubular silence.

POETRY IN THE MINOR LEAGUES

MEL GLENN

Sitting on the bench, waiting
for my anticipated turn at bat,
I stare out across the old ball field
at the old manufacturing plant
just beyond the right field fence.
It used to turn out poems,
supplying a living wage
to writers and poets of all ages
They would have worked for nothing, you know,
enjoying the sunrises and sunsets over the river,
describing various colors of the sky's palette.
With paper and pen, they carved out
intricate and masterful work,
but now all writing has been
transferred to the city, pulsing
electronically from place to place,
often without any artistic input at all.
The factory and the ball park closed ten years ago,
and my call up to the majors
now seems doubtful at best.

IN A PICKLE ON THE PACUARE RIVER

LEIGH GRAY

Would you like to know a travel secret? Most people would. Here it is. There's a small, safe, budget-friendly country on the planet that is a paradise for retirees, travelers or anyone who loves to be surrounded by natural beauty. In this gem of a country there are majestic volcanoes, tropical rain forests, pristine beaches and welcoming smiling faces. Do you have any ideas? I'm talking about Costa Rica – a shining star in Central America.

It was July, 1995. Summer was FINALLY here after another challenging year as a New York City High School ESL teacher. I longed to learn some new ways to motivate my students. I read about a week long series of educational workshops for language teachers in the New York Times. Research told me that Costa Rica is a “must see” for the adventurous. I decided to “go for it” and extend my stay a week to check it out for myself.

My host family picked me up at the San Jose International Airport and took me to their modest but comfortable home. I had my own room and all of my meals were covered by the program fee. I got a taste of “language immersion” that week since they didn't speak any English. My mind traveled back to 1975 when I lived in Mexico. Knowing Spanish really came in handy. In my free time when I wasn't in school I walked around chatting with the natives and soaking up “local color.” Since I could haggle in Spanish I was able to bargain while shopping. People smiled warmly at me during the many conversations I had. I truly now understood what my teachers from high school meant when they said “Language is Culture.” The new methods and approaches I was taught rekindled my interest as a teacher. Using theatrical techniques and playing theatre games while learning really was effective. I was more “alive” in the classroom and so were my students. Art and music were also two other tools I now had in my arsenal to stimulate learning.

I heard that white water rafting was very popular on the Pacuare River. Little did I know the kind of roller coaster thrill ride I was in for. I convinced some people I met during my class to join me. Through the week of workshops we shared together we became friends. They agree to give rafting a shot.

The Pacuare River is a quintessential tropical river of warm water flanked by lush rain forests which are home to exotic wildlife. It also is known to be the BEST river of water sports as it is home to world class rapids. I was not fully aware of the grading systems used for rapids. I later learned that it is similar to the one used for hurricanes. (Class 1 is the weakest; while Class 5 is the strongest).

Gilberto was a licensed river guide who traveled with us as we navigated down the river. I asked him about the class of rapids that was forecasted for the day. At this point I couldn't back out, but my curiosity was piqued. He replied, “The river is at its highest level; rapids may go as high as Class 4.” On the outside I was stoical. On the inside, I was quaking with fear.

We started our journey down the river. Gilberto communicated clear instructions to us as to whether the people sitting on the right or left should row and when. We were being tossed around like rag dolls as the waves hit us like gunshots from all sides. Through it all Gilberto remained both confident and competent. It was reassuring to see that he knew what he was doing. I tried to relax

and go with the flow, but I really couldn't.

It seemed like this roller coaster type of experience was actually becoming enjoyable. I distracted myself by taking in the natural beauty and conversing with my trip mates. I found out through conversation that we were all novices. The camaraderie among us was great.

By the time I saw it and we all tried to avoid it, it was too late. A HUGE swell hit us from underneath and we were STUCK on a monstrous boulder. The front of the boat was high in the air while the back started filling with rushing water, as the waves danced around us. My faith in Gilberto waned. I felt enveloped in fear. My companions were equally apprehensive.

A string of commands from Gilberto started coming at us full blast. "Paddle on the right, paddle front, paddle on the left, paddle back." We were stuck, but good. I was in the front so I was up high. In the midst of the chaos, I started to pray silently. We were doing as instructed, but Mother Nature would not give in. Gilberto stayed collected during the ordeal, letting his knowledge prevail over his emotions. The delivery of polite commands continued.

Finally, we got a break out of nowhere. Another huge rapid walloped the boat. Somehow we slid off the boulder back into the swirling rapids. We all breathed a long sigh of relief before being carried off yet again. Gilberto said, "Great work everybody." I still don't know how he missed this tricky spot. Anyway, the experience made the trip memorable. We all were fortunate in that nobody got hurt.

The balance of the trip was collectively enjoyed by all of us in spite of our harrowing ordeal. As we were carried downstream and with the warm sunshine caressing my shoulders, I tried to mentally take stock of the situation. I thought of the value of teamwork and how Gilberto knew who should do what and when. It brought to mind an acronym using the letter in the word TEAM that I had just learned in the workshop I attended. When I think about it, it rings so true – Together Everyone Achieves More. What a concept! I couldn't have said it any better.

A HERO AMONG US

LINDA GREBANIER

Watching me push Cynthia G. in her wheelchair along Prospect Park's wooded paths, you'd think she was just one of many sufferers of Parkinson's disease. You wouldn't be aware of the unique woman in the chair. She is not able to leap tall buildings in a single bound or fly around the world solving disasters. But she is a Superhero!

Cynthia G. was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease twenty-eight years ago. It started with a tremor in her right hand. From the beginning, she has been using whatever tools traditional science or experimental alternative techniques could provide.

Cynthia knew that taking Sinemet, the traditional pharmaceutical medication which increases the production of dopamine in the brain, would only help for a limited amount of time. She was successful in postponing the taking of that medication for fifteen years. When the shaking, dyskinesia, and frozen posture hampered her functioning too much, Cynthia G. went to a neurologist and began taking Sinemet. A year ago, she participated in a National Institute of Health experimental study which entailed the injecting of a genetically modified virus into her brain. The surgery lasted eight hours. The study only involved six subjects out of all the Parkinson's patients in the entire world. This was an illustration of Cynthia's pioneer spirit.

Cyndy has shared the information she has learned about ameliorating the effects of Parkinson's disease with many members of the Parkinson's community. She joined the Brooklyn Parkinson's Group and takes many courses to maintain her health including: exercise, dance, singing, voice training and playing the melodica.

The Brooklyn Parkinson's Group joined with the Mark Morris Dance Troupe to create a dance performance. This performance, in which Parkinson's patients danced together with professional dancers, depicted the struggles of Parkinson's sufferers and their rise above their circumstances. Cynthia G., taking extra Sinemet to control her symptoms, danced majestically. In spite of the possibility of succumbing to her dyskinesia, shaking or frozen posture, she danced bravely and did not falter. Cynthia G. was a star.

A professional cinematographer made a film about the collaborative effort between the Brooklyn Parkinson's Group and The Mark Morris Dance Troupe. An interview with Cyndy was featured in the movie. She danced statuesquely around her apartment saying, "Sometimes I can't walk, but I can dance." The film was aptly called: "Capturing Grace."

I have been friends with Cynthia G. for forty-two years. I watched her go from a twenty-six year old that all of the guys tripped over me to meet, to a sixty-eight year old stricken with this terrible disease. She does not feel sorry for herself. Often sitting immobile in a chair, she is never victimized. Cynthia tries and tries and tries and doesn't give up.

I, too, have my struggles. I am bipolar and have O.C.D. (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). Anxiety is often my companion and it is my goal to keep it in check. Cynthia shakes on the outside and I shake on the inside. We are truly sisters in adversity. Cyndy leads by example, helping me face my demons. She shows me how to live with uncertainty, for her condition is always uncertain, as is

mine. Life knocks Cynthia down and she gets right back up. She faces the negative and is then able to focus on the positive. Cyndy is an expert at employing a practical, optimistic view of life. She is a fighter, just as many people strive to be. Cynthia is my role model. She has truly captured grace. She is a hero among us!

OH BROTHER!

EUNICE HARRIS

Youngest of six siblings
Standing six feet six
In 2004, lost wife
Causing much strife
Oh Brother!

Raising his two young children alone
Now grown
Into productive members of society
Oh Brother!

Cancer struck him in 2011
Thinking he could see heaven
Fought fight, won
Oh Brother!

Deadly cells seen again in 2014
Not bold, never told family
Fiancé revealed what he concealed
“Fighting stage four cancer”
Hiding his burden on
Trusting in knowing gone
Oh Brother!

Praying
Hopelessness replaced by faith
Devotion with strong connection
In right direction
Oh Brother!

Modern medicine and prayer
Now cancer FREE
Total glee
Blest with living life to fullest
Fortunate Brother!!

FEELING PRESSURE

EUNICE HARRIS

After World War II, metal more available
Brought Pressure Cooker into popularity
With this invention, must mention
My hard working Nana often used
Wanting quick meals

In our two family house
Climbing stairs to visit
Hearing the slow purring pot
Beginning to reach crescendo
Locomotive coming through
Breaking into a piercing whistle
Pot rocking dancing on stove
Scaring me
Thinking mass explosion about to happen
Glued to kitchen chair
Blaring noise hard to bear
Whistling slowly subsided

Rushing cold water surrounded pot
Cover off
Bursting overflowing steamy cloud
Disappearing into ceiling

Marriage gift – Pressure Cooker
Sitting on shelf for years
Never used resulting fears
Using contemporary Crock Pot
Liking slow cooking a lot
Pressure Off

SMITH AND NINTH

SHARON HAWKINS

“Cameron, stop. You need to go home and get started on your homework.”

“But girl, you taste so good.”

The thickness and softness of his lips pressed hungrily onto my lips, which were thinner, but other boys had told me that my lips were good for kissing. And that’s all they were going to get anyway, was some good kissin’ because that was as far as I was going.

I remember that it was late in the fall of 1960—something because I was wearing my Erasmus Hall High School coat and he was wearing his. Our names were embroidered respectively, in script writing, in yellowish gold thread just below the left shoulders.

Cameron was a star player on the school’s football team though I can’t remember what position he played. I just remember that he was very popular and fine. I played the piccolo in the ERHS marching band. It was amazing how the shrill tones of my instrument could be heard over all the drums and the tubas and other blaring horns. Yep, I was important to our high school’s orchestra and concert band also, where I played the flute. I didn’t just play the flute but I fancied myself a flautist.

I wasn’t that cold on the platform of that elevated train station in Red Hook, Brooklyn, because I was wrapped in the sweet embrace of Cam’s 17-year-old muscular body. He was 5 feet 11 inches tall and weighed in the 190’s.

I was leaning into his body at the top of the stairs of the platform. I remember that it wasn’t too cold and it couldn’t have been too windy that day because we were standing there with our jackets unbuttoned. My arms were wrapped inside his jacket encircling his body. His arms engulfed me like a two-armed octopus. Young love. Teenage necking. I was barely aware that a man was standing at the bottom of the first landing of stairs just below us. I guess that I was so mesmerized by Cam and our innocent smooching that I hardly noticed that man standing down there. Even though it was a rather strange place for someone to be standing if they were waiting for a train.

Cam and I finally decided to dislodge from our romantic embrace because another train was roaring into the station and we had already let several other trains pass us by.

I slipped out of his embrace. Our schoolbooks were on the ground next to us so Cam picked them up in one heap. Quickly separated his books from mine. Handed me mine and moved towards the open train door. Our hands did a smooth reverse slap five as he slid away from me and boarded the train car.

I waved and he blew me a kiss as the doors closed. The train pulled out of the station and I proceeded down the stairs. My coat was still opened and I carried my schoolbooks in my left arm. I then noticed that man at the bottom of the stairs. He was slinking up the staircase. And then, as if he were a cobra, that man reached over the railing, past my schoolbooks, and grabbed and released my right breast. He then proceeded to slink up the stairs as if he hadn’t even done such an abominable thing.

The sweet innocence of Cam’s kisses and embrace were destroyed by that violently subtle assault. I never looked back. Not even to this day.

NYC RESTAURANT WEEK POEMS

SHARON HAWKINS

If you leave me waiting for you to arrive for a luncheon or dinner date at an upscale Manhattan restaurant during restaurant week, and I am there alone waiting for you at the bar with a seltzer with lime for too long, I'll probably take out my iPad mini and write a poem.

Last year, I arrived at City Crab, to meet my dear high school BFF, promptly at noon. She hadn't arrived as yet and the hostess suggested that I sit at the bar and wait for her there. My phone vibrated with a text from her apologizing that there were major delays on her train line from Brooklyn. So I wrote:

Godward I surge, I plunge, I advance, I press
My heart filled with expectation of the day's challenges
Delighted that I can call on His Name with confidence
Thrilled awaiting the newness, the sweetness of the Holy Spirit's still small voice
Leading me...Godward

...While I waited for her to arrive. Not bad.

And last week my niece took me out for a birthday dinner at her mom's, my sister's, favorite restaurant, The Gotham on University. As I waited for her to arrive for our 6 o'clock reservation I had time...to sip my lime...and break out my trusty writing tool.

I sat at the bar with my usual and admired the restaurant's elegant décor and the other seated diners with servers attending to them. I spotted the section of the dining area where I sat the last time that I was at The Gotham. It was the day of my late sister's memorial service five years ago. I wrote:

Two dead sisters
With one I shared a room
With one I shared the womb
I had two sisters
Same mom and dad
One the same cell
I had two sisters
One nine years older
One forty minutes older
I have two dead sisters
One I knew for a lifetime
One I can only imagine

I'm the matriarch now.

THE HALLOWEEN LESSON

SAMUEL HOPKINS

"I can't believe you're giving your students homework on Halloween, Dad. They're only second graders. You are a mean teacher."

Steven Hunter looked up from the lesson plan template on his computer screen. "Halloween is just another day. Besides, giving them homework will keep them busy. It will keep them out of trouble."

"Whatever," ten year old Marcus muttered as he left the living room, shaking his head.

Steven took his glasses off as he again looked up from the screen. *Am I wrong? I just want to make sure that my students are learning. Maybe I do drive them too hard. Like Marcus said, they are still just in second grade.*

"What's wrong, honey?" Emily's question pierced through Steven's contemplation. "I thought you were speaking to someone, but you were in here by yourself."

"It's Marcus. Something he said." Steven paused. "He thinks I'm being mean because I'm giving the regular amount of homework to my students on Halloween." He looked up at his wife knowing after twelve years of marriage that she would give him an honest answer about anything. It was her directness and honesty that he loved about her. "What do you think?"

Emily stood behind Steven. "I know that you want your kids to learn, and that you want them to stay safe and out of trouble..."

"But..." Steven sensed her hesitance. "I'm being a cruel, heartless bas--"

"I didn't say that," Emily smiled.

"Yes, you did," Steven laughed, only partly in humor.

After a pause, Emily looked at her husband. "I know you, Steven. I know that you will do the right thing for your students. You always have." After leaning over with a kiss she returned to the kitchen.

Steven stood up from his desk and walked to the bedroom. He suddenly felt tired. Maybe a short nap will help me think this out. His head rested on the pillow. *I'll just rest until dinner...*

I don't remember turning the TV on before I laid down, Steven thought. He also didn't remember turning to the old movie channel. Everything was in High Definition black and white. The narrator's voice was not recognizable.

"There's a tale in these parts of New England about an old schoolhouse on an island off the coast of Massachusetts. Mr. Graves has been the teacher in this school house for as long as anyone could remember. Some people say he's been teaching there since the Pilgrims landed on the Mayflower."

Steven rubbed his eyes. He noticed that the character, Mr. Graves, although dressed in nineteenth century garb, looked a lot like him!

The narration continued. “Mr. Graves expected that when he gave a homework assignment it would be done, and he would collect it. When he looked at his roll book he noticed that one of his students, from one hundred years earlier, had not submitted a homework assignment. Mr. Graves was going to collect it.”

Dust flew from the ancient ledger as the teacher closed his roll book and walked toward the door. “Even though the student, Kevin Dunn, had been dead for twenty years, Mr. Graves knew exactly where he was buried and he was going to dig him up to get the missing assignment.”

“I can’t let my students get by with not doing their homework.” It was the only line delivered by the teacher.

The narrator resumed, “There was a strange, eerie noise coming from the island town’s cemetery the night of October 31, 1879. Almost everyone heard it, but they were too afraid to go see what it was. The next day the sheriff and his deputies found what they thought was a Halloween prank. Further investigation explained the weird things they found. In front of the headstone of one Kevin Dunn, there were arms sticking out from the partially covered grave. In one hand there was an old ledger titled roll book, and in the other hand was a pen. When they opened to roll book they found a check next to Kevin Dunn’s name.”

Steven Hunter bolted up from his bed. Everything had seemed so real, so vivid, that he hadn’t realized it was a dream—a nightmare, he thought, induced by my own pride and selfishness.

He walked to the door of his son’s room and knocked. “Marcus.”

Marcus opened the door. “Dad?”

“Yeah. I just wanted to tell you that you were right—I was being mean. Halloween is still a special day for kids that age. So, I have decided to give them less homework and to make it due on Tuesday, November 3rd.”

Steven held his hand out in a fist, and his son walked over and bumped his smaller fist against his father’s. Then Marcus hugged his dad.

“Dad, can I hang out with Javon and Michaela on Halloween?”

Steven knew these two children and their parents. “As long as you stay at their house or here, and you have your cell phone, and be home by dark.”

“But Dad, that’s just when Halloween starts...”

Steven had already left his son’s room.

STUFF AND SENSIBILITY

LUCY ISCARO

My father recently surprised us all by deciding to give up his house and move to a nearby assisted living facility. The house was his home for 62 years.

He took with him all he considered necessary for his own comfort. I pack more for a one-week trip. In his 99th year he has apparently changed from a hoarder to a minimalist.

Before this shift I couldn't get him to remove magazines that were ten years old. Books were stacked on every dusty surface and no article of clothing was ever old enough or stained enough to discard. Illustrated calendars from 2005 were tucked next to an old folding screen that holds greeting cards sent when stamps were twenty cents. Take-out menus to restaurants that closed years ago were stuffed in a cabinet next to the *sippy* cups my niece used. Both of her children are now in college.

In his new studio apartment there are the usual bedroom furniture pieces plus an easy chair for him and one for a visitor. The tiny kitchenette holds a few mugs, some tea bags, cookies, flatware and china for one. It's like a college dorm for a very neat, very old freshman.

Ten miles away the home he left last month is still filled with the detritus of a family's life story.

My father, mother, older sister and I moved into this house the day I turned six. In a real estate advertisement it will be described as *single family home, 3 bedrooms, 1 full bath, 1 powder room, finished basement*. For me it's a time machine.

Each room, each object can take me to its unique place in my past. The six-inch orange cast iron frying pan is the one I taught myself to fry eggs in. I look at it and see the yellow yolk begin to film over as it firms, and smell the nutty scent of hot butter.

In the basement I'm a teenager slow dancing with a special boy at my sweet sixteen. In the backyard I'm playing with my dog and escaping the summer's heat by ducking under the cool wet wash hanging out to dry.

I like to think that I'm above caring about possessions. I'm an aging flower child who tries to do a lot with a little. But this experience of trying to clear out my father's home has tested my convictions and made me realize that often we hold onto things for reasons that have nothing to do with greed.

Sometimes things are deeply imbued with the owner's essence. Since my mother died nine years ago I have not visited her grave but once. That cold gray stone did not give me a sense of her presence nor did it comfort me. In the house, on her vanity table, an aqua tube of lipstick has sat where she left it. That tube, a gift with her last Clinique purchase, helps me see my mother. I can see her squint into the mirror, purse her lips and swipe on the color. Then she'd take a tissue and hold it between her lips and blot off the excess. She considered a thick coat of lipstick to be trashy looking. The tissue, so as not to be wasteful, went into her pocket. If she had no pocket, she'd stow the tissue up her sleeve. When Mom died we found dozens of tissues tucked in pockets and handbags.

We're trying to clean out the house so we can sell it for Dad. We need the cash to bankroll his new lifestyle. The family has come together to help separate what needs to be disposed of and what should be kept. His children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren all would like to have their own keepsakes from this repository of memories, this museum of stories.

I'm trying to let go and adopt my father's new Zen approach to these bits and pieces. This weekend I tried again to understand why he did not want us to bring any of my mom's artwork into his new place. "Dad wouldn't you like any of Mom's paintings? Wouldn't you like to be able to look at them here?"

He smiled at me and took his time answering. His blue eyes were clear and bright. He held my hand as he tried to find the right words to help me learn this lesson. "I looked at them long enough."

THE LOVE OF HER LIFE

KATHY IVANS

I met my first love on a spring afternoon in 1960. She was a two month old infant named Patty Ann, born to a teenage mother and given up for adoption at the Angel Guardian Home in Brooklyn. My Aunt Annie was her foster mother.

Annie had emigrated from Austria at sixteen and married my father's brother. They lived on the top floor of our two family house with their sons, who were about the same age as my brother and I. Years later I learned that Annie was illiterate and that taking in foster children was a way for her to earn some money of her own. Annie and I were both looking forward to bringing a baby girl into our house full of boys!

I was an awkward seventh grader left alone to watch out for my younger brother after school while our mother was working. He had no interest in homework and usually rushed outside to play with his friends as soon as he changed into his play clothes. I would often head upstairs, as I liked spending time with my aunt and the new baby.

Patty Ann was a happy blond haired girl with a large port wine stain covering her right cheek. The social worker told us that she had been born this way, but that the stain could be medically removed someday by her adoptive parents. My Aunt Annie would not be allowed to adopt her, since at age forty she was considered too old to adopt an infant. Of course, this seems ridiculous now when it is common for women of that age and older to have their first child.

As the weather warmed up, I was often allowed to take Patty Ann out for a walk in the carriage and I would happily parade her up and down our street to be admired by the neighborhood ladies. We took a blanket out to the backyard and sat in the warm sun to play with blocks and stacking toys. Feeding her the strange and mushy foods of babyhood became one of my favorite activities.

The summer passed and I entered eighth grade and I fell more deeply in love with Patty Ann. She knew me well and I always got a big smile when I came into the room. She learned to crawl and to stand up holding on to a chair. I taught her pat-a-cake and sang "You Are My Sunshine" to her. She celebrated her first Christmas with us and I saved up to buy her a special present. We were a great pair and our love affair was intense.

On March 18th, we had a family party to celebrate Patty Ann's first birthday. That very afternoon, she took her first steps, leaving Aunt Annie's protective arms and coming right to me. It was an amazing feeling!

Not long after, we heard the news we'd been dreading. The agency had found a family to adopt Patty Ann. They would be able to afford the procedure to remove the port wine stain and she would have a "real" family. Of course we all wanted to be happy for her, but we were devastated. We were to be told nothing and Patty Ann would disappear from my life as if she had never been born.

Our last night together was bittersweet. I enjoyed Patty Ann's laughter as we played our games, and then helped to give her a bath. After I read her a bedtime story, she kissed me goodnight and waved bye-bye. I walked down the stairs in tears and never saw her again. The next morning I ar-

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rived at school in such a state that I could hardly explain to my teacher what was wrong. She asked if someone in my family had died and I sobbed,

“It feels that way to me.”

Each year on March 18th, I can’t help but think of Patty Ann.

I wonder what her life has been like and I hope that somehow she knows that she was dearly loved from the very beginning.

AFTERNOON ENCHANTMENT
IN THE BROOKLYN BOTANIC GARDEN

ANN KASLOW

Pansies greeting us with smiling faces
A duck skimming on the water – raindrops among the ripples
The Japanese garden – perfection of curves and form
Lake and trees – shimmering changeability and steadfast magnificence
Lavender waves of field – the divine made manifest in forty thousand
 woodland bluebells
Gift shop supreme – temptation in all directions
Carrot cake and hot drinks shared under a sheltering umbrella
Love abounds in a fairy tale afternoon – existing beyond the constraints of time.

TAI CHI FOR HEALTH AND VITALITY

WILLIAM LEMMON

Tai chi exploded upon the world scene
As a popular martial art
Millions of people have been drawn
To it like a powerful magnet
To maintain and improve health.
Initial stages involve slow
And graceful basic movements.
Advanced instruction includes fast,
Powerful movements like a Samurai Warrior.

Slow movements relax the body
Like a warm gentle breeze
And brings strength and balance.
Progress leaps forward like a jumping jack
With consistent, dedicated practice.
Like an explorer, discoveries are made
About parts of the body that are tense.
Soon, you will sense your own energy or chi.

Repetition of movements will become automatic
Like working on an assembly line.
Your practice becomes one continuous
Flowing exercise like a moving stream.
Morning is the golden time slot –
Relaxes the mind and provides energy for the day.
You are the mighty, magnificent master of your daily routine.
Ignite your imagination like the fireworks
Of a July 4th celebration and fantasize
You are a Martial Arts hero,
Strong, flexible, healthy and confident.

ROCK AROUND THE CLOCK

MARTIN H. LEVINSON

Some say That's All Right Mama was the first
rock song, others say Rocket 88. I go with
Crazy Man, Crazy by Bill Haley & His Comets
who later recorded Rock Around the Clock, a
twelve bar B-side blues single, instant classic in
The Blackboard Jungle, a flick filled with delinquent
teens, brass knuckles, and rebel rock that seemed
tame when played on American Bandstand with
its lip-synch recording artists, autograph sessions,
interviews, the latest dance fads, a fab afternoon lineup
on ABC that featured Kenny, Arlene and the other
Bandstand kids doing the Shake, the Madison and
the Stroll, helpful for picking up girls at parties before
or after spin the bottle when you had ten seconds to
kiss and if the time was up you had to French kiss
which wasn't that bad even if your partner wore braces
and before you could say Razz my berries Daddy-O,
Chuck Berry was in jail, Little Richard had become a
preacher, Elvis was drafted into the army, Jerry Lee Lewis
got banned from the airways. Just desserts said my parents
who preferred Lawrence Welk, Bing Crosby, and Patti Page
to a bunch of bad boys playing Satan's music, so I
turned up the collar of my black leather jacket, put a
little dab of Brylcreem on my hair, dropped some dimes in
a diner jukebox, blasted my transistor radio through the
'hood. I was invincible, indestructible, unconquerable,
impregnable, then the plane crash, Buddy Holly, Richie
Valens, The Big Bopper, the Third of February 1959,
the day the music died but not for me, not for the
with-it kids who scrambled into the sixties. Hendrix,
Joplin, protests, a Summer of Love, Led Zeppelin
buying a stairway to heaven we all
wanted to climb.

“TWEETING”YOUR LIFE AWAY

BARBARA LEVITT

The art of face-to-face oral communication appears to be sadly disappearing in this country's modern civilization. It is being enveloped by the modern internet and “cloud” technology. Individual personality is being swallowed by the latest interpretation of progress. The current fad is to “tweet” and to do it via a small instrument that rests on your lap or in the palm of your hand. One who “tweets” is often seen completely engaged and deeply involved in communicating without words emanating from active lips. Human vocal interaction is becoming obsolete. It may become a lost art!

The source of the problem may be the 24 hour daily use of the computer, smartphone, and various artificial means of communications which have become so popular. Watch our young people as they “tweet” each other, raptly gazing at their modernized cell phones while their fingers rapidly scan the instrument in their hands, touching the script and typing out messages.

One can be sitting next to a friend. Neither speaks aloud, but each one is intent on using his or her appliance to converse. It is as though words spoken aloud are an enemy to be feared. I recently observed two young people in a movie theatre who arrived together and sat next to each other, but spent their entire time “tweeting” while the movie was going on. Did they even pay attention to what was happening on the screen? It was a waste of the cost of admission tickets, but seems to be a prediction of things to come in our society.

Can anyone explain why this lack of oral communication is becoming so prevalent? Are machines slated to rule humanity? Will speech become something remembered but eventually obsolete? Is cloud technology going to rule our earthly world? This is a dangerous robotic aspect that looms over our society. Our younger population is being influenced by this scientific communication development which has its pluses and minuses.

Ultra-modern machines and new discoveries, inventions and methods should be encouraged if they benefit society. However, we must never lose our faith in humanity and the role and worth of the individual, particularly when orally communicating with each other. Science has displayed evidence of progress in the course of daily living. However, it should not lead to the loss of human vocal interaction.

FOOTSTEPS IN THE DARK

BARBARA LEVITT

It was the darkest of nights
On one strange Halloween
Lacking moon or bright stars
Black clouds covered the scene.

As I peered out my window
Confounded to see
A devilish vision
Hunched under a tree.

This apparition had ghostly eyes
With a toothless smile of bright red paint
Enveloped in a shadowy mist
My placid soul was about to faint!

Was this a creature from outer space
How was it able to travel to earth
And will it create a deadly future
By casting aside humanity's worth?

Its footsteps were coming ever nearer
Amidst clinging shadows overhead
I cringed, foretelling mass destruction
Was this the enemy plan ahead?

With my threatened fears of an evil future
And no longer feeling calm and serene
I looked at the figure approaching closely
He looked familiar, my neighbor's teen.

That young sounded was happily laughing
As out of the woods he appeared on the scene
Throwing his cape and his mask on the ground
While shouting: "Have a Happy Halloween!"

FORGOTTEN

SABREEN LEWIS

No one speaks about you anymore.

No acknowledgement of your brief existence.

You were once the main focus of my childhood nightmares; a youngster's way of coping with loss.

But eventually, even the nightmares marked you as forgotten; as no one speaks about you anymore.

Your photo remains as proof of your existence, but your image evokes no emotion.

It triggers no memory of the sweet scent of lilac, freshly washed linen or warm bread, baked in an old fashion oven.

It might as well be the photo that came with the frame.

I wonder, had you not been stolen, would you still be forgotten or would you be the center of my own existence.

Would I be your favorite, or simply be the last of one child too many?

And though no one speaks about you anymore; in the faces of yet another generation lays the proof that you are not quite forgotten.

TIME PASSES

SABREEN LEWIS

Hey mom, you say, should I be a princess or Cinderella?

It's that spooky time of year, and you, a girl of six, must make the right impression.

I say to you, in my most motherly voice, whichever one you choose will make you look more beautiful than ever, but honey, it's all up to you.

Then, as though blown by the strong winds of a raging storm, I now look upon a shy and impressionable teenager.

Ma, you say, is it too bold to go strapless or should I play it safe and stick to sleeveless? You know, all of my friends will be at the prom.

Which one makes you feel most comfortable, I ask? It's your big night and not only about the dress, I added, but honey, it's all up to you.

Thinking I had awakened from a long night's slumber, you stood before me dressed in white, posing in a full length mirror.

Do I need a train, or even a veil, you question?

I marvel at your very sight, holding back tears ready to be shed before your wedding night.

Neither will hide nor heighten your beauty, I explain, as you are more radiant than a mid-day's sun, but honey, it's your special day and it's all up to you.

As if transplanted by a speedy tornado into a distant tomorrow, I hear, mom, should I be Iron-man or Darth Vader?

Supportively, I declare, either one will do and you will always be my superhero, but it's totally up to you.

You exclaim with giddy laughter, no grandma, not you, actually I was asking mom.

JOURNEY HOME

JANET LIEBERMAN

Charming Roman guide, Monica shepherds us thru Tuscany villages,
Orcia Valley, Pienza, Sienna, Scala, Assisi heart of Umbria...
Cypress rows shadow monastery walls set amidst rounded Apennines*
Languorous flowering hills surround ochre terracotta farmhouses
Yellow blazes of forsythia light hills, terraced vineyards

Yields to rocky villages clinging to cliffs, beguiling Amalfi coast
Spikes of sunlight fall across volcanic islands
Flung out over azure Aegean waters, Positano looms...

Monica, petite siren tosses sleek black tresses,
Flings billowing carmine scarves into tempests,
Wails unearthly exquisite melodies...
Ensnares restless travelers, suddenly melancholy
Lures Homer's progeny homeward bound!

*mountain chain in Italy

OH, AUTUMN

MADELINE MANDEL

Oh, Autumn! It's a love-hate relationship I feel when it comes to you.

How I dread your coming! You rob me of my delicious daylight, little by little, at first; until, by your end, I am cast in darkness, forced to rush indoors much sooner than I am prepared for my day to end. A sharp contrast to summer!

Autumn, you make my eyes water, my nose itch, and my voice crack with your dust, dander and mold. I await my first cold.

Your unwanted leaves clog my drains; make driving and walking a hazard, and, when your season is in full sway, you overburden me with black bags full from daily raking.

Your wind can be relentless, wrapping me once again inside an overstuffed coat while my sun tan fades and I am overtaken with chaffing, chapping and goose bumps.

You cause my garden to grow so bare...and your mornings are too quiet. Only occasionally do I perceive the sound of a squirrel scurrying; my sparrow friends are racing away from you in v-shapes across the sky.

The smell of roses is but a distant memory; instead, there is a hint of burning leaves in the nighttime air.

I can't forget that your season always brought me back to my hectic work schedule.

Too, it was the time of year in which my mom died thirteen years ago, and on an Indian summer day the following year, we had to put our family dog to sleep.

My curb tree will soon become scrawny and bent like all the rest of my neighbors' trees, and appear before not too long, like tired soldiers in a forced march against a pale landscape.

And yet, Sweet Autumn, you are the season in which I celebrate my first born's birth; and I recount annually the cherished memory of my two small sons hurrying out the door with almost brand new book bags; or dressed up, after long decisions, in costumes holding sacks of candy.

There are days when your sun shines radiant through the trees, against a palette of the warmest of colors. It serves to remind me of your unmistakable and unmatched beauty.

Autumn, your air smells and feels clean and fresh, and I am instantly recharged and exhilarated by it; my pace quickens into a more heart healthy step. A contrast to the sluggish stroll of summer!

It's the time for a closetful of cozy sweaters.

Every autumn, I am reminded of that October morning twenty five years ago when my youngest son asked me who painted the leaves while we slept.

I feel brave as I walk against your wind, and make it safely to the comfort of my car. This is also the time when my new coat's warmth is put to the test.

Pumpkin lattes have reappeared at Starbucks, apples are abundant and are available in every vari-

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ety, and soon it will be the time of year that I say thank you for all of my blessings, and feel grateful in having reached the autumn of my years!

Oh, Autumn, it is a love-hate relationship that I have when it comes to you!

SECOND CHANCE

TED MIESZCZANSKI

Staying in shape is not an easy thing for an old guy to do without some serious motivation. Sometimes it's sensible. More often it's stupid. But it's always powerful. I got in shape to play ball. Later for ball getting you in shape, that's suicidal!

I played with a schoolyard crew of cops, firemen, teachers, salesmen, doctors, thieves, drug addicts, butchers, bakers and even one candlestick maker, all bound by our love of the game.

Every August, we were invited to an upstate CYO camp to play under the bright nightlights. Usually it was just a run that ended with a few brews, a few laughs and a few lies. But for me it was magical. See, when I was a kid my parents packed us up and we'd escape to the Jewish Alps, the Catskills. I couldn't wait to jump out of the car and breathe that delicious fresh air.

So when spring came I would hit the gym harder. You see I needed to be ready for that game. First lift the weights, then the bike and leg machines slowly building, building, building.

One of the salesmen had a limo so a hundred campers went crazy thinking the Knicks had arrived. But no, it was only a few carloads of trash talking basketball freakazoids. That was the upside. The downside was there were so many players if you lost the game, you were done for the night.

Maybe it was the cold. Maybe it was nerves but my team couldn't hit a shot the first four trips. We were down three zero and the game was only to five. The ball kept moving because we needed a little magic. There I was sitting deep in the right corner. I say sitting because the sideline felt like the subway. And then the ball arrived.

The instant it touched my hands everything slowed down. I felt the ball so well that as I held it each nub of the grip felt singular and perfect. Rising up I saw above the treetops into a field of stars that felt like friendly observers. I lifted higher on my j and because I was so deep cranked my wrist and elbow back another notch. Lift, push, release and follow through. The ball rose into the night air and then curved downward towards the iron hoop. Swish, nothing but net! In my heart a switch had flipped. All that training, running, lifting and hoping had just mixed together into a potent mountain air cocktail. An adrenaline rush lifted me as I raced up the court. I felt myself smiling like a madman. There wasn't anything to think about anymore, only the doing. I knew good things were about to happen.

We won the next few games. They were exciting, full of great shots, steals and beautiful plays. But in the last game of the night we were struggling again. Tied game at 4, next basket wins. They missed what should have been their winner. We boarded and fast broke at full speed. My point hit me with a pass to my right. In front of me was a brother named, "Cuba". It should have been, "Cobra". He was smart, super quick and knew my game. Playing me to the right he was going to force me to give up the ball and slow up our break. Usually, probably it would have worked, but today wasn't usually.

I'd run hard all night and should have been tired. Cuba was back peddling and I knew he thought he had me, but he didn't. I had him. In full stride I head-faked right, then crossed the ball over to my left and drove hard. Lifting towards the basket I reached out with my left hand and

felt the ball go up on my fingertips. Cuba was desperately trying to readjust and spring again. The backboard grazed my hand as I released the ball with perfect spin. Then there was the hoop, big as the fat full moon above waiting patiently to receive the winning bucket.

I sat on the bench watching clouds of steam pour off of my body. I tried hard to memorize that moment with every sense. I knew. After all how many chances are you given to experience what is gone forever? I knew God had been good to me. He'd given me a second chance to feel young again. I was grateful and content.

GOSSIP

TEENA MILLER

Sun glinting on waters
retirement
dream community
warm weather
cold and ice in distant past
the viper moves slowly unnoticed

Blue skies with light floating clouds
friends and activities
to fill the day
parties, cards, shopping
mah jongg, movies
it slithers between the grass blades

The talk goes on
get togethers
luncheons, poolside chats
playing games
adult camp
it hides within the shade of rocks

One day I stand
unseen behind a column
and hear my friend speak of me
my clothes unfashionable
my intelligence questionable
family problems
spilled in confidence
discussed in an open arena
the serpent strikes

My friend my community
Will never be the same

I NEED A CHANGE

TEENA MILLER

I need a change
cannot metamorphose
like a butterfly
or a tadpole waiting

what can I do
but
paint my bedroom
white walls and lace curtains
no longer me

sunny yellow
I don't always feel cheerful
too bright for eyes wanting sleep

Deep red
Color of lips hearts passion
Too energizing and heated

soft sage green
neutral calming
but I recall it being
in institutions and schools

pale aqua
not exactly aqua
but the color of the sea
refreshing open cleansing water
a boat swaying on low waves
lapping at its sides
rocking a passenger to dreams

painting completed
ocean on the walls
feeling transformed
I am lulled to a good sleep

metamorphosis

THE BACKSIDE OF THINGS

CONSTANCE MITCHELL

My name is Bench. I've been bolted down here for sixty years, and I could tell you a thing or two about the folks who live in that building in front of me. They're really not a bad lot. Let me fill you in.

The porter arrives at about 6:45 A.M. each morning with his container of coffee. He sits on me and plans his day. He's a nice guy who takes great pride in "his" building...what to polish, what to wax, which folks need him to move this or that.

Around 8:15 A.M., the middle school kids sit on me sometimes to copy each other's homework (kids will be kids), but mostly so that they can walk together and push and shove along the way. There were seven kids in September, but now there are six. (Tim got hit by a taxi while riding his bike down Second Avenue in November). His mother fainted on me when they came to tell her.

At 9 A.M. or so, the retirees arrive. Five men, a painter, a postman, an ambulance driver, a small business owner and a male nurse. They talk and read the newspaper, smoke and cough a lot.

The carriage brigade arrives at 10 A.M. All seven mothers gather with their babies and head for the park. About that time too, the old gals come down. They don't sit on me. They sit one bench down so that they can gossip about everyone and everything without being overheard. Everyone passing gets their assessment.....too fat, dress too short, five kids and no husband, gay.

I get a breather until after one o'clock. Then the home aides bring down the folks in wheel-chairs. I've known many of them since they were 20 years old and sat on me to spoon a bit before they said good night. Now, they smile and shake their heads at people who stop to greet them. More often, they just drool and nap in the afternoon sun.

Of course, they are those who just rest on me for a minute and go on their way. Glad to be of service.

A GIFT RETURNED

DANIEL MOINESTER

I stood by my grandfather's hospital bed as he lay dying of cancer. His children and grandchildren were there, but his wife of sixty-five years had passed years before. His home for some forty years now held strangers. And from ninety-two years of accumulated possessions, all that remained had been squeezed into the hospital's small metal cabinet. Everything else was gone: the desk on which he diligently wrote twenty-five dollar checks to his grandchildren, regardless of their age; the plaid shirts he meticulously laid so neatly in his chest of drawers; the picture-plate of the Queen of England, hanging proudly on his dining room wall; the reclining chair where he sat to watch his beloved Mets; all of it was gone. He looked at me, his voice filled with despair, "Dan, what do I have? I have lost everything. I have nothing left."

As a young boy, I loved spending the weekends at my grandparent's apartment. Breakfast was a feast: cereal, eggs, Kippurs, breads, jams, English tea. Juxtaposed against the one course breakfast I ate at home, this was a smorgasbord of delights. But the real highlight at that morning table was my grandfather, a smile spread across his face as he watched me consume this plethora of palate options. He would say, "How come you get so many choices?" He would then look at his one bowl of cold cereal and add, "What makes you so special?" And in those few words he filled me with the thought, 'Yes, I am special'.

And while I devoured breakfast, he would regale me with stories of his youth in England during the early part of the 20th century. I was transfixed by a world so different from mine. There was the story of the first time he saw a 'horseless carriage', actually heard it before seeing it, it was so noisy. Everyone stopped to stare, wondering what made it move. He and his friends would run alongside, hurling questions, only occasionally receiving answers.

He spoke of returning home from school to his cold, drafty apartment, the only source of warmth, one fireplace. He would sidle up close, hoping to absorb as much heat as possible, once getting so near he singed the edge of his pants. His parents were not happy he had ruined such a valuable article.

But my favorite story was his courtship of my grandmother. He loved telling of the subterfuge he used in trying to impress upon her that he was a man of substance. He would cut newspaper the same size as the English pound note. He would then place two one pound notes on top of the newspaper and one on the bottom, making it look as if he had a wad of bills. As a child, I recall asking why two on top. He would smile an all knowing smile and reply, "Because when you go to pay for something and you peel off the top pound note, the second one keeps the newspaper hidden. I thought he was so clever until my grandmother would chime in that she was never fooled by this ruse. He would then laugh and tell me another story.

To be adored by your grandparents is different than being loved by a parent. Your grandparent's love is unencumbered by having to raise you. And parents are supposed to love you. But here is someone else fawning over you, spoiling you, an inimitable bequest that made me feel loved unconditionally. Growing up, I took my grandfather's love for granted, never understanding the special gift he bestowed on me. Now, as an adult and grandparent myself, I understand.

And in that hospital room, as the sun set on my grandfather's life, I was fortunate enough to repay a small measure of what he had given me. Standing next to him, seeing the anguish on his brow for all he had lost, I said, "Grandpa, you are the wealthiest man I know. Look at all the people in your life who love you: your children, your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren. No man could have more riches than you."

He thought for a moment and a sense of calm spread across his face. He looked at me and said, "Yes. I am loved. I am a wealthy man." That thought, of all the love surrounding him, comforted him for the remainder of his days.

The hospice nurse, who cared for him at the end, told me she had never seen anyone slip away so peacefully.

WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED?

SELMA REVA NEWMAN

Ben and John were classmates in English, Science, and Math
John was favored by his teachers, while Ben evoked their wrath
For John was diligent in getting school work done
But Ben just wanted to play and have some fun.

In eighth grade they thought about high school
Teachers said to study hard, don't be a fool
If you neglect your studies now, beware
To pass an entrance exam you must prepare.

Off to Bronx High School of Science one early Saturday
With just a tedious qualifying exam standing in their way
Of acceptance in such a prestigious school as this one
Went John who did test practice and Ben who did none.

Afterwards, into the bright sunny day and waiting arms
Came eye-squinting kids with their many charms
John said, "Mom, I worked fast to finish and did my best!"
"Mom," said Ben, "I fell asleep towards the end of the test!"

When the students' grades came to their eighth grade classes
Ben and John's teachers had to put on their eyeglasses
Who would have fathomed that honor student John was left out
And the fun-loving, carefree Ben was in without a doubt.

THE MISCHIEVOUS WIND

SUNI PAZ

In Roquetas del Mar, Almeria, the wind plays with people and things as if they were toys. It makes water jars, parasols, handkerchiefs and hats fly in the sky like birds.

Calling attention to its force by banging on doors, Almeria's wind sings unusual songs in various tones while breaking flowerpots over the paving tiles of patios, scattering its flowers in every direction. In a second, all becomes confusion.

The wise seagulls remain sitting quietly under cover and even the abubillas find shelter under hedges and fences or they will be mercilessly hurled over the sea.

The wind laughs with glee and continues its piracy. Dancing, it steals a tablecloth and overturns a chair at the beach cafe, casually ripping its awnings.

From a lady, who a second before was worshiping the sun, the wind pilfers beach clothes and throws them into the water so that the waves could have fun fighting over them.

I'm looking at the wind doing its pranks and I'm in awe at its total lack of respect.

The sand, used to its excesses, passively gives itself to the wind and lets it carry the grains through holes and slits, crevices and cracks, to the most unexpected corners of the town. Well, thinks the sand, it's a great way to travel and learn about other corners of the world. The sand gets really indignant only when the wind forces it to lash at the children's legs and destroy their sand-castles.

The clouds, that from centuries back, know about its strength, open a corridor for the wind to pass through and then, like a herd guided by a shepherd, run in search of a corner of the horizon where they would become invisible. No use trying to confront the wind or dethrone it. Nobody can deal with it.

When at siesta time, the Almeria wind goes to extremes, dreams get disturbed and a slight anxiety navigates to its beat. At last, exhausted from its own maddening games, the wind quiets down. Under this new mantle of silence, people's thoughts also abate. The evening becomes drowsy, yawns and waits for the night to arrive. The moon slowly comes up to illumine the havoc left by the wind.

BADEN-BADEN BLISS

LORRAINE PEARSON

Huddling quietly in an arched doorway, Franz and Anna pressed against the wooden entry to avoid the SS officers' detection in the small medieval town of Baden-Baden, Germany. Famous for the spa and thermal baths that the Romans had enjoyed nearly two thousand years ago, it had been a pleasant place to call home for Jews and Christians alike until World War I. Now in 1938, there was unemployment and deprivation as well as an underlying suspicion of all Jews. Fear festered and fouled the air of this idyllic village.

Still, on this November 9th, in the twilight of an unseasonably warm evening, Franz, a Christian, and Anna, a Jewess, were like all other lovers who had tread the cobblestones of Baden-Baden in the soft glow of the street lamps and the promise of moonbeams. Nothing could thwart their love, so secretly cultivated in this incendiary garden of hate. Even their parents, long-time friends and neighbors, now insisted that their children find more suitable partners. Marriages of Jews and Christians were verboten in accordance with the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. The insanity of hate was growing.

Anna and Franz knew full well that their disobedience could bring harsh punishment; yet, they ardently continued to meet at dusk to satisfy their unquenchable longing for each other. At this very moment, Franz's fingers gently grazed Anna's soft cheek. With that simple caress, her eyes grew tearful and her emotions surfaced. She encircled him with her arms and leaned into his muscular body. He patted her eyes with his handkerchief; his index finger slowly outlined her aquiline nose and strong forehead, returning purposefully to her finely formed lips, now plumped and waiting for the warm touch of his own. The sensation excited them as their bodies meshed with the sweetness of a bird's song.

Suddenly, from a short distance, they heard the battering sound of wooden sticks smacking store fronts and windows of private homes. The hard thud of soldiers' feet trampled their momentary passion. Scared, they knocked repeatedly at the door in hope of gaining entrance. The black-booted feet moved closer. They knocked harder and harder until a sympathetic resident opened her heart to their plight.

Little did these lovers know that this fateful night in 1938 would be their last together. By morning, the Jews would be forcibly removed from their homes to board trains to Dachau. The town, once famous for its Roman pleasure baths, would become the path to lethal showers instead. For Franz and Anna – and millions more – this Kristallnacht would shatter lives and dreams beyond repair. Light would be eclipsed by the evil that darkly prevailed in a world on the cusp of war.

LUCKY DOG

DOROTHY PRIDEAUX

Watery eyes
Tiger teeth
Joey Tarantino's dog
Lucky eats rocks
And growls
Not at the other kids
Only me

If I see him first
I cross over
If not I walk by quickly
While he snarls
Showing all his spiky teeth
And tugs on his leash
Pulling towards me
As I pass

My sister laughs
My brother teases
Com 'ere Lucky
You aren't gonna bite her
Are ya, boy
Mom lectures
He smells your fear.

Then I'm lucky
I no longer meet him
On the street
Joey tells me
Lucky died
Sorry Lucky
Not Really
So Lucky

NOISES AND SHADOWS

DOROTHY PRIDEAUX

When you live on the second floor
Even when you creep down
And try to swallow the creaking stairs
In your tiptoes
You hear noises and see long dark shadows
Coming from the open basement door

You are certain
They are moving up to grab you
Before you make it to the street
Down they drag you
Tie you up
No one can find you
You're gone forever
Maybe hardly missed
By your older sister
Only by your mom

Shut up
Stop it
Says your sister
There's no one there
You're just making it all up
If you don't
I'll tell mom
And she'll punish you
For scaring yourself
But you see the shadows
You hear the noises
They keep the rope in the basement
You're convinced
It's just a matter of time

Then one day they're gone
No more noises and shadows
You click down as fancy as new shoes
Fearless and taller
Smart as they come
To the sunshine of the street

starting over

DM RANKINS

summer snuggles
interrupted
by a cool change in the air
wanted to stay
in that time
in that place
surrounded by the warmth of the sun
where time moved slowly through the sand
you left as the earth changed
walked past the wilting marigolds and petunias
bottled my heart by the beachside
collections of seashells replaced by pinecones
the sound of falling acorns
opened me for tomorrow
where colored leaves
softened my fall
wrapped me in their transition
regrets raked fittingly in a pile
autumn breeze brushed the bruises away
plump pumpkins mark my path
i'll pick one
and carve
my season of recovery

just one more

DM RANKINS

you wanted turkey
with cornbread stuffing
yearned for baked apple pie
being home
with family
you smiled
through the pain
allowing streams of hope
to capture our heart
you laughed
tasting memories
of novembers in the bronx
banquets of life
we planned
made lists of gotta haves
stirred thoughts of mommy's
unwritten recipes
wanted to have
just one more thanksgiving
but you left before
the turkey thawed
the apples were peeled
the autumn leaves fell
before any of us were ready
empty plate where you would sit
filled with our remembrances of you
softly singing
Don't Make Me Over
sharing sweet treats
from yesterday's leftover
moments of happiness
we toast your years
grateful for our part
in your time of harvest.

A GRAVE MATTER

TERRY RICCARDI

October 7, 2015

It took me almost 10 years to go visit my mother's grave in her family plot. I've never been a religious person or a cemetery person; once I bury someone, as I did literally with my mother, I say goodbye at the gravesite, if I haven't already done so before that point. But I felt I needed to go for two reasons. I wanted to make sure the headstone had been engraved correctly, and that the grave was indeed receiving perpetual care.

I chose Mom's mid-July birthday to make the trip out to New Jersey. My husband, who is always there to support me when I face something difficult, drove me out to the cemetery. Not having been there since I climbed into the newly dug grave and placed my mother's cremated remains at the bottom of the hole, I didn't remember exactly where it was. We walked around the area, growing hot and sweaty as we avoided stepping on gravestones set flush in the uneven ground. Soon I began worrying about my husband. Since his three heart attacks and stroke, he cannot walk far and starts panting when he overdoes it. Just when I was about to give up and tell him we should leave, I happened to glance behind me and there it was—the double headstone with my parents' names on it.

The engraving was perfect, with lovely flower scrolls at each top corner, and their names, birth and death dates, and other inscriptions exactly as they should be. Each grave was covered with neatly trimmed ivy, so I knew that perpetual care was being given. I bowed my head and was silent for a moment, not knowing any prayers to say. Placing two small stones, one on each side of their headstone, I stood quietly, feeling good about finally doing my duty.

To the left of their stone was my aunt's. I had loved her very much, but hadn't gotten to spend much time with her. I had a few gems of childhood memory, a few pictures, and her amethyst cameo ring, but I wish to this day that I could have shared more time with her, especially as I grew into adulthood and became less painfully shy. My parents had only told me she had cancer when I graduated college and they knew I'd be coming home and wanting to see her.

That summer, I traveled from the Bronx to Stuyvesant Town a few times a week while my aunt, bedridden and deaf, lay dying. We communicated via the steno pad I brought with me. I'd write any news I could think of and show it to her. She would read, smile or nod, and so the visits went. At summer's end, she was gone. I chose her anniversary as my first wedding day, but the marriage lasted for only a few years. It ended as my horrendous first year of teaching and my father's losing fight with cancer both came to a close. I placed a stone on her marker after silently sending her my love.

To my aunt's left, a tall, slender black stone with a faded photograph set into it marked the resting place of my uncle, whom I'd never met. He had died in the great flu pandemic of 1916, at the age of five. Had he lived, I would not have been standing there almost a century later. The doctor told my grandmother to have another child, as therapy. Not only did she do so, she also told my mother this. My grandmother's love went to her older daughter and her dead son, which explained a lot about my mother.

Last, I moved to the right of my parents' stone. There was my great-aunt, whose Hebrew name I had been given. I've always hated it, as to me it sounds like an angry hiss. But I'd never known the lady, and I liked to think she was a wonderful person. Just as I had this thought and was preparing to leave, the tall clump of grass to my right moved.

A large fawn stood up, looked over its shoulder at me, shook its little tail, and moved on its incredibly long, thin legs farther away and out of my sight. My husband approached, I took a last look at everyone I'd come to visit, and we left. As luck would have it, we lunched with a friend, and I related the story of the fawn. As I said before, I'm not particularly religious, but she has a very strong faith. It was an angel, she explained, who waited there until I was ready to do what I had to do. Now that I had done it, the fawn moved on to await the next person who needed to do their duty. The tears came, and I felt her words were true.

Like some other experiences in my life, I knew this one had been deeply important to me, and would take an untold amount of time before I could put it into words. Now that I have, I can see how much more of my past has never been put on paper, and why it took me ten years to return to the cemetery. It has been as cathartic as it was disturbing, and God bless Bambi.

VIOLENCE

FRANCES ROSENFELD

WE MUST FINALLY CONCEDE
IT IS TRUE
WE ARE AT WAR

OUR COUNTRY HAS BECOME
A HOT BED OF VIOLENCE

A SPRAY OF BULLETS
ATTACKING INNOCENT
MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN

THE HALLS OF CONGRESS
ARE ALIVE
WITH THE ECHOES OF VICTIMS
TOO STUNNED TO RUN
CRYING "WHY ME"

CONGRESS HAS REMAINED MUTE
TO A SPIRALLING CATASTROPHE

IS THIS ENTRAPMENT OF
HATE, IGNORANCE, INDIFFERENCE
TO BE IGNORED
BY USELESS CONGRESSMEN

ARE WE TO BECOME
A RED RIVER

WE CANNOT PRETEND
WE MUST FACE THIS CHALLENGE
WE ARE IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

TIME TO MOVE FORWARD

WHAT WE NEED
IS LOVE FOR HUMANITY

LIVING IN HOPE
I WAIT

PLAY BALL
WHERE HAVE ALL THE PLAYERS GONE
PRINCES OF YESTERYEAR

FRANCES ROSENFELD

LOU GEHRIG
DUKE SNIDER
JACKIE ROBINSON
JOE DIMAGGIO

THEY WERE FIERCE
AGGRESSIVELY POWERFUL

PLAY BALL
SHOUTED THE UMPIRES
THE PLAYERS RAN
ON STRONG STURDY LEGS
ARMS PUMPING
BREATH SPREWING STEAM

ROUND AND ROUND
THEY FLEW
THEIR RUBBERY LEGS
LEADING THE WAY

PICK THEM UP
PUT THEM DOWN

RUN, RUN
ROARED THE CROWD
FRENZY WITH UNCONTROLLED EXCITEMENT

PLAYERS WHEEZING
RACING FOR HOME PLATE

HAPPY TO HAVE WON

WHERE HAVE ALL THE
PRINCES GONE

SANDY KOUFAX
MICKEY MANTLE

OLD LIKE ME

JUDITH KARISH RYCAR

At grocery store checkout, I
request senior discount
very young cashier turns to me
“You have to be 55 for that”
I smile. Haven’t seen 55 in
almost a decade
sometimes I feel
older than the hills,
older than anything around me
cell phone, computer
flat screen tv
calculator, microwave
cd, dvd
technology races forward,
I age slowly
is anything still here
from when I was born?
Direct dial phone calls, color tv
are both the same age as me
America watched Little Ricky come home
read about Holden Caulfield’s angst
first saw Dennis enrage Mr. Wilson
as my parents welcomed me home
so many ideas birthed along with me
one would change women’s destiny
a little pill to set women free
no more unwanted pregnancy
women’s movement born along with me!

LETTING GO

JUDITH KARISH RYCAR

Cleaning out Mom's house, hoarder's delight
so many memories arise from the dust
piles of possessions, photos, letters
some surprises bring delight
we relive our childhood while filling the dumpster
handing pieces of our lives to friends, neighbors, strangers
donating clothing, linens, games
selecting things to hold on to

Working together brings us closer
to each other, to Mom
as we empty the house, erase decades of use as
home to a young couple, fresh from military service
raising three children
first together, then only Mom as Dad passed on
she watched us grow and move on
finally she moved on too
leaving us to sort, discard, save
say goodbye to our childhood home,
goodbye to our Mom

SOUNDS OF SILENCE

BETTY SAMUELS

Yetta had lived with the sounds of silence ever since she had been asked to choose sides. the sounds of silence spanned three thousand miles from the urban sidewalks of Manhattna to the never ending freeways of California. a family dispute had caused the rift and two decades had come and gone with neither party willing to reconcile. How many times had she thought to pick up the phone and call, but ultimately thought it was useless and would come to nothing. Then one day the phone rang. The voice said, "Just calling to tell you your aunt died." Her initial reaction was relief. Finally, the wicked witch was dead. She felt free but as the hours passed and she began to recall the years living with her aunt; she became her heart, opened, as remorse and guilt started to fill the chambers. Now there would be no second chances as the gates were closed for forgiveness. All was lost.

It was Friday, so she decided to go and pray at the Orthodox synagogue around the corner. Throwing on any clothes, she found herself climbing the stairs to the women's section. It was a familiar sight from her youth. She used to go to these Orthodox synagogues with her grandfather as a small child. She had even attended a yeshiva after school. She had loved going and studying in that tiny room with the teacher reading in Yiddish about the little fagele. But that was so long ago. Now her visits to a synagogue were only on Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashonah.

Yetta was about to pick up the prayer book when a woman instantaneously moved closer to her sharing the prayer book with her. Downstairs near the beamer there the men were singing and chanting...almost dancing and a big flame seemed to be leaping this way and that way in the middle of the room. There was a fervor she had not experienced before. The spirit of the evening seemed to grab her as she began to cry for the aunt she would never see again. She realized then that in spite of what had transpired she had loved her aunt, and the feud had come between them. At the end of the service everyone wished each other a good Shabbos and Yetta returned home.

Although her aunt had lit the candles on Friday nights and her grandmother had, Yetta never kept the tradition. This night being Chanukah she decided to light the candles saying the prayer she remembered as a child...Boruch atah.....she continued and began talking to her aunt explaining the situation and praying that she would be heard by her, impossible as it seemed. Just then the candle unit fell from the menorah. Yetta went to pick it up and right where it had fallen was the wedding ring of her grandmother's that she had been searching for, for the last months. She thought it had been lost. Yetta could not believe her eyes and knew her ancestors including her aunt had somehow heard her prayer and was answering her. Their spirit had come full circle. Yetta felt all was forgiven!

WHO TOOK THE CAR?

KAREN SIEGEL

It was 2 AM on a windy September night. My father sat on the porch of his Little Neck home, his baseball jacket zipped. My mother stood at the curb.

“Back up,” my father yelled to her. “They’ll grab you.”

“No one wants to grab an old woman.” My mother was scared of nothing.

The number of cars stolen over 25 years from the front of my parents’ home is baffling. We’re still looking for the ’59 turquoise Chevy, with the wide winged tails, the ’66 yellow GTO, with the raised up hood, the red and white Electra 225 convertible, the shiny black Seville. But what happened to the ’83 grey Cressida is something that none of us will ever forget.

My parents drove back and forth between Florida and New York in their distinguished, a little boxy, Toyota. They arrived home early June that year. After resting for a few days they were ready to reestablish their New York residence. With keys in hand they went outside to the car. They looked up and down the street. The car was gone. Being almost immune to this unfortunate but all too frequent occurrence they called the police. We, their children chauffeured them around in the meantime. They were hoping the Cressida would return, as it had the last time it had been taken, just four years before.

Two weeks passed. Nothing. Then Tuesday at 4:30 in the morning the telephone rang. My mother answered it.

“My name is Tony. I have your car.”

“You have my car? What?”

“I wanna return it.”

“Now?”

“Yeah. Now. I have it in a garage for safekeeping. Took it from some punks pawning it off on the street.”

“I don’t have a car right now.”

“Oh yeah. I’ll get a buddy to follow me. Be there soon.”

“Wait. Um. I’ll drive you back. Do you know where I live?”

“Sure. It’s on the registration in the glove box.”

“Oh. Um. Ok. Come.”

My mother hung up and called the police. She woke my father. They quickly dressed.

Two patrol cars arrived within minutes. My parents conferred with the four officers who strategically positioned themselves around two corners. My mother at the curb, my father on the porch, watched for their ’83 Toyota, Cressida.

At 5:30 AM the grey car turned left onto the street. My mother waved her hands high over her head. Officers on foot and officers in the patrol cars surrounded the “83 Cressida, guns pointed at the pristine vehicle. Two boys, no older than 19, one white, one black got out with their hands gripping the back of their heads. They were thrown against the car, padded down, handcuffed.

“We just doing a good thing,” one boy spoke.

“Do you want to press charges?” An officer asked my parents.

“I don’t know. What do you think?” My mother asked the officer.

“It’s up to you. After all it’s your car. Your crime.”

“Use your best judgment,” my mother told the officers.

A flatbed truck arrived to escort the Cressida to the station.

My father offered his keys. The officer refused. “These boys have all the keys we need.”

My parents went back into the house. My father fell immediately to sleep; my mother sat in the kitchen. When my father got up later that morning, he asked, “Did I have a strange dream last night?”

“No. Unfortunately not,” my mother replied.

“Do we move?”

“Maybe we should go back to Florida.”

“Do you think they’re the ones who took the car?”

“Why would I know that?”

My mother called me at 7:20 AM to tell me their story. She was going to wait by the phone all day for the DA’s office to call her. Later that afternoon, my mother called me to say the Cressida was back at home with empty beer cans all over the back seat.

As for the boys, they were fingerprinted and let go. My parents didn’t press charges their reasoning was they didn’t actually see these boys take their car. They wanted to reward the boys for returning the car. It was too late. The boys were released.

My cousin, a cop, said, these boys were dumb criminals. If they were smart, when they called they should have said they were detectives who found the car.

It gives you something to think about.

My parents were lucky.

What did these boys really want? We will never know.

DON'T

GRETA SINGER

People, especially parents, love to tell kids what they shouldn't do. Don't start smoking; don't have casual or unprotected sex; don't drink too much even when you are of age. But what I remember as a young person growing up in Brooklyn are more personal "don'ts," more specific, even more lasting.

Some of the don'ts my mother tried to impress upon me when I was a kid were related to health. Or to her opinions, however dubious, of what was healthy. Brooklyn in summer is hot and humid. None of us had air-conditioning of course. My mother believed, in the 40's and 50's, that a fan blowing on you when you were asleep would cause disease. Never mind that you were sweating, tossing, turning and miserable all night without one. When I left home at 18, the first thing I bought with my own money was a large window fan, planning to run it on high every summer night.

Another thing that we were warned against was buying a hot dog from a Sabrett cart on a street corner in Manhattan. The carts were everywhere and the smells coming from them were delicious. In movies, and in real life, people in New York were always buying and savoring these treats. The vendor had pots of onions, relish, pickles, sauerkraut as well as mustard and ketchup to add to the hot dogs. The people eating them were always smiling and really enjoying their food. For years, I craved one of these franks. When I finally had some money and bought one, I wasn't disappointed. It was wonderful and soooo unhealthy.

Another menace to my health was a public swimming pool in Brooklyn. This was the age of the polio epidemics and parents were terribly worried. It was hot and humid, as I have said, but we weren't allowed to go to the pool. No science ever proved that swimming was the cause of polio, but parents were convinced and that was all that mattered. When we finally were able to get polio shots, parents were able to calm down somewhat. And it certainly helped that Jonas Salk was Jewish.

A big don't in my life, having nothing to do with my health, was talking to strangers about my parents' political views. I guess this had to do with my mother's mental health. She was constantly fearful that people would find out that my father and she were leftists and ostracize us. My father was an armchair communist, a debater, an arguer, a signer of petitions. He was intellectual and my mother went along with his ideas. I did a lot of listening and learning; he never tried to indoctrinate me. Certainly, he never tried to indoctrinate his students of mathematics where he was a high school teacher. When he was fired during the McCarthy period from his job in the New York City schools, my mother was terrified of the consequences. Having no job was bad enough, but she pictured us all being dragged to jail and worse. My sister and I were given many don'ts; don't talk about Daddy; don't mention newspapers we read; don't discuss politics with anyone, etc. etc.

What a relief to grow up and be able to be the progressive thinker I wanted to be, to share my opinions and beliefs and not be afraid any more. And, of course, in my adult years, to be very proud of my father for his ideas of equality, decency, intellectualism, fairness...the best parts of democracy. And I found out, also, that my father loved those Sabrett hot dogs off the carts.

THE CREATION OF A POET

CASSANDRA SMITH

My turbulent childhood
molded me into a poet.

Black shadows hiding
beneath gray clouds
of confusion.

Sculpturing, steaming,
forming words
throwing them on paper

Living now
Putting my past behind
unless pulling up,
or helping others

Avoiding pitfalls, pot holes,
poisoning emotions
I'm writing, dreaming,
living, loving, hoping,
pulling good out of chaos

Caressing paper
raising me higher
above turbulence

Someone said,
"The best thing about
childhood is that it is over."

I don't agree.

Living my childhood
molded me into a poet

Using words as tools
painting positive pictures
on naked canvases

Coloring life – soft
white clouds mingling
among celestial beings
Soft, soft, blue...

HERE IT IS

E. MILDRED SPEISER

THAT

hidden treasure
buried in brush
teased
strings and strands
unseen
for years

THEN

clipped and bared
hear at last
the EARS!

TINNITIS

E. MILDRED SPEISER

My head hums a persistent hiss
ears turn inward
outward an abyss....

Hidden
world of words and sound
Beethoven duos resound
profound silence crescendos
without entry within

never ending notes surge
reverberate
pound

My head hums a continuous hiss
undisturbed stillness
remembered

NEW YEAR'S EVE AT VIRGINIA BEACH

ANGELINA SPERO

Proper suited gentlemen
draped in ribbons of paper streamers
women in black sequined sheaths
adorned in glitzy cardboard hats
crown on to the dance floor.

Balloons floating past
horns honking
noisemakers squeaking
rattles clattering
glasses clinking

Communal kisses
in the Grand Ballroom
of the Sheraton
at midnight.

I find myself wandering
walking out the doorway
seek solace
on the beach below.

From the distant sea
slow drift of waves
flows on to the beach
in timeless succession.

The sand feels soft
beneath my feet
its silence soothes me
shares my loneliness
tonight.

THE WINEMAKER

ANGELINA SPERO

From summer spent
playing cards with the paisans
tossing the pallino
at the bocci court,
came his time in autumn
to carry the crates, laden
with clusters of grapes
to lower them into the vat
pressing, squeezing
until they lay limp
their juices fermenting
until he tested, tasted
to tell me
“Drink the wine
mia piccina★
it makes you strong”
wine with pasta
wine with pizza
every day...wine

On day trips to vinters
testing, tasting
I search for Poppa’s wine
not there, not anywhere.

★mia piccina – my little girl.

SILENT FRIEND

BY FLORENCE STRAUSS

She's gone now; not dead, but alive either.
Almost unrecognizable to me, she stares blankly into space,
Sitting in the back seat of the car parked in the driveway,
On this steamy, August afternoon.
She's wearing a long sleeved, black velvet robe
And fuzzy pink slippers ---
So inappropriately dressed for this hot summer day.
Her grandson has brought her to see me.
He is her caretaker now, as she once was his.
They had been to visit family in Massachusetts
And are on their way home to North Carolina
"She keeps calling your name, he says
So I thought we'd make a stop in Brooklyn."
He doesn't attempt to let her out of the car.
"She might get violent in a new situation," he says,
She who was always so gentle and peace loving and devoted to God.
"How is that possible?" I ask myself, but I don't say it out loud.
Did she know who I was when I kissed her on the cheek
And squeezed her leathery hand?
"It's me Ora, Flo Gently," I said.
I can't be sure, but I'd like to think she did.
I held a cup of cool water to her lips
And she drank --- but said nothing.
Cheeks sunken in, mouth without teeth,
Does she have any accurate memory left?
She thinks her grandson is her dead husband.
She, who had been so bright, so alive,
So full of goodness and grace and speech.
She was my rock in my many hours of need.
"Hang, Flo Gently, if only by a fingernail.
Deliverance will surely come," she would tell me.
Now she says nothing.
I stand there holding her limp hand,
Until my son appears at the car door.
"My Ricky," she says softly,
Recognition lighting her face.
But it quickly fades and she returns to silence.
My dear friend is gone, and I am more than sad.

CLIMBING UP

SYLVANA SWINBURNE

Living life with uncertain steps
A life that slowly goes by
I climb the hill
that will take me
to the extreme end.
I fall
I get up
and drying
the blood
that runs
from my open wounds
slowly
I keep
climbing.

REMINISCING

DOTTI ANITA TAYLOR

Such anticipation
knowing the fun we will have
having freedom to roam
on that massive boat
massive to my young eyes

Anticipation accelerated
seeing preparation of
my favorite picnic dishes

Family of four to meet
family of four
year after year
laying on blankets
eating at picnic tables
swimming in aqua waters
chlorinated to the nth degree
children playing children's games
adults playing adult's games
Catching the last boat at sunset
filled with a multitude of memories
created on Bear Mountain

Arriving home
turning in early
reminiscing about
the day's exciting adventure
just before sleep comes my way

AN UNUSUAL SUNSET

GLORIA TAYLOR

Driving on the north main highways in Jamaica during rush hour is a test of grit and therefore something to be avoided if at all possible. Driving through areas of Kingston with its dual two lane roads, traffic back-up is common during mid-day much more so at peak hour. I had deliberately timed my return home from a visit to my Aunt Jane in the city of Kingston to miss the rush hour traffic.

I was whizzing along, making good time, when suddenly coming around a bend about five miles from the main highway I found myself caught in a hideous back-up. "Well! Well! What now?" I muttered. "I cannot entertain a delay this evening. Driving alone in the dark around treacherously deep corners was too terrifying for me." I tried to inch my way around a deep bend going west for a good distance. I soon realize the reason for the delay. Before me, was a long line of cars that had almost come to a snail's pace so that their drivers could view a most magnificent sunset. I joined the drivers who had moved their cars over to the left shoulder to stop and view the wonder that mystified them.

Like the other drivers I was mesmerized by the unusual colorful lights that filled the western sky in red, gold and pink from the setting sun. Each color gave the appearance as if it folded into one another. The brilliance seemed to give a glow that descended over the landscape from the horizon toward the valley below. Even after a considerable time of viewing this rare beauty, drivers remained stationary as though not caring to proceed. Anxious drivers, who were satisfied, began to honk their horns demanding some movement. The cars started moving very slowly and cautiously letting in a stray car at regular interval before speeding off at regular pace.

The scene lasted for a while then lessened in brilliance as the sun descended and the gray of dusk began to appear. I was caught up in the glory of a celestial light show quite forgetting that there was a time constraint in reaching home to avoid getting lost in the dark.

AGING WITH BENEFITS

PAULA THESING

I see myself as a couch potato. I don't exercise enough. My favorite activity in the daytime is reading and in the evening I watch TV.

But it seems as though everything I read in the newspaper or hear on the TV screams Exercise! Exercise! Exercise!

I am plagued with guilt.

So you can imagine my glee when Jane Brody, in her NY Times column, quoted a Dr. Jungwha Lee, "You don't need a gym membership to promote good health. Build movement into your daily routine. Don't park right next to the store. If your job involves prolonged sitting, set an alarm and stand up every twenty minutes. Use a remote printer. Take a lap around the floor after using the restroom. Go for a walk during lunch." ★

Hey! I'm not doing so badly after all. I am sure I am more fit than I was five years ago and I have been losing a little weight lately too.

After reading that article I figured out why. It's memory loss.

Yes, memory loss has accelerated the amount of walking I do each and every day.

Think about my typical day. I walk around my apartment at least five times a day in search of my glasses. Then there is the time I put in going from closet to closet trying to remember where I hung my coat. I have to look for keys, gloves, and scarves not just in the closet but anywhere I might have deposited them when I used them last.

The timer I set to remind me something is on the stove repeatedly summons me to the kitchen.

And since I can't remember recipes, I keep resetting the timer over and over. I must get up from the couch at least 15 times to check on a casserole baking.

My appliances are aging too and don't work as well as they used to. Take my oven. I can't trust the temperature gauge anymore and because I can't see well enough to recalibrate it, I get more exercise getting up and down to check the temperature while I am baking.

When my TV remote broke, did I fix it? Of course not. I kept forgetting to get it repaired so I have to get up off my couch to change stations. See what I mean?

The old cold water tap in one bathroom is so hard to turn I use two bathrooms every day. One for hot water activities like washing my hands the other for drinking water and brushing my teeth. Coupled with the fact that I don't remember where I left my toothbrush, soap or towel, I get a lot of exercise roaming from bathroom to bathroom to locate things.

Then there is searching for pens and pencils. That takes miles of steps.

I am in shape before I ever get to the door to go out.

And all I had to do was grow old and lose my memory.

REFLECTIONS

in poetry and prose

I think I'll get a pedometer to scientifically track how many steps I take each day so

I can write a book and go on the "Dr. Oz" show to tout my new exercise routine: "You Can Get All the Exercise You Need Through Age Related Memory Loss." I would make millions.

There are so many advantages to aging; I don't know why I didn't age sooner.

*Jane Brody, "Keep Moving to Stay Ahead of Arthritis," New York Times, April 27, 2015.

PHANTOM ESSAYS

PAULA THESING

A friend of mine, a recently retired professor of English Literature, has been writing what he calls phantom essays. They are more or less the type of essay you would find in scholarly journals.

He has published his share of books and articles on Victorian poets. I found the books at the NYPL.

He has chosen not to publish anymore. He sends his essays to friends and colleagues who have expressed interest in receiving them. This saves him the fuss and bother of going through the publishing process.

His reasoning is that few people would read or remember them anyway.

In one essay he talks about mandalas, the enormous intricately and beautiful, sand paintings Tibetan monks painstakingly create and then destroy upon completion. The monks believe that nothing is permanent. Each creation is a step to a higher state. They believe that the real beauty is in the act of creating the art rather than preserving it.

Beauty is ephemeral. We appreciate art in the moment.

It is the process of production that is important. The creating not the creation that is the central issue. Think of the poem "Ithaca" advising us to enjoy the voyage not the destination.

The act of writing is a journey. It leads you to places you might not have otherwise explored. To write is to come alive with an idea, an inspiration that you try to express in words. You transcend the ordinary. You are taken out of yourself. You become a writer.

Someone once said that a writer is a person who writes.

There is real purpose in the professor's phantom essay. It's the act of writing itself that matters to him.

I do appreciate the monks' courage in destroying their art. But I think I will keep mine.

DON'T GIVE UP

HOPETON THOMAS

Obstacles in your way, failures, difficulties and setbacks
seem to arise day after day?
Don't give up, even when you want to give out or give in
Take a long lingering look at why you should go on
for yours might just be a battle that you can ultimately win
To paraphrase a true maxim, the heights of great men reached and kept
were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while friends and so many others gave up, kept on trying
to reach their goal with all their might

Review my list carefully, thoughtfully, look it over,
check it all out
If you're ever racked by disappointment, discouragement,
despair – any kind of doubt
If you've striven and held out for opportunities
but come back with an empty cup
Don't abandon your quest to fulfill your potential,
stick doggedly to it and don't simply give up

Walt Disney was once fired by a newspaper editor because
“they said he lacked imagination and had no good ideas
and on several occasions his life was bankruptive
Thomas Edison's teachers deemed him “too stupid to learn anything”
and he was given the royal boot from his first two jobs for
being “nonproductive”

Albert Einstein did not speak until he was four years old,
did not read until he was seven
He was thought of as “unsociable and adrift forever in foolish dreams”,
head in the heavens
One of his teachers described him as “mentally slow” perhaps even a fool
His parents thought him “subnormal,” and with such negative determinations
he was subsequently expelled from school

Each and every cartoon that Charles Schulz submitted to his high school
yearbook staff was rejected,
But he kept on drawing and persisted in his efforts
despite feeling dejected
from being turned down with ridicule and derision
attended by no ifs, ands or buts
Now check out his history, and fortune on any Forbes' list
as creator of the comic strip ‘Peanuts’

Following Fred Astaire's first screen test the MGM testing director
wrote, "Can't act. Can't sing. Slightly bald. Can dance a bit"
His became and remains the standard for elegant movie song and dance
So much for the prediction he could never be a hit

A young singer disrespectfully kicked out of an office for wasting
the executive's time, later became one of the most prolific
and timeless of hit makers known to countless millions as Elton John
Decca Records declined a recording contract with the Beatles declaring
"We don't like their sound. Guitar groups are on their way out"
Of course we now know their outcome, how their struggle was won.
They didn't allow a gloomy state to overtake, to overpower
Their desire to succeed
Discipline and determination, patience and persistence paid off for each
They followed a resolute creed

It's paramount you keep this uppermost in your mind
as through life you wayward wing
'You will have to surmount some mountains before you amount to something.'
It can be shown that many of life's failures are of subsequently of those
Who didn't realize when they gave up that success was just so close
I speak from my own sacrificial experiences, and not from mere theory
So I hope you appreciate and act on the advice I share, born of others
and of my own history
Don't early say uncle. Don't give up or despondently give out or give in
Tenacity, perseverance and endurance are all marks, qualities of champions
the ones who ultimately win.

IN THE MIRROR

ADRIANNE TOOMER

I looked
in the mirror
the other day,
An act
quite ordinary

I saw
in the mirror
the other day,
Something
extraordinary

I smiled
in the mirror
at the face of another
Gazing back at me smiling
Beamed the face of my mother

She was
in the mirror
I felt like I was she
Expressed just as she was
Gaze and lines I used to see

I am
in the mirror
Twin to her reflection
Thankful I now feel her there
A sort of resurrection

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 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

26.2 DECISIONS MADE

WENDY TRONTZ

Asked by a friend if I wanted to run a one mile foot race.
Never was a fast runner.
Have to make a decision.
If you can do it, I can do it.
Decision made.
Run my first race.
Got a commemorative T-shirt.
The Running Bug Bit.
Ran three mile races, no problem.
Races I enter get longer and longer.
Run a half-marathon.
Running friend asks me if I want to run the New York City Marathon.
Always thought people who run 26.2 miles were crazy.
Decide to become one of the crazies.
The training begins.
Increase my long runs by a mile a week.
Ten mile runs in the ninety degree summer heat.
Eighteen mile run a few weeks before race day.
Ask my mother if she wants to come to the race and see me finish.
She is "very encouraging."
She says, "With your asthma you must be crazy to do this.
Do you want me there so I can bring you home in a pine box?"
I guess her answer is no.
Marathon day arrives.
Some running friends and I get dropped off at the race staging area at Fort Totten.
There I meet twenty-four thousand other crazies.
The race starts.
Running across the Verrazano Bridge I trip over some clothes discarded by a runner.
Go down hard on my right knee.
Good Samaritan arms pick me up.
Knee hurts.
Should I continue on?
I got here, I am not giving up so easily.
I keep running.
My running friends and I get separated.
I am now running alone among twenty-four thousand runners.
Miles into the run a man runs next to me.
He would like to know if he could run with me.
I say, yes.
He tells me he is an ophthalmologist from Argentina.

We run together for miles.
I begin to slow down,
He says goodbye and he will look for me at the finish.
I am alone again.
At a water stop I am offered Gatorade.
I drink it.
Bad decision, it makes me feel sick.
Stop at the aide station at mile thirteen.
Aide station volunteer tells me,
“Stop running, wait for the bus that will be coming along for injured runners.”
Have to make a decision.
I am halfway through the race.
Make the crazy decision to run on.
Aide station volunteer gives me a box of saltines for the nausea.
What must the other runners think of me jogging along eating saltines?
Somehow I make it to mile eighteen, “The Wall.”
The “Wall” means, my body is telling me,
“You got to be kidding you don’t really expect me to finish this thing.”
Decide not to listen to my body and continue on.
Taking a moment to rest,
I lean against the side of the Willis Ave. Bridge and stretch.
A woman jogs up to me.
She tells me she doesn’t think she can make it to the end of the race.
She shows me a rosary she is carrying and says,
“I have been praying for help so I can finish.”
I tell her she can run with me and together we can help each other to finish.
We run together for miles, encouraging each other all along the way.
The finish line is finally in sight.
Can’t believe this is almost over.

Tell my new running friend to go through the finish ahead of me.
Watch her go over the finish line.
I know in some way I have been part of the answer to her prayers.
As I crossover the finish line the announcer calls out my name.
A finisher’s medal is placed around my neck.
I have just run 26.2 miles.
Then why am I standing here crying?

scenting sounds

ANDREW VELEZ

listen...do you hear
melodious sounds flowing
rising high without fear
expressing songs that are glowing

making images of mystic clouds
moving mountains to and fro
rhythmic tunes beat aloud
bring back memories long long ago

lost thoughts in the grave
raising flowers through concrete paved
declaring tones that must be saved
by lost composers that were brave

oh!...music that I see
what has become of me
hearing colors of many voices
why are there so many choices

spraying waves of rainbow vibes
smelling music in the sky
reaching out in every size
radiant roses and some chives

hear "The Sound of Music" in all the B's
Bach...Beethoven...Brahms and BB's
thrashing their way amongst the lilies hue
arise to claim the air they knew

songs of love...songs of sadness
songs emerged in outright madness
songs of rage...songs of calm
songs to suit everyone's charm

what is it that music has
that created in us a little jazz
the beat and silence that rests on us
infusing sounds without fuss

autumn retold

ANDREW VELEZ

many faces on the vine
express vibrant prisms
sought after colorful charades
breathing familiar air

there is no difference between what happens
in the air on the ground in the sea
everywhere patches arise in bloody colors
minds wrinkled with violent paths

changing with earth's revolution
clockwork sun-beams chant
the coming of another season
brilliantly expressing their arrival

clashing colors...the bugles sound
mixed...brave
bitter sweet canyon graves
bewildered...stare silently into

red yellow and orange
rise up ejected from
green veins red veins broken limbs
ready to submit their turbulent beauty

dying whispers of life-things
transforming into earthly needs
desperate burials segue
the daylight crimsons into
forgotten lessons and countless beings

a tree a branch a leaf
a human an animal the unseen
surrender their melodious gifts
like the color wars of intellect
surrender their lives for

new beginnings that never fail
in life in death and in-between

MINDFUL

MARILYN T. WALKER

I went to school the other day
I had to leave I couldn't stay
Attendees sat an hour or more
Before we bounded out the door
We had decided not to remain
Nor would we take the class again
We'd hoped to learn 'bout memory loss
But, alas, the instructor forgot the course
I do not mean to seem unkind
But the seminar had slipped her mind
Never again this course I'd choose
The mind is a terrible thing to lose!

AS VOWED

MARILYN T. WALKER

His sweet young wife too soon gone
He had found it hard to move on
They were happy as man and wife
It was time to reclaim his life
He believed it was what she would want
Not a legacy of death left to haunt
So he entered God's garden that day
To tell her he was moving away
In Danny Boy fashion he knelt down
And kissed the stone in the ground
Laid a bouquet of love-filled red roses
On the bed where his true love reposes
Then there at the site of her grave
Bowed his head and said an ave
When he had finished his silent prayer
He dried his unfallen tear
Closed his eyes and remembered her face
Then rose to leave her resting place
His remorse did not totally cease
But the visit had brought newfound peace
He felt something more than pain and sorrow
His thoughts turned to a happier tomorrow
What lay ahead time would tell
But now was the time for farewell
For any wrongs he begged her pardon
Then prepared to leave the garden
He had faithfully lived up to his vow
He whispered "goodbye love...for now"

GOODBYE KITTIE

ANNA WIELAND

The days grow long, just waiting for the time to arrive, the time to depart. I am no longer able to respond by jumping up from wherever I am and run upstairs to my mistress, when my name 'Kittie' is called. *The energy that I once had is slowly dissipating, I have no appetite, Friskies and 9 Lives no longer attract me, these, instead repulse me. I barely drink water and just feel like lying around...right underneath the porch that sheltered me from the rain, the wind and the cold for so many years when I was allowed the luxury that other cats don't have, that of being able to walk out, go for a walk and then return home. But those times are gone, for now I can barely lift my head up and look at my mistress' sad eyes. Tranquility overcomes me, the squirrels do come, parading by and I hear the chirping of the birds, but I do not chase them anymore...I just sit and wait...*

I remember when I was just a few weeks old, separated from my Mom, I was brought to a pet shop and was left there at the mercy of the pet shop owner and his customers. Fortunately I was a cute and friendly kitty whose days in the infernal shop were limited. I was not only petted regularly, but all the little ones who wanted to take me home with them. But I did not go to a home with a child; I suppose that I looked not like a fluffy stuffed animal-a play, thing, but much like a ferret and my fur was grey, instead of yellow or white or with colorful specs all over. Instead I was taken to my new home by nervous young woman who was more like a child, but just as affectionate, caring and loving. There in her apartment I lived with her and her muscular, unfriendly husband, for only a short time. Their relationship was not going well and I felt scared, when they got loud and confrontational with each other. I was still a baby getting acquainted with my surroundings, then, it was time to relocate. They did split- up and I was carried away to a new location, with people I vaguely recognized for I had seen them, when they visited. It was here where I finally grew from childhood, through adolescence, to adulthood, transforming myself into a beautiful, loving, confident, healthy Grey cat. The new home was, peaceful, more spacious, and after a while I was allowed out to explore the landscape, smell the flowers, watch the birds also becoming acquainted with the other unfamiliar critters. What a lovely life! Memories!

My new family consisted of an older couple, who probably had little choice in keeping me, but I made it up to them with my affection and gratitude. I still remember that the evenings were the most wonderful time for me; this was when I was called to sit at my new father's lap where I purred as I was being petted until I would slumber off into dreamland. I also became this old man's lap dog, keeping his company while he worked inside his house and out in the garden. His wife would feed me, talk to me, but would soon disappear, supposedly to a job away from home...but I did not mind as I always kept myself entertained. I would see my former mistress from time to time, but she was rough in handling me and I would try to hide from her whenever I could.

That was more than a decade ago. Many things changed, I no longer wanted to return to my former mistress and my affection was now directed towards the older couple that had temporarily rescued me. My mistress separated for good and was finally divorced, living now in some distant borough. I remained with the older couple, but there I noticed changes too. For some odd reason, I was no longer going to my masters' lap, for he was not there. I could not see him anywhere, no matter how hard I searched for him; perhaps I was told that he had departed to eternity and had not really abandoned me, but, I guess I did not understand those concepts, so I continued living my existence the best I could, without his loving strokes. The old lady was still around, now began spending more time around the house, as she retired from her loving job. We had an amicable relationship, I would wrap my fur/body around her legs, she then would bend down to pet me, feed me and allowed

me to drink from the kitchen faucet, for I preferred fresh water; finally making eye contact, she would open the door and let me out for my siesta and fresh air....

The years have drifted by, slowly. I recently overheard that the old lady, who lives alone with me, may be relocating to a far- away distant place. I myself don't feel that energetic anymore, I supposed that old age is catching up with me too. Visits to the unfriendly Vet point out to decreased or diminishing functioning, internal organs not functioning to capacity with recommendations for new dietary requirements...and fresh air restrictions...

Now, quietly I sit and wait...not for the old woman to abandon me or leave me, for she is not capable of doing that, but for me to finally succumb to the eternal slumber that I would never wake up from. While I wait my memories are rather vivid and I rejoice the lovely and exiting existence I once had. I hear her voice 'Kitty Come', but I cannot respond, for I am too weak, must leave her all alone, then depart from our familiar landscape, thus, escaping into the land of dreams for an eternity.

I REMEMBER ROSE

SARAH WILLIAMS-HARRIGAN

I remember Rose
With her gravelly voice and curly white hair
With a smile and a kind word for everyone
Whether in the writing class or the watercolor class
Rose's quiet strength was always apparent.

The last time I saw her she was sitting alone painting a bird
"I want to finish this," she said when we all began the next project.
I can still hear her laugh and see the light in her eyes as we raved about her work.
The day before she shared a story she had written about her late husband.
Although she was reading it to us,
It was a poignant hand-written love letter to him
It sounded as if she were telling him that she looked forward to seeing him again one day
We didn't know it would be a matter of days.

Though I knew her just from the classes we attended together, I will miss her.
I feel blessed to have met her, to have shared her stories, to have seen her smile,
To have called her Rosie.
What's in a name? Our beloved Rose by any other name would be just as sweet,
Just as beautiful
And just as memorable.

For Rose Gootzeit



RTC



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