



# *Reflections*

*in poetry and prose*

2017



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 24th anniversary as part of a Retired Teachers Chapter tradition reflecting the continuing interests and vitality of our retirees. The union takes great pride in the work of our retirees and expects this tradition to continue for years to come.

Congratulations!



Michael Mulgrew  
PRESIDENT, UFT



# REFLECTIONS

## *in poetry and prose*

Welcome to the 24th 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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## SHELTERS

BY MARTHA ANDUJAR

I went to a shelter once,  
A social worker talked me into it.  
She said it would be better for me  
Instead of sleeping outdoors.  
“After all,” she said,  
“You are a lady.”

The moment I entered  
The shelter’s gray walls,  
Loud noise and too many people  
Caused banging in my head.

I was given a cot  
in the middle of the room  
Blocked on all sides  
By other women on cots.  
Some talking to others  
Some talking to themselves  
Some sleeping  
While others fought.

I held tight to my possessions  
All that night.  
I sat frozen on the cot  
Afraid to sleep.

So I’m not staying there tonight or any night,  
I’d rather sleep on the street.  
I used to be scared of the streets  
But now I am frightened of shelters.

I used to be timid,  
Spoke low, almost a whisper.  
No more.  
Now I ask people for food and money.  
Every day you can find me at the usual places,  
34th Street and 7th Avenue  
The subway at Times Square  
Central Park, summer and spring.

Sometimes I see a familiar face  
But the name doesn’t come to mind.  
I turn away quickly.  
One day, a woman came over to me  
Hesitant, her eyes took me in.  
As I readied myself to leave,  
She said, “Don’t go.”  
I wouldn’t look at her, but I said  
“Got to go now.” She moved closer,  
So close that she almost touched me.  
I knew I had to hurry.  
“Is your name Susan Green?”  
Shaking my head, I walked away fast.  
She called out loudly, “It’s me, Jenny, don’t go.”

In that moment, I could see her long ago,  
The two of us standing in front of a building  
Eating ice cream, our book bags on the stoop.  
I stopped for a moment, looked back at her.  
“I won’t run after you, Sue,” she said.  
I turned and walked away fast.

One thing I know for sure,  
No one is going to make me stay in a shelter.  
Not even Jenny.

## ELEPHANTS AT THE WATERHOLE

BY ELINOR BAUMBACH

The waterhole crowds at night  
With shapes and snouts and tails  
Footfalls, quick and quiet,  
Dark shapes, massive  
A living, moving wall  
Of power.  
Among the legs, the babies hide  
Always touching  
Mothers, grandmas, aunts  
All alert, touching, herding, touching  
Our skins vibrate to that soft touch.  
A baby sidles from protection  
Off to a far corner  
Where hyenas lurk,  
Then explosion of love,  
Of care, erupts  
As a mountain figure  
Guards and spans  
That smallest shadow  
  
And herds the child to safety.  
Lesson learned,  
So many babes to be herded today  
As families diffuse,  
And hyenas darkly crouch.

## CONFLICTED

By VIVIAN BERGENTHAL

I realize I still have a problem  
    with unrelenting rainstorms.  
sometimes heavy downpours  
    which reverberate atop my roof  
    actually brings calm  
and other times they cause distress.  
    a summer in Scotland  
was supposed to have cured any leftover  
    discomfort  
associated with the heavens opening up.  
    why then the depressed response  
    to the monsoon-like weather  
    which had gripped  
the northeast coast of that idyllic land  
    I remember dressing in layers  
    rain jacket and hood  
  
    while the scent of moist flowers  
    heather, mostly  
    filled the air  
  
I remember raindrops slithering down my face  
    the coolness of the space  
    within which  
    we traveled.  
    who could ever forget  
trying to paint a scene  
in such inclement weather  
    not long after we had settled  
onto our foldable chairs  
pulled out paints and paper  
    we scooted down the path  
to seek shelter from more rain  
a cup of coffee, a quick glass of water  
    prepared us  
    to persevere  
    whatever the odds.  
    for completion of our paintings  
or a reasonable facsimile thereof  
    we departed  
    while raindrops continued to assail us  
    we tried to shelter our paintings

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knowing full well that paints and raindrops  
were busily cohabiting  
resigned, we acknowledged that day.

## A LIFE-CHANGING EVENT

BY BARBARA MCGILICUDDY BOLTON

One evening at a band concert in my home town I was speaking with a former high school classmate when a florid man with a trim white beard spoke my name. He had to tell me his before an old image swam back: skinny, pale faced, graham cracker-colored crew cut, quiet, a classmate since fourth grade--Earl.

When Earl was in fifth grade his father and another man drowned in the river that every spring flooded the garden behind my house. The two men had started under the first bridge in town and capsized under the second and last, the one by my garden. My younger brother watched their canoe revolve and the men spill out. The rescuers operated out of our driveway. They found the other man's body, and his funeral was performed before the recovery of Earl's father's body, which the cold water had preserved so well that there was an open casket.

There's a park and public landing now where my house and garden stood. On the other side of the river, there's a park underneath the first bridge and a path built with grant money from there to under the second bridge. Before the concert Earl had walked that stretch, a father himself now of a grown son and daughter and two sons who died in their twenties—he didn't say of what.

He looked good, filled out—his wife's a good cook he said—easy talking, a bit of a twang from living forty-eight years in Texas, back in Maine to see his mother. And, I surmised, to walk alongside the final journey his father took when Earl was ten.



## A SELF-CONTAINED SCENE FROM THE SHORT STORY

### “THE COALMINER’S DAUGHTER”

BY FRANCIS X. BOLTON

The spring after arriving in North Carolina, Mary Szwarc saw an end to the far-from good-natured teasing she had been enduring for months, mostly from the chubby boy named Jimmy who sat behind her in Mrs. Roan’s classroom. Jimmy’s teasing was usually some variation on the mispronunciation of Mary’s name: “Si-zi-wark is just so smart” was one that Mary was particularly disdainful of because she thought Jimmy intended it to be a rhyme.

The teasing ended on May 7th, the Monday after the running of the 66th Kentucky Derby. *The Charlotte Observer* had run a story about Gallahadion which had won the horse race the previous weekend. The champion became the source of Jimmy’s taunt during recess that Monday.

Mary was very smart but not what one would call a pretty girl, particularly not by standards below the Mason-Dixon line. Like many fourth grade girls who were tall for their age, she was a bit gawky. Her head with its jet black hair was large; one might say she would grow into it. Her face was long, her jaw almost masculine and her nose slightly larger than a girl might wish.

Picking up on the photo of the Derby winner that Jimmy saw in the paper, he found Mary in a quiet corner of the playground and said “Si-zi-warc has a face like Gallahadion.” When he explained what Gallahadion was, Mary shoved him. She hit him in the nose, which gushed blood. His cousin Darlene, a third grader who seemed to enjoy watching Jimmy torment Mary, ran to a teacher. The boy was hustled into the school building, his cousin following behind, while Mary was escorted to the principal’s office.

Mary sat on a chair outside the office until Jimmy arrived, his nose packed with cotton, accompanied by his cousin Darlene, an agitated witness. The three children were paraded into Mr. Delacort’s office where Darlene was voluble about what she had witnessed. She was then told to return to her classroom.

“Does what Darlene said describe what happened in the schoolyard?” Mr. Delacort asked Jimmy.

“No sir,” he said. “What happened was an accident. Mary lost her balance while we were playing and she fell into me.” And that became the public story of the event.

By lunchtime, Darlene was held in disregard by some of the school children because they thought she was both a snitch and a liar. To the other children’s surprise, Mary and Jimmy huddled in the corner where the accident happened that morning. Both were grateful, Mary because she didn’t get into trouble and Jimmy because he didn’t lose face. He didn’t want to be known as the boy who got a bloody nose from a girl, even if the girl was 4 inches taller than him.

Mary was surprised to find a friend in Jimmy. Years later, when she was teaching, she realized that teasing was one of the awkward ways in which young boys sometimes relate to young girls. By then, she and Jimmy had been friends for years, their rare point of disagreement being how one achieved salvation. Jimmy was an ardent Baptist and Mary one of the very few Catholics in the town of Matthews.

HAVANA 2016

BY MARIANNE BONGOLAN

Up on the hill in the lush estate of the Lookout Farm,  
or Finca Vigia as the locals call it,  
above the humble fishing village of Cojimar  
this lavish home stands like a crown.

Under the shade of giant palms and tulip trees  
sounds of twirling jazz fill the air.

The typewriter of *The Old Man and the Sea* is still on the ledge,  
as if waiting for him to hit the keys.  
His thousand books and half-filled bottles  
of gin, bourbon and rum are guarded from above  
by watchful eyes of trophy animal heads mounted high on the walls.  
He may just have gone to catch another monster fish  
or get a daiquiri in his usual fishing spot below?

At the bottom of the majestic marble steps  
a shiny old Chevy still waits for Papa.  
A visitor hits the giant bell above the porch  
hoping to awaken the spirit of the owner  
*For Whom the Bell Tolls.*

## THE GUY

BY MARIANNE BONGOLAN

I always wanted to have a boyfriend or husband who would be ready to be at hand for small chores. Someone who could patch up a little crack on the wall or does not hesitate to give another coat to the fading and moldy bathroom wall. Someone who can hang a picture with certainty. Someone who is willing to give a try to the window stuck in its frame.

I did not expect for someone to replace a professional plumber or electrician or a contractor. However, I watched with envy as one of our friends showed us the wooden porch he created in his backyard with his own hands, equipped with swings and slides for his children. Another one bragged about the new shelves and cabinets he hung in his spare time. Not to mention, putting together a complex IKEA piece of furniture...!

I had no such luck. My first husband was a writer and poet with his head way up in the clouds, who took a pencil when a screwdriver was needed.

My husband, Tom, a retired psychologist and perfectionist, has such an understanding of the nature of physics that no tool is good enough. Therefore, everything takes forever.

“Honey, can you give me a hand to hang up this painting?” I ask.

Tom replies: “I have to see what kind of wall it is. And find out where the stud is...”

*What is that? Who cares about the stud,* I think with the hammer and a nail in hand, but Tom is not willing to compromise.

Once we find out about the nature of the wall and measure the distance from the stud, Tom has to research in the *Builders’ Bible* for the kind of nail appropriate to that kind of wall. Of course, we don’t have the perfect copper nails in the contents of the dozen jars where I keep the discards. So, we have to look on the internet and order the suitable ones for the job.

A couple of weeks later, nail and hammer in hand, Tom then does the work with impeccable precision, but only if I play the apprentice of holding the flashlight, the measuring tape, magnifying glass and various tools to hand him on cue. It took us only a month to put up that painting!

I am an impatient person and many times, in the past I just wanted to fix things by myself. For leaky faucets or toilet not flushing properly, I watched YouTube videos and enthusiastically tried answering to the call of duty. Watching those videos, it looked so easy! However, invariably, it turned out that I bought the wrong parts or my measurements were so off that I just wasted both time and money.

Recently, when a door hinge fell out, I could not wait and I just called Joe, “The Guy,” our handyman, *but it cost me!*

## AN UNFORGETTABLE NINETEEN HOUR DAY

PHYLLIS BOWDWIN

I posted on Face Book: I worked at the polls from 5 am to 9:45 pm on Tuesday, November 8, 2016. It was my first major election. I wanted to be part of this history, to be on site, to bear witness to the normal process, or anything untoward. We had a moderate turnout – nothing, I’m told, like for President Obama, where the lines wrapped around the block. The disappointing outcome brought futile words of despair and lots of finger pointing.

A friend posted: Thank you for your service. I worked on Hillary’s campaign. I just wanted to help make it happen. I have never been as invested as this election. It hurt so bad I cried. But the sky is not falling. Hopefully, we will settle in and come to our senses.

I posted: I understand your feelings. I couldn’t believe the outcome, and am still having trouble seeing him on TV and shudder at hearing his new title. As far as my service goes, it was my pleasure. I’m not a morning person, so I had to condition myself to getting up by 3 am to get out by 4 to be at my assigned polling site by 5 to be open by 6 am. That said, the highlights of my day were interacting with the melting pot of people who came out to vote: White, African American, Hispanic, African, Asian, Indian, Muslim, etc. Two beautiful, young Muslim sisters dressed in their traditional hijabs came in to vote, their eyes luminous with excitement and anticipation. One was registered, and the other one needed to file an affidavit. Both were eager to trounce Trump, and wanted to discuss him. My poll worker/colleague tugged on the hem of my jacket to keep me, caught up in their enthusiasm and determination, from discussing anything with them – it wasn’t allowed. Later, one came back, smiled and said,

“Thanks for helping my sister!”

“It was my pleasure,” I said.

Then they brought an elderly East Indian woman to me to show her how to use the BMD machine for the handicapped. She was bent over, hobbling and using a cane. She said she couldn’t raise her arm too far, couldn’t see well and couldn’t do any extensive writing. I got her seated then scanned her ballot into the machine. The names of the candidates appeared magnified on the large screen, with a box next to each name. I pointed and read each name to her then told her to touch the box next to the name of the candidate she wanted. As I was stepping back to give her the mandated privacy, she slowly raised her arm, aimed for the top box, jabbed it with a gnarled finger and yelled “Hillaryyyyyy,” like a battle cry! The screen lit up with the name of her selection magnified. I don’t know what came over me, but I did a slight shoulder shimmy and said,

“Ding!, ding!, ding!, ding!, ding!,” like a pinball machine. The lady looked at me, her eyes brightened and she laughed with delight. I showed her how to move the screen to the next selection, and the next, and the next. She jabbed her finger with more and more confidence, and I cheered her on with assorted whoops and dings until she had finished. I showed her how to retrieve her marked ballot, fold it, put it in the affidavit envelope and seal it. Then I did a slight victory dance for her, chanting,

“You did it!, You did it!, You did it!, You did it!”

The woman laughed, her dark eyes glimmering in triumph and said,

“You know, I woke up this morning in so much pain that I almost didn’t come, but I said no! I took my pills and made myself come! I couldn’t stay home – this is too important, so I came, and you helped me to cast my vote. God bless you!

“Glad to be of service, and thank you for voting,” I said.

I believe we will survive the tsunami of madness, meanness and mayhem that appears to be poised to engulf our nation because this is just another test – a wakeup call. I “*can’t stay home*” because “*this is too important!*” My pastor says, “Do what you can with what you’ve got, where you’re at, right now.” I plan to wake up my old activist, community-organizing muscles, and use social media as a platform to educate, motivate, bless what’s right and blast what’s wrong. Testing, testing, one two three four, TESTING!!!



TIME

JOAN BOWEN-NICHLOS

Time, I cannot hold, behold or even restore as intrusive as you are.  
Exclusive, you play cat and mouse like an insincere lover; here today, gone tomorrow;  
nowhere to be found or recaptured.  
Sweet are you in youth, promising forever while stealing away ever so gently, one does not measure.  
Immersed in the warmth of the present, yesterday belongs to the past.  
Time, we seize the day, grasping tightly, attempting to hold the moment which cannot be held.  
You, time flee; disappearing as silently as the air we do not see yet inhale and exhale.  
Tick, tock, rarely, barely we hear a clock which gives you concrete identity.  
Digitally you elapse before one realizes one has awakened not to growing old but to being old.  
In and out you come and go. When did we say “goodbye”? Surprisingly, the notice comes: you passed!  
Oh, precious time, warmly welcomed, in your finality you are brutally cold.

## PASTORAL DELIGHT

BY YVONNE BRUNO

Come sit beside me  
While I feed you  
Delightful food  
Smooth, yellow, soft  
Custard, sweet to taste

Prepared with eggs  
Fresh and wholesome  
Laid each day  
By hens that sit on nests  
Secluded near golden buttercups

Content they gaze  
In grassy meadows  
By quiet streams  
Where cows graze  
Around the quiet countryside

Come and sit with me  
As we dine on this sensuous food  
Made with milk  
Brought home fresh  
From those contented cows

Let us dream of sounds  
Wafting upwards from  
The surrounding valleys

Where ancient nymphs  
Once sang softly and sweetly  
As they danced in circles  
Dressed in rainbow attire  
With colorful daisies  
That decorated their long flowing tresses.  
Let us imagine that they serenade us

While perchance we happily  
Enjoy a brief respite  
From distressing news  
Filled with grief  
From lands both near and far

Let these joyful memories  
Replace the grief we now feel  
May there be the beginning of Unity of nations  
and people  
Living in peace throughout the world

IN AN EVENING

BY RAANAN BURD

In an evening  
                  decorated  
by small words  
                  and long  
kisses.

Loving each other  
                  in a world  
written  
                  by poets  
and  
caressed by  
                  warm  
ocean breezes.

The world  
                  is ours  
and no one  
                  else's.

## LET ME BE A MEMORY

BY TERRIE CAMPBELL

Alzheimer's the binding of a brain  
a host to many forget -me- nots.  
Lying in the depth of despair for me, you, siblings and kinfolds....  
for her or him.  
Release the host to sustain a thread of dignity.  
The hopes, the pleads, the prayers, the cries, the begs for the liaison to be released from this  
agonizing grief of someone not departed.  
Just for one more than a second, a minute, an hour or a day or more, a glim of light to remember  
what was and still can be once again and again.  
To return to what was before the domain host deprived the synapses of the nerve connection.

## I THREW IT AWAY

BY SUSAN COLLENDER

I threw away negativity,  
embracing productivity  
    rejecting inactivity,  
    discovering creativity

Serenity and tranquility  
empathy and sympathy  
    finding serendipity  
Prescription for longevity



## DISTANT SIBLINGS

BY SHEILA CONTICELLO

For a couple of decades now  
We had met sporadically:  
Jump talk family gatherings,  
Lunch or dinner, no overnight -  
    Brief and shallow talk  
        What made us think  
        We knew each other  
        When we had grown so far apart?  
Because of Mom's emergency  
We had to spend a long weekend  
Sharing a room in our youth time home.  
And so we'd talked and soon found out  
Our goals and outlooks differed  
As left and right as our politics  
As even our religions.  
We've learned that college, kids and friends  
Had shaped our different values.  
    Will we ever find again  
    The core we shared so long ago?  
    Will we find within that core  
    The love that bound our family?  
Longer meetings, kinder words  
May someday lead us home.

COURSES NIBBLER

BY SHEILA CONTICELLO

I searched out flavors  
    Eager to try  
Tastes to sample  
    Before I die.  
Savory appetizers  
Pique my taste.  
Varied flavors fill me up,  
No room left for entrée.  
Though dessert may be a dream  
    Nonetheless  
I stick my fingers in the pie.  
No Gourmet, gourmand, artist  
    Only nibbler  
    Satisfied.

PURPOSE

BY CHARLOTTE H. CRAWFORD

the dried flower  
fell from pages  
of a dusty book  
    it had lost color  
    no longer gave fragrance  
    did not invoke a special memory  
yet its will was done  
when it whispered  
as the petals rested

## COUNTRY ROADS

By JAMES CUNNINGHAM

There is something about country roads  
they cry out to me like a mother calling her child  
for a hot chocolate on a cold winter's day.  
I thirst to trek the brown path leading here and  
there and everywhere.  
walking westward I view the tall trees  
with leaves of yellow, brown, orange, green and gold,  
colorful branches merging – forming nature's tapestry  
like a soft warm multi-colored quilt comforting us from  
the cold December air.  
Eagerly I explore the myriad of trees, the plethora of plants and bushes,  
I observe the creatures of the woods, the birds of flight and insects of  
all types.  
In the distance I see the bright red barn bridge with white trim which stands  
proudly over the little spring it shelters like an open country house it welcomes  
all who pass through it.  
Some passersby pause to carve their initials into the bridge's wooden frame –  
wanting to be part of it, others take time to observe the splendor of the spring below –  
The rolling water is clear and constant, pure and perfect, timeless.  
Too soon day turns to darkness, my journey comes to an end – but there is  
still so much to see,  
I vow to return again next year for country roads  
call to me.

## THE QUALITY OF PAIN

BY JOHN DeSANTIS

there is no standard of pain  
nothing that can be quantified  
no feeling than can be objectified  
nothing that any two can agree upon  
does the elephant grieve her cub's loss  
equally as the man his child  
pain is uniquely personal  
but it can be measured with the self:  
"on a scale from one to ten  
what would you say your pain is?"  
and if you can measure your pain  
today relative to yesterday  
or now relative to then  
what would it mean  
how does it relate to another's pain  
could we ever share an amount  
agreed upon by all  
or can we see our pain not as quantity  
but quality reflected in  
each other's eyes if not our hearts  
the elephant graveyard gathers bones  
as well as sorrow fixed in human tombs



## REMAINS

BY LYNN EASTON

A soft grey winter scarf still holding the scent of my father...  
A small bridal bible hiding a faded blue garter...  
Keys to a long-forgotten door...  
Two dolls, securely wrapped in a blanket, sleeping silently in the attic...  
A pressed daffodil from my mother's grave, just there at my bedside...

All of us have things we cannot toss or give away;  
The remains of a lifetime whose significance is ours alone.  
No one will know why they remained there in that secreted place.  
They will be found in the dark corner of a closet or between the pages of an old book.  
I muse, "I should make a list so that someone can place them in my final bed with me."

The entire sum of my belongings is of no importance.  
All can be taken and owned by others.  
For I do not treasure them as I do  
These few

Remains.

THE ONLY SHOW IN TOWN

BY ELIZABETH FEIN

In the thin, last sleep of morning  
Before daylight touches face and hand  
Memories dance like painted chorines  
Under the carnival lights of dreams.

First moving slowly, seductively,  
They strut their stuff  
Then spinning, twirling --  
faster ever faster --  
Lipstick, sequins, rouge  
Merge into a rose-colored wave.

Suddenly they drop, like marionettes  
Cut down from their strings.  
And sunlight floods the stage.

I try to go back, to touch  
the gaudy figures.  
But the show is over. They were  
so tawdry, yet so beguiling  
so familiar.  
And, alas, they are  
The only show in town.

WAITING

BY ELIZABETH FEIN

I wait for inspiration

For my first poem in years.  
Will it come crashing in?  
With a torrent of images and words  
Or will it come softly on tiptoe  
Like a fearful child  
Or maybe it won't come at all?  
Which would leave me undone.

I wait for inspiration.

Maybe I should chase my muse  
Go after it tooth and nail  
With Thesaurus or Venn Diagram  
No, best leave it unbidden  
For inspiration only comes  
When least expected - in the shower  
strolling in the park, wrapped in dreams.  
I'm still waiting.

splendid isolation

BY PETER FERRARA

isolation is extollrd in a song by Warren Zevon  
praise for the upside of withdrawing  
the lyrical benefits of cutting oneself off  
I have lived like that  
too depressed to communicate  
too worthless to socialize  
too drunk to think  
too frightened to live  
too scared to pull the plug

Charles Bukowski used the same phrase in a poem  
splendid isolation

self imposed isolation propels me downward  
increases self loathing  
I don't get better by isolating  
I don't improve by hiding out  
yet can't face the world feeling so beaten

I need people  
so I can communicate  
express an idea  
read a poem to  
so I can feel a little better about myself  
like I do now

## NO HARD CHARGERS HERE

BY PETER FERRARA

it is hard to be enthusiastic  
tolling in a struggling  
failing school  
one does not feel inspired  
nor compelled to rise to challenges  
faculty becomes enveloped in a dispiriting ennui  
morale is so low  
cynicism reigns

incompetence abounds amidst  
a crumbling landscape  
an endless  
succession  
of administrators  
fail  
to improve standards

the building is as ugly  
and dysfunctional as the faculty  
things don't work too well  
there is a pervasive anxiety  
the school will be taken over  
or shut down

it is easy to see  
there are no hard chargers here

MEMORIES I WON'T FORGET

BY EUGENE FORSYTH

I see her sitting there,  
I hear her humming there,  
A melody I won't forget

And though I know she's gone,  
The melodies linger on,  
The melodies I won't forget

And though I know she's gone,  
The memories linger on,  
The memories I won't forget

## THE BENCH

BY JUDY FRITSCH

It's just a plain wooden slotted bench, topped with three black and white foam vinyl cushions. The legs are a bit wobbly now and the cushions sag a bit, but that is understandable given its age. This was the first purchase my husband and I bought after we were married and began to furnish our home in July 1957. We had rented a tiny, one-bedroom apartment in the Pelham Parkway section of the Bronx and spent our honeymoon week buying furniture. The only money we had came from the generous wedding gifts we had received from our guests.

The apartment was initially furnished with basic hand-me-downs from relatives who were probably happy to part with their unwanted extra furniture. Aunt Frances gave us a solid maple bedroom set consisting of bed, bureau, nightstand and dressing table. The mattress was a bit hard, but we got used to it. Mom contributed a chrome-edged kitchen table with white marble top and two cracked vinyl chairs. I understand that this dinette set is now a valuable collector's item, but back then it was just old cast-off furniture and I have no idea what happened to it.

Kitchen supplies consisted of a variety of dented pots and pans and chipped dishes. The only new things were those we had received as engagement or wedding gifts: a set of silver-plated cutlery, a chrome toaster and a MixMaster machine. We also had an elegant blue damask tablecloth too large and fine for everyday use, a set of crystal wine glasses, a silver tray with sugar and creamer and two pairs of elegant silver candleholders.

But our large living room was bare. That was where we concentrated our first shopping expedition into the furniture stores along White Plains Road in the Bronx. The first thing we saw as we entered the store was the bench. It was on sale for under \$20.00, including those cushions and we bought it without hesitation. Some chairs, a sofa and a coffee table were to be delivered later, but we walked the four blocks home carrying the bench and installed it in the place of honor between the two windows.

In subsequent times and several moves to new dwellings, the bench always found a perfect spot somewhere. When we brought our first house with its large master bedroom, the bench sat at the foot of our bed, perfect to use when dressing. Our huge German Shepherd made his den under the bench and snored there during the night. We hadn't the heart to shoo him out of the room and learned to ignore the gentle noise.

Now it sits in the little hallway just off the garage entrance into the house. It is useful to sit there and put on winter boots which are stored underneath the bench, or to set packages brought home while we remove our jackets, or to place items there destined for transport to the car the next morning.

It's old now, a bit creaky with age, as I am, but it is still that same old bench we brought in 1957, one of the most useful things we ever acquired. I know that when my end is near and I am living in a nursing home or hospital, the bench will not be far away. And it will make a useful resting place along the pathway to the Pearly Gates.

## I WONDER WHY

BY JUDY FRITSCH

As I was riding the subway the other day, I saw an elderly gentleman sitting across from me. He seemed to be staring at me with greater intent than the usual riders one sees on the train. Most of them do their best to avert their eyes; no eye contact is the rule of the street – and of the subway. His face seemed a bit familiar, but I was not able to place it in my memory.

“I wonder why he keeps staring at me?” I thought to myself. I tried to bury my eyes in my book as I usually do, but kept glancing up from time to time. Each time I peered I saw him staring at me. I began to feel uncomfortable. Should I move my seat? Looking around, I saw no empty seats; on the contrary, the train was filling up and there were quite a few standees.

“I wonder if I know him,” was my second thought. And my third was “I wonder if he knows me.” I was very uncomfortable. I’ve ridden the subway hundreds of times, especially this number six train on the way to my doctor’s office, and this has never happened to me before. We kept riding that way for many stops until my station was coming up next. “Good, I’ll be rid of him finally.”

I rose as the train pulled into the station and saw with some alarm that the gentleman rose also. We both exited the train and started for same stairway. We went up side by side. I kept glancing at him and every time I looked, he was staring back at me. We didn’t speak. I hurried. He kept pace with me.

In the street I aimed for my doctor’s building. He stayed with me and we entered the building at the same time. This was creepy. At the elevators, I stayed back and let him enter first, while I waited for the next car. There was no way I was going into the same elevator with him. It took a while for the elevator to return for me and I noticed with relief that he was not there.

Entering my doctor’s office and being told by the receptionist that the doctor was running late and would be just a few minutes longer, I settled into the waiting room and resumed reading my book. I was rather annoyed at the wait because I had purposely made an early appointment so as not to have to endure the usual backlog of patients waiting to see this caring doctor. I didn’t even need an exam. This was just a consult visit.

I noticed with relief that the old gentleman was nowhere in sight. But when I finally was called into Dr. Katz’s office, there he was. The old gentleman on the train was my doctor of many years. I hadn’t recognized him out of his white coat and out of his accustomed setting.

I still wondered why he was staring at me on the subway. He solved the riddle by asking, “It was you, wasn’t it, on the train? I thought you looked familiar, but I couldn’t place where I knew you from. Please forgive me for staring.”

I laughed when I realized that this wonderful doctor was my gynecologist and he usually didn’t pay much attention to my face in his office.



a firenze

BY DIANNE PIANKIAN GEIGER

he adds two quick twists  
from a pepper mill  
to basil scented  
honey colored olive oil  
in an earthenware dish

then breaking off a chunk  
of warm crusty bread  
he dips it carefully  
before bringing it  
to her parted lips  
she chews slowly  
savoring

he lifts a goblet  
of young Montepulciano  
to her mouth  
she takes a deep swallow  
then another  
her eyes never move  
from his face

twilight

BY DIANNE PIANKIAN GEIGER

a soft calling scent  
rises warm from her shoulders  
her neck pulses under his thumb

stroking the arch of her eyebrow  
he breathes into her hair  
a cry escapes her mouth

tenderly he holds her  
his touch a benediction  
enraptured they dance

faint fingers of light  
pass through the window  
Incandescence surrounds

DEPARTURE

BY FRANCOISE GEWIRTZMAN

On a glorious, sunny day I walk to the Metropolitan Museum.  
I decide to view the nineteenth century galleries.  
Suddenly my memory is flooded with my mother  
giving Chinese vases, ornate silver centerpieces,  
candlesticks adorned with porcelain flowers,  
wooden statues, landscape paintings,  
to be sold at auction.

My father will discuss with us  
how these objects were made –  
screws, patina, provenance –  
a passionate discussion  
about antique treasures.

I can't let go of them, forget them.  
Their beauty, their uniqueness haunts me,  
clings to me. My mother's spirit erupts.  
A feeling of sorrow, emptiness envelopes me.

## MY OLYMPIC MEDAL

BY ERIC GLABERSON

In my early teens, I excelled at only one sport: running. My early growth spurts worked to my advantage in that area since I had much longer legs than most of my classmates.

A couple of people who saw me run in those days said I was funny to watch: all windmilling arms and legs. Yet no one doubted that I was fast.

In the late fifties, I attended William Alexander Junior High School on Fourth Avenue in Park Slope. I was in the school's Special progress class, meaning that we supposedly covered three years work in two. In June of 1959, I had just turned fourteen and was about to graduate, when the school held its Field Day on a brilliant sunny day at a high school's athletic field which had a professional looking oval track and a large grassy area for other events.

Our class didn't expect to accomplish much that day since; although we were officially ninth graders, we were a year younger than the kids we would compete against.

In the fifty yard dash I finished second in my heat, which qualified me for the final. In that race I got caught between two other racers, since I was a slow starter, and finished well out of the running.

Then came the ninth grade boys' relay race. Despite having only ten boys in our class (and nineteen girls) we thought we had put together a good relay team for which I would run the anchor leg.

A teacher lowered a flag and eight boys sped away, jockeying for position. Running first for our class was John Gaw, as tall as I was and nearly as fast. By the time he handed off the baton, we were in third place, good enough to medal. Running next for us was Jerry Sabatino, an all-around athlete, whose strong running kept us third. Peter Snell, who while not very tall was quick, took over next. Yet it was soon clear that something was wrong. Peter was laboring and shortly we saw why. He was coughing, sometimes holding his hand to his mouth. One runner passed him and then a second. Yet another was closing in on him as he struggled to reach me and pass off the baton. (We found out later that he had bronchitis from which he soon recovered).

When my fingers finally closed around the baton, a medal seemed almost out of reach. Yet I was determined to do all I could to win one. Within a few strides I reached full speed and pulled away from the runner who had just been on my heels. I began to feel like I was levitating, cruising along as though I was above the track instead of on it. At that moment nothing but this race mattered to me.

About halfway around the track, I passed the boy who was fourth. Perhaps twenty yards before the finish line, I overtook the runner in third. I remember thinking "I can catch number two" when I ran out of track.

The little group of boys in our class swarmed around me, and we hugged each other, shouting and jumping up and down. It wasn't just because we had finished third. We had shown the older boys that we could compete against them and even win a medal.

Over many years I have had a recurring dream in which I run faster and faster, then spread my arms and touch off the ground. Finally I am flying through the air, arms outstretched, looking

down at the buildings and people in my neighborhood. Only recently did it occur to me that the origin of this dream may have been that Field Day relay race when I was fourteen years old.

When I moved onto high school, I found out soon that some of the boys whom I had once towered over grew to be taller than six feet, while I topped out at five-eleven. I had lost my advantage and no longer won races. And the other boys who ran in that relay, all of whom would now be over seventy, may well have forgotten that race entirely. Yet for many years after that Field Day, the little bronze pin I helped win in 1959 was my Olympic medal.

## NO PROBLEM

BY MEL GLENN

Why do people automatically say,  
“No problem” when there is little chance  
that the topic under discussion  
is a problem in the first place?  
You sit in a diner;  
you order a burger and fries.  
Why does the waitress say, “No problem?”  
Was she expecting one?  
What problem could there have been?  
they ran out of burgers? They ran out of fries?  
Or maybe, at that exact moment,  
the kitchen has burst into flames.  
Now that would have been a problem!  
Or maybe, while the waitress was taking your order,  
she was figuring out a difficult equation in her head,  
and at that very moment, she got it,  
and triumphantly exclaimed, “No problem!”  
I really don’t know why  
I am making such a problem out of this.

## HUMMINGBIRD'S HEART

BY MEL GLENN

If a hummingbird's heart  
pulses at 1260 beats per minute,  
what chance do we humans have for love?  
If cool and slick are the trend styles of the age,  
where is the romance of love letters,  
replaced now by unvoiced text messages?  
Do people seriously date anymore, or do they  
just hang out at Friday night bar scrums?  
Do couples sneak away to mountain motels, or do they  
just stay home to watch Sunday night football?  
Hallmark has manufactured love,  
and rom/coms have absurdified it.  
I call on all romantic heroes and heroines  
of 19th century letters and literature  
to return to teach us the ways of the hummingbird  
whose heart pulses at 1260 beats per minute.

## A GATHERING

BY GAIL HAMILTON

I'm dressed;  
    I have a new skirt and blouse.  
        I have chosen the soft, silent colors carefully.  
I do not hurry;  
    I do not want it to be time to leave the house.  
I usually wait for these special days. After all...everyone will be there:  
    sister, brother, their spouses, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles,  
cousins,  
        close friends, neighbors, co-workers, and assorted towns people.  
They too have chosen their outfits carefully.  
They too are preparing to leave their houses.

We all leave our respective homes at the appropriate time.  
    Quietly, without spontaneity we will get in our cars  
        for the ride we don't want to take.

How can one slow the day down?  
Who wants the time to arrive when we will say our final good bye to:  
    our mother, grandmother, sister, aunt, close friend,  
        co-worker, and neighbor  
            as she is taken to her final resting place?



## A STRANGE ENCOUNTER IN THE BIG CITY

BY YOLANDA HARDY

I remember it well, an indelible memory of many, many years ago. It was a Sunday morning. I was young and carefree, only 17 years old. My parents were home sleeping, but I was on my way to church. Our Lady of Sorrows was located on Pitt and Stanton Streets in the Lower East Side. This is where I spent most of my teenage years, earning money doing clerical work in the parish office and typing the weekly newsletter for the parishioners.

Saturdays were spent teaching catechism to younger boys and girls. The nuns and priests would comment on my ability to teach at such a young age. However, Sundays were for attending mass with a group of girls called the Sodality. We would wear white skirts, white blouses, light blue capes, and “mantillas” – silk or lace head scarfs – on our heads. We were identified as “the good girls,” religious, respectful, and reliable. After mass we would go to different luncheonettes in the neighborhood to eat breakfast and drink chocolate egg creams. We would talk, laugh, and just enjoy pure fun. Occasionally, we would do community service and visit nursing homes, helping and cheering the elderly in any way possible.

As President of the Sodality I would always arrive early to ensure our processional ritual was intact, but this particular Sunday as I walked north on Clinton Street, at 7:30 in the morning, I encountered two strangers who were intent on snatching me into their car. One man drove the car onto the sidewalk while the other man opened his door, came towards me and tried to grab my arm. I froze for a second but found the strength to pull away and run in the opposite direction of the car. As I ran I screamed, “Papi! Papi! Papi!” My sleeping parents never heard the story. I stayed inside my building for about half hour, trying to control my nerves, thanking God for another day and praying these men would be gone. Eventually, I ventured briskly back into the “Big City” and made it to church on time. The girls asked why I was the last to arrive this particular Sunday, and I simply said, “Do I have a story to tell at breakfast!”

## STRANGERS

BY YOLANDA HARDY

strangers conspicuously meet  
conversation starts easily  
curiosity piques  
pleasant talk enjoyed

things in common surface  
exchanging numbers  
willing to invest more time  
building friendships

strangers on best behavior  
talk to life and dreams  
no secrets revealed  
nothing peculiar exposed

strangers anxious to perceive  
both want power  
meeting again and again  
mental notes dissected

whirlwind attraction emerges  
nine and a half weeks deep  
hot molten lava  
freezes like the steep Artic Sea

enigmatic stranger now a phantom  
no clue to analyze the truth  
inner voices shout repeatedly  
*life goes on*  
sometimes strangers are  
destined to be strangers

## CAMPAIGNING

BY EUNICE HARRIS

Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah!  
Rah, rah, rah, rah, rah, rah, rah!!  
Repetition through tired ear  
Blaring promises disappear

Negativity erupts  
Carrying distrust  
Emotional upheaval  
Bringing out latent evil

Lying, spying, crying, dying  
Cheating, beating, defeating  
Interruption with corruption

Such grand expectation  
Disappointed nation  
Voters can't see  
INTEGRITY!!

## POWERS THAT BE

BY EUNICE HARRIS

To the "Powers That Be"  
this is my country  
With Native American blood  
Running through my veins  
How about you?

Daughter Major striving for Colonel  
Serves in the Army Reserves  
Dad and Uncles  
Served in World War II  
Keeping freedom  
For me and you  
Grandfather in France  
Fought in World War I  
when segregation was on the run  
How about you?

Slave ancestors  
Helped build America  
English entitled ancestors  
Took over country  
To claim it theirs  
But not true heirs

If ever I relocated South  
Do not tell me "NOVOTE"  
I'd shut you down  
Grab your throat  
To look you straight in the eyes

Put it all on the scale  
I'm the whale  
Carrying more weight than you  
Rights taken away  
Because of skin color  
MUST STOP  
If this country is to remain on top  
Our Constitution speaks for me  
Take a good look for yourself and see.

## WHAT GLASS CEILING? A POEM OF EMPOWERMENT

BY SHARON HAWKINS

The once oppressive glass ceiling is now the floor I walk on  
Sometimes I tread lightly  
Sometimes not so much  
I do a praise dance each morning as I rise

Most times I sing without accompaniment  
Sometimes I sing backup  
I sing the registers of my life with no restraint

The depths of the bass line and the trill of my early morning song  
Are no longer hysterical screams or regretful moans  
But that high-C note that shatters the glass  
The ceiling floor that I now walk upon

I'm above and not beneath  
I'm the head and not the tail  
The oppressive curse has been reversed

So I no longer slip and slide  
I glide  
On that previously formidable glass ceiling that is now my floor

## HALLOWEEN LESSONS (CHAPTER TWO)

BY SAMUEL HOPKINS

*Dad, you worry too much, Marcus thought. Nothing ever happens around here.*

What he hadn't told his father was that Javon, Michaela and he planned to go out on Halloween and sneak into the cemetery. It was kind of an initiation ritual for pre-teens in their neighborhood. Almost a rite of passage. After all, what was the point of living that close to a cemetery if you weren't going to make the most of it?

"If I don't go they will think I was scared," Marcus reasoned to himself out loud that night before drifting off to sleep.

When Marcus woke up the next morning his mother was already busy filling small bags with candy.

"Good morning. You want to help me?"

"Good morning, Mom. Sure."

He didn't see his father. "Where's Dad?"

"He's outside putting up some decorations."

Marcus sat next to his mother and helped her fill the small treat bags with miniature chocolate bars, peanut butter cups, lollipops, gumballs, candy tarts, bubble gum and licorice. Each bag was sealed with transparent tape and placed in a large plastic jack-o-lantern. When they finished they went outside and admired the front of the house. The porch and lawn appeared haunted by ghosts, mummies, zombies, witches and vampires.

"Are you still going to spend Halloween with Javon and his sister?" Emily asked.

"Yeah. I'm going upstairs to get my costume. I'll put it on over there."

"Take three of the candy bags with you."

"Great! Thank you."

Stephen and Emily looked at each other. "He'll be eleven years old next week. We have to let him start having some independence," Stephen reassured his wife. "Besides, I reminded him of the rules."

"I'm sure everything will be alright," Emily sighed.

\*\*\*\*\*

When he got to Javon and Michaela's house, Marcus rang the bell. Mrs. Stewart answered the door. Marcus noticed that she was wearing a robe. Although she was around the same age as his mother, Marcus had always thought Mrs. Stewart looked younger than his mother. *And hotter.*

"Hi, Marcus. Your mother called and reminded me that you three had planned to hang out here. Come on in."

"Th-Thank you, Mrs. Stewart," Marcus stammered, embarrassed about his thoughts.

“Michaela, Javon! The third Musketeer is here!” Mrs. Stewart called out to her children.

The three of them hurried down the street filled with a combination of fear, excitement, and bravado. They talked proudly about how they had tricked their parents and how they were ready to prove themselves to the other teens in the neighborhood.

They saw a few kids they knew, but most of the masked and costumed pranksters who were hanging around inside the cemetery seemed bigger and older than the three of them. Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea.

Daylight Savings Time had not ended yet, but the sky was already beginning to darken. Marcus knew he was wrong, but the thrill of doing what he wanted felt exhilarating. His thought was interrupted by three loud successive series of pops.

“Firecrackers?” Michaela asked.

“I don’t think so!” Javon answered, fear obvious in his voice.

“Let’s go!” whispered Marcus.

The three of them ran to the entrance of the cemetery. They saw a patrol car parked outside the gate, with its siren flashing. A plain clothes officer, silhouetted by the darkness, was getting out of the car. When he stood up the three children could tell who it was. They tried to keep walking past the squad car.

“Stop! Don’t move!” yelled the voice that was familiar, but with a tone they had never heard before.

When they looked closely, they saw that Detective Stewart had his right hand on top of his holster.

## MOTHER'S DAY 2016

### A letter from MOTHER to her wayward sons

BY ANN KASLOW

On this Mother's Day, I am writing to let you know that I am disgusted with your behavior. You have taken the amazing gift of life I have given you and use it in destructive, disrespectful ways. Well, I am warning you right now, you had better change.

Your treatment of women on my beautiful earth is reprehensible. Just because you have more physical strength than women do, does not give you the right to dominate and abuse them. I created my sons and daughters to complement each other, to support each other and to live peacefully and joyfully side by side. So what is this I hear about an epidemic of rape, domestic violence and "honor killings?" And what is this outrage that girls in some countries are forced into marriage at ten years old? I consider this slavery which you well know is abhorrent to me! And yes, I also know that 250 million women wanted birth control last year but couldn't get it. Why is that? This looks to me like another instance of your forcing your will on my daughters. Well understand this, and understand this well. I give each of my daughters at birth the right to determine what she will do with her body. I never have and never will give you the right to determine this for her! That goes for the horrendous practice of female genital mutilation as well, which you force on millions of girls. This is another total distortion of my intentions. You had better reform your malevolent ways. MOTHER is angry!!!

I know what you are doing to the beautiful planet over which I gave you stewardship. You are destroying it! Instead of heeding the voices of reason and knowledge, you continue with your reckless, polluting ways. You frack for gas and you drill for oil and you burn gas and oil and coal with abandon, warming my beautiful earth to dangerous, record breaking levels. You don't seem to have any regard, none at all, for the animals and vegetation with which you share this planet. Well, my wayward sons, the operative word is "share." You had better embrace this concept and stop your destructive, pathological behavior now! MOTHER is angry – and disgusted with you!!!

I have tried to instill the values of peaceful co-existence and respect in you, but your solution to problems and difficulties is always violence and destruction. You operate by the principle that "might makes right." Well, my wayward sons, I am telling you right now, you had better start listening to your enlightened brothers – the peacemakers. I am tired of your warring ways. You had better change – and change fast!

MOTHER HAS SPOKEN!!!



## MOTHER'S HANDKERCHIEF MUSIC BOX

BY WILLIAM LEMMON

Mother's delicately, decorated, dark wooden handkerchief box  
Reposes in center of living room coffee table  
Like a centerpiece magnet with  
Powerful attractive powers.  
Light dims as sunset creeps into living room  
Like a stealthy, strong, sly fox.

Metal music box mechanism embedded  
In bottom of box like a seashell  
Buried in sand.  
Metal prongs strike raised metal  
Projections on rotating cylinder.  
Sounds of Blue Danube Waltz and  
Home Sweet Home magnified as  
Songs resonate in cavernous box.

Fond memories of mother extracting  
Handkerchiefs from box dance in my mind from deep past like a reel to reel film.  
As box opens, music begins to play  
Repeatedly until winding mechanism completely depleted.  
Strong, sweet scent of perfume tickles nostrils  
And soothes spirit like a sedative.

Handkerchief music box treasured for its musical quality  
And fond memories it ignites.  
Mother's magnificent box, and object to  
Enjoy, experience and extol.

## MY UNIQUE AQUARIUM

BY WILLIAM LEMMON

Six magnificent Fantail Goldfish  
Gliding back and forth between  
Stalks of seaweed and ceramic castles  
Create a magical fantasy land.  
Their lacey tails and fins transform  
Them into shiny, angelic creatures.  
Appear like groups of gorgeous, golden submarines  
Rising and descending to all parts of tank.  
Swimming in and out of castles,  
They are archaeologists searching  
For artifacts and treasures.

Morning is fantastic, fish feeding time.  
Fantails zoom to surface swiftly,  
Racing to get tidbits of dried food.  
Once a week they consume a banquet  
Of tiny, twisting, tasty shrimp.  
Searching for every last morsel,  
Pebbles are pushed around to uncover hiding shrimp.  
Later in the day, a ping pong ball  
Stirs excitement on water surface.  
Ball is vigorously pushed by their heads,  
Creating a competitive game.  
It's a miniature theatrical performance  
With fish characters as stars.

Various events accumulate to  
Create my unique aquarium,  
With an atmosphere of wonder and expectation.

## GROWING UP IN THE FIFTIES

BY MARTIN H. LEVINSON

A busy blacktop Brooklyn street,  
stickball game, choose up sides,  
pick me, pick me, pick me, pick me.

Marvin steps up to the plate, manhole cover on  
the ground, thumps the Spalding o'er my  
head, winged orb's trajectory, gravity defies.

Jonny grins when I strike out, I laugh when  
he trips on first, Ralph says Mantle is the best,  
time to give that trope a rest, the girls play

Hopscotch on the street, radio queens with  
hi-fi lips, Elvis Presley, Billy Joe, Chuck  
Berry and Fats Domino. We pretend that

they're not there, but give the chicks a Flatbush  
stare when someone makes an awesome catch,  
female veneration, natch, cars honk horns

as they zoom by, moms watch from  
windows, fear is high, maybe we will move  
someday near a park where we can play,

the green, green grass of Mandalay, Kipling  
knew it well. We play punchball in the street,  
we play boxball on the walk, pitching pennies

done indoors, reading at the candy store,  
Archie comics, Superman, Davy Crockett  
trading cards, life is good in the 'hood,

in the alley flipping cards,  
Marvin smokes a cigarette,  
Jonny tells a dirty joke,

I go to the building roof,  
water in a red balloon, hits  
Ralph on the curb below, he

glares at me with hate-filled  
eyes, I repay his evil gaze,  
Mantle has seen better days,

the Yankees have  
begun to fade,  
we're forever young.

## THE CITY

BY BARBARA LEVITT

Herzog had just deftly landed in his sleek spaceship next to a monkey's cage in the Central Park Zoo, New York City. As a scientist devoted to space travel and the study of major life elements, he had traveled from his own planet located in a far-off galaxy as yet undiscovered by those specimens inhabiting earth.

His initial appearance resembled that of a human male. One would have to look closely to notice that a tiny eye protruded from the back of his long neck and that an extra finger extended from each boney hand. Since actual cities did not exist in his homeland, Herzog had sped through space over a distance of trillions of miles to eagerly study the behavior of inhabitants residing in a typical metropolis.

He immediately observed that the peculiar residents of this city had furry skin and wiggly tails. Strange sounds emerged from their mouths as they communicated with each other. They made hopping movements and had the agility to climb up and down quickly with no effort. Their faces were extremely expressive.

What an unusual, worthless city society this is, he thought. Here are live human beings who scamper around in small, enclosed living areas, babbling to each other in an unintelligible language. Babies are carried on their mother's backs. They scratch each other's skin incessantly, amidst an aimless lifestyle. Their own human waste is excreted out in the open and they continuously pop lumps of food into their mouths. While chewing, scraps dribble down onto their feet. It is a disgusting manner in which to live, he observed.

Herzog decided that there was no point in continuing the study of this particular prehistoric city population. It was much too primitive. Nothing could possibly be learned of scholarly value that would be of benefit to his own advanced civilization.

Returning to his sleek spaceship, he sped back to his galaxy to report on his conclusion that studying the inhabitants on this primitive planet Earth revealed the existence of an odd species of life form that was not worthy of any method of scientific exploration.

WORDS...THE VOICE WITHIN

BY JANET LIEBERMAN

Words...

Squeeze dripping tears, my soul's third eye  
Grasp fresh fruit dangling from slender boughs  
Suck essence/delicious amber juices

Words...

Empower dove wings beating in my soul  
Fan glowing coals/expose fears, doubts,  
Soothe scars sorrow/hoard memories  
Cleanse dreams swirling like pigeons  
Pecking at burning coals,

Words...

Sculpt sand grains, rub sea shells  
Coalesce shadows, nuances,  
Spit out pearls, swirl in lacey sea foam  
Shine sunlight upon my soul

Words...my voice within!

## HOMeward BOUND

By JANET LIEBERMAN

*Whoosh, rush of steam engulfs travelers...  
Disembark cavernous train station, enter city hub  
Hustle and bustle, roar deafens, ambulances shriek*

*Wind whistles through shadowed canyons  
Sun pierces chromatic concrete facades  
Silver skyscrapers scrape tattered cumulus clouds*

*Energy surges, crowds gather like cluttered fruit  
tongues toss languages like colored holiday ribbons  
Discordant harmony throbs, radiates buzz*

*Passengers stride grey checkered pavement  
Embark upward E train, homeward bound*

*Whoosh, fistful of fresh air beckons  
Wafts breezes, encircles green trees  
Gathers tired travelers, time out at MacDonald Park!*

## TRANSITION

By JOCELYNE LINDOR

Reclining on easy chair contemplating  
myriad rivulets of water course down  
bay windows of my sister's solarium  
dreamily I follow their aimless meandering

The staccato beat of rain drops on glass roof  
plays a melancholy leitmotiv,  
accompany background to my wandering mind  
as the mournful wind grieves the ending of winter

On patches of brownish green grass outside  
a few "perce-neige" (snow crocuses)  
brave the cold and rain poking  
tiny heads timidly through melting snow

And trees above furiously shake  
scraggy branches skeletal limbs waging  
silent protest against lashing wind.  
But hope is in the air for tomorrow April begins.

## FLOWERS

BY MADELINE MANDEL

On the side shelf of my refrigerator where the butter should be is a small bag of flowers. One is a group of off white roses...the other, a single, red flower. All are dried and withered, but retain their shape, as well as a place in my memory.

The only time I pinned a corsage on my older son was at his prom. I stepped back to check on the angle of the single white rose, and to take in the whole picture of him with his date. Shawn was tall, and very handsome in his newly cut "fade" and crisp tuxedo. He was also very nervous; beads of sweat glistened above his lip and on his forehead that unusually, cool June evening. Our eyes met and I smiled the same knowing smile that I smiled on the day of his Bar Mitzvah. He was tense then too, as he recited his Haftorah masterfully, but without removing his eyes from my face the whole time.

Today was different. Not only was he pinning a chalky group of roses on me, but he was confident and calm on this his wedding day. He stepped back to take a picture, and smiled warmly in my direction just as his soon-to-be-bride slipped her hand inside his arm. Today it was me who was anxious.

The other flower in the bag is a sole rose. Tiny fragments have fallen from it, but its red color is almost the same as it was thirteen years ago when my younger son, and I stood next to my mother's casket. We watched as the funeral director carefully took a very large floral arrangement from its metal stand, and draped it onto the wooden lid of my mother's now closed coffin. Gold foil paper shone with its message - Dearest grandmother...from your loving grandchildren. Simultaneously, Scott and I each picked a rose from the group and stuck it in our pockets.

Scott keeps his rose in a partitioned area high up in his large computer desk. On occasion, I've removed the flower temporarily to dust underneath. He'll caution me on its fragility, as I return it to its resting place smiling. I'm not the only one who keeps flowers!



## THE BEGINNINGS

BY MADELINE MANDEL

“Write,” he encouraged.  
Words emerged...a sputter, at first. Arduous and slow. Strenuous.  
But as the weeks passed, confidence grew...with his help.  
Drips trailed, widened, and arched robustly in many directions. Energetically. Tirelessly.

“Describe,” was his next suggestion. Insistence.  
He stood before me.  
This ancient mariner of words. And their manipulation. Infusion.  
He, with the kindest blue eyes, and the gentlest, but expectant manner...arms folded waiting at attention. Fixed. Patient.  
Ready to catch me in the wink of an eye should I fall;  
Or to exalt me as I finally lifted and soared outside the classroom window.  
He watched gleefully as I flew above the leafless trees into the pale grayness of that late October afternoon sky. He nodded affirmatively because he knew I could.  
Was it he,  
or instinct,  
that led me to strain at selecting syllables for rhyme and purpose?  
To see differently...with color, and texture, and sound.

“Create,” he coaxed. And I drew upon my meager twenty years of observation, digestion, and emotion as he was directing.  
I conjured up the real and the imagined...the expected and the unexpected... until I had enough papers to fill up the top drawer of my nightstand,  
And to last a lifetime.  
But, alas, for me, I was merely at the beginning of my writing journey – one that lasts to this day.

## SHADES OF NIGHT

BY LUCILLE MATTIOLA-BARON

After we're dazzled and blinded by its late day finale,  
The sun surrenders,  
Slowly sliding into its niche below the horizon.  
Then and only then, will the night make its reluctant debut-  
Not boldly, but softly, gently layering blankets of darkness over the earth.

Once dusk is completely stripped away,  
All that remains is an endless camouflage of blue, grey and black.  
Oh, there is such a velvet richness in this absence of light,  
The perfect escape from daylight's glaring reality.

Night is steadfast in shading its midnight dwellers.  
They can calmly stand naked and unadorned,  
Shameless in their drama,  
Unique in their form,  
Substantial in their strength.

Night's embrace can blind us from what was once obvious.  
Shapes are shrouded in confusing masks  
Both exciting yet frightening,  
Dynamic and secretive,  
Stimulating, intimidating.

Cleverly, perhaps grudgingly, night also ornaments the sky with the moon and stars.  
They are allowed to intrude on night's obsessions.  
Their light touch, a perfectly brilliant complement,  
Gives just enough contrast to evening's artistic etchings.  
Now the inquisitive are enlightened, the reluctant comforted.

Night's rich darkness is also the perfect excuse to rest, meditate, ponder.  
Hopefully, that most superlative of darkness will cradle us 'til morn,  
When mystically, eerily,  
It is erased by a rising sun that gradually warms the earth  
And lights the sky.

POETRY

BY KATHERINE METS

I would read poetry before school  
It seemed more real  
more vital than life.

Poetry was profound  
it cut right to the quick  
to the nitty-gritty.

It conveyed the world  
in relatively few words  
which I like to do.

## RAIZLEH AND LEIB

BY TED MIESZCZANSKI

The orderly garden sprawled behind the red brick building and its attached wooden home. It was mostly a vegetable patch, cabbage, carrots and onions abounded but still here and there someone had taken the time to plant food for the soul alongside that of the body. The house's ornate tiled roof, though extensively patched marked this as a property once highly valued by men of means. Now it belonged to both man and God for etched high above a Star of David marked a regal entrance to the shul within.

The early morning's dew dripped rhythmically along the discolored stone eaves metering the rhythm of soulful prayers. They filled in nicely alongside the songbirds calling out their daily greetings to the brilliant blue sky. Wisps of white clouds accentuated the quietude of this day's beginning. When breathed in unison they combined into a perfect response to the holiest of unasked questions. Is God pleased with his own handiwork?

A young woman looked up from her mending to make certain no danger intruded upon the solitude enveloping the morning sleepiness of Vilna. A girl child in a blue velvet dress, white collar, and white smock raced about the garden dashing between splashes of golden daisies and then back among the delicate pink and white roses choosing among the brightest of all the blossoms. Laughing with delight she raced back to the wooden steps pushing her bouquet into her mother's hands. Receiving an embrace and several sweet kisses she squirmed delightedly in her mother's arms, receiving her mother's whispered words, "My sweet girl."

Turning her eyes upwards a splash of color caught the girl's attention. Whirling about she broke free to dash behind the bluebird hopping about the garden's rows. At its end she sneaked behind the grounded bird and clapped her hands. The startled bird took to the air and alit on an overhanging bough. From beneath the little girl then sat down to contemplate the angry bird that scolded her for denying it its morning meal.

"Raizleh, Raizleh, allow the bird to eat! All of God's creatures need nourishment. Be kind, my kitten! That's God's commandment to us all!"

Raizle appeared to ignore her mother's voice. But within seconds she'd turned around to answer, "Yes, Mameh."

"Sweet child, come inside and set the table for your grandfather's breakfast. The Rebbe's always famished after morning prayers. You can put the jam on his bread!"

"Yes, Mameh, oh yes!" She knew she'd be allowed to lick the spoon after carefully spreading the sweet marmalade on her grandfather's freshly baked bread!

As they turned, hand in hand now to climb the old wooden steps they barely took notice of the burly man who'd arrived leading his horse-drawn wagon. *Why should they notice him? Wasn't he the very same person who arrived every morning to supply the household with milk, flour and eggs?* The Grand-Rabbi's daughter and the wagoner did mutter "Shalom," but it was no more than an indifferent measure of politeness. The rabbi's daughter and the deliveryman may as well have lived with a vast ocean yawning between them.

The Grand Rabbi's daughter and granddaughter lived an existence surrounded by culture and most of all, Torah. The wagoner's family lived a harder life. Hard labor, framed by only enough education to read a prayer book and a hand to mouth existence accentuated by petty theft.

But all that meant nothing to the husky teenage boy who helped his father unload the heavy sacks they'd picked up for the Rebbe's household. The young man had celebrated his Bar Mitzvah here only the week before with his family. And here he was, once again helping his father unload the wagon exactly as he'd done before he was thirteen.

*How had things changed? How would they change? When ...?*

*I'll get older, work harder, buy my own wagon, marry someone picked for me, have children, drink schnapps each night in order to forget each day. Is that happiness?*

Leaning against the wagon to wipe the sweat off his face he turned to watch the little girl re-turned to race about the garden of the home they were delivering to. How happy she seemed, a small honeybee amongst the blossoms. Something stirred in his chest.

*What name was it her mother had called out?*

*Raizle, Raizleh, little Rose, the name fit her perfectly.*

He lifted the heavy sack onto his shoulder and walked towards the house.

## I AM THE WIND

By TEENA MILLER

I am the wind that blows the palm trees  
and autumn leaves about in northern climes  
the wind that billows sails on boats  
and moves the clouds both stormy and fair  
that blows the seeds in spring to settle on  
the ground in fertile spots  
the wind that sends the flower scents through open windows  
that comforts park sitters on hot summer days  
and powers turbines and peaks the ocean waves  
the wind that cools marathon runners' brows  
and lifts up kites to children's giggles

I am the wind in Aleppo that blows  
the scents of gunfire and smoke through the air  
the howling wind that competes with sirens and bombs  
to shatter the silence of every night  
the wind that echoes through empty broken structures  
and forces fine particles of crumbled concrete  
into the air to scratch the eyes of fleeing crowds  
the wind that blows desert sands  
forming a covering blanket  
found by seekers as they unearth remains  
and will say: "How, how?"

SUPERMARKET QUEEN

By TEENA MILLER

escaping the brutal Florida sun  
I enter a cool Publix supermarket  
to begin my fantasy reign  
surveying all as I walk  
down regimented aisles  
in strict formation

I see brightly shining lights  
sconces of fire  
bringing glowing illumination  
to my cavernous room  
so I easily see my domain

fruit and vegetable displays  
a medieval banquet of luxury  
presented in colors of jewels  
dazzling beets, grapes and lemons  
bowing to me

aromas of detergents and exquisite soaps  
scents of jasmine and roses  
waft from the royal garden  
my soldiers stand tall on shelves  
waiting for my review  
salad dressings, oil and vinegar  
wear polished form fitting uniforms  
shiny buttons and boots

in a horse drawn carriage  
I ride down the straight aisles  
as I point to the items  
for others to gather  
and be brought to my castle  
then prepared by the cooks  
what a delightful delivery  
that I need not carry

leaving my kingdom  
the heat surrounds me  
as I load bags into the car  
and set off for home  
while planning my dinner

THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

BY CONSTANCE MITCHELL

Too long the fear, anguish and the longing prevail  
But after we are done/they are done as well  
Too short the time of fulfillment and accomplishments that swell the chest  
The grave yawns and beckons anxious to offer rest  
I think it is not long before we take our leave  
Freed



ALARM

BY CONSTANCE MITCHELL

They killing black men  
The comely ones too  
I heard a black woman talking to a Jew  
In the supermarket round our way  
That's how they started in '32 the Jewish woman say

One by one, two or three – a bus load  
Take out the strong, healthy and the bright  
The ones that might stand strong in a fight

Three or four in recent months the black woman say  
Walking up the driveway, sitting in a car  
Coming from the store – opening the screen door

What's it all about the black woman asks  
The heavy boots have begun to walk  
Time for alarm the Jewish woman say  
And showed the tattoo on her arm

HOW DO I LOVE MY KNEE REPLACEMENTS?  
LET ME COUNT THE WAYS

BY DANIEL MOINESTER

When every step was a confluence of  
Throbbing, agony a constant escort.  
I love thee for renewing lost passion.  
No hills nor dales are my encumbrances.  
Tormented no more by that dreaded pain.  
Refurbished from impaired to vigorous,  
Released to enjoy this fresh boundless life.  
From here to as far as I can travel.  
As I hold my grandchildren in my arms,  
Stride the avenues of worldwide cities,  
Race excitedly to embrace my wife,  
Scamper nimbly around the tennis court,  
I laugh – with a joy I'd long forgotten.  
I shall love thee, 'til my days are no more.

*With special thanks to Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Doctor Kassapidis.*

## THE CULMINATION

BY EVA MORRIS

Feeling lucky that dinner for this evening will be Chinese food. Menus spread out across the table in an effort to decide the correct correlating combination of column choices. The epicurean Chow Fun, Low Mein, Chow Mein, Yackamein main course. Chop sticks, no sticks, barbecue ribs and last licks. Tiny packed packets of parcels containing soy sauce, duck sauce, tea bags but most importantly in that packed packet of combined condiments is the “culmination”. The end, the finish, the conclusion, the omega of my gastrointestinal experience. The small crispy folded confection containing the purposely positioned positive aphorism awaiting to be crumbled, read and eaten; the fortune cookie. I opened the fabricated fortune finally prophesying my future when only to not find my long awaited future, destiny and maxim. That strip of paper guiding my life, my fortune and my future not located within that crispy folded confection. My culmination was no fortune, future or fate. Just a feeling of fortuneless from my unfortunate cookie fortune cookie.

## THE CHANGES

BY EVA MORRIS

When the morning turned on and I realized it was the afternoon of my life,  
sunsets have changed and the length of a day had a new perspective.  
Tomorrows are yesterdays that flow faster as each year passes and  
today will become just another reflective memory.  
As I flip through the calendar of my life,  
I appreciate how quickly months have changed to years;  
and all my saved odds and ends are now more odds that end.  
I try to keep in touch with all of my friends,  
planned parties, only to have many non-attendees and no RSVP'S,  
yet after my demise, I will draw onlookers to view me and say  
"But I just saw her yesterday."  
For if I threw a planned party for 25 guests and only some showed up,  
when I die, my audience in a day's notice will be tripled without a formal invitation.  
Daily routines of my transitional eras of family and living,  
have been altered through time and necessity.  
While visual changes of what I actually see and think I see, have become a new reality  
and 20/20 vision was a compliment I did not cherish as I should have;  
that dish of what I thought was baked ziti at the party, close up in reality were French Fries,  
My taste buds have been forced to be altered  
to accommodate non-gmo and low carb dishes,  
while I try to shy away from future dentures.  
My altered view towards my sense of the seasons,  
where the hot summer was a welcomed time of year;  
and the winter was an invitation to make snow angels,  
are a thing of the past and now an open window with a breeze is my best companion.  
The counting down of daily time,  
as opposed to the feeling of "whatever," has arrived.  
Personal accomplishment is the catalyst  
that creates a sense of fleeting moments within my soul.  
This new overwhelming feeling of unfinished-ness and anxiety overcome me.  
While renewing remembrances in my mind  
in order to trigger a flashback of the morning of my life.  
I will do it tomorrow, but how many morrows will there be?  
And then suddenly the lights went out and the afternoon is the forever sunset.

## THE MISSED PLANE

BY SELMA REVA NEWMAN

Higher and higher flies my plane but I remain  
on solid ground defeated  
    watching cloudy skies  
        as they envelop a diminishing metal bird  
            while I stay behind  
                standing alone.

Too late to board the plane  
the gate closed after  
other passengers boarded  
I wonder when the next flight might be?  
how long before I fly?  
who can answer me?

The next plane leaves in three hours  
for my destiny  
not a lifetime; I will arrive  
before dawn of a new day  
not too late for my date  
I will survive.

Then comes the news that the plane  
    accidentally missed by my tardiness  
        will never reach its destination  
            struck down by lightening it crashed  
                into the angry waters of a raging sea  
                    a huge dead bird.

## HOTEL AMENITIES

BY SELMA REVA NEWMAN

I chose a five star hotel and assured my friend not to worry about forgetting to bring anything. "A five-star hotel provides for all our needs," I said, "If you forget your toothbrush or toothpaste, you can get it from the front desk." In the hotels where I had recently stayed there had been a cardboard sign in the bathroom, that folded in half, stood up quite noticeably stating: "Did you forget something? Ask for it at the Front Desk." I know someone who asks, not only for dental supplies, but also for sewing kits, q tips, shower caps, combs, and other things she has not forgotten.

When we went into our hotel room, naturally I checked the bathroom, but there was not the expected sign. There were the usual soap, shampoo, and hand cream, nothing more. In the clothing closet hung one plush, cream colored bathrobe. It had a sign saying: "For use during your stay. You may purchase one in the gift shop for \$65.00." I looked around for a coffee maker with condiments, but it was not to be found. Deciding to inquire about certain items, I called the front desk using one of the two room phones. Surprisingly there were two.

"There is only one bathrobe and we are two people in the room," I said.

"You can buy a bathrobe in the gift shop," replied the front desk lady.

"I want to use it while staying here, I am not interested in buying it."

"We will see if there is an extra bathrobe available."

"Hope so because my friend and I can't fit into one."

Then I asked about the missing coffee maker which is usually present in hotel rooms.

"No, there is no coffee maker because you can get coffee at Starbucks or through room service," she replied.

"I am so glad we both brought our own tooth brushes and tooth paste," I said and hung up.

## DAD'S COMING HOME

BY DOROTHY PRIDEAUX

Dad's coming home  
I have a happy heart  
A sad heart  
Will he be mad at mom

Dad went to market at 4:30 am  
To stock the butcher shop  
He stood a lot today  
By 6:00 pm, he's tired, hungry

Mom gets the dinner ready  
Dad's coming home  
Please, please  
You know how he gets

I hear his step on the stair  
a happy heart  
A sad heart  
I'm frightened

He is so loud  
When he's angry  
I'm so afraid  
Is it my fault?

I did my homework  
I did my chores  
I used my best penmanship  
No holes in my paper from erasing  
Dad's coming home  
I want to disappear  
I want to hide  
And peek from the closet door

I'm so afraid  
He screams at mom  
Where's dinner  
What did you do all day

She mothers four of us  
Is always there for us  
She doesn't answer him  
Why is she silent?

I love my mom  
I love my dad  
Sometimes he's happy  
then it's OK mom's late

He talks to Mom  
Asks when's dinner  
Will be ready  
Goes to sit down

He talks to me  
Asks about school  
Asks me to get him  
A glass of water

He doesn't yell then  
Will tonight be  
One of those nights  
Wait and see

A happy heart  
A sad heart  
Dad's coming home  
Dad's coming home

## LIFE PATHWAY

BY GERARDO E. RAMOS

That's a way of life.  
Sometimes long uncertainty in the future.  
A space that seems endless.  
Hope that soon we will leave the maze  
and there will be no unpleasant surprises down the road.  
We all want to open our eyes  
and see something different to an infinite cloud around us.  
All trusting the mechanical guides in the plane,  
They have our lives in their hands.  
The white wall on both sides extends  
and we know we're in decline since the ears begin to uncover.  
Now the engine sounds different  
But whiteness is still infinite.  
Everything remains suspended.  
A fly on the plane is heard.  
Eyes fixed on the head of the front seat.  
Sighing maintained  
and unfinished thoughts.  
Once again I feel the pressure in the head.  
My ears struggle to unclothe.  
Oh !!! this wall beside the plane is endless.  
Nobody knows what lies beyond.  
We just hope that nothing stands in the path of the plane...  
Suddenly the blue sky begins to appear.  
And the whiteness falls behind.  
How good is life when, even if you do not know the direction to take  
at least you see the way to go.



## NIGHT VISIT

By DM RANKINS

Lay on my pillow  
ready for our Ferris wheel ride  
rising high in night lights  
circle of life  
movement of moments  
caught in my dream  
sky painted forever blue  
we stay sketched in youth  
your shadow eases into my space  
familiar touch  
provide much warmth  
spin down into calamity  
hold tight  
pain fades as big wheel turns  
makes you whole again  
dancing in full remission  
skip through fields of daffodils  
gather handful of yellow blooms  
shared plots and bubble baths  
grabbing bundles of laughs  
sticky pink cotton candy  
cling to fingers and mouth  
smell of honey roasted peanuts  
keep us wanting  
times missed but cherished  
I sleep and smile  
feel your happiness inside  
when I'm weary with tired mind  
I'll welcome you back  
for our Ferris wheel ride.

## A FATHER'S EXPECTATION

By DM RANKINS

found his way  
from the Blue Ridge mountains  
of Georgis  
to the hills of the South Bronx  
carrying the load of his ancestors  
embracing memories of the motherland  
  
he pulls and he lifts to let his children know  
hard labor has its rewards  
earned value in a job well done  
he lifts the spirits of his grandfathers  
bent over  
in cotton fields  
picking for survival  
he pulls his determination  
to be his own man  
leaving the bitterness of the south on I-95  
while he watches his children stack victories  
brown bag full of aspirations realized  
fears tossed in metal garbage cans  
standing 6'3" he controlled his space  
proud army veteran of WWII  
he remained ready for life's battles  
bearing the weight of exhausted promises

he lifts and he pulls tomorrow's possibilitites  
crammed in grimy work gloves  
anxious to touch the beauty of the Cherokee rose  
evoking tears of his mother  
he roars through the city street  
feeling the strength of the community  
dumping their despair and disappointment  
into the back of his truck  
watching as the wide blade devours and crushes  
pushing rejected remnants into tangled knots  
he lifts in the snow storms  
as his children sleep serenely through the night  
he pulls in the heat waves  
as they giggle and gallop under fire hydrant  
sprinklers  
he found dignity  
seated high  
wearing pressed green uniform  
driving with purpose  
deliberate turns and stops  
leaving transformed blocks  
collecting pieces of discarded lives  
so that he could build his own  
  
he lifts and he pulls

## RECOLLECTIONS ON THE OCCASION OF A 90TH BIRTHDAY

BY TERRY RICCARDI

Many years ago, I answered an ad from a woman who was looking for stamp collectors, in hopes of starting a stamp club. Though I lived far away in the Bronx at that time, I hopped into my car and headed for a foreign territory known as Brooklyn. The hoped-for stamp club never did materialize, but Rita and I discovered that we shared many interests and soon became fast friends.

In the decades that followed, life brought many changes to each of us, but our friendship ran through it all as a constant. We traded books and stamps, went to numerous plays, and shared all our news over many a meal. We each moved, I from the Bronx to Queens, and she from Brooklyn to Manhattan. But distance, as before, made little difference. We continued to meet, go places for food and entertainment, and care deeply for each other.

Rita included me in the celebration of her 65th birthday. Years later, that memory inspired me to celebrate my own 70th with a party at my favorite restaurant. Needless to say, she was one of the first people on my guest list! At about the same point in time, we each met a major love of our lives; we were enriched by each other's happiness.

Rita's beau was in his late eighties when they met, and he was in good physical and mental shape despite his age. My beau was in his late fifties. He had already survived two heart attacks and was an insulin-dependent diabetic. I had met him a couple of decades earlier when I was assigned to his bowling team. Now when we got together, Rita and I compared notes on our newly revived romantic lives. But nothing lasts forever. Alzheimer's claimed Rita's love in his early nineties. A third heart attack and a stroke robbed my now-husband of significant balance and stamina.

As the years passed, Rita became less and less mobile and needed an aide during the day. The time came when she knew she had to give up her Manhattan apartment and leave her beloved city. Her son and his family in Atlanta found her an assisted-living residence near them, so she reluctantly but realistically resigned herself to the move. Our last visit together was joyous yet bittersweet; we both knew that Atlanta is so much further away than Brooklyn ever was.

It was our hope to keep in touch and have a real, face-to-face visit in the future. Last year, my husband and I decided to drive to Universal Studios; of course we planned a stop in Atlanta on the way to Orlando. Rita and I spent a peaceful afternoon together in her spacious suite, while my husband explored the luxurious residence and then joined us, where he sat and read contentedly for some hours. He remarks to this day on how he kept looking at our faces beaming with happiness. Two friends, together again.

(A shorter version of this piece was written at the request of Rita's family, who threw her a party for her 90th birthday. From New York, I asked that they please accept all the love and best wishes, from both me and my husband, that this poor piece of paper could convey.)

POETRY MATTERS

BY JUDITH KARISH RYCAR

Why poetry  
instead of prose  
artificial construct  
unnatural  
people don't talk in rhyme  
most of the time or  
send images into the sky like  
birds flying south for the winter

Why poetry  
instead of prose  
complex, difficult  
entire lexicon required to  
decipher its secrets  
students suffer silently  
awaiting return to  
prosaic prose

Why poetry  
instead of prose  
despite all difficulties in  
comprehension, it  
remains an elegant vehicle  
transporting readers to  
unexplored worlds of  
pure pleasure

## LOOKING AROUND

BY BETTY SAMUELS

Order how does it come to be  
My world cluttered and unfree  
Some books by subject form an array  
Others dangling as they lay

Dishes drying not put away  
Clothes to be ironed looking astray  
Bed unmade pillows piled high  
Sheets crumpled wrinkled bedspread  
So lazy...why

Bills and papers forming a pile  
Checks unwritten and not in file  
Matters needing attention not put to rest  
Knowing it's far from doing my best

Kitchen and bathroom almost clean  
Hiding riff raff clutter so as not to be seen  
A pretty tablecloth disguising the mess  
Thinking now who would ever guess

Large yellow envelope holding paper and stuff  
Neat and smooth not very rough  
Unevenly folded brown plastic shopping bags  
Old clothes torn into cleaning rags

Shoes under the dresser and bed  
A few in a row others strewn ahead  
Computer wires some old yellow and red  
Need to get rid of them...often said

Painting supplies jumbled in a corner of the  
living room  
Canvas easels and brushes awaiting use soon  
Carnations in a yellow vase bathed in light  
Thankfully on this day no visitor in sight

Ceiling fan bulbs waiting to be thrown out  
Eventually do that without doubt  
Life is not in order for sure  
Always trying to run out the door

A neighbor asking to see the new bathroom tiles  
Yes I respond yet fearing she will see the piles  
Noting only the fine painting on the peach  
colored walls  
Commenting on the abstract prints in both halls

Smiling she says, "So colorful and with form"  
Ignoring the unfinished quilting of pillows  
that adorn  
Reminding myself it's the invite that matters  
Even if one imagines their home in tatters

Days later she sends a fine e-mail  
Thanking me so this my tale  
The next time you think your home's fit not  
to be seen  
Remember real friends and neighbors look  
beyond  
Seeing only gleam

Weeks later she invites me to her chicory tea  
She remarks her apartment is as messy as can be  
True to her word papers here and there  
Friendship first who gives a care

FIRST POEM

BY LESLIE SELBST

I folded my first poem and locked it up with sealing wax.  
I don't know if the wax will spoil the words,  
but it's my first poem and I must guard it from strangers.  
I made a stamper from a moldy potato,  
Carved it up real nice,  
It's the outline of a doggie footprint, and I pressed it into melted wax.  
Now turned brittle it will protect the fold,  
And tell me if my secret has been told.

## GRATITUDE

BY VIVIAN SKINNER

I went to bed last night, in my own bed  
Laden with clean sheets and blankets.  
I did not have to stand in line, hoping to secure a bed in the Shelter  
Nor did I have to find, a sleeping corner  
In some dark, desolate doorway,  
In the streets of the big city.  
I slept in comfort, in my own bed.

The police did not have to jar me awake and send me on my way.  
Or my worrying about street adversaries  
Stealing my menial possessions,  
And even attempting to take my life.  
I slept in peace, in my own bed.

I awakened this morning, refreshed, grateful,  
Alert, full of appreciation,  
Full of life, anticipating the goodness in my day.  
I was able to get out of bed without assistance,  
And yes, I know my name. But for many, It's not the same.  
There are those who have no recollection of their name,  
Nor the names of those they love.

Father God, I love you  
I thank you for blessings, seen and unseen  
So from the housetop I shout, "I am thankful  
Thankful, thankful, so very thankful"  
I am full of gratitude.

## PIECE IN PROGRSS

BY E. MILDRED SPEISER

I have an addiction. It is thinking. For a while now, I've been thinking of our every day writing vocabulary, it's peculiarities and impreciseness.

We are now in the era of texting and tweeting.  
2b or nt 2 b    Tht iz th kwstchn

"Twentieth century people, you are obsolete. Look at the time you waste with your spelling and writing. Face it. You are as ancient as someone from the 12th century." So saith today's young people, with a rapid takeover, and literally a coup over last centuries standardized English language spelling and sentence structure.

The lock step generation just doesn't get it. How about trying out some young people's lingo? Say –

IDK (I don't know)	OMG (Oh, my God) How can I face this?
TTYL (Talk to you later)	LOL (Laughing out loud)

Those from another era must conquer the new spelling, and accept these new writing standards to be "with it." The electronic digital age is here and thriving.

This 21st century lexicon is a curious, limited language anomaly reminiscent of "You Tarzan, Me Jane" days. After all, in today's do it yourself society of no government interference, it follows that writing and spelling standards should also be left to the individual. That's the democratic way. Will this short form handwriting overwhelm written standards for the foreseeable future? Others of us question how do we bridge understanding, broader acceptability, with more accessibility to both sides of the century? After all, new terminology or new ways of using it have been evolving from B.C. to A.D. through the centuries and decades.

With that in mind, how about setting up a friendly competition to see how all this would work? To inform the electorate out there of what is coming, we start with a monster opening campaign. People near and dear, the language challenge is here. Are you ready?

Rallies and marches demanding word equality will begin. Californians will be counted on to bring out the vocabulary vote in the next election. The voice of every-day people will be heard and seen. Calm vocal communication would become the vogue but more excitement will be brought to this proposition by opposition posters: Don't Mess with Our Vocabulary; What is Lexicon Anyway?

Every city, state, and community could co-operate by setting up local teams. They would discourse on the finer points of the suggested word choices submitted. They would be sent along for the ultimate challenge – the Verbal World Series with Koreografd Spelling (the written word). No doubt this would spread the word and result in popular consumer consumption.

Even the economy would be boosted from the expanded sale of pens, pennants, tee shirts and other memorabilia. Every community would have a Wall of Fame prominently displaying the new expressions and new scribe to be used. Carpenters, construction workers, dictionary publishers, display artists would be important positions of employment. Other satellite businesses also would profit.



The largest financial booster would be a national lottery. Just do the math. If 100,000,000 people were each to buy a \$10 lottery ticket, a whopping billion dollars would be raised to benefit us. The prize: the honor of having the Verbal World Series in the winner's home state with a permanent plaque so stating and participating in the opening ceremonies. Most important, the economy would finally be back on track. Spirits would soar.

The bonus, for all, is the awareness of necessary language clarity and what is being missed without it. Language use, oral and written has a lasting legacy. So stand-up and shout: We're not going to take it anymore! Grateful generations to come surely declare a national holiday in remembrance of the early days of struggle. Think of the songs and legends generated for the celebrations. Why even a Nobel Peace prize nomination for successful vernacular negotiations would be in the works.

So conservative, radical or independent: What shall it be?  
exercise your rights or exercise your rights or do what you want

As I said, I have an addiction and this is a piece in progress with no end in sight. Join me, Jon Stewart and all you word wonks.

remember praktis maks perfek

## VENETIAN CARNEVALE

BY ANGELINA SPERO

Celebrants  
in spirited conviviality  
splashes of color  
this night of Carnevale  
in San Marco Square.

Her eyes seeking, searching  
through her mask of sequins  
its trimmings of delicate lace  
                    rose tinted ribbons  
                    lilies of the valley  
her stroll seductive, sensuous  
                    in red satin robes  
                    purple velvet bows  
.....while, beneath, layers of wool  
press against her flesh  
warming her  
.....while brisk winds of winter  
slap across her face

as when I strive to defy  
life's harsh blasts  
seek some diversion  
if only for a while.

## FROM THE BEGINNING

BY ANGELINA SPERO

Your silken tresses  
flowing in ringlets  
on Ghiberti's door of gold  
at the Gates of Paradise\*  
why must you hide behind  
peeking over Adam's shoulder?

Is it the artist's perception  
of you as that serpent  
twisting, turning, teasing  
snaring him into sin?

Is it, dear Eve  
from one woman to another  
that you are being judged too harshly?

And, if I were depicting  
this historical scene  
you both would embrace  
at this scene of your banishment  
flee from the Garden  
arm in arm.

\*reference to one of the "Doors in Paradise" in which Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden.

## MY UNCLE MAX

BY FLORENCE STRAUSS

I was nine years old the first time I met my Uncle Max. My mother came from a family of eleven children. Max and Phil, his twin, were the youngest. My Uncle Phil was a mail carrier, an honorable profession during the Depression years. He had a wife and two daughters and owned a car. His brother, Max, as far as we knew, never married. At a young age he had left home to join the Merchant Marines and no one in the family seemed to know his whereabouts.

And then one day, the scenario changed. After a period of about twenty years Max had reappeared in New York and was in touch with my Uncle Phil. My mother told us that he was coming to visit us in our tenement apartment on the lower east side. I don't know how word got around from one relative to another, for we did not have a telephone. But there we were, eagerly awaiting his visit.

I was a shy little girl and did not relate easily to strangers. But when I saw Uncle Max for the first time I was elated. He was in his Merchant Marines uniform which I found very impressive. Some of my uncles were quite tall, but Max was not. He must have been about forty years old. He wore a great big smile and I thought he was very handsome. He did not resemble his twin at all. Also, he came bearing gifts. He had been in the Far East and brought us a silk kimono from Japan and a beautifully embroidered white tablecloth from China with a great big dragon emblazoned on it. He also gave us beaded gold locket with a large round stone in the center – a green stone for my older sister and an amber colored one just for me. Although we had been told he was not married, he was accompanied by a very glamorous woman wearing lots of makeup and a fur stole. He introduced her as Olga.

On that visit an appointment was made for a future date. Uncle Max and Olga were coming back next week to take us to Radio City Music Hall. It was the most exciting event of my young life. We saw Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland in "Babes on Broadway" in one of the most magnificent movie palaces in the world. I was awed. We also had dinner in an upstairs Chinese restaurant and traveled by taxi. Although I have since seen and been to many wonderful places throughout the world, that special night remains in my memory as one of the best.

Then, just as suddenly as Max had reappeared, he disappeared again. When the country went to war in 1941 we were told that Max was in the middle of the fighting in the South Pacific. I felt proud that my uncle was in the midst of it all, protecting my country. When the overwhelmingly sad news reached us that his ship had been torpedoed and he was lost at sea, I was inconsolable. My hero was gone.

My mother had been widowed after only five years of marriage and we lived in genteel poverty. Discretionary money was virtually non-existent. When we found out that she was the beneficiary of an insurance policy taken out by Uncle Max, we were totally overwhelmed. She had inherited the astounding sum of two hundred dollars. I was thirteen years old and for the first time in my life I was able to buy a new spring jacket, just like the one my best friend Irene had bought at Norton's Department store on 14th Street, and it cost four dollars. It was light blue plaid and I can still picture it in my mind. I have absolutely no recollection of how the rest of the money was spent, but I remember that jacket so well.

# REFLECTIONS

*in poetry and prose*

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I still have the “gold” locket Uncle Max gave me with the only existing picture of him inside. The pearls have peeled and I guess it wasn’t gold after all. When my granddaughter used to look through my ‘treasure box’ where I keep it, I would tell her the story. My mother never liked possessions. She was a true minimalist and cut up the magnificent silk tablecloth into gym bags for my sister and myself. I never did know what happened to the Japanese kimono or to Olga.

FIRST DAY

BY TILLIE THALL

That first day in school is etched in my mind  
Where do I get the courage to find  
But as soon as I found the children in game  
It was easy for me to say, Ma, go home  
I'm going to be here for the rest of the day  
To have a real day of joy  
I can do it like any girl or boy  
The fear was gone and in its place anticipation  
I faced that first day with a feeling of elation  
I could do exactly what other children do  
I follow the rules too  
So gone was the fear  
and banished all year  
I learned to mature with time  
And tell about this my rhyme.

CATS I HAVE KNOWN

BY TILLIE THALL

I'm not a cat lover  
Don't get me wrong  
I just happen to raise a few  
One was called Black Nose  
Who was scrawny and had a weak voice  
The other named Tiger was plump  
Black Nose would go to the refrigerator  
Tiger was a fighter  
Eventually they both ran away into the wide wide world  
They joined a cat colony and lived happily ever after.

WITH MY GRANDMA

BY ADRIANNE TOOMER

we sit in Grandma's garden  
on the carved wooden bench  
handmade by the old carpenter  
down the road

calm blue green waters  
quietly waltz by  
beneath skyscraper mountains  
shiny in the sun

Grandma tells me of her life  
all here on this island

I hold her hands so soft  
in spite of all the work they've done

Mother has the same face as she  
without the lines

I hug her gently and  
she smiles that smile I smile myself

a wistful grandchild's fantasy...  
I never got to meet her



THE WISH

BY ADRIANNE TOOMER

She'd wished him gone  
to where was not  
her province  
She hadn't wished him  
dead        just gone  
He died    she cried  
not with sorrow  
He'd gone

FLICKERING

BY HENRY TORRES

flickering  
from sweetly stimulating  
mind-blossoms

living  
liquid aromatic thoughts  
are delicately released  
into my inner ethos  
blessing me with  
unselfish delight

a butterfly moment  
of inspiration  
presents itself  
issuing a strong  
plea to manifest  
a love infused  
poem  
before time  
expires for  
this selfless germ  
to sprout into  
an experience  
shared  
and  
before  
it becomes  
lost  
in the  
opportunity  
to gently touch  
your emotions in a  
tender way

THEN GOD SAID

BY HENRY TORRES

*Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.—Genesis 1:3*

It's a stillness  
consumed by melancholy  
like an aged dawn  
whose muted colors  
bemoan the coming of a new day

it's an inner quiver  
despite the welcomed  
chilled air of  
a northern breeze  
that clashes  
against the tailwind of  
a waning summer

it's being on the dark side  
of a harvest moon  
and not seeing countless  
stars  
shine their selfless  
pins of light

so many happy times  
drifting  
to the dark side  
of my mind

nothing is what  
it should be  
always less  
or more  
than what I  
expect it  
to be  
but so less-more

than the more

## THE MOMENTS OF MY LIFE

By WENDY TRONTZ

I have always liked watches.

The Timex that, “Took a licking and kept on ticking”, through a rough and tumble childhood.

The gold toned, seventeen jeweled, grown-up watch my mother gave me for my junior high school graduation.

The silver faced watch I bought with money I earned as a summer life guard.

The Seiko dress watch my sister gave me to commemorate my college graduation.

The Marathon runner’s watch that helped me to train for six New York City Marathons.

The scuba divers watch I bought myself, when I got certified as an Open Water Diver.

The watch with large numbers which I inherited from my mother.

Now in my senior years I buy inexpensive water resistant watches which don’t get ruined when I forget to take them off before taking a shower.

What my next watch will look like, only time will tell.

## TWO VIEWS

By WENDY TRONTZ

A newborn cries as it takes its first breath.  
She gasps for breath climbing the stairs.  
A toddler smiles after falling down while learning to walk.  
She, hindered by arthritis, terrified of falling.  
A teenager learns all the new tech.  
She struggles to find the words she wants.  
A young bride, surrounded by loved ones, looks forward to the beginning of a new life.  
She surrounded by loved ones, draws her last breath.

CLASS PICTURE-1948, PS 1, QUEENS

BY JUDITH VEDER

Outside the world is warming from war;  
but colder days are coming.  
Food is being sent to starving children whose  
names I do not know,  
in places I cannot say the names of.  
Colored people are moving to my block,  
and families are buying houses in Levittown  
with something called the GI Bill.  
FDR still hangs proudly on the wall,  
and even my father has packed away his Khaki  
army clothes.  
The second grade is having its picture taken.  
We tuck our dog-tags under our clothes.  
Judith and Gloria, first row, stiffly posed with  
folded hands,  
have hankies pinned to their dresses.  
Jeremiah and Clement, second row,  
their hands glued to their sides,  
wear bowties and suspenders.  
All ears are cleaned, hands scrubbed,  
hair checked twice  
for dirt and lice.  
Mrs. Spacek smiles a bigger smile than us;  
she is older and has had the time to try those  
faces on.  
And also she is “pregnant with her third,”  
and will take a leave to rear the child.  
Rear? Like the back of me? I wonder.

I have not yet learned of pregnancies or how  
to put your best face forward, but  
in time, I guess, I will.  
Row 3, Carl and Lafayette and William, the  
future of America!  
Garment center boys and salesmen, the work  
force and  
“pillow of the country”, I have heard.  
They know the rules, these boys.  
They tell lies and pull our hair and want to see  
under our clothes—  
all the pretty maids in a row.  
Lorraine, and Nancy and Mary, girls of House  
and Garden,  
who will share their secret recipes in years to  
come while  
playing Mah Jongg on a Tuesday night,  
For now, content to cut out paper dolls and  
dress them.  
Susan and Johanna and Arlene, in the middle,  
book ended by some boys,  
looking to the left, the other right,  
thinking of recess and spaldeens and running all  
over the yard.  
Everyone is giggling into cupped hands.  
There was a lot to laugh about that day.  
The second grade was having its picture taken.  
The loudest word we heard was “cheese.”

## MY MOTHER AND MAH JONGG

BY JUDITH VEDER

My mother was really at her best when playing Mah Jongg. She practically sang “bams and cracks” and played a tune as she moved the beautiful ivory tiles across the table. My mother had a mah-jongg group, which met once a week in each of the player’s houses. Getting together was a freedom allowed to these mothers, housewives, and friends. It was a special occasion for the children in the house too. We couldn’t wait for the group to come to our house, we, meaning me, about 10 and my sister, 8, my mother, but not my father. He usually found something else to do when this gala occurred. I think he thought the whole thing silly. Men thought that about women’s groups then.

There were many rituals attached to the Mah Jongg game night. The whole house was cleaned and dusted. Furniture covers were removed from sofas, pillows plumped, knick knacks taken out of hiding. The little bridge table, the one I still have today, with the mock needlepoint floral design was brought out from the back of the closet and dusted and covered with the red quilted pad. This was often covered with a plain white table cover. Five folding bridge chairs were taken out of hiding. The living room was vacuumed and various pieces of furniture were moved aside to accommodate all of this. Then little snack tables were opened and special candy dishes were set out on them and pretty napkins were ironed and put on the table too. The houseplants, usually snake plants or rubber trees, were moved around. There were even guest towels in the bathroom. My mother would stand at the entrance to each room and inspect it all as if the President of the United States was coming to our house. We kids were actually moved around too but we could help with all of this.

The house the game was in was also the catering establishment. And the women each outdid the other in what snacks they would prepare. They never had dinners or wine or liquor. They always had cakes and coffee, coffee that was ground fresh from the A & P. We helped put this all out under the direction of the Sergeant-mother, warned not to sample the goodies but of course my sister and I became the best nibblers, pre and post-game time.

I loved the Mah Jongg set. I loved its brown leather case with the little gold clasp and the tiniest key. In it were racks with little plastic discs to keep score, and tiles, white, ivory with such exotic little pictures. Even the sound of these tiles banging against each other was musical. Mah Jongg was played in China, with men, and like Chinese food was adopted by Jewish women. I couldn’t figure this out. For my mother mah-jongg was a consciousness raising group and a chance to talk freely with her women friends.

My sister and I were allowed to help set up the place, arrange the snacks and smell the coffee, but once the game started, we could say hello and just as quickly, say good-bye and we were sent to bed. This was the rule with all the families. But oftentimes we forced ourselves to stay up, parading in and out of our room to the bathroom or boldly into the living room complaining of a stomachache just to see what was happening. We became the best eavesdroppers but heard things we didn’t understand about money, about sex, gossip and tears. I heard complaints about fathers and complaints about weight. I heard worries about war or taxes. I heard stories about children. None of this touched us. My mother always seemed very involved with all of this and always

# REFLECTIONS

*in poetry and prose*

---

seemed so happy when this was going on. She saved the money she won from the game in a special sack as did all the women. And I always knew when they saved enough because it was then that the whole group would get tickets for a Broadway show. I can't recall my father and mother ever saving money to see a Broadway show together and I guess that was true for the other mothers too. And I think it is true today.



## SONGS TO NO-SELF

BY ANDREW P. VELEZ

eat me...  
eat me inside out  
listen to my words...when you are dead  
digest the invisible  
fleeting words  
ether words  
blasting syncretic sounds 'cross your memory  
imprinting gender  
timeless words  
ooze...sweeping away holographic shadows  
announcing the make believe  
ingested thoughts scattered-shattered  
searching for  
pseudo meanings  
pseudo realities  
faceless forms shimmering-mouthing  
forever emancipating genders  
inside I am she  
outside I am he  
outside I am her  
inside I am him  
hormonal confusion-delusion  
twisted...missing gene  
dna...abducted-unfolds  
warring words...fading facades  
consuming words with empty letters  
words  
without gender  
without texture  
without perfumed essence  
rasping-grasping energies tongue  
songs to no-self  
like stars standing still  
steadfast in their wake

trespassing space and time  
transforming moment-words  
transcending other likenesses  
other selves  
genders within genders  
gentle defenders  
identities stolen  
offended words blink-wink-shrink  
split by – transmuted-transected creators  
gobble nature's intentions  
taste the fluorescent flower's eye  
exchanging wet words with dry words  
dry words with wet words  
rising within...emerging dauntless selves  
listen to my words...when you are dead  
there is no gender  
no words...only  
fractals floating freely  
shaping other languages  
catch them on the waves  
transient non-sense  
let your word create no-self  
no gender

## INSPIRATION

BY MARILYN T. WALKER

Poetically speaking  
Don't know what I'm seeking  
Thoughts and words both evade

My muse still pursues me  
But nothing renews me  
Despite any efforts I've made

I'm not new at writing  
But nothing exciting  
Serves my creative urges

Sparks of wisdom are out  
Of that there's no doubt  
Until my power light surges

Seems there's no resolution  
Bright outlook solution  
My skills have all gone astray

If my day seems to brighten  
If I put pen to writin'  
Brain shortage causes delay

The pen's lost its might  
Dried up ceased to write  
And talent fell on the sword

My ship has set sail  
My idea train derailed  
With cargos of dreams all aboard

But true scribes don't quit  
So I won't merely sit  
And mourn the success I yearn

So I'll traverse the earth  
In search of poetic rebirth  
And await my lost cargo's return

Then my mind will explode  
With rhymes sonnets odes  
Pouring forth literary wealth

I'll grip my pen tighter  
Become a profuse writer  
Discover renewed pride in myself

## I HAVE SEEN THE GUNS ON THE BEACH

BY CHAIM WEINSTEIN

I have seen the guns on the beach  
Rusted, now useless, beyond reproach,  
Helpless, grotesque, and deformed:  
Time, the cancer, kills the killer.  
Where are the men  
Who scanned the ships,  
Loaded the cannons,  
Cried with terror unclothed?  
Who with gusto poured the ammo  
Into gaping mouths of big guns,  
Horrific then as toothless now  
Along the sand?  
Shrieks lost in the screaming wind,  
Youths long gone in curling smoke,  
Ashes with stunted weeds lie mixed.  
Still, honor to family we pay,  
Paeans to freedom we obey,  
Duty to country is owed.  
And this fallacy we know:  
Killing justly prevents just killing.

THE SHUL IS DARK

BY CHAIM WEINSTEIN

The shul is dark and still.  
Blood-red velvet drapes  
Hide cold hard-oak doors  
Slide open, reveal  
Lonely Torah scroll:  
Knitted mantle frayed,  
Blushing, embarrassed,  
Like town urchin or  
Forlorn orphan brought  
To Magistrate's Throne.  
Old Jews' prayers rise  
Like illusory  
Flickering flames high  
Above the gold-hewed  
Menorah, curling,  
Wispy bony smoke  
Rising to gray grime  
Of low-hung ceilings:  
Here some journeys end

## THE TRAVEL BUG

BY ANITA WEISENFELD

I count travel as a passion, a “sickness”, if you will  
One for which there is no cure and therein lies the thrill  
The next trip’s always being planned; the question is “where to?”  
To satisfy this wanderlust, not just any place will do.

To immerse myself in culture, hear a language I don’t speak  
Try foods I’ve never tasted or climb a mountain peak  
To swim with sharks or para-sail or zip-line through the trees  
I’m thrilled to say that I have tried more than one of these.

The travel “bug” has bitten me, of that there is no doubt  
I long to be “infected” as I wander all about  
Each new destination makes we want to travel more  
I yearn to wander far from home to explore, explore, explore.

The medicine is simple, this dosage does not fail  
Don’t care about a relapse, my passport tells the tale  
So please don’t call a doctor, for surely now you see  
I just love to travel--there’s nothing wrong with me!

PAYBACK

BY ANITA WEISENFELD

The lesson wasn't going well  
The students unprepared  
Oh dear, my chairman just walked in  
Now I'm really scared!

He sat down at a last row desk  
The students turned to stare  
"Who's that guy?" "What's his name?"  
"What's he doing there?"

Then suddenly they rallied  
Sat up straight and looked ahead  
Behaved like perfect angels  
Relieved my deep-felt dread

The bell rang; lesson's over  
Whew, so glad that it was done  
And as the students filed out  
I heard, "You owe us one."

## THE PRIZE

BY SARAH WILLIAMS-HARRIGAN

It happened more than 50 years ago, yet the sting of it still remains. When I became a teacher, the memory was always uppermost in my mind.

Mrs. Leonard, the Guidance Counselor at my elementary school, was an extraordinary woman. She made all of us students feel we could do and be anything we wanted in life. She recognized each student as a special individual with talents the world needed. With this mission in mind, she identified a group of us to get out of our East Harlem neighborhood and go to a “better school” in Queens. At least that is how she presented it to our parents. I didn’t know it until many years later that we were being bussed to integrate an all-white school in Queens. Not only that, Margie and I would be in an accelerated class (SP or special progress as it was called. It also meant we would skip a grade.) The school, PS 141Q, is still in Astoria. It was a short ride by bus. Our group was especially excited because we would be taking the city bus by ourselves. Junior high school was going to be fun!

Fortunately for us, we didn’t encounter any outward hostility. Unlike what was happening at the time in Boston, for example, where parents and children were aggressively protesting bussing by hurling verbal insults at the children and in some cases throwing garbage and other debris at the busses that were bringing the children to the schools. Newspaper accounts detailed the violence and acrimony that were present at the time. But for us, there was only excitement and adventure.

Although there were some Italian and some Puerto Rican children who were our friends from our neighborhood elementary school, in Queens we met Greek, Jewish, WASP and Black children. We ate lunch together, studied together and moaned about certain teachers together. A few of my new school friends wanted to invite me to their homes, but they weren’t sure if it would be acceptable to their parents. One friend worried about what I would eat. “Don’t worry,” she assured me, “We’ll eat spaghetti!” I laughed because although I had never eaten Greek food, I had eaten some Italian food and plenty of Jewish food because my mother used to work for families that always gave her food to bring home. I never did get to visit any of my classmates’ homes.

Because Margie and I were in the SP class, we had the best teachers. No one treated us any better or worse than any of the other children. Our favorite classes were with Mrs. Garcia and Mr. Levy. We all disliked Miss N, our English teacher and her “friend” Miss T who taught Social Studies. Even though we weren’t too fond of Miss N, we all recognized she was a good teacher, for her classes were never dull—just hard work. We also liked her treatment of the students who excelled on her Thursday tests. It was a great motivating tool because it made us all, as bright as we were, study even harder to try to earn the prize, usually a book, she gave to the person who scored the highest mark on the test.

Every Thursday since the second month of school, Miss N gave us a test of the week’s work. When we returned on Friday, she would reveal the scores, saving the highest scorer for last. It was a cold, wintry day, but our classroom was warm and buzzing with anticipation. I had studied harder than usual because I was determined to get one of the highest scores for a change. As Miss N called out the names (and the scores), I began to get nervous. She had called more than half of

the class, and still had not called my name. After several more names, she gave Margie her paper. Margie had gotten a 90! I still hadn't received my paper. Margie and I looked at each quizzically. I mouthed the words, "Where's my test paper?" She hunched her shoulders. There were only two of us left who had not received our papers, Evelyn whom we all acknowledged was the teacher's pet and myself. I couldn't believe it. "Did I really get the highest mark?" I wondered to myself. The class was deathly silent as we all waited to see who had the highest score. Finally, in what seemed like an eternity, Miss N announced there was a tie for first place.

"I don't know how this happened," she said, her face red and contorted, but Evelyn and Sarah both received 100 per cent on the test."

My friends in the class broke out in spontaneous applause. I heard someone whisper, "Ha. Evelyn has to share the prize this time."

"Sarah where were you sitting during the test?" Miss N asked in a soft but accusatory voice.

"I sat where I always sit; why are you asking?" I asked, my voice trembling in anger as I realized what she was implying.

Silence. I really didn't care what she thought. I knew I had studied hard and deserved the prize. "I wonder what she has for us," I thought blocking out her tone.

"Well, class this week there will be no prize given out because I didn't get a chance to pick anything up. Now let's go over the homework." That was it. No further explanation. No discussion.

No one spoke up. No one looked at me. Not even Margie. I looked at Evelyn. Her head, too was down, ostensibly looking over her test paper. I was devastated. I knew then how Miss N really felt about my being in the class. It was then that I vowed if I became a teacher I would never treat my students differently, except to gear instruction to their level and interests. I vowed never to have my students feel what I felt and clearly still feel 50 years later.



## HOMELESS WINTER BLUES

BY SARAH WILLIAMS-HARRIGAN

In summer when sultry nights seduce us  
With the rhythms of the city,  
We marvel at them—  
The homeless  
who appear like free-spirits, nonconformists,  
Men and women who dare to live by their wits  
In hand fashioned domiciles they call home.  
We don't mind not giving money and a smile  
But often we do anyway  
Because the season makes us feel bigger than we are.

The summer air fragrant with the spittle of life  
Invites them and us  
To stay out late in places they call home,  
Listening to summer city music,  
Bongos, congas, saxophones  
And even violins—parts of string quartets  
In Central Park and other local haunts  
Under starry-eyed city nights.

But when the temperature drops.  
Our brothers and sisters, our humanity  
Don't seem so enviable,  
For the only music they hear now is the wintery whistle  
And the heartless wind toll from the Hudson  
While slashing savagely to the bone.  
Our homeless are nowhere to be seen.

It is then we wonder where they are and how they are faring  
In their ramshackl'd cardboard houses with plastic bay windows.

We see no one, but wish we could be sure they are warm and cozy  
As we in our cars, our own selfish islands  
With the tinted windows and the heat turned up on full blast  
Drive by the same spots we both love in summer;  
Only now we wouldn't mind  
If one asked for change for coffee or Muscatel  
To keep warm and awake,

For in the cold we fear their sleep  
And wish for summer  
To keep them awake.

WE USED TO LIVE DANGEROUSLY

BY ALLAN YASHIN

We used to live dangerously  
caution never entered our minds

We used to live extemporaneously  
in the fast lane all the time

We used to live passionately  
fervent commitment.. or none at all

We used to live spontaneously  
Excitement...our siren's call

But now we're on to a different adventure  
Though no less courage demands the task

We look back—where did the years go?  
That's what we all seem to ask

The future beckons but who knows  
just how long it will last?

So pass your days quenching your yearnings  
Self-denial...make it a thing of the past

No one knows when the finish line's coming  
So don't let that get in your way

And try, if just for a little bit  
To live dangerously today

## I ASKED THE MAILMAN

BY ALLAN YASHIN

I asked the mailman, "Has it arrived?"  
That acceptance letter for my book  
After all these years of writing I have strived.  
He took off his sunglasses and looked for a letter  
Sorry, Mr. Yashin nothing for you  
Maybe next week your luck will be better.  
I asked the mailman  
Do you have a letter from a publisher for me today?  
He unbuttoned his fall sweater...looked in his bag  
Nothing for you Allan, what can I say  
Are you sure...can you please give it one more look?  
Sorry, but still no letter from a publisher wanting your book.  
I asked the mailman  
Do you have a letter for me before you go?  
He shook off his mailbag...it was covered with snow  
Al, you're breaking my heart here, cause I've still got nothing for you  
But don't give up hoping cause what can you do  
Maybe next week I'll bring you a letter with lots of good news  
I bet someday I'll be looking in the paper to read your reviews.  
I asked the mailman  
Am I a fool to still expect a big surprise?  
He unzipped his spring jacket and looked me in the eyes  
My friend did you ever think  
"What do those dumb publishers know"  
I get off in an hour  
And I'd love it if you would show  
Me that book that you've written...I'm sure it's just great  
Say...why the hell not!  
Cause how long can I wait  
To have the world read what I have done  
At least now I can say that I have a readership of "one."

## MY OWN ROLLER SKATES

BY ANITA ZUCKERBERG

Roller skating – what a thrill! I was eight-years-old and ecstatic when my older brother, Gary, gave me his old pair of roller skates. Dad had bought Gary a new pair so he passed his worn pair down to me. Every afternoon when the weather was warm and dry and my homework was completed, the roller skates would come out of the bottom of the hall closet. It did not concern me that there were irregular-shaped cracks in the pavement, which sometimes caused me to trip and fall. I would just get up and try again. Scrapes and bruises on my knees and elbows would not deter me from my favorite activity.

My roller skates were the old-fashioned kind that required the use of a skate key. They were made of plain-looking silver metal and were attached to the ankle by a thin leather strap. The key was very important because the skates could be lengthened or shortened with one side of the key and tightened around the front of the foot with the other side. I remember having to make several adjustments before the skates were comfortable, and sometimes the inflexible metal pinched my toes.

The skates were so heavy that it took me some time to get used to their weight. Yesteryear's skates were not lightweight and attractive like the ones parents purchase for their young children today. Now a child could possess a nice-looking plastic pair of skates in pink, blue, purple or some other color and skates that are considerably easier to put on.

Since I was not permitted to cross the street, my roller skating territory was limited to the block we lived on. However, the street was quite long (at least to an eight year old) and I could make endless trips around the entire block in about ten minutes. Along the way I would meet friends from school who would join me and friends of Mom who would make cheerful remarks about my skating ability. Boy did I think I was a “big shot!”

Even when I was in high school my friends and I would spend many a pleasant fun-filled Friday night at the roller skating rink in Prospect Park near the stables. Since then the skating rink, as well as the stables, has been torn down and parts of the Prospect Expressway now occupy its place.

We were a large co-ed group of friends made of mostly friends from school, from the neighborhood, and sometimes boyfriends and girlfriends. We would all take the bus or train to the rink usually around 7 o'clock (or we would pile into one or two of our Mom or Dad's cars) and stay until closing. Between the lively piano music piped into the rink and the joy of making new friends while enjoying old ones, the evenings were a total delight. When the night was over, we were exhausted but satisfied.

When I think back to what made roller skating so satisfying to me, it was probably the speed and the feeling of freedom. As a young kid, going fast was thrilling because it spurred my imagination. I would race, roll and fly along the streets as I imagined that cowboys and Indians, or nefarious villains were pursuing me. As a teen it was just plain social fun when we chased each other, soaring as couples and threesomes or more, laughing at each spin!

I did not realize it at the time, but because I often fell down (but got up again), skating was a childhood lesson on how to respond to the disappointments and travails of life. Back then it was

# REFLECTIONS

*in poetry and prose*

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just pure enjoyment, made better by sharing it with good friends who were also seeking clean, fun-loving ways to pass the time.

So, if you haven't skated the streets of Brooklyn, you have not enjoyed all roller skating has to offer!

## OH, THE GLORIOUS SIGHTS OF SPRING

BY ANITA ZUCKERBERG

Oh, the glorious sights of spring  
The wind is gentle, the clouds are few, and the sky is azure  
Bouquets of creamy carnations, perky petunias, and fragrant  
gardenias lace over each other  
Elongated jonquils spread joyously in lush green gardens

Massive bunches of opulent orchids cover an outcropping of wild  
berries  
Indelibly pure irises and fragrant snowdrops grow among pristine  
white tulips  
Oceans of lilacs mix with wondrous vines of silver-belled clematis  
Innumerable roses of every regal color boldly display their  
magnificence

Wild lilies of the valley, heavy with last night's rain, appear  
momentarily languorous among newly bloomed crocuses  
Sweet-smelling lavender bows over a mat of grass and leaves  
Wild carpets of moss conceal large areas of the earth's floor and  
Jagged rocks that have been here since life began are obscured

Elm, oak, hickory, and fir trees reach toward the sun's light  
Their leaves tremble slightly as spray from nearby waterfalls drop  
water on each leaf with kisses of refreshment  
The gentle breeze causes succulent oranges to undulate on thin  
branches  
Small red and green plums, bounty, hang on branches waiting to be  
plucked

Blue-feathered and red-breasted birds flit from one tree to another  
Animal inhabitants of the forest secrete themselves behind bushes  
and trees  
Then scamper for nuts and insects buried in the earth  
The forest is rich with treasures

Spring has arrived with all its majesty  
Bringing with it a vibrant, multicolored feast for the eyes







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