Reflections
in poetry and prose
2022
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 29th 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
Welcome to the 29th 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 Retiree Programs Assistant Director, Lynn Lospenuso; the Editorial Committee of Genevieve Richards-Wright, Karen Millard, Gail Sternfeld and Libby Gershansky; and 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

Gino Giustra
Director, UFTWF Retiree Programs
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irene Abruzzese</td>
<td>THE COVID METAMORPHOSIS BOND</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberta Ann Afflitto</td>
<td>THE FIRST HORSEMAN</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberta Ann Afflitto</td>
<td>WHO ARE YOU?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriella Aghoghovbia</td>
<td>BREATHE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith P. Allen</td>
<td>I REMEMBER</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith P. Allen</td>
<td>BEAT FOR ME, MY HEART</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darzellia Arnette Allert</td>
<td>OPPRESSOR</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darzellia Arnette Allert</td>
<td>GRANDMA AND FRIENDS</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha Andujar</td>
<td>TREASURES</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha Andujar</td>
<td>BEGINNING</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Marie Antenucci</td>
<td>PENNY CANDY</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Marie Antenucci</td>
<td>SOMEWHERE IN TIME</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amie Avny</td>
<td>HOME</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara McGillicuddy Bolton</td>
<td>MILK TOAST, RED JELLO, AND GINGER ALE</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara McGillicuddy Bolton</td>
<td>ALL IS ONE</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis X. Bolton</td>
<td>BESIDE THE CURB</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillis Brown</td>
<td>FIRST KISS</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha Cataldo</td>
<td>THE GIFT</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise Cazazian</td>
<td>FEARLESS</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry Citron</td>
<td>THE MARK OF REMEMBRANCE</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Collender</td>
<td>SEPARATE YET UNITED: TOGETHER WE RISE DURING PANDEMIC TIMES...</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Collender</td>
<td>MY FAVORITE SONG</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Cruz</td>
<td>RAINBOW ON THE GROUND</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Cunningham</td>
<td>SECRETS OF A HAPPY MARRIAGE</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Cunningham</td>
<td>PHOTOGRAPH</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Dobbs</td>
<td>MOURNING HAS BROKEN</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Dobbs</td>
<td>FROM AND TOO</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Dora</td>
<td>THEY BEAT YOU UP</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Dora</td>
<td>THIS CAN’T BE REAL</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcia Dubrow</td>
<td>LESSONS</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sultana Ehrlich</td>
<td>REMEMBERING JEAN PAUL BELMONDO</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell Isaac Friedman</td>
<td>FULL MOON</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell Isaac Friedman</td>
<td>ROLE MODEL</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele Gensler</td>
<td>TAP,TAP,TAP</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele Gensler</td>
<td>IN MY DREAMS</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norma Felsenthal Gerber</td>
<td>LYING FLAT (a phrase coined by a Chinese worker)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norma Felsenthal Gerber</td>
<td>MASKS II 5/2021</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline Giurato</td>
<td>DRAWING CLASS</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFLECTIONS
in poetry and prose

Mel Glenn .................................. THE WOLF AT MY DOOR .................................................. Page 59
Mel Glenn .................................. JOCELYNE, UPPER EAST SIDE, NEW YORK CITY .................................. Page 60
Sandy Hoberman .......................... MEMORIES AND CHOCOLATE ........................................... Page 61
Sandy Hoberman .......................... ROSIE AND DAISY ............................................................... Page 62
Delores Johnson .......................... TRUE LOVE ................................................................. Page 63
Delores Johnson .......................... LIFE’S TREASURES ............................................................. Page 64
Martha K. Johnson ......................... BLOOMING HOPE .......................................................... Page 65
Martha K. Johnson ......................... PRIDE, VANITY AND HUMILITY ........................................ Page 66
Marilyn Kamile ............................ MORNING ................................................................. Page 68
Marilyn Kamile ............................ LAMENTATION ................................................................. Page 69
Gwyndolyn Korahais ....................... AUTUMN SUN ............................................................... Page 70
Gwyndolyn Korahais ....................... FLOUR SACK DRESSES .................................................... Page 71
Janet Lieberman .......................... CURVACIOUS CAT TAIL ..................................................... Page 72
Janet Lieberman .......................... TALE OF RENEWAL ............................................................ Page 73
Jocelyne Lindor .......................... HELLO THERE ................................................................. Page 74
Jocelyne Lindor .......................... LISTEN ............................................................................... Page 75
Madeline Mandel .......................... REFLECTIONS I ................................................................. Page 76
Madeline Mandel .......................... REFLECTIONS II ............................................................... Page 77
Constance Meccarello-Gerson ....... CONFINEMENT ................................................................. Page 78
Constance Meccarello-Gerson ....... I LOVE BOOKS ................................................................. Page 79
Ted Mieszczanski ......................... SURVIVING ON THE EDGE .................................................. Page 80
Ted Mieszczanski ......................... COVID RUMINATIONS .................................................... Page 81
John Paul Miraglia ......................... I AM SO DISTRUCTED BY THIS WARMING WORLD .... Page 82
Jacqueline Napolitano .................. WHO AM I? ................................................................. Page 83
Jacqueline Napolitano .................. A PAPER TIME MACHINE ................................................... Page 84
Selma Reva Newman .................. VIRTUAL TRIP ................................................................. Page 85
Selma Reva Newman .................. CAPE COD ................................................................. Page 86
Avinash Pancholi .......................... THE BOY WHO NEVER GREW UP .................................. Page 87
Lorraine Pearson .......................... OCEANS OF LONGING .................................................... Page 89
Irene Reinhard .......................... OVER THE TOP (A Play in Rhyme) ....................................... Page 90
Terry Riccardi .......................... WHERE’S THE GOLD?? ....................................................... Page 93
Genevieve Richards-Wright ............ NO DIFFERENCES .......................................................... Page 95
Genevieve Richards-Wright ............ BUTCH’S STORY ............................................................. Page 96
Pamela Salmon .......................... SLEEPING BEAUTY .............................................................. Page 97
Pamela Salmon .......................... BELONGINGS ................................................................. Page 98
Betty Samuels .......................... LATKES ............................................................................... Page 99
Betty Samuels .......................... MISSING YOU ................................................................. Page 100
Lois Sarnoff .......................... NOT JUST ANY MATZO BALL SOUP ..................................... Page 102
Lois Sarnoff .......................... MY CO-OPTY THE BAY ......................................................... Page 103
Donna Schettina .......................... FIRST GRANDCHILD ....................................................... Page 104
Donna Schettina .......................... FRACTURED ................................................................. Page 105
Naomi Shore .......................... MOONLIGHT ................................................................. Page 106
Naomi Shore.................................A RANDOM ROMANCE.................................................. Page 107
Monique Sledge-Ambrose ..........LETTING GO .................................................................... Page 108
Monique Sledge-Ambrose ..........LONGING........................................................................ Page 110
Beth Smuckler............................MY CURSED LOVE........................................................ Page 111
Beth Smuckler............................A RETIREE'S YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW ........ Page 112
Kenneth Solway............................IT WAS ........................................................................ Page 113
Kenneth Solway............................THAT'S IT .................................................................... Page 114
Christine Soper............................AN ACT OF KINDNESS ............................................... Page 115
Christine Soper............................THE VISIT .................................................................... Page 117
Steven L. Thomaschek.................MELODY 61 .................................................................. Page 118
Wendy Trontz...............................THEIR BONES WILL GLOW ........................................ Page 120
Wendy Trontz...............................THE WATERS WILL CLAIM HER ............................. Page 121
Judith Veder.................................WE SHARE THE SUNSETS........................................ Page 122
Judith Veder.................................A MEMOIRY .............................................................. Page 123
Anita Weisenfeld .........................THE EYES HAVE IT ................................................... Page 124
Anita Weisenfeld .........................THE SUNDAY FOOTBALL BLUES .............................. Page 125
Paul Wojcik.................................WINGSPAN .................................................................. Page 126
Paul Wojcik.................................NO POEM TO OFFER ............................................... Page 127
Perlita P. Wolahan .......................WHAT IS LIFE? .......................................................... Page 128
THE COVID METAMORPHOSIS BOND

By Irene Abruzzese

It all began with a desire to write.
A mission to share one's legacy, should the grim reaper arrive.
The impetus: a plague and the varied ravages of an all-encompassing pandemic.
The result: a union of unique individuals searching for a comfortable path
on the road to writing.
For three consecutive terms, a group of retired educators bore their souls together.
They shared the most intimate moments of their lives.
Why? The obvious: to define themselves; share the essence of their family history.
Yet, they found deeper purpose;
hopefully, to better the lives of others, in revealing their own trials and tribulations.
From across the miles, via the magic of technology,
we entered each other’s hearts and minds.
We shared the sagas of our distinctly different, yet united lives.
The pain, the passions, the suffering and the joy,
our frailties, strengths, courage and fears;
politics, the state of our nation and the world.
No, far from just the tale of families;
though the intricacies of such are worth sharing indeed.
And oh the prejudices within those personal histories;
the struggle of their successes and failures along the way.
Yet through it all, the warmth, the laughter, the appreciation of life and love
as they endured and survived to reach this moment in time.
So many lessons learned of great value.
Yet mostly, this small group of ten women and one man,
shared far more than the artistry of storytelling, the craft of writing
and the special ways to bring life and light to their memoirs.
They shared Humanity!
Along the way we became deeply bonded.
African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist;
It mattered not our country of origin or faith.
It mattered that we were a united team,
in our depth of understanding and concern for each other.
Our common goal, the good of mankind,
our printed words and conversation:
an attempt to somehow make the world just a bit better through our shared journeys.
To bring a bit of beauty, laughter, compassion and sensitivity along the roads traveled.
I am proud to have been part of this beautiful collection of human beings;
honored to have connected as their muse in pursuit of their memoirs.
My life is abundantly enriched by this fine group.
Their stories have made us all grow and I have been gifted the most.
Their ongoing bond, dedication and desire to remain together
is a treasure in itself.
This is a thank you to my fellow colleagues, who I, no all of us,
can now call friends of the heart and soul.
As Covid has morphed, so have we.
Like the butterfly, we are emerging ever stronger, more spiritually beautiful,
and though still in need of nurturing, ready to fly.
THE FIRST HORSEMAN

BY ROBERTA ANN AFFLITTO

The summer of nineteen sixty-nine.
Moon landing, Woodstock, all possibilities were mine.
Rhythm of youth as we danced each day.
Music of hope, nothing got in our way.
Reality snapped us into ordinary lives.
Future astronauts settled down as husbands and wives.
Raising our children, paying those bills.
Growing older with the usual ills.
I now see the loss of plain common sense.
Tearing down what was built, unending violence.
The promise, the dream clearly is no more.
Fifty years after, danger outside each door.
WHO ARE YOU?

BY Roberta Ann Afflitto

The gray haired woman works in Shop Rite each day.
Does her job efficiently without much to say.
We give her a nod and barely a thought.
How could we know she was in the Kinder transport?
The man in the World War II cap who lives next door,
Stormed the beach of Normandy in 1944.
The old person who is taking too long,
We’ll never know their unsung song.
“OK Boomer” means me and my peers.
But the youngsters are clueless about our times and our fears.
“Respect your elders” is what we were taught.
Let’s acknowledge their strength in unknown battles they fought.
Show some patience and always be kind.
You’ll need it in return when things slow in your mind.
BREATHE

BY GABRIELLA AGHOHOVHIA

When I stand up for my rights
Some say I am inhumane
When I sit down at the table
Pleading for justice,
Others say I am insane.

“I come in peace,” I say.
“Let me tell my story, so you could learn my way.”

“Speak” they say
But there is no listening ear
The audience – they do not seem to care.
Eyes are transfixed on me
They look at me without seeing me
It’s all about them
Was never about me.
They vowed to give me justice
but that justice comes with a price
that’s too costly for me.
“We will listen,” they say.
“Tell us your story, so we could learn your way.”
“You want to hear my story?”
I’ll keep telling my story
until there’s nothing left to say.
I tell my story my way
I tell them the truth
Yet that’s not what they want me to say
They want me to tell my story
their way.

So
They beat me
Torture me
Spit on me
Disenfranchise me
dispossess me
Debase me
lambaste me
deprive me of my rights
Take my freedom away from me.
condemn me
rape me
fire me
chase me
burn me
Tell lies on me
Try to paint me a picture foreign to me.
Force me to reach something very far from me
Try to confound me
Indemnify me, then swindle me
Take away my song from me.
Twist my words
Mirandize me.
Then use my words to crucify me.

Rob me
Starve me
Misappropriate me
Try to destroy me
Change my story
Zap the strength out of me.

Break me
Burn me
Shackle me
Take your dirty hands off me!

Your blood is dirt to me
My blood mixed with your dirt
gives life to me.
You beat your chest
Causing injury to me
I cry out in pain, but
My cries you hear selectively
never had a prayer in your heart for me.
Yet you kneel on me
Strip the life away from me
and yet again
I rise triumphantly.
I must tell my story
It lives in me
The air I breathe
Is free to me
Even in shackles,
It’s no cost to me.
It always will
be a part of me
And always will
Remain in me.
Breathe!
Just breathe!
The air I breathe
lives on
in me!
I REMEMBER

By Judith P. Allen

I remember,
The moments we shared,
Which were ours to reminisce,
Which were ours to retain,
And ours not to forget.

I recalled,
The hesitating at first
The trembling touch,
The assertiveness
And the confidence that followed.

In time,
We gave of ourselves:
The knowledge we had,
The trust in each other
And the sharing of unselfish love.

In return,
We accepted with openness,
New experiences
Different values
And mutual affection.

With patience,
We overcame the challenges,
Withstood the obstacles
To build a bond,
Which no one can equal.

What I remember,
No one can duplicate,
Nor will they erase
What took place
Nor will they come close to it.
BEAT FOR ME, MY HEART

By Judith P. Allen

Beat for me,
Like a Drum,
Sounds without words,
Beating with a Tempo,
To move the heart:
Beating,
To move the feet:
Beating,
To move the soul:
Beating,
Just for me alone.

Beat for me,
Like music to the ears.
Sounds to create Rhythm:
Pulsating,
To heighten the thoughts:
Pulsating,
To excite the mind:
Pulsating,
To create a work of art:
Pulsating,
To maintain the heart.

Beat for me:
Like the flow of the wind.
Blowing blindly with no direction:
Pumping,
To sustain the Rhythm:
Pumping,
To heighten the senses:
Pumping,
To keep the pace:
Pumping,
Just to stay in the race.

Beat for me,
Like the sea without end.
Rising with abandon:
Flowing,
To a crescendo to its own beat:
Flowing,
To a cadence with no limit:
Flowing,
To a Rhythm in time:
Flowing,
Knowing the beat is mine.
At thirteen years old he was burly and husky. If he had been better coordinated and a fast runner, he could have made the school football team according to some kids. He was five feet seven inches tall, with thick arms and legs. If you saw him from behind, you may have mistaken him for a grown man at times. He knew he scared a lot of kids in the neighborhood. He was known for pushing kids around especially kids like me who were small for thirteen years of age. Junior carried around his reputation like a badge of honor. But the day I saw him his behavior was hardly that of a bully.

I think Junior always hated me because one day I saw his mother slapping him upside the head several times. I assume Junior must have misbehaved and his mother deemed him worthy of a hand whipping.

They were standing in an empty lot where me and my friends often played. Since I was familiar with the lot, I found a hiding place behind the building where I could be invisible to Junior and his mother.

Junior’s mother was a big woman about six feet tall with a thickness to her body just like him. He could not escape those slaps even if he wanted to. I imagine her strong thick arms would have just grabbed him back like a rag doll. She kept saying,

“Why are you lying I know you took it!”

“Ma,” Junior said, “I didn’t take nothing!”

“Boy, if you don’t find my ten dollars, you gonna get worse than this later on tonight.”

As I crouched down peering from behind the building, I could hear the echo of slaps bouncing off the brick walls. Pop! Pop! went the sounds as Junior cried and wailed at the angry stings of pain.

In that moment I could identify with his pain, I had been slapped by my mother before due to some misbehavior, but never more than once. Just as I decided I had enough, Junior and I locked eyes. His were red and watery, gobs of sweat dripping down his shirt as if he had just come from chasing down one of his poor bully victims. My sorrow quickly faded to fear. I thought to myself, “Oh my God! He just saw me and he’s going to be so pissed off at me seeing him in this moment of fragility.” I decided to haul ass out of there as fast as my body could go.

I was really scared; I was never the type of kid who argued and fought with other kids. I only had a small group of friends and the ones who could fight I used as my protectors. But I was not sure if they could keep me safe from Junior even if they wanted too!

As the weeks faded so did my memory of the incident. I knew Junior lived about a half a mile from me and I was grateful he did not attend the same junior high school I did. I never saw him again after that but sometimes I heard rumors about some kid who was doomed to become his victim with intimidation, threats and punches with his hands of fury.
Unfortunately, my luck ran out the day I was walking to the store with about ten dollars in my hand to buy milk and snacks for me and my siblings. I was walking peacefully alone, my mouth-watering and daydreaming about eating snacks, when I heard someone say from behind me,

“Give me your money!”

The command of his voice jolted me to attention like a scared soldier. I was paralyzed to even turn around to look to see who my assailant was. Junior stood in front of me like a big brick wall I could never climb over. I knew there was no need to scream, no one was around. As I was about to open my mouth to say, “Take the money,” I felt as if someone had just smacked me in the face with a school textbook. I heard a crunch sound in my ears and the taste of moisture in my mouth. He snatched the money from my hand as quick as a snake would bite his victim. I was left standing there with a bloody nose, trembling and dumbfounded. I thought to myself, “If this is my payback, it really sucks!”
Grandma and Friends

By Darzellia Arnette Allert

Grandma is driving down the dirt road ever so slowly. My sister Felicia and I stare out the car window. I can hear the crackle sounds of rocks and dirt seep through our open windows. We enjoy our car rides with grandma, today we are going to visit her best friend, Ruth. As we make a turn off the dirt road onto the highway, we pass the same lonely red brick house. Its yard so far from the road it seems it would take an hour to reach it. I decide to ask grandma,

“Who lives in that house? I never see anyone in the yard or even a car parked there.”

“The house belonged to Mrs. Geneva, she passed away a very long time ago. We were friends right up until she died.”

She me told the history of their friendship. Mrs. Geneva and grandma’s children used to play together almost every day. She was also a midwife who delivered my cousin when she was born, Mrs. Geneva named her Shirley. She loved that little curly haired baby so much she nicknamed her after Shirley Temple, a famous actress who performed in the 1930’s. What surprised me about this friendship is that Mrs. Geneva was white, and my grandma is black. I never imagined that black and white people would be friends during those times when Jim Crow Laws enforced racial segregation. Mrs. Geneva and grandma never visited each other in their homes. I guess crossing that racial divide may have been too much in those days. But there was a mutual respect that these women had for each other that softened the laws of segregation that wanted to keep them apart.

We finally arrive at Ruth’s house. The screen door squeaks as she opens it for us to enter. Ruth is about ten years older than grandma. She is wearing her thick tan stockings that seem too hot for South Carolina summers, but I never see a drop of sweat on her face. She has a limp and a voice that sounds like she is singing when she speaks.

When you walk into Ruth’s house it seems so ancient. Old sofa, old chairs, old tables and pictures of old people. She offers us all something to drink.

“Heyyy girrrls, Heyyy Floreen y’all want some pop?”

My sister and I sit and listen as grandma and Ruth converse about what we thought was mundane information to an eight and twelve-year-old kid. Our grandmother taught us to respect our elders, this meant you do not whine about leaving because you are bored. We stayed for what seemed like three hours in child time. On this day my sister and I decided to explore Ruth’s house. In our mind this was not being rude, so we asked to use the bathroom. In our haste to discover we did not realize the floors of Ruth’s house would tell on us. Creak! Creak! were the sounds the floor would scream each time Felicia and I took a step to look in the bedroom or bathroom. The next thing we knew we were being hit by grandma’s words.

“Arnette! What y’all doing back there?”

My sister gave me the look of you answer her!

“Nothing!” I replied in a scared shaky voice.
Grandma yelled out,

“Alright now y’all better git back in here we don’t walk around folks house without permission.”

So, we creaked our way back to our chairs and drank the rest of our pop, whispering and giggling about what we had done. When grandma announced that she would see Ruth on Sunday to pick her up for church we knew it was time to go. Felicia and I jumped up out of our chairs as if something had just set our behinds on fire.

“Bye Ruth see you next time!” we shouted in unison already halfway across the porch, ready to hop in the car. Ruth would die a few years later. Every now and then if we drove past her house, grandma would tell Felicia and me about the good times they had together.
The sun woke me up early this morning,
Beamed into my bedroom.
The quiet and calm surrounded me.
Reminding me of long ago in my hometown,
Hertford, North Carolina.
The countryside,
Had a stillness and a silence
That I grew accustomed to.

A time before television
A time of limited radio listening.
A time unhurried.

A childhood filled with endless time
My brother and I frolicked.
Climbed trees, roamed the woods,
Ran, jumped, made up games
Rode our bicycle down the lane.

It was a time where
The nearest neighbor was “a piece down the road.”
Mr. Charlie Chest’s apple trees beckoned us.
Miss Annie’s pecan tree opened its arms to us.
A time when Mama and Daddy got up early
And often found bags of vegetables on our porch:
Cabbage, turnip greens, collard greens, string beans, corn,
Left by relatives and neighbors.

A time when few cars passed on Chinapin’s dirt road,
Yet when one did,
Everyone stopped to look, listen and wave.
No one was a stranger.

A time after dinner,
When Daddy and Mama told
Stories about their childhood.
I hear their voices filled with laughter, jokes, songs.
And always, ---
Ending the night with prayer.

Such a peaceful time for our family then
Those treasured memories give me peace once again.
BEGINNING

By Martha Andujar

February 8th, 1967, I stepped off the Q 25/34 bus in Flushing, Queens on Kissena Blvd., and looked around. Nothing was familiar to me because in August 1966, my husband, Joe and I had moved from the Bronx to live in the Queensbridge Housing Projects in Queens. We were happy to move there because we felt that it was a step up. Five months later, my husband and I separated, and I became a 22-year-old single parent with an eleven-month-old baby girl named Lisa. That fact changed my perspective on life making me realize that I needed to earn more money to give my daughter a good life. I earned little at the New York Telephone Company where I was employed as a keypunch operator.

Shortly after the separation from my husband, I read a book entitled Letters to My Son by Bob Teague, a sport’s journalist who wrote of graduating from college and earning a six-figure income. It occurred to me that if I went to college, I would become rich also. I was excited for now I had the plan for improving my daughter’s life. Go to college and become rich!

So that day, February 8th, I stood on Kissena Blvd. in front of the entrance to Queens College Campus. It was a crisp sunny winter morning. My heart started to pound for it occurred to me that I was alone. No one in my family had taken this step; nor had any of my friends. I looked up and down the street. I did not see anyone who looked like me. I paused there a few minutes as many thoughts rushed through my head. Suddenly, I heard Mama’s voice in my head. “Go on, Martha; you’re young, take a chance. It may just work out.” I looked down at my watch 8:45. I needed to be there at 9:00. Entering the gate, I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the campus with its open endless space, many trees, and greenery. The buildings were distributed in such a way that complemented the landscape. I paused to savor this peaceful inviting environment that looked like a painting. I had never seen a college campus before this one.

A few students walked across the campus casually dressed in dungarees, short winter jackets and book bags. I was over dressed in a suit, being accustomed to the working business world. I glanced at my watch again. Seven minutes to find the right building. Now, I rushed over to a passing student. “Could you tell me where the Social Science Building is?” He said hurriedly, “Oh, the SS building is straight ahead.” I thought to myself that he was my new colleague. The building was further than it appeared, and when I arrived, I was out of breath. The room I needed was on the second floor. Peeking through the door’s window I could see that the students were all seated, and the teacher, a petite blonde woman, stood in the front of the large classroom. I stood at the side of the door wanting to turn around. There were lots of students in that room but again I saw none that were African American, like me. I knew that when I entered, all eyes would be on me. I wanted to bolt, but my feet would not move. Once again, I heard mama’s voice say clearly, “Martha, just put one foot in front of the other; one foot in front of the other.” I took a deep breath and entered the classroom.

All heads turned to look at me. The teacher smiled and said, “Welcome.” She pointed to where I should sit. “You’re just in time for the exam.” I smiled back and relaxed for I was now on familiar ground. I always performed well on exams.
That day turned out to be a good day, and as I left Queens College Campus, I knew that I would return.
All eyes—40 sets of them—were on the clock as it slowly ticked away until dismissal. In a few minutes, we would leave the classroom without sorrowful abandonment, and experience utter freedom.

We were the illustrious students of St. John the Baptist de la Salle, on Jackson Street in Stapleton, and our moment of liberation had arrived.

We charged out of the building like wild mustangs, shouting, screaming, laughing, and running—running straight to the corner candy store at the corner of Jackson and Beach Streets.

A hanging bell on the door signaled our arrival, as if the proprietor had not heard us and the racket we made as we rounded the corner.

It was a tiny store, crowded with bins, and it could only hold five of us at a time. Candy, 1-cent each, all neatly stacked, waiting for our selection. It wasn’t well-lit—it was a bit dim. Still, the sparkling treats beamed at us.

What would we pick today? Mary Janes, lemon drops, Tootsie Rolls, orange, peppermints, or watermelon slices, bubble gum, sour balls. We loaded up our small paper bags and then presented our pennies to the husband or wife who owned the store, whoever was there that day. It was the early 1950s, and they didn’t feel like they had to watch us too closely, or count out each piece for us.

I chose Mary Janes, a hard candy outside with a peanut butter center. And sometimes, bubble gum. Tommy loved lemon drops. The owners waited patiently while the other kids debated their choices.

It was a quick operation—the school dismissed the grades in waves, with only a few minutes between them. And then we had to make a run for the bus stop, lest we miss the bus home.

Somehow we all managed to get our bags of candy and make our buses, and off we went on the No. 5 over the hill to Castleton Avenue, near the old Staten Island Hospital, crunching loudly or chewing two pieces of bubble gum at a time, the sudden burst of sugar in our mouths. Chattering the whole way.

It was the best thing that happened all day. Better than learning the new spelling words, better than recess, better even than the final sounding bell.
SOMEWHERE IN TIME

BY ANN MARIE ANTENUCCI

Rosa, born in 1950, left her beloved Calabria, Italy at the age of 15. She was forced to come to America with her parents. She cried for many months leaving her friends and cherished memories behind.

She arrived in New York on a cold winter day without an overcoat. Shocked by the bone-deep cold and gray skies, she murmured to herself, “This is a bad omen.” She wondered if it boded ill for her life in America.

It did.

Almost immediately, her father announced that there would be “no more school” and forced her to seek employment in a dress factory, vanishing her future plans to become a beautician.

Looking for any escape, Rosa met a man and married at 17, shifting from one dominating male to another. She gave birth to her first child one year later with four more children to follow.

Her husband eventually became quite wealthy. She wears a three-carat diamond ring encrusted with circular rows of small diamonds.

She has long straight jet-black hair, with bangs in front, slightly feathered, in a style reminiscent of the 1970s, and her style of dress reflects that era. She frequently wears black.

Rosa doesn’t say much but watches unfolding events with an observant eye.

For years she lived in New York City, until her husband bought a boat, and then a condo in Florida, and they started living the snow-bird life, winters down there, summers and autumns in New York, where she comes to life in the company of her friends and family.

Then, one day at lunch with a group of girlfriends, she announced they’d be moving to Florida full-time. It wasn’t her idea, she said. “It’s what my husband wants,” she told us, and the table grew uncomfortably silent for a long, awkward moment.

She is caught somewhere in time, neither here nor there, quiet, closed mouth, laid back and withdrawn.

All her relatives in Italy have fled for foreign lands—Australia and New Zealand. Unfortunately, most southern Italians depart in search of better opportunities that do not exist in the south.

These poor souls scatter all over the globe but never forget their roots. Most don’t surrender their key to their original home, carrying it with them throughout their new life hoping one day they can return and live out their lives that remain in the land of their birth.

They walk with a sadness, a sorrowful longing, a sense of nostalgia always remembering their village.

Rosa is a heartbreaking commentary of old-world traditions, customs and ideals: too late to change, too late to swim against the waves, or even make a ripple, drifting endlessly through the ocean of life.
Lined up bodies of old age, along the walls
Many on stretchers they call out.
Again, and again and again they call.
But no one comes, no one cares to come
The heads droop like rag dolls
Heads with bodies placed, out from sight and out from mind
Stripped down to the bone
Yet each one of them once was, a being, a doing
A mother, wife, sister, father, friend or lover
Time ago each one of them was out there.
Looking ahead and looking forward
Looking to the golden years

John stirs and yells, Help, Help, Help
The big man in his electric rider asks,
What is it John? What is it now?
I, I don’t belong here, I don’t want to be here,
Where am I? Why am I here?
I don’t, I won’t, I feel, so, so, so, lo, lo, lo, what is the word?
The rider nods sadly, yes, I know I know.
Puts a hand on his shoulder,
You’re in a new home John, home now.
They take care of us here.
Nice warm bed and three meals. We’re parked here now, where you sleep
It’s okay John, it’s okay, you’ll be okay.
Everything is all right.

In a curtained off bedroom, we see one who lies there
Sick and tired, and tired and sick
Waiting for someone to come remove their diaper.
She weeps in shame. She shakes her head
This is not mine!! I am not in my place! I…
Bring me back!
I am so, so very afraid to ask for this and ask for that
I need to go, to go, I’m full, please, please,
A bony hand reaches for

The gruff nurse with a scowl who shoves the pan roughly towards her,
“Here, here… Here’s your pan, go ahead, take it and go
Hurry up, I don’t have time. Hurry up and pee!
I’m trying, yes, I can do it, do it myself,
I did it, see? Look!
The woman finishes and tries to hand the pan over,
But it spills, spills and it splashes .
The nurse gives the woman a look of disgust
Shamed now her head low a tear falls down her cheek
But the nurse does not see, does not feel
These ones, fragile and worn. They learn, learn to keep quiet
Don’t say anything!
They learn to keep quiet
Don’t complain, no complaints, things only get worse,
Much worse if they find out you complain,
An outsider asks, Are you ever bored?
Oh yes, yes, so bored, always bored.

Bored of waiting for, for this, for that, for what? For the
same old thing, same tastes, same smells
No taste, no salt. We can’t have salt!
Tastes the same, smells the same,
Can I, Can I please have some chocolate? Just a small piece, a taste.
I love chocolate, oh please!
Everybody tells me, I can’t have chocolate, I can’t have sweet,
I shut my complaints, I stop begging, I stop, I stop.
No more from me.
But the nurses, they can complain
They think we don’t hear, but we hear, we hear
“That one, that one over there,” a nurse says with a smirk
“She is getting too heavy to lift, it will take two of us now to lift her”
Me? Am I getting too heavy? Heavy from what? From the food, from the chocolate?
Two of them, it takes them so long, too long.
It’s too late, I can’t...It’s too late.

An outsider asks, Are you happy now?
No, no I say to myself. This is not the way. Not the way I thought my life would turn out
This, this, here, here look around you!
I will die here,
I do not want this!
People, they die, they die here all alone.
No one to hold, to hold onto.
Look around you, this place is where we are brought.
Where we are left.
My life? My life!
Surrounded by stink, sickness and death!
My final days, spent here in this hell hole

Till the end. Till the finish.
Ach! Oh G-d, I know now!
I know why my husband shot himself that day!
Yes, my dear, I know now, I understand the why my dear, my sweet......
You didn’t , you wouldn’t, you couldn’t.
You knew how it would end.
Not for you to get so old so helpless
Not for you to be dumped in a place like this!
To die in a place like this! I understand dear, I understand
And I forgive you.
You took your last breath in your own home, your own bed.
Oh, my dear! How I wish you had taken me with you!

Pleading with eyes for someone, anyone to notice
Just a little help, a little love.
No comfort here, no tending anywhere.
Look at me! Look at this, look! I’m old, I’m a wrinkled hulk in a aged body
That is what you only see! But look closer! Closer!
And Listen, listen carefully
For you will see and hear here
Here inside of me
A human being inside here!
I have them all here, here inside!
Memories, dreams, stories, hopes, I was someone once, please can’t you see!
Please, look!
I am you, and you are me!
Oh, can you not, can you look and see I am here?

I am here! I am here!
MILK TOAST, RED JELLO, AND GINGER ALE
A MEMORY RECALLED WHILE RECOVERING FROM THE SECOND MODERNA SHOT
BY BARBARA McGILICUDDY BOLTON

Say you stay home from school
With a fever and sore throat
Say mama toasts a slice of her homemade bread
Butters it, dices it, drops it into a bowl
Pours warm milk over it
The butter lifting off and floating
A golden sheen on a white cloud
Say she carries a tray upstairs
And sits by the bed
While you prop yourself against pillows
And let the milk toast slide down your raw throat
And warm your tummy
Say you fall asleep and sleep for a long time
And when you wake up you put on your flannel robe and bunny slippers
And go downstairs
To sit at the supper table with the others
And let cool red Jello slip down your raspy throat
And sip the ginger ale
Daddy stopped to buy on his way home
And the other kids drink some too
It isn’t every day there’s soda pop in the house
Good thing tomorrow’s the weekend Daddy says
Come Monday you’ll be right as rain.
ALL IS ONE

BY BARBARA MCGILICUDDY BOLTON

The six-month old plumply sits
Smiling, showing no partiality
Between resident grandparents
Visiting great-grand aunt and uncle
And Maggie the Dog.

His toddler brother when
Our grandniece appears in the doorway
Runs, arms raised, shrieking, “Mama, Mama”
Picked up, hugged, thrown in the air and caught
Maggie barking with excitement or worry.

Still, the six-month old serenely sits
Unmoved, like God almighty
Showing no partiality.
I spent my growing up years in the same town, on the same street, in the same house, the first house from the corner. On the corner was a mostly wooded lot on a main street going north through the south shore of Long Island. Often the boys on my street played guns in the lot, usually Americans fighting Germans, being the late 40’s. Sometimes we played cowboys and Indians, likely influenced by the waning days of Tom Mix on the radio. Girls never played in the woods, though I once played doctor with Naomi from across the street. After she had examined me, it was my turn as doctor but she said she had to go home for lunch.

We played other places – the refurbished park behind the town hall had an area where we’d play baseball, though with only a half dozen boys, we had only infielders with a single batter. One summer, there was a young mother who traveled around with us, pushing her baby in a carriage and expanding our horizons.

But there were days when, for some reason, we felt disenchanted with our options. On such days, Billy and Johnny – two years and one year older than me – the two Jeffs and Paul – one, two and three years younger than me – would sit on the curb. Like “Marty” on TV, the conversation might be, “Wadda ya wanna do, Johnny?” “I don’t know. Wadda ya wanna do, Billy?”

Billy was essentially a bully. On reflection, I think he took after his older brother. I have a vague recollection of my brother – 9 years older than me – going down the block to warn Billy’s brother to stop frightening the younger kids.

On a day when we were sitting on the curb at a loss for what to do, Billy decided something to do would be to sit on my stomach. He was much heavier than me. I begged him to stop but he simply rocked back and forth. I began to cry which only encouraged him to laugh. The other boys just watched. Paul may have gone home – he was likely the next target. In retrospect, Johnny couldn’t have been there: he often could control Billy verbally.

Johnny’s younger sister Helen was somehow a witness and ran to tell my mother. She walked down the block. Billy kept sitting on me even though he saw her coming. When she reached us, she may have said, “Get off him.” If she did, he didn’t do it fast enough because she slapped him across the face.

Billy got up, crying. I got up and walked home with my mother, probably crying myself. I was also surprised. My parents never spanked any of us. Seeing her slap Billy was remarkable.

A few years later, a group of us were balancing ourselves on the curbstones as we walked up the main street when a newspaper boy rode by on his bike. An 8th grader big for his age, he waved when Billy called to him by name. Shortly thereafter, another newspaper boy rode by – smaller bike, smaller kid, smaller bag of newspapers. Billy, as leader of our crew, was carrying a branch to show his authority. The second newspaper boy reached us, Billy stuck the branch into the spokes of his front wheel – newspaper bag, boy and bike tumbled.

“Why’d you do that?” one of us asked.
“’Cause I felt like it.”

Not five minutes later, the smaller boy pedaled back in our direction, followed by the 8th grader. The bigger boy dismounted, walked up to Billy and shoved him. Billy’s response was, “I didn’t know he was with you.” The bigger boy shoved him again and then again until Billy fell over. Our day ended with Billy walking home, crying. His branch of authority lay on the ground, forgotten by us all.

Several years later, Billy and I were riding double on his bike, me on the handle bars, steering. I turned the handle bars to avoid a parked car but Billy didn’t shift his weight. Down we went. I suffered a concussion and lay on our living room couch for three days.

Several days later, Billy had a misadventure and broke his collar bone. Everyone conflated the broken collar bone with the bike mishap and Billy became the center of attention, the place where I suspect he always wanted to be.
FIRST KISS

By Phillis Brown

When you are fifteen and watch movies that show young people enjoying the company of other young people your age you want to be a part of that group. Girls talking about kissing boys and what happens to them and how it felt. At fifteen you want to feel that way too.

However, in our girl group talks, I never talked about the boy I liked. The thought of my mom’s retaliation if she even heard, saw or caught me with a boy. Nevertheless, I did have a first kiss with James.

James was a tall, nicely dressed 18-years-old. He wore leather shoes from Florsheim, nylon socks and white shirts with a tie. Now some would say he looked odd compared to the other boys in high school who wore regular cotton pants, cotton socks and shoes from Thom McCann, but James was dapper. He looked experienced in everything he did. Not that I knew what he did.

James and I lived in the same building. I on the fourth floor and he on the third. Whenever I saw him go into the building, I would run up the stairs to the fourth floor or wait until the elevator stopped on the third floor where James lived, recall the elevator and get off on the sixth floor and walk down to the fourth.

One day I left my apartment to run an errand for my mom. I went downstairs to the elevator on the third floor. James came out of his apartment.

“Hi Phillis.”

“I see you have science with Mr. Kallistratos.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Does he still wear the same wool grey suit and green tie?”

“Yes, he does. I wonder does he ever have it cleaned and pressed?” We both laughed.

“Phillis, have you ever been kissed?”

“Yes, of course. My dad kissed me on my forehead every day before going to work. He was killed in a car accident.”

“That is not a kiss, kiss. Not a real kiss.” I was about to get angry. But James said, before I got my ire up, “I mean a kiss between a boy and a girl,” as he pointed between himself and me.

“No.”

“I want to kiss you.”

I wanted to say NO!

Then I wanted to say Yes, Yes.

Before I could say anything, he kissed me quickly. Then he said, “I am going to kiss you again.” This time I was ready. I wet my lips and puckered up.
“No, don’t do that,” he said. “Wet lips are like kissing an orange. All wet.”

But that is how lips looked in the movies. Wet and shiny. Then he kissed me again. Softly then harder. When his tongue attempted to part my lips, I fell backward, and he grabbed me to keep me from falling down the steps. That shocked me.

“That’s it,” he said and went back into his apartment. I ran down the stairs without stopping and out of the building.

My thoughts were running wild. Suppose someone saw the two of us on the stairway, suppose they told my mom. Noisy people were always looking through the peephole. Suppose he told the boy I did like. I walked blindly to the post office. So blindly that I barely felt a tap on my shoulder. It was the boy I really wanted to kiss. I could hardly speak. My mind was still on James and the stairwell incident and the possibility of being found out.

Taylor said, “How are you?”

“Fine.” I responded.

He held the door for me as I went into the post office. I dropped one of the letters. He picked it up and put it in the slot for me. And together we left the post office and walked home. He went to his building, and I went to mine. He was wearing a light blue shirt, dark pants with cotton socks and dark shoes.
THE GIFT

By Martha Cataldo

We took the E train from Continental Ave to Chambers St almost every Saturday.

Back in the 50’s-60’s, it wasn’t the World Trade Center stop since there was no World Trade Center. There was just the sprawling Washington Market, which was actually 800 markets corralled into a single one-story, four square block building that would become the home of the Twin Towers.

Downtown was abandoned by everyone who worked weekdays 9 to 5, leaving the place empty and silent on weekends. That is, except for one little section of lower Manhattan that was noisy and always bustling with activity. It was called Radio Row and included Liberty, Dey, Greenwich, Washington and West Streets. Its boundaries were to become the future rectangle that bounded the World Trade Center.

Nothing was quite as exciting as strolling those streets, seeing all the modern equipment, hearing the sounds that came out of those stores with their televisions, radios, record players, cameras, everything you could imagine back then that connected you to the outside world.

This Saturday was special because my father and I were heading to Radio Row to find my 15-year birthday present, a new, modern radio that did not have to be plugged in to listen to it. Yes, this was the original Walkman, known then as a transistor radio.

Sometime around 3pm, we headed west along Liberty, past Broadway and Church to Greenwich. We went 1 block north to find Davega’s City Radio. There I heard for the first time, music coming out of a free-standing radio. How did they do that? I loved it, but you know, it wasn’t quite the one I wanted.

So, we went a few doors west and found Leonard Radio. Same thing, these magnificent free-standing radios that captured sound in a little box and sent the music out to the world! But even at Leonard’s, the radios still weren’t quite right. So, we went west again, store after store, Digby’s, Terminal Radio and Magna Radio Store, listening and looking.

Finally, we found it. I knew it when I saw it! Yes, that was the one, the little red Emerson transistor radio, the best birthday gift I ever received. It was bright red, fit perfectly in my hand, comfortable by my ear and just as easily sat on a table by itself. It was amazingly perfect!

For the next 5 or 6 years, I took my little red Emerson transistor radio everywhere. I took it to the Atlantic Ocean, loved sitting on the sand, listening to the music floating up over the ocean sounds. I took it to school and kept it in my bookbag so I could listen to music during recess. I’d set it on my desk at home and listen to music while studying. What a precious companion that little red radio was. Yet for such a good friend, I have no memory of how and why it finally disappeared. After 7-8 years, I suspect it broke from overuse.

I never even thought about it until some 35 years later, when on Sept 20, 2001 I rode my bike down to the site that was once the World Trade Center. From the hill on Vesey and Nassau Sts, looking west, I could see the facade of one of the towers leaning against the pile of rubble, like giant fingers pointing to the sky. Or were they reaching? And like a zipline going back in time, I
remembered the day my father and I found my little red transistor radio at a store that had been leveled to make way for the new WTC. I was probably staring at the spot where that store once stood.

And then I remembered that, during the NYC blackout of the 1970's, my father heroically led people down 25 flights of stairs in his office building, lighting their way with a torch that he made out of rolled up newspapers. Yup, he loved being a hero.

At that moment, I was grateful and relieved that he had died 10 years earlier in 1991. I knew he would have been one of those rescuers who ran in to help without a second thought. And then all I wanted to do was climb to the top of the pile of rubble and rest my head there. I wanted to comfort whoever was beneath to let them know we were all going to be ok.
FEARLESS

By Louise Cazazian

I must have been about 15 when this happened. I was living in Brasov-Romania in the only apartment I remember living in until I left the country in 1963 to emigrate to Beirut-Lebanon in transit to the USA. It was the year when JF Kennedy was assassinated.

Well, I was on a date with a colleague of mine, same age as me. I always thought that a boy my age was too young for me and in the end I was right. We were walking thru the town and decided as it was almost dark, to climb the hills behind the hill I lived on. It was a steep climb thru the woods but we made it to the top. I had sturdy shoes or sneakers on, so I could climb without a problem.

As we reached the summit it really started to get dark. Above us was a very large fortress which was hundreds of years old and was turned into an Army post to my surprise. As we were walking an officer in uniform appeared and startled us.

He demanded papers from us because we were not allowed to trespass and not allowed to be there.

I didn’t have any ID on me, neither did my friend. So this officer with high black leather boots asked my date to go home and bring papers, and he was to detain me and wait until he would return.

I was nervous about being alone with this man, but my friend was glad to get out of there. As soon as he left, this officer started walking towards me and tried to kiss me and touch me.

Immediately I knew that I was in danger with this animal of a man who was also armed with a rifle.

He pushed me to the ground, and I was able to kick him in the balls and he screamed out and tried to get up, but his boots skidded on the cobblestone path.

I got up and since I knew where I was, one hill down on the left of me to get home, I started running like hell down the hill in the dark with him following me. I knew that the back of our property had a fence with a hole in it so I ran and when I reached that opening, I went thru and hid so he could pass me going further down the hill.

The building where I lived was built on a hill whereby the front was down on street level and the back of the building was 3 floors up at the level of the hill I was running on. So, I ran on the side of the building down to my apartment. Thank God my parents were not home, so I got in and tried to catch my breath. About an hour later the boy, my date, instead of going back to where he left me with this officer came straight to the house because he was afraid for his safety.

So, I opened the door, and told him that he is only a child and that I’m
through with him, that I need a real man who can protect me. So, I shut the door in his face and that was that. Had I been a coward I would probably have been raped by this officer, and since we were under communism no one would have protected me, although I was a minor, but I would have been regarded as a lying child in court. Thank God that I was not a child, and I was fearless and took life into my own hands and got away from a vicious animal who was also armed. Thank God he didn’t shoot. He also did not know these hills as well as I did. After that night I never went to that spot. 2007 when I visited my birthplace again my brother-in-law, my sister and my nephew invited me to go to this very exclusive restaurant. And where do you think it was located? At that famous fortress where I almost lost my virginity. Oh wow, what memories. I still have nightmares about that night. It feels so real. I’m still reliving those moments as I’m writing this story 60 years later.

Poem by Nikita Gill

For the fearless
As they roared as loud as thunder
and carried lightning
the strike of their cruelty
but what are thunder and lightning fearless girls who are used
to carrying entire storms
and hurricanes
in their fingertips?

Quote by IBN Taymiyyah (1263-1328)
Islamic jurist, scholar, theologian, judge philosopher, economist.

“Don’t depend too much on anyone in this world because even your shadow leaves you when you’re in darkness“

How true this is. Both poems inspired me to write this story.
This will be my mark
And my remembrance.
The torn white and blue stripes
Under the collar of my shirt
Collar bone down to sternum
No one else can see it
I can even wear the shirt again
How did this come to be?

I took large black and silver scissors
From a chassid* at a greeting stand
And began to cut my shirt from
My neck and further down.

Down I tore the shirt
Ripping it by hand
First 1/4 inch, which wasn’t enough,
Then 1/2 inch, which was not much more,
So down again I tore it
Again, and again until
I tore the shirt sufficiently
Reaching the ribs concealed by my T-shirt.

Why did I pick that inner place?
That concealed point near the buttonhole
To start to tear,
I don’t know, but I had done my part.

Ripping my shirt in mourning
Upon returning to the Kotel,
That Western Wall, remembering
Our lost Temple, yet to be rebuilt
From over 2 millennia.

Standing transfixed where the
Beit Hamikdosh once stood majestically.
I closed the top buttons.
Yes, I can wear this shirt again.
Yes, no one else could see that tear
Except for myself
And, of course, my G-d.
No one would know
I was wearing that sign of mourning
On my light blue and white striped shirt.

Only a vague hint of the torn and
Tattered grey striped garments
Worn at Auschwitz.

I could now wear that shirt
With inner pride.
How many would understand
What I had done
Or what it represents?

Knowing from where I had come
And from where I’m standing now,
Looking at this massive beige and
Sunlit wall of bricks
I can humbly wear this shirt,
Praying for a World of Peace!

*chassid — a member of a strictly orthodox Jewish sect
A TRIBUTE TO ALL THE PEOPLE WHO MADE THE ZOOM SI BEAGLE PROGRAMS

SEPARATE YET UNITED: TOGETHER WE RISE DURING PANDEMIC TIMES

BY SUSAN COLLENDER

We’re all new to the virtual Technology ZOOM Separate yet united ZOOM classes a gift, a boon

My guitar, piano writing classes What Fun! There are interesting classes For everyone

Si Beagle programs A welcome surprise To help us continue to learn and grow—Together we Rise Yes, Together we Rise

In Pandemic times, Si Beagle Programs helped us get through Kudos, Bravo to coordinators, Instructors, participants, TO ALL OF YOU
MY FAVORITE SONG

BY SUSAN COLLENDER

“LET IT BE”

BEATLES

Lyrics reminds me of my counseling psychology

Not as easy as you know To follow this philosophy

To meet new challenges every day Overcome the small stuff in the way

If you wish a life stress-free Let past problems be history

These three words can set you free “Whisper words of wisdom” and “Let it Be”

I hope this song resonates with you Move positively in all you do and as the Beatles sing

“There will be an answer” LET IT BE
Seeing my 26-year-old son Alex without glasses has taken some time to get used to. For as long as I can remember Alex has worn glasses. He wore them in every school photo, soccer or baseball team photos, and high school prom photos. It was only recently that he has been able to wear contact lenses. When he was first prescribed glasses, we were told that due to his severe vision issues, there weren’t contact lenses made for him. Over the years with advances in contact lens technology, he finally got his first pair a few months ago. Watching Alex put in his contact lenses took me back to his first eye exam.

When it was time to enroll our youngest son Alex into Pre-K, we received a medical form that had to be filled out by his pediatrician. Dr. Sergiou diligently examined four-year-old Alex and the final portion to be done was a simple eye exam. I was asked if Alex knew his ABCs and I assured his pediatrician that he did. As Alex stood at the required distance from the eye chart, the doctor began to point at random letters and Alex could not name any letter. He couldn’t even read the letters at the very top of the chart. No matter how much Alex scrunched up his little face, or how he struggled to see, he could not read a single letter. “I thought you said Alex knew the ABCs,” said his doctor, as he switched the chart from letters to basic shapes. Again, he pointed and again Alex couldn’t name a single shape. Dr. Sergiou and I exchanged awkward looks and then he had Alex move closer to the chart and it wasn’t until Alex was right in front of the chart, that he could finally name the shapes. At that point, we realized Alex needed a serious eye exam.

The pediatric ophthalmologist had all kinds of apparatus and equipment that he used to examine Alex’s eyes. After a very thorough examination, Dr. Deutsh said that Alex had severe astigmatism, a condition in which an abnormal curvature of the cornea occurs, resulting in decreased vision. Instead of his cornea or lens being evenly round, like a basketball, his is shaped more like a football. “As it is, Alex is legally blind,” explained the doctor. “He needs to wear glasses and because he’s so young, his vision can improve, but he will always have astigmatism.” At the optometrist shop, Alex tried on a variety of children’s frames and shyly smiled when he saw himself in a mirror and chose a gold wired rim pair.

On the day the glasses were ready, Alex, his dad and I went to pick them up. Alex put them on and smiled brightly as he started to realize how much more there was to see. We got in the car and drove away. When we got out, I could tell Alex was still adjusting to sudden changes to his sight. As I reached for his hand to walk on to the sidewalk around some puddles, Alex excitedly exclaimed, “Look! There’s a rainbow on the ground!” What? I suddenly realized he had never noticed the colorful residue from an oil slick on the ground where a car had dripped oil. The sunlight had touched upon the oil residue and a colorful sheen was left behind. My little boy was seeing what I had taken for granted all my life. How did we never realize that Alex couldn’t see well? There hadn’t been any squinting or putting his face too close to a book or a TV screen. I will forever remember that moment of pure delight when Alex saw a rainbow in the gutter on the streets of Brooklyn.

Alex never lets his vision limit the many adventures and challenges he takes on. Rock climbing, mountain biking, snowboarding, or surfing at Far Rockaway in February, these are a few of the
activities he enjoys year-round and glasses, contact lenses, or goggles allow him to enjoy activities
that as a mother, I cringe and cross my fingers and wait for his phone call to know if he’s fine. No
matter the adventure, wherever he goes, Alex has a camera or a GoPro with him ready to record
and document the great moments of life and the many rainbows life has to offer.
Every time I hear the song, “How to Handle a Woman” from the play Camelot, I note the lyrics because I totally agree with them. If you recall, the king asked the old wiseman Marlin: “How do you Handle a woman?” Merlin replies, “The way to handle a woman is to love her, simply love her, merely love her, love her.”

Most newlyweds say, “I love you,” over and over again; however, more than half of all marriages end in divorce. Is the wiseman Merlin wrong? Not exactly. He neglected to tell us men the secrets of a happy marriage. So, listen up!

In order to keep your wife happy and your marriage vibrant, always remember these secrets – the secrets of a happy marriage. Never ever forget your anniversary. Circle the date on your calendar, put it in your cell phone, put it on sticky notes and place them all over your house, in your office and in your car. If you are very forgetful, get a body tattoo of a heart with the date inscribed. Be sure to buy your wife a dozen roses and a romantic Hallmark anniversary card. Make reservations at a high class five-star restaurant and splurge for an expensive, romantic dinner. Have an exotic dessert like chocolate covered strawberries along with a chilled bottle of champagne. It will cost a lot of money but it’s money well-spent. A happy wife means a happy life.

When your wife comes home from the beauty parlor, always say, “Your hair looks beautiful.” Even if she gets it dyed green, pink or purple, be sure to compliment her. What can I say? Women have a thing about their hair. Next, if your wife tries on a new dress in a department store and models it for you, never ever say, “That dress makes you look fat.” That’s committing marriage suicide. If she wants a new handbag, get out your American Express platinum card. Back in the day, Coach bags were the rage and they cost about $500.00. Nowadays you have to go for a Gucci bag or a “Louie” bag which will run in the thousands! Your wife is worth every penny. Also, do your own wash. Why? Do you realize how funky your socks and your under garments are? Do you really want your lovely wife to deal with that? Furthermore, never ever forget to put the toilet seat down after you pee. Nothing makes a woman more cranky than an upright toilet seat. She wants the seat down! After all, she is your queen and she deserves...
her throne.

Take the garbage out on garbage nights before your wife screams, “It’s Friday night – take the trash out!” You will save yourself a lot of aggravation and remember your wife always wants that stinky trash taken out during the most exciting part of the big game.

Lastly, but the most important part and secret of married life is to remember these words when dealing with your wife on a daily basis. “Yes, dear.” “You are right, dear.” “Whatever you say, dear.” Heed my words and follow the wiseman’s advice. If you want marital bliss, give your wife a big kiss and love her, simply love her.
PHOTOGRAPH

By James Cunningham

Reaching for book on library shelf.
Photograph drops onto floor.
Retrieving it, glancing at photo of and old love.
Remembering her beautiful face,
Her soul-filled eyes,
Her long, black hair; exotic smile,
the way she bit her lip
and made me laugh.
Reminiscing about the love we shared.
Our long walks on sandy beaches.
Holding hands under sun’s shining rays.
Warming our hearts.
Exciting our souls.
Dancing into wee hours of the morning.
Holding each other close.
Two becoming one.
The love of my life.
Spending years together.
Doing all we wanted to do.
Travelling around the world –
Paris, Rome, Portugal.
Enjoying each other’s company.
Living a life that dreamers dream of.
Growing old together; getting to know each other.
Death came suddenly, unexpectedly, like a flash of
lightning on a spring day.
Taking my love away from me.
She is still with me in my heart and
in my soul, clutching her photograph
to my chest.
I know we will meet again for true love
never dies.
MOURNING HAS BROKEN

By Jonathan Dobbs

Get up Ms. Medlin, the morning has come,
It’s time to be leaving,
Get up Ms. Medlin, there is work to be done,
So, why do you lay there still sleeping?

The bathroom is free,
And the sun is so high,
Breakfast is served,
And you’ve only to open your eyes.

Get up Ms. Medlin, my radio’s on,
The news is all bad but it’s good for a laugh,
The bus is ready and it’s time to be gone,
So why do you lie there still sleeping?

Get up Ms. Medlin, you’re missing the fun,
They’re loading the bus, it’s time to go home,
It’s not over for us, there’s more to be done,
And why do you lay there still sleeping?

It’s Middletown for a visit, the folks may not know,
A surprise it will be,
We’re next on the bus, we’re ready to go,
And you’ve only to open your eyes.

Get up Ms. Medlin, they won’t take my word,
I said you sleep hard but they’re shaking their heads,
Get up Ms. Medlin and show them you’ve heard,
Ms. Medlin show them you’re still not sleeping!
A joke is a joke, but there’s nothing to gain,
And you’ve only to open your eyes.
FROM AND TOO

By Jonathan Dobbs

We come from a place of crowds
The restaurants, the family gatherings, the streets
All of us struggling to be together
But we came to a place of no crowds
In the world at war with words
Where the healing is on the far distant horizon if at all
The gatherings and all that was
slowly slips back in
But we should stop & sit where we can find a stillness
And feel the beauty as we reclaim the calm
THEY BEAT YOU UP
By Tony Dora

This is an excerpt from Tony Dora’s memoir, “Peter Pan Children: Fleeing Castro’s Communism,” which recounts how he, as a nine-year-old, and his eight-year-old sister Norma took refuge in the United States. The memoir chronicles their emotional journey as they navigated life for six weeks in a refugee camp and then for a year in an orphanage. This excerpt takes place in the Florida City camp. From December 26, 1960, to October 23, 1962 (during the Missile Crisis), 14,048 unescorted children fled Cuba for the U.S.

One day, a bunch of us, boys and girls, including some of the older girls, were congregating on the sidewalk outside one of the houses. We were discussing our future. Incidentally, the camp was home to boys under the age of thirteen and to girls up to the age of nineteen. Years later I learned that thirteen-year-old boys were sent to another camp to live with other boys. The prevailing wisdom at the time was that once a boy turns thirteen, he begins to notice girls. Thus, the genders had to be kept away from each other.

“You know this place is temporary,” Said one of the older girls. “Don’t you?”

“What do you mean?” asked one of the younger boys.

“We won’t be here forever,” she answered. “They’re going to send us either to a foster home or to an orphanage.”

“Pray that they send you to a foster home,” verbalized another one of the big girls.

The views of the big girls held a lot of weight.

“Yeah…” said another big girl, “you don’t want to go to an orphanage.”

“Why not?” asked Norma, concerned.

“Because they beat you up,” countered one of the boys, “that’s why!”

“No, they don’t!” I refuted the boy’s statement; not so much because this was my belief, but because I didn’t want Norma to be frightened.

“They do so!” the boy insisted.

“That’s right,” said another boy, calmly. “That’s what they do.”

“And they whip you,” alleged one of the big girls. She was chewing bubble gum.

“Thirty lashes,” another boy added.

“Get outta here!” Alex hollered. “I don’t believe it!”

“Neither do I,” said another boy.

The oldest girl addressed that boy and Alex. “Neither one of you has any idea what you’re talking about!” She proceeded to confirm the alarming story. “I know for a fact they beat you up!”
“And they whip you!” repeated the gum-chewing girl as she blew a large bubble.

“Thirty lashes,” reiterated the oldest girl.

I could see that Norma was getting upset, so I blurted out, “This is ridiculous! All it does is scare us all half to death! It solves nothing!” I turned to my sister. “Come on Norma, let’s get out of here!” I took Norma by the hand and we started to walk away.

As we were leaving, one of the oldest girls, the one who started the conversation, yelled at us. “You can choose not to believe it, but that doesn’t mean it ain’t so!”

When we were a safe distance away, I held Norma by the shoulders. “I promise, Norma, that I will never leave you. I will always protect you!” Norma smiled weakly and embraced me.
THIS CAN’T BE REAL

By Tony Dora

This is an excerpt from Tony Dora’s memoir, “Peter Pan Children: Fleeing Castro’s Communism,” which recounts how he, as a nine-year-old, and his eight-year-old sister Norma took refuge in the United States. The memoir chronicles their emotional journey as they navigated life for six weeks in a refugee camp and then for a year in an orphanage. This excerpt takes place in the Florida City camp. From December 26, 1960, to October 23, 1962 (during the Missile Crisis), 14,048 unescorted children fled Cuba for the U.S.

My sister Norma and I had the opportunity to meet on a daily basis in the Florida City refugee camp. In the beginning, I served as her comforter, but there were times when she was inconsolable; understandable – she was only eight years old. It seemed that I was failing in my attempts to relieve her anguish of having left Castro’s communist island without our family. At some point I gazed into her eyes and vowed, “I promise you, Norma, no matter what, I will always protect you.” That seemed to assuage her somewhat. Slowly, she adapted to our new circumstance. But who was going to comfort me? I was a little kid, too – I had just turned ten years old.

One day I wandered off to a place in the refugee camp where I believed I could be alone. I sat on a dead branch under a tree in an abandoned storage area where they kept rusted old trucks. There I felt safe enough to let my tears loose and cry my heart out. I searched in my pocket for a prayer card that I had found in the chapel and took it out. It was the Thirty-First Psalm. I read kept reading the third verse over and over again:

“God, You are my Rock and my Fortress.”

It was cathartic. I soon discovered that my tears had dried up – for the most part. Still, I continued to frequent that spot. It was quiet and peaceful. One day, Alex, my best friend, was wandering in the same area. I tried to act naturally. “Don’t be ashamed, Tony. I come here, too. It helps me think. It’s a great place to cry.”

“I don’t come here for that reason, Alex… not anymore anyway. Frankly, I’m no longer able to cry. I just have this gut feeling that this isn’t real. You know?”

As soon as the words left my lips, my eyes got misty and a tear trickled down my face. Alex acted as if he hadn’t noticed my tear and damp eyes. “I feel the same way, but it still hurts.”

“Of course it does!”

“You know, Tony, I can’t cry anymore, either. It’s like I’ve cried myself out. Sleep is something else I can’t do anymore.”

“Thank God I have no problem sleeping. The thing is, Alex, when I think of my mom and family, I get a feeling in my throat,” I sighed. “You probably don’t know what I’m talking about.”

“It’s like… a tightness. Isn’t it?”

“Yes! And my chest feels…” I paused, trying to come up with a word.
“Heavy?”

“Why… yes!”

“Looks like we’re feeling the same kinds of things!”

“I knew there was a reason why we have become such good friends.”

“Brothers… that’s what we are.”

I stood up to face him and we shook hands. “Brothers,” I confirmed the sentiment, and we hugged each other. We continued to meet there. It was a great place to talk and share our feelings; a place to comfort and support each other.
LESSONS
By Marcia Dubrow

Split-kids we called ourselves, we tweenagers who, instead of sentences or theorems, parsed adult relationships, yet made it to college anyway, and so, with your wedding two days away, I was there, you two knowingly arriving as the moon lit the first innocent snowflakes, but we three breakfasting in a post-blizzard Binghamton and braving the crawl down I 95 South where you probably wanted me to glean some boring lesson on true love or perseverance, but what I learned was that my family hadn’t been irrevocably ruptured, but had suffered mere wound, and that I was integral to its healing.
REMEMBERING JEAN PAUL BELMONDO

By Sultana Ehrlich

I would like to share with you the few exciting and unforgettable seconds I spent with Jean Paul Belmondo.

“Je ne me laverai jamais la main.” I will never wash my hand.

I hope he replied: “Moi, non-plus,” me neither. I touched his skin, on his way down from the dais, that is when I ambushed him.

I remember it was June or July of 2004. There he was, standing on the dais, looking like an angel, elegantly dressed with a form-fitting, striking white silk suit.

Yes, that is him Jean Paul Belmondo, with his silver white hair looking proud and smiling to his fans, greeting them with both his hands. What a “magnificent” man, roughneck and “dégueulasse,” disgusting on the outside but sweet like honey on the inside!

In his lifetime, he attracted cinema goers in the millions from all over the world. He was sought after by distinguished film makers like Goddard, Truffaut, Chabrol, etc..

Jean-Luke Goddard was considering Charles Aznavour for the leading role of Michel Poiccard for the film Breathless but luckily he chose Jean Paul Belmondo. Even though Bebel was a great actor, he never made it to the Comédie-Française.

The Parc was overly crowded that night. His fans, young and old, showed up to take a glance at their “Idol”. Everybody brought their food and drink with them in their knapsack.

It is a long movie and these fans were seriously anchoring down for a long time. I remember that night vividly, we had to be searched before entering the Parc. This had never happened before.

Jean Paul Belmondo had come to l’Hôtel De Ville to be honored with the Medal of the City of Paris by Mayor Delanoe. After the ceremony, Jean Paul Belmondo stepped outside to greet the fans who had come out to see his New Wave film “À Bout de Souffle,” Breathless, which was playing in his honor that hot summer night.

When he addressed the Parisians, the crowd stood up and went crazy. Screams of “Jet’aime Bebel, Bebel” were coming out from every corner of the park.

He was very gracious and appreciative. He said very little because he was still recovering from his illness. He looked fine, and I did not notice any physical changes. He just looked so happy to be among his fans. That night was a glorious night for him.

To his right, stood Bertrand Delanoe, much beloved mayor of Paris. He was one of the best mayors Paris ever had. He is famous for opening “Paris – Beach” on the Bank of the Seine River so that the Parisians could experience the joys of a summer day at the beach in the heart of Paris.

Mayor Delanoe also introduced the program “Velib,” the bicycle rental system which became famous in the big cities all over the world.
Mayor Delanoe enjoyed visibility and he walked out of City Hall that night to thank the Parisians for having elected him and to be seen with his best friend Bebel.

Mayor Delanoe and Jean Paul Belmondo were good friends, with common roots, North Africa - Mayor Delanoe from Tunisia and Jean Paul Belmondo parents from Algeria.

The outdoor film festival takes place every summer in Paris in the big parks. This time it was taking place in the Esplanade of the Parc de l’Hôtel de Ville, which is a monumental administrative building, City Hall, Rue de Rivoli, in the district of the Marais.

The South Side of the Hôtel de Ville, the Esplanade or Court Yard, is almost as big as half of a football field. It is a meticulously designed parc all surrounded with flowers like irises and lilies, bushes and trees.

That night most of the fans had to sit either on the freshly cut lawn or on the hard cement floor, but my great knowledge of the parc’s plan allowed me to get the closest bench to the dais. After all that was my childhood playground.

Being an international superstar who brought so much joy to people’s hearts, Jean Paul Belmondo will be missed by the whole world.

So, as we bid “[Adieu]” to this gentle giant, we will think of him with gratefulness for having given us so much joy and so much of himself throughout his lifetime.

We will surely miss Jean Paul Belmondo and we will remember him fondly with love and affection for the artistic excellence in the numerous roles he portrayed.
FULL MOON

By Mitchell Isaac Friedman

Pale golden orb hangs in dark velvet night,
faint markings displaying a ghostly face
illuminated with reflected light
that plays bright across that pale gold surface.

Hanging low overhead in sapphire sky,
smiling down on traffic travelling by.
Gleaming celestial guide showing the way
marking the serene close of the day.
ROLE MODEL
BY MITCHELL ISAAC FRIEDMAN

Do I measure up, I wonder,
to the man he thought I would be?
Do I measure up, I wonder?
Would he, I wonder, be proud of me?

It was his example molded me
into the man I am today.
He taught me to walk with dignity,
to consider well all I say.

He walks beside me to this day,
though he’s been gone these forty years.
And yet I wonder what he’d say
if he could whisper in my ear?
TAP, TAP, TAP

By Michele Gensler

On line at the deli counter in a supermarket in rural Pennsylvania, filling the time by observing the goings on around me and watching the people, I wait patiently for my turn.
A pound of ham, sliced thin, is all I need. The line is long, but I don’t care, I’m in no rush, and I enjoy “people watching.”
The woman behind the counter is very nice and friendly and greets each customer with a smile and pleasant chatter.
One by one they are done, and it is now my turn. I smile at the woman behind the counter, but she does not return my smile. My “hello” is met with silence. She stares at me with an angry face, and says nothing.
Perplexed by her sudden mood change, I attempt to tell her what I want. She just looks hard at me and says, “That tapping will get you nowhere.”
“Tapping?” I say. Again she says nothing but glances at my right hand resting on the counter. I look, too.
Indeed, I have been unconsciously tapping my fingers, one at a time, on her counter.
She interprets this as a sign of impatience and has pegged me as one of those “Cidiots,” someone who lives in NYC and vacations in (invades) her home town.
She now hates my guts.
This is trouble since I will be here all summer with my family. The people on line behind me begin tuning in to the conversation. The crowd, mostly locals, doesn’t look friendly.
What to do?!
Have to think fast, win her over, but how?
Kill her with kindness, I think. That might work.
I begin, “Oh, no, I’m so sorry! I wasn’t even aware that I was doing that!
Just a habit, please forgive me,” I say.
I continue, “In fact, I was admiring all the wonderful delicacies you have in your showcase. They all look so wonderful I can’t decide.”
She stares sternly at me then suddenly breaks into the biggest smile and says, “I’m sorry, I misjudged you.”
‘Of course, of course,” I say. “No problem at all.”
After our close encounter, the woman behind the counter is very nice to me, giving me many free samples, chatting the whole time.
We both feel happy and relieved!
In my dream…

I am confused, afraid. I don’t recognize this place. It is dark and threatening. A cave maybe, or the ruins of a demolished building, dirt, debris, and sweating walls with a pungent odor as old as time. I can hear voices, mournful sounds that seem to emanate from deep within the walls. I follow the sounds and find pockets of people, groups of two or three, huddled together, cowering in the dark spaces, filling in the crevices with their bodies, fearful of my presence. I move on. I am alone, searching frantically for my partner. He is nowhere. I wake up shaken, heart beating fast, rattled by this dream/nightmare. Depressed.

In my dream…

I am there again, same place, exactly where the first dream ended. I’m still alone, still afraid, still searching for my partner. I move along the ruins, both human and non-living, with what looks like determination, but is really a panic, a fear that I will never find him and never get out alive. I ignore the people now, they don’t exist for me. I’m running, calling his name, but my voice is just an echo, reverberating without answer.

In my dream…

I go to bed that night afraid of the dark, afraid to sleep, afraid of this recurring nightmare. Finally, I fall asleep, and the dream continues. But it feels different, something is different. It’s me. I’m different—stronger, faster, more determined to find my way. I continue traveling through this seemingly endless labyrinth of destruction in search of the light. I stop for nothing and no one. Still can’t find my partner, but I’m not thinking of him now. Just the light and life.

Morning…

It’s morning. I awake and sit up slowly, no longer afraid, and think about the last dream, about the reason for these recurring nightmares, if there is a reason, and why I had to suffer them. Like all dreams, it begins to fade from memory. But this one stays with me, not the details, but the feelings and impressions. I realize that my partner was never there at all. It was just me. This journey was mine alone to traverse, to figure out. No one could help me, so I grew stronger, more determined to survive, and depended on no one, except myself. I know from these dreams that in the future, in real life, I may have to put up resistance in some situations, fight back, and not accept everything at face value without considering other options or solutions. In other situations, I know that I will be able to just roll along. I now understand that in this new world we’ve created, or that has been created for us, it will be the only way to be happy, or at least to survive. I hope I’m ready.
LYING FLAT  (a phrase coined by a Chinese worker)

BY NORMA FELSENTHAL GERBER

I refuse
To neglect my soul
To fill your coffers
To do your bidding
To build your state
To grow your factories

I refuse
To neglect my health
By working endless hours
I need rest
I will lie flat
I am saying good-bye

I need an endless vacation
I will feed on rest
I will feed on the green landscape
I will feed on views of hummingbirds feeding
I will read books and write stories
I will kiss my sweetie
I will kiss my children
I will play with the dog.
More than a year later I am back to my bench by the boat pond in Central Park, still no children playing with their model boats here. The water so calm, murky green oval with tall trees all around, cool breeze.

Surprise, I spot three ducks splashing about joyfully. Do they think the pandemic is over? Still no model boats here.

The ducks play, flapping their wings, jumping out of the water, then diving, their tailfeathers pointing up. Makes me laugh to watch their frolic, the sun painting luminous trails as they slip over the surface of the water.

Strollers and bikers circle the pond’s perimeter, registering their presence in the world after a year of death. One man wears a mask, knows things are not right yet, but most adults are now maskless, ready to live again but still no model boats here.

A brave terrier bounds up to the water’s edge, startled to see the ducks. And now three more ducks come to join the party. A boy of about five stands on a parapet like a ruler surveying his watery kingdom without any ships of state; the sun is burning my bare arms and I savor the warmth penetrating my body that has been too long indoors.

More walkers, with headphones, come by but do not consider the ducks or lack of boats and children playing, only talk to their invisible friends in the cloud. They don’t see the six ducks have now added eight more friends just flown in from who knows where, feathers flickering in the sunlight, leaping playfully out of the water, so happy to see their comrades.

But suddenly some clouds glide in to cover the sun and everything is thrown into shadow. Still no children playing with their model boats here.
When I turned fifty I applied for and was granted a year’s sabbatical to attend the “Special Sabbatical Program in the Arts for New York City Teachers” held at LaGuardia Community College. The first semester we learned about sculpture and drawing; theater was introduced in the second semester. We visited museums, art galleries and Broadway shows.

At the age of five my son Michael showed me a crayon drawing he had made. It was a typical five-year-old rendition of a spring day: a green meadow dotted with colorful flowers, an orange butterfly, and white clouds in a blue sky. But what intrigued me was the train he drew chugging over a brown mountain range in the background. He drew the mountains and the train small, so they looked like they were far away in the distance. I wondered how he intuitively understood perspective. I thought the program would give me some insight into how artists see the world.

In drawing class, we used charcoal pencils to sketch three-dimensional shapes and learned about form, shadow, and light. After we practiced drawing the shapes individually, we drew them arranged together in a still life. In time, we graduated to teapots, fruit arrangements and crystal glass.

One day toward the end of the first semester, the class entered the drawing studio to find a cute guy with a muscular build and dark wavy hair sitting on a metal folding chair on the elevated platform at the front of the room. He was wearing a purple wrap-around robe that was casually tied at his waist. The nude model we had been promised at the start of the semester! There he sat, patiently waiting for class to begin.

I found a seat in front of the platform next to a perky, petite blond named Sally. The other students arranged themselves around the room seeking their own unique vantage point of the model. At the instructor’s cue the model removed his purple robe.

Sally and I placed our large drawing pads over our easels and picked up our charcoal pencils in preparation to draw the model. In his seat facing us, the model was engaged in arranging himself into a comfortable position. He let his legs part slightly and smiled down at us from his perch on the platform. We returned his smile and began to draw. Now it was time for us to focus, to look at him unflinchingly, purposefully drawing his image as best we could. We hunched over our easels in concentration.

For a while that’s all that happened, until we understood that something new was happening. With lowered eyes, Sally and I glanced at each other. Could it be? Could be. We looked up to find the model sitting with a smirk spreading across his face, a grin reminiscent of the Cheshire Cat. He was getting an erection. Before our very eyes, his penis slowly elongated, hardened, and quivered. Holy shit! This was not supposed to happen. He beamed at us and said, “This is not supposed to happen. It very rarely ever happens.” And yet there he was, sitting in his chair, smiling like an idiot with a raging hard-on.

I started to laugh. Sally started to laugh. What were we supposed to do with this? We waved for the instructor to come over so he could see our predicament and reprimand the model and his member for being inappropriate. Trying to control ourselves, we pointed up at the lunatic with a
boner sitting on the platform. Our pony-tailed instructor, known for his dry sense of humor, assessed the situation, shrugged, and said, “Well, just draw what you see.”

I stared at him and said, “You must be kidding.”

“Just draw what you see,” he said again and walked away.

I tried. I really did try to be serious and mature and behave like an adult. But I couldn’t. I just couldn’t. I had been reduced to a giggling teen-ager. I couldn’t focus. But Sally, my bouncy blond classmate, went at it and completed her drawing “as she saw it.” At the end of class, the teacher gave her a piece of white copy paper to cover up the “sensitive” area of her drawing—a make-shift paper fig leaf for her long subway ride home.
Unscathed, I live comfortably in isolation,
my larder stocked, my outlook optimistic.
The morning air flows through my window,
and I hear the call and response of birds,
punctuated by the screams of ambulances.
I peer out my window and go downstairs
to see a strange man dressed all in black.
“I have some terrible news about your friend, Tony, I believe”
“Tony?”
“Yes, I see you and Tony most days at the diner.
You often eat breakfast together. Is that not true?
And he is a paramedic, loved by many.”
“He’s a good friend. What’s wrong? Tell me.”
“He’s in the hospital with Covid.”
“Oh, my God, is he OK?”
“I’m sorry to say he’s on a ventilator.”
“Which hospital? Can I see him?”
“I’m afraid that’s impossible. Can I come in?
Perhaps we can pray together.”
“No, No, go away. You’re scaring me.”
“But there’s more.”
“Don’t tell me he’s gonna die.”
“Most probably, but there’s even more.”
“Are you coming for me?”
“Yes, possibly, quite soon, but I am not sure when.”
Panic-stricken, I double lock the door and shut the window.
I collapse in a chair and start praying for my friend,
but, upon reflection, I begin to say Kaddish for myself,
somehow hoping these words will save me.
She had come from Pittsburgh, armed with a bus ticket to the Port Authority, and a B.A. in English from a small college hidden in the western hills of Pennsylvania. She came, despite the objection of her mother, who said, “What can you possibly find there?” She was too polite to answer, “A life?” She wanted to go into publishing, telling her friends of her desire to bring good books to little children. Staying at the Y, she sent out many resumes, most not even generating the courtesy of a reply. Those companies that did answer cited the harsh winter, the pandemic for the hiring freeze, try again in the spring after the vaccine would be more widespread. Her money running out, she found a temporary job at a bakery, exaggerating the skills she had learned at her mother’s knee. Dripping with sweat from the heat of the ovens, she wondered if she would ever sink her hands into a book career that might never even open. How long can I live like this? she worried.
MEMORIES AND CHOCOLATE

By Sandy Hoberman

My favorite room was always my dining room, which was the host to so many dinners, parties and fun.
The dining room table was always filled with delicious food desserts and chocolates inviting family and friends to enjoy.
So you can see why this was always my favorite room.
Then one day my daughter asked if she could take over the holiday dinners and parties
Of course. Of course.
And so my dining room table was alone and empty, all year long until I had a great idea.
I emptied my closet of boxes and boxes of pictures that no one even looked at anymore.
New pictures, old pictures, black and white pictures, color pictures, big pictures, smaller pictures—hundreds and hundreds of pictures and I put them all on my dining room table.
And it was no longer alone and empty, and neither was I.
And what’s more it found itself then center of attention once again as family and friends came to visit and find pictures of themselves. They even began taking pictures of my pictures.
A table filled with stories—
Memoirs
Non-fiction stories
Happy stories
Sad stories
Exciting stories
Each picture telling its own story.
Each picture wanting to be heard.
Three years later, Sandy the Storm came along with 4 feet of Water.
But my Storybook Table remained untouched
Thank you!
I still serve chocolate but now it comes along with memories.
And so you see why my dining room is still my favorite room in my house.
It serves memories lots of memories and chocolate.
This is a story about two dogs: Rosie my daughter’s dog- a beautiful black mid-sized Havenese who just has to smile, wag her tail and look cute to get food.

And Daisy- a black, white and brown mid-sized dog who lived in Tennessee for two years on her own before she was rescued by my son and daughter-in-law. Daisy learned to kill all kinds of animals in order to survive. Even now she would bring home different animals-big and small- a present for my kids.

One time she even chased a bear and my brave daughter-in-law had to run out and rescue the poor bear.

Daisy proved to be a great watch dog - Rosie not so much.

And the problem was they could not be together- even for a minute.

Daisy aimed for Rosie’s throat- making sure Rosie knew who was boss, and so my kids could not ever get together with their dogs.

One day after the pandemic, my daughter did not have anyone to leave Rosie with, and she was forced to bring her along to my sons’ house. To their amazement, both dogs were happy to see one another.

They actually ate together, they walked together and they played together.

What happened?

My kids tell me they just got old and tired and probably forgot what they were fighting about in the first place.

But, maybe like me, after the long Pandemic - they realized how important friends are. And maybe like me, they decided it didn’t pay to hold a grudge. Forgiveness is so important.

And maybe like me, they couldn’t wait to see a smiling face or a wagging tail for that matter.
TRUE LOVE
BY DELORES JOHNSON

The first time on this beach, they were just kids, running and frolicking on the wet sand. With sun warmed skin and laughing eyes they watched their sandcastles tumble and fall, as salty sprays from the sea pull sand battlements away from the shore.

Another time on this beach, they kicked at the foamy waves, spattering warm water on bare feet and legs. Frothy waves battered the sandy shore, and rolled back out to sea, leaving the young adults alone to enjoy their time together.

The next time on this beach, they walked affectionately in synchronized steps, hand in hand, smiling into adoring eyes and leaving behind footprints, pulled out to sea by the ebbing tide.

A later time on this beach, smaller sets of footprints encircle the larger ones exposed by the damp sand, high pitched squeals of children’s laughter and joy greet bubbly waves that float back out to sea.

One enchanted time on this beach, a wedding party stands on the sandy shore; gentle waves rush to greet their daughter’s radiant smile, and her sweet soft murmur, vowing love everlasting, as calm waves tenderly stir the swirling rose petals around their feet.

This time on this beach is sad and somber; carrying the remains of their only son they stand subdued, embracing each other against a chilly fall breeze. Frosty waves will pull his ashes from the icy shore, helping them keep a promise of interment at sea.

The last time on this very beach, they walked slowly, measuring their steps in the sandy surf, her arthritic hands folded into the crook of his arm. Admiring the red orange glow left by sun dipping into the sea, they cherish this time here together and savor the feel of rolling waves enveloping their feet on the wet shore.

This time he is alone and like the soaring of his heart, waves surge onto the shore with emotional images of his true love, then drawing back leaving nothing in its wake.

It’s growing darker now, as he walks with grits of sand feeling so familiar between ageing toes. The moon drinks up the sea, they bond, pulling at one another causing tidal waves to rise onto the shore.

He wishes she could be with him tonight. They would kick at the waves, laugh at nothing in particular, join hands, and walk together as they had always done on this beach so long ago.

He would love to be able to kiss her smiling face and have her beside him as he watches the summit of moon and sea tides eddying around his feet, because she would always be his one true love.
There in the corner
sits a brown leather trunk
battered and bruised
forgotten and neglected
so very long ago

Lifting the heavy lid
disturbing dust bunnies
that rise on stale air
like gray snowflakes
falling in reverse

In the deep cavern
dark shapes lurk
in shadowy corners
a beam of sunlight helps
discover what treasures lie within

A tarnished silver tea pot
its handle askew
nestles beside bent candle sticks
wrapped in a tie-dyed shirt
lying atop a metal shoe box

Rusty hinges squeak
as the top is folded back
revealing generations of life
through pictures and writings
from loved ones of bygone years

In a small velvet box
rests a gold wedding band
worn thin with time
the faded inscription proclaims
Love you forever – 1863

Many of life’s treasures can be found
in brown leather trunks
battered and bruised
forgotten and neglected
so very long ago.
A collage of multicolored autumn leaves is more beautiful than a bouquet of roses, in my opinion. I think trees are the most awesome plants. They vary in size, shape and color. The same tree can change four to five times in a year. The deciduous trees spread their summer fans to move the air around on a hot summer day and spread their cool shade in the heat of the blazing sun. Lemon chiffon, orange sherbet, beet red, key lime green, cinnamon brown, turmeric yellow and an array of neon glow, paint the hills during chilly autumn. Winter leaves a barren tree. Yet, it houses the animals’ nest and finds itself frosted with snow and glazed with ice. But come spring, the dormant tree, which seemingly is dead, comes alive. Like the trees, I also have experienced different seasons in my life.

When I was in college, a very special person in my life sent me a letter from Germany. We had dated until he decided to reenlist in the army. He had returned to his former base in Germany. I had moved on with my life and decided to return to college in Ohio. In the middle of November, I received his letter asking me to marry him. I knew my answer had to be no. We were not compatible. During the time we had been apart, I had come to that realization. However, it was a very hard emotional decision.

So, I went for a walk before writing my reply. When I stopped in front of the Music building, I began to cry. The security guard was doing his rounds and saw me crying. He stopped to see if he could help. I explained my situation. Then, he pointed at the barren winter tree and said, “See that tree. It looks dead and lifeless. Just like life, at times, can be hopeless. Nevertheless, come spring that tree will rejuvenate from its long winter. The winter will give that tree stronger roots to weather the storms and longer limbs for more beautiful foliage in the spring. Just weather through this winter in your life, and you will emerge with stronger roots, and more beautiful when your spring comes.”

Every spring when I see the trees blooming, I remember the hope that spring brings.
PRIDE, VANITY AND HUMILITY

BY MARTHA K. JOHNSON

I remember being 28.
   I was riding the Amtrak,
   California Zephyr #5,
   Chicago to Creston, Iowa,
   My childhood hometown.

I remember spending
   The whole morning
   Wearing my contacts,
   Putting on my make-up,
   Styling my hair.

I remember looking
   In the hand mirror,
   Vainly,
   Beholding,
   A very beautiful woman.

I remember hearing
   From my memory,
   Echoes
   Of my grandmother’s words,
   “The old girl scrubs up pretty well.”

I remember going down
   To the lounge car
   To enjoy the beauty
   Of God’s handiwork fly by,
   Also, show off my own beauty.

I remember being disappointed.
   Only three teens,
   Two girls and a boy,
   In the lounge car
   To admire my loveliness.

I remember watching,
   The teens looking,
   Whispering,
   Walking towards me,
   Stopping behind me.
I remember hearing
One of the girls saying,
“You’re so beautiful”
“Thank-You”
I replied.

I remember puffing up
With pride
Of ego,
Vanity
Of self.

I remember hearing
The girl
Then say,
“It’s a shame,
You’re so FAT.”

I will remember learning
That day
God’s lesson
On Humility
For the rest of my life.
MORNING

By Marilyn Kamile

The sun rises gently
as a balloon of
iridescent light,
floats over the rim of darkness at
the deep blue horizon,
and suddenly the sky is luminescent.

Gold softly kisses every surface of
the shore,
and streaks across the sky, leaving
pink, white, pale blue traces of its
journey.

The waves dance
in their new garments of golden light, as
if in a whirling waltz,
on a vast welcoming cascade of
blue-grey sound.
LAMENTATION

By Marilyn Kamile

Man sprawled on sidewalk, his limbs at angles.
Liquids form spirals around him. Asleep, drugged, intoxicated, exhausted, mouth open,
he cannot receive nourishment: a kiss, a drink, a sweet, an expression of love.

A silent cry for help.
But who will listen?

Young, thin,
his face carefully sculpted,
he lies near a construction site.
Booming machinery and traffic is the music of progress that accompanies
his silent, static lamentation.
AUTUMN SUN

By Gwyndolyn Korahais

Sun shining on trees
radiant with leaves
colored crimson and gold

It’s soon disappearing
as nighttime is nearing
each day growing shorter

Short days, a long night
will soon be our plight
with night coming earlier

as winter’s harsh cold
blatant and bold
is suddenly upon us.
FLOUR SACK DRESSES

BY GWYNDOYLN KORAHAI

Dresses of lovely print
made from the soft cotton fabric
of flour sacks with colorful patterns

Bags of perfect size for
five-year-old girls
whose father was working
two jobs to get out of the
Great Depression

Shaped and sewn by
an aunt on her beautiful
Singer sewing machine
black with ornate colors
decorating it

Coming from the house on
the farm where the family’s
food was grown, cooked,
preserved for winter
when it would be too cold
to plant and grow

Coming from the sacks which
had held the flour from which
all the family’s bread had been baked,
lovely dresses.
CURVACEOUS CAT TALE

By Janet Lieberman

Cat tale
Undulating plume, golden grey tail waves
Round soft like a super fluffy cloud
Vigilant miniature kitty startles, stares
Agile arches back, spreads claws
Capricious feline leaps, lounges on piano keys
Enchanting round quixotic eyes, aloof gaze
Oppositional mischievous minx, defies reason
Undemanding elegant sassy Ms Maisie
Sweet survivor seven cat tales!
TALE OF RENEWAL

By Janet Lieberman

My beautiful high-spirited dear friend…
Straight white teeth flash, bright mischievous smile
Convivial deep brown eyes shine with verve
Curly chestnut tendrils frame charming face.

Pawn of pandemic, sad isolation …
Tender skin crinkled like fine lined cardboard
Fighting spirit battles inner demons
Yearns for freedom respect, release from burdens …

Break free stand tall, regain strength in sunlight
Grasp hope happiness, embrace your birthright!
HELLO THERE

By Jocelyne Lindor

Said the garden to waning winter
Make up your mind, will you brother
T’is past time you let us know
Will you stay or will you go?
See the trees are burgeoning
And birds their nests feathering
Quit your shillyshallying
Are you staying or leaving?
This time around you are a jest
An uninteresting guest
With your two-step dance
And your cycle all askance
No use trying to be tough
Off with you! We all have enough
Enough with the freezing rain,
The blood curling howls of wind
Spring doesn’t want to wait
Stop challenging your fate
Feel the warm sun, breathe the crisp air
Green grass and impatient flowers
All are getting ready for their show
Face it brother, you really have to go
LISTEN

By Jocelyne Lindor

Do you hear the sound of waves
crashing against craggy rocks
along the shoreline?
Or the pitter pat of rain
Hitting window panes?

Do you hear the thrill of
larks greeting the new dawn?
Or the song of a
cardinal calling its mate?

Do you hear the cry of a
mourning dove marking time?
Or the lonely cricket
sadly chirping in the grass?

Do you hear the wind
whistling in the trees?
Or the silence of quiet night?

You can hear it all if you listen
REFLECTIONS I

By Madeline Mandel

For me, it’s the sound of the birds that triggers memory. Their once indistinct chirpings that went unnoticed in the background of whatever I was doing, now provides essential “recall,” a much-welcomed catalyst for it to all tumble out. It leaves me with a feeling of melancholy, for I miss the times and events that have passed, and are otherwise unrecoverable. This same mood is the one in which I have always done my best writing.

I walk on among the bird calls. The warmth of the mid October sun feels good through my long sleeves, but unnatural as my feet crumble reams of leaves below. My back hurts today, as well as my knee. It’s getting hard to ignore almost daily aches and pains, and I’m really not happy to have to take Tylenol two days or more in a row.

Finn, our ten-month Australian Shepherd puppy, doesn’t help the situation at all…he spots a squirrel scurrying up a tree and I am thrust forward by the force of his youthful, eighteen-pound body. Instinctively, I want to yank him back and set his lovely steel blue eyes straight about who’s the boss! But I don’t. I have the wisdom to back away from wanting to break him the way my father tried with my sister and me. With patience and love, he’ll learn like the rest.

Finn is our third dog. He is good natured and is a wonderful addition to our family. He’s the only dog we are raising alone though. Our boys are grown, and live on opposite southern coasts. It is not easy to handle such an active “child” at our age, but we love nurturing our 10-month-old fur baby.
REFLECTIONS II
By Madeline Mandel

The last of this year’s roses are out today. Their pale peach heads are so fragrant, reminiscent of
the smell of my young sons’ hair after a bath. I had hoped they would bloom when Shawn and
Jessie were here with the kids from Florida two weeks ago. They’ve only seen them in the pictures
that I send when that first precious one blossoms in the spring.

We had the tree planted three years ago for Mother’s Day after our other rose bush succumbed
to the wind during Hurricane Sandy. Scott, who was in for a visit, came with Howie and me to
pick it out. It wasn’t a hard decision - we all agreed that our block needed more peach colored
roses!

My mom had pink and red ones in her garden. She tended to them dearly and was out with a
smile and the hose when she deemed them wilting or thirsty. I put some of those cherished petals
in her shoes and in the pockets of the clothing that she was buried in. She loved her roses, and I
feel the same about mine.
CONFINEMENT

BY CONSTANCE MECCARELLO-GERSON

The last year did you feel it too?
The closed in feeling as if you were in a very small box?
The locked up trapped feeling of not being able to run around screaming, “Free! Free!”
You did?
Well, too bad about you.
I enjoyed it.
It made me concentrate on what really mattered.
I told my husband we were in a lifeboat together, heading for land, somewhere.
This was before vaccines, and we have stayed in a lifeboat, together, ever since.
Focused on my writing, a thousand words a day.
Finished a fantasy sci-fi and started a new mystery.
Watched the balcony bees come to our lovely flowers.
They looked happy too.
I joined twitter and got book followers.
Interesting…
Yes, in a weird wacky way, I enjoyed the lockdown.
Why didn’t you?
I LOVE BOOKS

BY CONSTANCE MECCARELLO-GERSON

Reading is like food it makes you grow
Wiser, Taller, Smarter
Books are like treasure
They all shine, some like pearls
Some like diamonds
What jewels do you like to collect?
Collect those books
And cherish them.
I’m in your hands now.
And that’s fine
But I can’t deny that I’ve questioned you.
I admit to all my misdeeds.
And it’s passed the time I thanked you for letting me survive those choices.
I’ve twisted, turned, tripped and dangled, but somehow not yet burned.
At times I’ve foolishly chosen wrong over right.
Again, and again I’ve come close to that edge.
But now I see with different eyes how you’ve covered me,
Lifted me from out of my own way.
How wisely you’d set me free, to find me.
You chose me long before I could choose.
You chose us all.
Now, humbly, I choose you.
COVID RUMINATIONS

By Ted Mieszczanski

Reflection has become my new reality.
My imagination has attached me to its insatiable hem.

Paper, pen and ego are rebraided as one into a new virtual reality.
Kitchen, bedroom, hallway, surround me,
But they are merely physical backdrops.
It is yellow pad, blue parallel lines and ink stained fingers
That give so generously of themselves.
We hold one another closely, warmly, tightly,
Sharing the intimate embrace of ideas.
And so then, does a new day’s light reveal embittered rhymes?
Or a zealot’s quatrains sharpened in isolation’s deafening silence?
Or shall then this day’s words ring as sweetly as newly formed dew drops?
And so marking the birth of another viral phoenix,
Swaying to its own mournful rhymes,
Accompanied by the bluebird of besotted badinage?
Or will today’s task be to wield a wittily honed epee,
And with a sarcastic retort skewer said opponent displaying a mighty poetic thrust?
So thusly do I become the dastardly Cyrano to another’s dreams?

Yes, once again daylight bids me to begin anew,
And my world of dissonant words restarts,
Double-dutching over another night’s restless dreams,
Waves of maybes, could be’s, and should be’s shat themselves inside
Tidal pools reflecting the words, “I’m not sure,” or “I doubt it’s so.”
All of them meanly attempting to degrade you, to debase you, in my eyes.

But you, my intangible Muse, dance nimbly on top of caffeine breezes,
Sharpening my worn-down nibs.
And it is you, reflection, propped up only by reason,
That allows me to stare unblinkingly at my own truth…
And so I must accept its consequences.

As for you Misfortune, and you miss-ed Opportunities, I denounce you!
I must forgive myself and allow my bare feet to wander within this morning’s sublime sunlight.
And then, perhaps, maybe for this one day, for this one hour,
Yes! For even only that one minute more, of embraceable clarity,
I will be able to escape the clamor of an imprisoned heart.
I AM SO DISTRAUGHT BY THIS WARMING WORLD

By John Paul Miraglia

I am so distraught by this warming world
My only hope is that it’s not too late
Who into this maelstrom wishes to be hurled?

Ravaged by fire, drought and by floods whorled
Upon a barren land that bemoans its dire straight
I am so distraught by this warming world

For this green and giving earth, once so pearled
With lustrous beads of life can escape this lethal fate
My only hope is that it’s not too late

We need not be twisted, and torn and twirled
Into a cauldron that can’t bear the burden of its weight
I am so distraught by this warming world

Who can deny the dismal facts and stay calmly curled
Beneath a blanket, scoffing and in a delusional state
Who into this maelstrom wishes to be hurled?

Open sails of change reanimate when not furled
And we’ve been warned there’s no time left to wait
I am so distraught by this warming world
Who into this maelstrom wishes to be hurled?

Style of Poem: A Villanelle - a chiefly French verse form running on two rhymes and consisting typically of five tercets and a quatrain in which the first and third lines of the opening tercet recur alternately at the end of the other tercets and together as the last two lines of the poem.
Perhaps the most famous example of a villanelle is Dylan Thomas’s “Do not go gentle into that good night.”
WHO AM I?

BY JACQUELINE NAPOLITANO

I am the Pied Piper. I am the Mad Hatter
leading my students down the trail
to inquiry, investigation and education.
I change forms of matter
before wide-eyed innocents.

I perform demonstrations of
evaporation, condensation, precipitation
with steam rising and droplets falling
down the sides of a graduated cylinder,
while little ones hang onto the edge of their seats.

I work magic with magnets,
electrify the crowd with battery-operated circuits.
I am a Svengali of science, a sculptor of minds and curiosity,
a lover of hypothesis, a procurer of procedure, data and results.
I am a Science teacher.
A PAPER TIME MACHINE

By Jacqueline Napolitano

A book is like a time machine, transporting me
across decades, even centuries;
as well as continents, mountains and oceans.

A book is more than words on a piece of paper,
more than phrases and sentences
painting pictures in my mind.

It is an invitation to Zelda and Scott’s garden party,
a seat next to Lucky Lindy as he flies across the Atlantic.
A book is passage on the Orient Express, sitting next to Agatha Christie.

It is a chance to share a drink with Ernest Hemingway
while recalling the running of the bulls
on a steamy afternoon in Spain.

A book is the key that unlocks a pirate’s treasure chest.
It is a glance at Alice’s looking glass,
a link to the future and the past.

It is a ticket on a submarine traveling
20,000 leagues under the sea.
A book is my time machine. A book is a part of me.
VIRTUAL TRIP?

By Selma Reva Newman

How could there be a trip
to see sites far away
you have never seen before
feel the lightness of a breeze
breathe the foreign smells
see the blueness of the sky
or the white clouds above
hear unfamiliar tongues speak
familiar sounds of life in a
same, yet different world?

How could there be a trip
without touching the hand
reaching for your hand to
shake in congeniality or
greeting as is the custom or
impulsively show warmth
closeness of a friendly hug
feel the pavement, maybe
cobblestone, as you stroll
while others scurry on routes
they know and you discover?

How can there be a virtual trip
where Zoom shows you places
you have never been before
with the sweet, spicy aroma
and satisfying taste of food of
a culture, unavailable to you
as you sit still, eyed to a screen
stuck in your own home
wishing you were there?
CAPE COD

By Selma Reva Newman

Sky above and sea below shades of blue
Sand dunes with green shrubs anew
Breathe air fragrant with morning dew
Cape Cod is a dream come true.
Roads with tall leafy trees shading you
Quaint pastel houses spread far and few
Downstream passes a fishing canoe
Up climbs a buggy where dunes grew
Come gather sandy seashells, please do
Collect smooth-shaped, shiny rocks, too
These mementos of Cape Cod to review
When our marvelous trip is through.
THE BOY WHO NEVER GREW UP

BY AVINASH PANCHOLI

I am that boy
who never grew up
Who
refused to learn the
crafty ways of the world -
Lying, cheating, scheming,
playing dirty games
against others-
But rather eager to help others

Old as a rock
I may be
But I am the boy
That rocks!

Always curious
Hardly serious
carefree
one big kid
With kids

Smart seniors,
It's the attitude
That matters
Not the age

Let's grow wiser
With every passing day
So that time may not fail us
Feeling old?
No way Jose!

Let's go down
the memory lane
revive that child in us
Pulling antics
Singing our heart out

Who cares how we sound?
Care not what others say
It's your life
Be that boisterous boy again
Be that girl that
boys dreamed of, again

Let’s kindle the lamp of hope

And pray like a child again
OCEANS OF LONGING

BY LORRAINE PEARSON

They tumbled and rumbled and giggled with glee
As they pranced and danced by the warm summer sea;
Their bodies pulsed with a giddying motion
Like the ins and outs of a restless ocean;
They jumped and rolled with ongoing zest
With never a thought of stop or rest;
Their movements certain, quick—-not fragile
Their bodies deliciously free and agile.
What joy they brought to my aging eyes!
Appreciating feats that “old” denies,
Delighting in the splendid “yes” of fun,
Remembering doing what they had done;
And I stared and I stared at their play by the sea
Dreamily wishing that could be me,
And I prayed with a child’s purest devotion
That I could return to this welcoming ocean.
OVER THE TOP (A Play in Rhyme)

By Irene Reinhard

The Players: Emcee; Contestant 1-C 1 (“Country Bumpkin”); Contestant 2-C 2 (“City Slicker”)

Emcee- Welcome contestants to the show where the more you tell, the more we know about you, that is Put your opponent to shame That is the goal of this game Nothing is sacred, nothing is tame So, what do you say? Let’s get started and play Over the Top! Contestant One, where are you from?
C 1- Well Wink, I hail from a town outside of Georgia. Live in a cold water flat, No running water.

Emcee- Hmm, well that’s certainly a pity and none too pretty, I hear you live in the city Contestant two
C 2- Um, yes, of course, Though, I am recently divorced came out of my urban closet, so to speak Had lived there for a while. It totally reeked. No clothing and Rod, to boot. This, literally is my last suit!

Emcee- With a nod and uh… wink, C 1, what do you think? 
C 1- You talk about clothing, I’ve just lost my holdings Cause of my canceled job Back to no earnings, my stomach is churning, Like a slow burning mob.

Emcee- OOH, so true, how problems do accrue. Back to you C 2
C 2- Well, back at the Barista, my job has a new vista The latte machine broke down Now, tons of ground beans, have been spotted and seen All over this coffee bean town

Emcee- Well, that’s a hot mess, you’ve got to confess, more or less, C 1?
C 1- Seems difficult to handle, but does not hold a candle, to this. I have no water or food, to feed my growing brood Back at the farm, the crops have all dried My wife done left me, and Rufus, just died. That’s my dog.
Emcee- Well, right off the bat, you can’t do worse than that! Batter up C 2
C 2- Well, just this morning, before getting my booster
I went to the Y
To check on Rod, Si,
and Rooster, my birds
Upon my arrival, I
found them barely
in…. survival- mode
Had no time to help them
just got up and left them
crossing the open road.

Emcee- Well, that’s certainly some chicken… Was it hit or miss? Your thoughts, C 1
C 1 – Contestant 2, You are a liar, right down to the wire,
To think, I stand here with you
Your problems are lame, worthy of disdain
All you do is spew!

Emcee- Okay, an unsympathetic report, to say the least. C 2, your retort, please
C 2- Though I may stretch the truth
just a bit
It is not a crime
Not from where I sit
Like perjury, my deft skill
Akin to the best improv
It’s a real thrill
One Tall Tale
I’ll never fail

Emcee- Wow, that’s what I call an aptitude with attitude or should I say latitude. Back to some fun, C 1
C 1- So, perjury, depicts your deft skill, eh (menacingly, turns to C 2)
I’d say surgery, would fit that bill
Slow and steady hands, perfectly still
Reach for the patient, against his free will
Ready to purge and to k…, Now, that’s a real thrill

Emcee- Con 2, You’re looking quite ill
C 2 – Yes, I’m feeling a bit queasy. Let’s chill, take it easy. C-1 is way over the top. What did you just call me?

Emcee- So, what I’m gathering, is you want to give up the blathering. Is that the gist?
C 2- Well, um…. yes.
C 1 – Then, hold out your wrists! (hand cuffs C 2)
C 2- Hey, what the heck! What is this?
C 1 – Con 2, you’re through. You’re going to jail, for perjury and wire fraud mail.
C 1 to Emcee- Lin Juan, read him his Miranda.
Con 2 to Emcee- Hey, I thought your name was Wink

Emcee- Yeah, that’s what they call me down at the pub
You know, the Lollapalooza, aka the Liar’s club.
And here at **Over the Top**, C 1 aka Connor is our top cop, a real show stopper.
Gothcha!
WHERE’S THAT GOLD?!?

By Terry Riccardi

When I was in my thirties, I taught in the New York City public schools and visited my mom during summer vacations. I’d fly down to Florida for a week, where one night was always card night with her circle of friends. For a few minutes, the elderly ladies would ask me how I was and about New York City. Once assured I was fine and the city was still there, they then devoted their attention to playing cards and discussing their various maladies, doctors, surgeries, and medications. I found it all very funny and thought, *Sure hope I never get like that!*

Fast forward a couple of decades. When I decided to retire, I heard about how wonderful life would be. No more living by the clock, no more oversized classes, no more lesson plans to write, no more having to make medical appointments or go shopping only after school hours. There’s gold in them senior hills, I was told.

And for several years, I agreed. My first official act as a retiree was to be outside Macy’s doors at 10 a.m. on the first day of school in September. What a joy it was to cruise through the just-opened, empty store and find sales staff aplenty, all eager to help me. I loved making appointments for the dentist, doctor, beauty salon at convenient times during the work week, instead of strictly on late afternoon or weekends.

I bought a new car and then took a trip to Spain. It was the first time I’d traveled outside the U.S. in many years. It was also the last time I left the country without notifying my credit card company that I was doing so. On my last night in Spain, my account was frozen; the company had been unable to reach me at home and suspected fraud. Thank goodness I went home the very next day, almost completely out of money!

Always a learner, I sampled some of my union’s retiree courses and stayed with creative writing— to this very day. When I remarried, my husband and I enjoyed our mutual sport of bowling. We also became time-share owners, traveling to many areas of the country, and meeting many delightful people.

If you’d asked me about those golden hills, I would have said, “Yes, yes, it’s so good to be free to do whatever we want, whenever we want, if we want! I love it!” But nothing is forever, and time moved on. My two loves, writing and bowling, became lifelines when my husband could no longer travel, needed hospice care, and then was gone.

Now on my own, I had to learn about asking others for help, and for forming a support network (handyman, plumber, cleaning lady, etc.). I was still mobile, writing and bowling, and making new friends. But when older friends passed away, years of my life that they’d been part of seemed to go with them. And I became aware that I was now in the oldest generation of my family.

Then I fell, and in a matter of seconds, life changed in a definitely un-golden way. A fractured wrist showed me how zillions of everyday movements depended on two working hands. I had to ask a neighbor to come over and loosen jar, can and bottle lids, so I could get at the foods and drinks they contained. Car service was a necessity to go anywhere. Books were too heavy to be handled, let alone read. Typing on the keyboard hurt, and of course bowling was out of the question.
My only glimmers of gold were that I had hurt my left hand, not my right, and that I had lived this long before breaking a bone. When people saw my cast, they often came over to share their own medical experiences. Even now that the cast is off, I find that health has become a constant topic of conversation, no matter who I’m with, where we are, or what the occasion happens to be.

Recently I stayed at a quaint hotel in the Pennsylvania boondocks. A small group of women gathered to chat on the final morning. And every single one of us talked about how low the toilets were, how high the beds were, and how the tubs didn’t have any grab bars. Give me another decade or so, and let me go back in time a bit. I just know I’d fit in perfectly with my mother’s friends.
NO DIFFERENCES

By Genevieve Richards-Wright

We didn’t see any differences. Sure, their hair was longer and straighter than ours. Ours was shorter and nappy. Some of us conked or hot combed ours—had our hair tied, dyed and laid to the side—like they used to say back then.

We didn’t see any differences. Sure, they had grandma, grandpa, Mami and Papi, auntie and uncle, brother, sister and baby all in one apartment. We had fathers, if they had survived the unforgiving South, mothers, aunties, sisters and brothers and baby in our apartments.

We didn’t see any differences. Sure, they spoke Spanish or Spanglish. We spoke street bop, broken English, or spoke up for the first time in our lives in the North. We all spoke different in school for the nuns than we did with our amigos and our boys on the block.

We didn’t see any differences because of the music! Mainly it was that drum beat that we all felt in our souls and soles. La música was the equalizer. We Blacks as children young as ten or eleven, when we heard that Salsa music coming out of the tenement windows for a Baptism or Christening celebration, Birthday, Wedding, whatever, we would follow those sounds through the doorway, up the stairs and into the joyful apartment to listen to that body-swaying music and join in the happiness that filled the room. Our weekly dancing lessons would melt all the so-called differences away.
BUTCH’S STORY

By Genevieve Richards-Wright

“Whomp, whomp, whomp!”

Uh Oh, Butch is getting ready to get it on …

“Whomp, whomp, whomp!” We knew the familiar sound of the large fan Butch would put in his bedroom window whenever Janice was in his room.

That “whomp, whomp, whomp” brought music and something else into my room and everyone else’s whose window was above Butch’s.

When the smell hit my Mother’s sensitive nose, she’d come running into my room with “Boy, you smoking marijuana in my house?”

No, Muh, that’s coming in the window.
What do you mean coming in the window?
Coming from cousin Butch’s room.
Oh!!

Butch had all the Salsa albums featuring Tito Puente, Joe Cuba, Mongo Santamaria, Celia Cruz, Herbie Mann and other Latin greats whose album covers lined his red wall of homage to them.

However, when Janice showed up, those early Latin artists got no play!
When Janice showed up, Johnny Mathis took center stage.

“Chances Are” played over and over and over all night long on his record player. None of us other kids had a record player in our houses!
He had one in his room. Butch was our hero!

After the first few times of that, whenever we saw Janice come walking down Prospect Avenue, all 6 foot 3 inches of her, all three of us friends whose rooms were directly over Butch’s, would run upstairs and close our windows!

Later on, we would fall asleep with the “whomp, whomp, whomp”, Chances Are and the smell of reefer blending in our Bronx dreams.
SLEEPING BEAUTY

By Pamela Salmon

Floodwaters turn rural towns into islands
and the new Cold War isolates us
in free, abuse-prone cyberspace, telling us
the old ice in the Arctic isn’t disappearing even though
hikers found a dancer’s pink ballet shoes in Mount Everest’s melting ice
beside her bones curled under a limestone
rock where sleeping beauty had fallen on her descent
and the bones of hundreds of missing climbers began telling us
the sobering reminder of the perils of not believing
what climbers now catch
in the lights of their headlamps
a glimpse of sleeping beauty who may be
a missing soloist ballerina with radiant creamy skin
one of the bluest ballerinas who danced
extra ordinarily in a Sleeping Beauty full of blue swirls
we didn’t even notice the sun kissing her
didn’t recognize someone was taking
away the earth’s extraordinary crystal cold climate
until her cold-crystal-white bones emerged
BELONGINGS

By Pamela Salmon

As a storm pushes its way across the sea,
I stand alone here thinking of you. Sand
piles up like hours we searched
this shore for weathered glass. We walked.
Mornings, men went out early
for clams. Their hands
dug deep. Sand held us
tightly together.

A hurricane took our summer
house. You were in the kitchen
shucking clams, careful to finish
the chowder before we drove away.
Our clothes came in wet heaps, the glass
colored in a bathroom jar.

Your hands come back now, hardened
the distance
came between. We must discuss
what we have salvaged. “It’s important,”
you say. You describe the china
you will leave.

I can’t touch your belongings.
They pile up like driftwood.
You lie covered in earth.
I squint over the sand between us.
I wish you were alive.
It is hard to leave here
quietly before the storm.
LATKES
By Betty Samuels

My feeble attempts at trying recipes came during the unimaginable pandemic of 2020. Homebound much of this time, my neighbor and I often ordered foods from Zabar’s, a famous food store on the upper west side of Manhattan. Nostalgic and lonesome, food creativity filled a hole. I decided to try my hand at making latkes for the Chanukah holiday and for my neighbor. I was very surprised to learn that she had never eaten a latke in her native Belgium or in the United States.

I started from scratch and bought a grater. Then the ingredients: potatoes and onions. I cut each potato in half working my fingers down to the knuckles. I cut an onion in quarters slicing it and then chopping it into bits with an old-fashioned tool with a chopping blade. I eyed how much onion to add. Then a pinch of salt and pepper. I heated the oil in the pan and when sizzling hot I dropped the latkes in. After three to four minutes on each side I drained them. Best eaten when hot I topped them with applesauce and brought some to my neighbor. It was my own way of making my own Chanukah festival and sharing. Zabar’s might get my next order or maybe this will become my very own tradition.

Potato Latkes

Ingredients:
4 large Idaho or russet potatoes, washed and dried
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
1 onion
Canola oil

- Slice the potato in half widthwise. Grate the flat flesh side of each piece using the large holes of the box grater (You can also use a food processor).
- Add the chopped onion and season to taste.
- Make patties about one half inch thick.
- Just before serving heat a large skillet with about one fourth of an inch canola oil over medium high heat. Drop about four latkes in the pan and fry until golden brown, usually three to four minutes on each side.
- Repeat to make four more latkes.
- Drain and serve with applesauce and sour cream.
MISSING YOU

By Betty Samuels

Missing the public library the most during the pandemic. Its doors closed aside from picking up and dropping off books. No fines until June 30th!

My earliest memories are of the public library somewhere in Brownsville or East New York. I picture myself in that safe brick building surrounded by shelves of books. There I am at my favorite shelf looking in the fairy tale book section. What color fairy tale book had I not read? Was it the green, red or yellow fairy tale book?

I loved the warmth emanating from the surrounding wooden walls. I see myself relishing reading a book sitting in a chair at a table in the library. In those days, the library really was a quiet place. Not a peep to be heard. If someone spoke too loud the librarian would put her finger to her lips mouthing sush! You did what she said!

I have no recollection of when I got my first library card. Could it have been my grandmother who took me to get it? Or perhaps an elementary school teacher did? Whoever it was I am most grateful to! I was most proud to have that card!

In my eyes the librarian was a very special person. She seemed a storehouse of knowledge and was full of guidance. The librarian would sometimes accompany me to the bookshelves and help me find a book. She was something like a friend who helped me find other friends in all the books I read. I loved reading about kids found in all those Beverly Cleary books. Henry, Beezus and Ramona and all the mischief they would get into! Later when older the Nancy Drew mystery books. I wanted to be like her. Curious, independent and adventurous! Well I did turn out to be somewhat like that!

The library was a place for research. We learned to use the Dewey Decimal system where each section had accompanying numbers. I imagine I learned that in public school. If the school had a library I do not recall it as I do the public library. I see myself searching for a book under a title, author or number in the card catalog. So many drawers, listing so many books! Does the catalog even exist today? Maybe somewhere!

I loved checking out books and would get as many as I was allowed to. Each book had a pocket and a card. I would sign my name and the name of the book and the librarian would stamp when it was due. I would carry those books home piled so high. I couldn’t wait to open them and start reading.

In those days living alone with my grandmother and an Uncle those visits to the library were exhilarating and exciting. My greatest pleasure
was opening those books and getting lost in worlds I could only dream of. It assuaged my inner loneliness, a shadow following me much of the time.

Libraries today in some ways are the same. I sit at the same table and chairs surrounded by the warmth of the warm wooden walls. They continue to give refuge to just about anyone of all ages. I find libraries noisier than before. Maybe it is because of all the activities held there from using computers to classes for literacy and citizenship. One can even learn how to write resumes for future employment. There are now writing groups and groups to learn to knit. Even dramatic readings at times. Once I saw a scene a woman wrote about her time living in the St. Agnes library where I usually go. Her father was a custodian there at the time. Now that would have been fun. I could read all the books I wanted!

As the pandemic becomes less of a threat I am hoping that the public libraries become one of the first to open their doors. I am so ready to return to that warm and safe space.

Postscript: Hooray! The libraries opened in late 2021. There are no more fines!
NOT JUST ANY MATZO BALL SOUP

BY LOIS SARNOFF

My Aunt Rhoda who passed away in 2005 was one of the best and most talented cooks I ever knew. We called her a “balabusta.” Everything that came out of her kitchen tasted delectable, especially her matzo ball soup.

My earliest memory is sitting at my aunt and uncle’s Passover table in the Springtime, usually in April. After we read the Hagaddah, the story of the Jews’ exodus from Egypt, the festive meal would begin with her matzo ball soup. That would be at about 10 P.M. I think I remember the soup best because I was always so hungry by the time it was served.

I can see Aunt Rhoda wearing a fancy apron and standing at the table in front of her large white ceramic soup tureen ladling out the steamy liquid and plopping a large matzo ball into everyone’s bowl.

She would ask if anyone wanted a pupik in their soup, too. A pupik is a dark chewy organ from a chicken. I always thought it was a testicle, but in fact, it’s actually a gizzard. Not everyone wanted one, but I always enjoyed eating the pupik as this was the only time of year she made them.

My bowl was placed in front of me and I would watch the chicken fat settle on the top of my soup as I allowed it to cool. I would cut up the baseball-sized matzo ball into small pieces so as to savor every bite.

As Passovers were celebrated annually, a discussion always ensued about whether Aunt Rhoda’s matzo balls were better cooked hard or soft. I always preferred them hard. Either way, she did not disappoint.

When cholesterol became a concern in the 1990s, Aunt Rhoda did away with my beloved pupiks. Instead, she added carrots to her matzo ball soup. Everyone in the family and the guests always “kvelled” over her soup.

Her main courses and side dishes were also delicious, but in my opinion nothing compared to her exceptional matzo ball soup. I can still taste it after all these years.

I have never eaten any since that could compare to the matzo ball soup that Aunt Rhoda made. That’s because she always sprinkled the soup with her secret ingredient - love!
I have lived in a beautiful neighborhood in Brooklyn for the past eighteen years. It is a very quiet area at the bottom of a big hill with several co-ops and private houses. When I saw it, I fell in love with it and I knew I had to live here.

Across the street from my co-op building is a large park which houses a baseball field, a great lawn for lounging, basketball courts, a small garden, a bandshell for live summer concerts, and a playground with swings, monkey bars, and slides, as well as sprinklers coming out of a frog’s mouth. There are also several walking paths.

It is along one of these walking paths that I stumbled upon a footbridge that goes over the very noisy and busy Belt Parkway. When walking across it often, I still marvel at the incredible scenery. As I overlook the expanse of the Verrazzano Narrows Bay, to my left I see the much trafficked Verrazzano Bridge leading to Staten Island. Directly across the Bay, I can see St. George’s Ferry Terminal and watch the Staten Island ferries traverse the waters towards lower Manhattan. If I turn my gaze slightly right, the Royal Caribbean cruise ship can be spotted at the pier in Bayonne, New Jersey. Farther out, I can see the Bayonne Bridge and nearby planes taking off from Newark Airport.

As I descend the steps of the footbridge to my right, I have come onto the Shore Road Promenade along the Bay. This walkway starts at Caesar’s Bay and continues several miles until it arrives at the 69th Street Pier. When I begin walking toward the Pier, the Manhattan skyline catches my eye. There is the Freedom Tower standing incredibly tall overlooking all of lower Manhattan: the ferries, cruise ships, cargo ships, boats, and the Statue of Liberty in the Harbor. I can also see this from my top floor bedroom window. I never get tired of the amazing view.

On July 4th, I can see the Macy’s fireworks from my window. The USNS Comfort ship, sent to New York in April 2020 to help with COVID patients, has also sailed past my window, as did the Queen Mary on her maiden voyage to New York City many years ago. Last week (and every September 11th), I saw the blue lights above the Freedom Tower, reaching up to Heaven, in memory of those precious lives lost on that fateful day. They give me the chills.

As I continue to walk, I pass bike riders, rollerbladers, runners, joggers, and other people walking. I smell the salt water, watch the ducks swimming on the bay, and hear the cawing of the seagulls flying overhead looking for food. Upon arriving at the end of the walkway, I am at the 69th Street Pier where I can see a large Vietnam War Memorial, picnic tables, people casting their fishing lines, and the NYC ferry dock. Here, I can board a ferry that makes stops at other Brooklyn neighborhoods along the waterfront and ends at Pier 11 in Manhattan. I have taken the ferry numerous times.

Then, I walk under the Belt Parkway overpass and I come upon the Narrows Botanic Garden to my right. It’s a smaller version of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Once inside, I see many varieties of flowers and plants, an active beehive, several species of birds, a tribute to the Twin Towers carved out of rocks, and a nice green lawn with trees to provide shade for those hot summer days.

As I exit the Garden, I continue for two blocks on the tree-lined cobblestone path and I realize that I have come full circle back to where I began, my home.
FIRST GRANDCHILD
BY DONNA SCHETTINA

He smiles
Day brightens
Suddenly our hearts explode with joy
A first grandchild grants glorious gifts
Of love
Of hope
He smiles

He grows
Joy continues
His mind expands, explores the universe
School, swimming, karate fill his days
And ours
But less
He grows

Life Evolves
We move
Zoom meetings, phone calls, photos exchanged
Help fill the loss of real hugs
Not fully
All accept
Life evolves
The eight men’s synchronized steps seemed to be in slow motion. Their grimacing faces hinted at the heavy weight that they bore. Tears that they were unable to wipe away, told that it was not the burden of weight, but their grief over whom they carried. The sight of my husband, my son, my nephews, and brothers-in-law carrying my only brother into the little church began the crack down on my already broken heart.

While I watched this unfold, I thought, little brother, weren’t we supposed to grow old together? CRACK!

Weren’t you supposed to be a groom at your cousin’s wedding? CRACK

Who will raise your little boy now? CRACK

I look at my parents bravely bearing the loss of their only son with such dignity. CRACK

I turn to my sisters’ shattered faces and CRACK

How will we all bear it, this sudden unbearable loss? The answers, love, hope and time are the most often repeated and I cling to them like they are true.
Quick, come see!
The moonlight is casting
window panes on the floor.
I took a few minutes to
walk to that darkened room.
By the time I looked,
the moon had moved.
The light had altered.
It had crept onto the bed
A perfect pattern of light filled boxes
Glowing sharply over the white coverlet.
Time moves.
Light changes.
It does not wait for me.
It was September 1947 when the dark-eyed young woman walked along Riverside Drive, missing home. She wondered at this strange country. She missed her parents and relatives and New Year greetings in her own language.

A broad-chested man in a suit, he with matinee idol good looks, was parking his car sixteen blocks from Columbia University in the closest parking space he could find. As he locked the door, his eye caught her small but energetic figure. In a minute, they were talking.

In December, he bought her alligator-skinned high-heeled shoes for her size 5 feet. His friends said, “Oh ho, that is an engagement present. He means to marry you.”

“How is that?” she asked.

“Bill does not spend money on women he is not serious about.”

In January, they were married. A handheld home movie tells us she wore a full-skirted light blue cocktail dress with a coquettish bow at her neck and matching veil. She smiled demurely like a cat and, in spite of the cold, pushed away a coat offered by her uncle.

Many years later, my father convinced my friend who believed in destiny that the world works on randomness.

I have always wondered whether their meeting near Grant’s Tomb was an utterly random occurrence or the exactitude of destiny.
LETTING GO

By Monique Sledge-Ambrose

I remember the call... Springing forward from the sofa, grabbing my hat, jacket, and the all-important masks, I was sucked into a vortex of panic. Flying out the door, I scrambled down 5 flights of stairs and burst into the still air. Running to my car, I unlocked it and frantically shoved myself behind the steering wheel, fumbling my keys to start the ignition. After about 10 minutes of speeding along a pandemic-cleared eastbound Long Island Expressway, I turned sharply onto the hospice campus, parked in a restricted area, and trembled -- my breath burdened with the anxiety of knowing the end was near.

“My mom is dying! May I park here?”

I bounded toward the hospice doors without waiting for a response from the security agent. At the entrance, I was greeted by a PPE-draped social worker. Her garb reminded me of contagion.

“Oh, my Lord,” I worried, “Please don’t let me get sick while I’m here with Mom. There’s still Dad to look after and it’s just too dangerous for him to even be here right now. This is not how it was supposed to be!” Nearly all the reasons for choosing hospice placement for Mom had been decimated by COVID-19. The promised services and compassionate care dwindled as staff either became ill, decided it was too risky to report for shifts, or feared close interaction with patients. However, pricked with the harsh reality that multitudes of people did not have the option of being present with dying loved ones, I quickly silenced my grumbling and prayed to humbly accept what I had no power to change.

Prior to entering Mom’s room – 810A-- I was required to don a plastic gown. Yellow. Thick goggles that smelled heavily of rubber threatened to trigger a migraine. As beads of perspiration broke through on what seemed like every inch of my body, I realized I still had 2 new masks and a face shield to layer across my face. And, oh, the gloves.

Mom lay there sleeping. “IT’S MONIQUE, YOUR DAUGHTER!” the hospice nurse crudely yelled. Lana, the aide, was distraught, thinking this – Mom’s dying – was somehow her fault. Too many voices followed, intermingling with the dire news reports of rising death tolls being announced, in one accord, on the many televisions that hung both inside and outside patients’ rooms:

“She was doing so well!”

“Stay as long as you want.”

“Oh, my goodness, I don’t know what happened! Why is she like this? She was ok!”

Chaos! I just wanted to sit quietly with Mom. “Please... Thank you, but please! Just leave and let us be. And for goodness’ sake, can you silence the televisions? Dying people don’t need to hear about all these deaths!”

I needed to hold Mom’s hand and, once again, pour out my heart to the heart of the woman who brought me into the world and never walked away. She was sweet and gentle in living, ailing,
and even now -- in dying. Each inhale and exhale were precious as I watched the slowing rise and fall of her chest, much as a new mother watches over her slumbering infant. Gratefully, the touch of our hands confirmed that our spirits knew each other despite the garb that rendered me unrecognizable.

Gently, I stroked Mom’s silky, silver hair and, whispering, emptied my heart into her ear, as I’d been told hearing is the last sense to fade. Wishfully, I thought, “Oh, to hold on a while longer would satisfy my selfish love.” Realistically, though, it would not be kind as Mom’s brain and body sought and fought -- for nearly a decade -- to be healed, whole. It was time to let her go in love. Although Mom did not die from COVID-19, COVID-19 significantly impacted the final weeks of her life. Yet, to sit as a sentry, keeping watch -- even if only for a short while -- was a tremendous gift. Difficult to receive, but forever cherished.
LONGING

BY MONIQUE SLEDGE-AMBROSE

Although at your desk – over there,
I see you seeing me here,
Sitting in this rickety chair –
A stranger to this cold atmosphere.
Abruptly, you break the stare,
And I continue to wait,
Hoping you’ll once again glance my way
So, my eyes can smile and my mouth say,
“Hello!”
Heartily breaking through the confines of a mask
To affirm the gift of breath in our lungs
Still has a healing purpose
Despite the lingering fear, isolation, and chaos
Of these pandemic days.
MY CURSED LOVE

By Beth Smuckler

Rarely do I check my messages in time,
But one January morning I viewed a surprise.
Somewhat like a knock on the door twenty years later,
Having climbed out, slowly but surely, from the dark crater.

Wanting to meet, you inquired of my desire.
I readily responded; you sparked my inner fire.
Then we spoke and soon stroked and tried to make jokes.
I assumed, like mine, your desire was no hoax.

But alas, I fear, my loving feelings are my curse.
They will not leave me, for better or for worse.
Yet, I wonder, are you that clueless or unsmart,
That you still refrain from sensitivity, or did your feelings depart?

I still wait to catch a glimpse of warmth in your voice.
Please give me a sign; make me rejoice.
I am too old and wilted to immaturely pout,
But I so hope these are my unfounded doubts.

I don’t want to remain in the crater in my mind,
Yet I chastise myself as I cater to you in this bind.
But even if you set me free as I once did myself,
This time, my cursed love prevails; I need your help.
A RETIREE’S YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW

By Beth Smuckler

My yesterdays were marked by studies,
Schoolwork, homework, tests, some time with buddies.
It all paid off and led me to the head of classes,
Not to study primarily, but to now instruct the masses.

Many students benefited as I imparted lessons, I hope.
I know I learned much from them, including how to cope.
Their special needs offered me challenges and perks.
I experimented, not as a scientist, but just to see what works.

They didn’t need to meet my standards to succeed.
Yes, they had to work hard, but I had to find what it was they’d need.
My students already had to function in a strange land,
And speak amongst others who did not readily offer a helping hand.

Today I am left to wonder how their lives did unravel.
The bells still toll, but I sleep later and then I travel.
Retired from the structure, routine, and regiment.
I choose my own hours and give instruction where I’m sent.

Support needed, I’m sent to lend a helping hand,
To figure out how to make them understand.
Immaturity swallows what needs to be an open mind.
Closed, it stifles learning and puts us both in a bind.

I travel door to door and cross many miles
Tangled in traffic, yet still arriving with smiles.
Ready to conquer confusion and capture comprehension.
With an audience of one, I still struggle to attain their attention.

Tomorrow, I tell myself as I stumble toward the door,
Unable to accomplish all, but promising to do more.
I’ll find the words; I’ll state my case and turn the key,
Unlocking his tomorrows, as perhaps he listens to me.

But tomorrow is promised to no one, I remember,
So, there must be a club of which I can be a member.
Tomorrow awaits me, out of school; I’ll join a fitness center too.
The meeting of my mind and my body is long overdue.

Later, I’ll tickle the ivories and strum the strings,
Prolonging my leisure and feeling the joy it brings.
Happily, hobbies hide unhappiness over hidden heartbreak,
Yet sighs over ending lessons replaced by smiles over unfulfillment can be fake.
IT WAS

BY KENNETH SOLWAY

Sleeping on a bed of cans,
Rolling in rags with fingertips holding fast,
His flesh gripping a corner of a building against the wind
Icing his bones and cropping his blood.
Rags pasted in piles on his skin
Unpeeling memories in the cave of his past.

Hello? Are you there?
Does anybody know this person?
He had a name on his face once.
He meant something to someone.
There once was a smile there.

Nothing besides is left,
underlapping the garbage, newspapers and plastic
lies a pretzel- like fetal shape.
THAT’S IT

BY KENNETH SOLWAY

It comes. It knocks on the door.
Whose mark is up?
They do not want this.
Not at this time most say.
It calls, when it calls and that’s it.
Its boatman swings its oar.
There is a custom seat for each
but not my time yet. The oar sweeps.
There are more floating on the horizon.
So many to do, how to get to all of them?
Sweeping souls to their origin,
when will mine be it?
Will I control my way?
Please keep my pain at bay
so I let go and let G-d say.
AN ACT OF KINDNESS

By Christine Soper

“Here, have some of this.” For the many hungry children in war-torn Europe, a single act of kindness could make all the difference. Edwin Burba Cook, a four-year-old street urchin in Hamburg, Germany was rescued by an American soldier who gave him a chocolate bar. “I thought I’d gone to heaven,” Ed, a retired Bronx VA counselor, says of his experience. “I’ll never forget the delicious comforting taste that overwhelmed me after I’d unwrapped the strange item and taken my first bite.”

It was 1944. The Axis powers would be defeated and the Russian Army was approaching the Baltic States. Thousands of refugees who had experienced the first Communist occupation with its terrors fled for their lives. Heading for Poland and Germany, areas they hoped would be controlled by the West, they presented a mass of confusion and a babble of tongues.

Ed, the 12th of 13 children born to Edward and Maryte Burba in Taurage, Lithuania, recalls happier times. “My father, a candlestick maker, let me help thread a string through a wheel to form the tapers used in church ceremonies. My relatives, all with lots of children, lived along a lake and Sunday outings meant boat rides in the summer and ice skating in the winter.”

But WWII changed everything. Ed’s father was shot by the Nazis and his mother went into hiding with her sister, scattering his brothers and sisters among family members. Ed was only four but his world was turned upside down.

Elyte, his 12-year-old sister, stood beside her little brothers, Edwin and Jousas, at the Vilnia railroad station where a train for Germany waited. Only families were allowed to board. Just before departure a woman traveling alone approached the children. “I’ll take care of him,” she told Elyte and pulled me onto the train as it left the station. The entire trip I cried for my motina, my mother.

When they arrived in Hamburg, the woman had no use for the little boy who had helped her escape but, perhaps out of guilt, rather than leave him on one of the bombed out, corpse littered streets, she took him to a German family. “They put me in a dark cellar where all I heard were rats scratching and squeaking. I was given dry crusts to eat and kept warm staying next to the coal bin. After a while, I got courage to climb up and open a window through which I escaped. I was one of many homeless children in that war-torn city, sleeping in shells of buildings, lean-tos, under tarps, eating garbage. There was never enough. I was skin and bones, close to starving.”

By the summer of 1945, Ed, a veteran of the streets, was stealing food from wherever he could find it. “When American occupation troops arrived, they were big and healthy and looked friendly. Filching grub from them was a cinch. I’d slip into the mess hall, hide under a table and make off with loaves of bread. One afternoon I was lurking around the mess tent, waiting for an opportunity, when two huge scary hands lifted me up by the collar. ‘Got ya,’ a soldier shouted.”

Ed was scared. This was the first time he was face to face with an American GI. “It’s okay kid,” the soldier said as he reached in his fatigue jacket and handed the frightened child a chocolate bar. Ed forgot his fear and for the first time since that day at the railroad station, he felt safe. “If I hadn’t been caught, I doubt I would have survived.” Ed never did learn the soldier’s name but his kind
deed is always in his thoughts.

Along with other homeless children, Ed was taken to a DP camp run by the Red Cross and UNRUH, a United Nations sponsored alliance. For the first time since Lithuania, he had food and a warm bed. The camps were separated by nationality and rescue teams did their best to reconstruct the refugees’ lives. Ed stayed at the camp for five years, going to school where he learned English and the three Rs. All that time, he was cared for lovingly by the “Amis” or Friends.

In 1950, he was processed by the National Catholic Agency and sent to a New York orphanage for adoption by a Lithuanian family from Pennsylvania. The mother had lost three children but a year after adopting Ed had a son quickly followed by twins. Ed became their babysitter and while he feels obligated to the family, says he was always restless, wanting to return to Lithuania.

“I always felt like an outsider who didn’t belong. I had a hard life. When I was 12, I worked in the coal mines as a cracker, someone who follows the wagons and picks up the excess coal. I hitchhiked 18 miles a day to high school and back so when I saw Uncle Sam on that poster, saying he wanted me, I enlisted.”

While stationed in Germany Ed was able to locate his family. Elyte apologized for letting a stranger kidnap him but he told her, “It’s all right. You were only a child yourself. Besides, how else would I have gotten to America?”

Ed attended college under the GI Bill and earned a degree in clinical social work. In 1983, he became a counselor for the VA, treating veterans with PTSD. He views his military service and life work as payment for the kindness of the soldier who first led him to safety. Today, the little malnourished orphan who prowled Hamburg’s bombed out streets, sets an example for resilience and healing for men who served in conflict.

I’m grateful that Elyte was at the station that day and that her brother Ed is part of our American family.
THE VISIT

By Christine Soper

A vacant smile greeted us and we stepped into the too warm room,
Thick with things that stood still, stagnating
In the anonymity of photos and books
That no longer had meaning.

In the hall, life moved, its faint heartbeat felt in hushes and hopeful smiles,
In polite steps, shushing apologetically past stains
In the thickly padded carpet that kept their secrets.
It settled on us, the smells of sighs and regrets, of
Tasteless, heavy food that punctuated hours and empty days,
And unfresh air, full of last breaths and nervous laughter.

An aide languished like an afghan on a pillowless loveseat, ambivalent
While high volume hoots and hi-fives from sparkly TV contestants kept time
And injected artificial excitement into dull swollen days.

We hover with photos, lobbing them to her like velcroed softballs:
“This is you at that party…and here is Victoria Falls, remember? and
Look at your husband’s sister.”
“Yes, that’s Bea.” We cheer.

Nameless visitors come, hoping for recollection, for something different than this.
The tiny tangles that robbed her, robbed us, imprison her, leaving her no way out.
We wonder what it’s like in there.

She looks at the clock and declares,”I’ve got to get home.”
Twilight rolls in, washing away what remains of the day and
Of her memories. A life once filled with colors. What’s left now are just the lines.
MELODY 61

BY STEVEN L. THOMASCHEK

Hello. My name is Melody 61. My friends just call me Melody. I am a portable electric piano, also known as an electronic keyboard. Unlike my acoustic cousins, the upright and grand pianos, I do not produce musical tones by striking tight metal strings inside my body, causing them to vibrate and create sounds. I have black and white keys just like they do, although not quite as many. They have eighty-eight. I have only sixty-one. If you press down on my keys, my nervous system generates electric signals which produce the sounds you hear.

Some people confuse electronic keyboards with digital pianos. We’re similar, but not exactly the same. Digitals primarily produce piano sounds and maybe those of other string instruments such as guitars and violins. Some have a striking resemblance to small acoustic pianos. You know, musical instruments that are also pieces of living room furniture like the ones your parents or grandparents might have had. Others look like me, a black light weight portable keyboard instrument, only with fewer buttons and minus a little lit up odometer-like screen.

I am proud to say that I am full of “bells and whistles,” added features like those above that make me suitable for the casual learner and appealing to older kids who thrive on variety and stimulation. My repertoire totals three hundred individual tones including the ping of a piano, heem of an organ, twang of a guitar, and doomp of a drum, all in various varieties. To make better use of these tones, my keyboard can be split in two, in essence turning me into a two-girl band. For instance, my right side can be your piano while my left side is your bass guitar. If you need a metronome, I am that too. I can play a tick-tock two, tick-tock-tock three, or tick-tock-tock-tock four beats per measure, or a continuous steady tick-tick-tick-tick with no regard to time signature. I do not mean to brag, but I think we electrics are fabulous figures of physics when you consider the ways in which we produce such stimulating musical sounds.

I was born in a factory in China although my biological family is from Rhode Island. They go by the name Alesis, but their real name is iMusicBrands, LLC. About a year ago I was adopted by Reyna and Steve, a lovely couple in New York. Both wanted to learn piano, so they adopted Alfred and me as a Christmas gift to each other. My new stepbrother Alfred is a do-it-yourself instructional piano book. His full name is Alfred’s Teach Yourself to Play Piano.

Reyna and Steve give Alfred and me lots of loving care. They keep me plugged in so that I never have to use my battery. Steve was about to get a special dust cover for me when Reyna stepped in and placed a delicate lady’s shawl over my shoulders. That was so sweet of her. They also gave Alfred his own music stand so that he is always opened to the last page played.

Alfred teaches a little bit of music theory and provides plenty of practice tunes and drills called finger aerobics. At first, Reyna didn’t care to read the explanations about music symbols, intervals, time signatures, and so on, so she let Steve do the reading and explaining while she stuck to the playing. On the other hand, Reyna practices more. That’s why she’s ahead of Steve in Alfred and more proficient with me. Today for instance, she played “The Marines’ Hymn.” Steve is still working on “Alouette.” I’m not worried about him though. He’ll get there. Recently, he joined a UFT retiree beginner’s piano group on Zoom that is sure to help.
Steve wishes he had tried piano or guitar during his elementary school teaching days. It would have come in handy for assemblies. On the other hand, there was seldom enough time for fun stuff like music. In his school, it was always reading and math. Don’t get me wrong. He loved those core subjects too but was particularly fond of teaching the content areas. You know, history, geography, earth science and things like that. And he loved physical education, aka Gym, just as much as the students. Nevertheless, Steve understood that their immediate needs came first.

Growing up, Reyna was surrounded by brothers who sang and played guitar. She once tried guitar but found some chords too much of a stretch. When her brother Julio in Kansas City, a decent self-taught guitarist and karaoke style singer, adopted a keyboard like me a few years ago, Reyna felt motivated to try her hands at playing piano not only for its own sake, but also to impress her brother. Julio will be impressed once he hears her play. Of that, I am sure.

I think Reyna and Steve know how I feel about them, and I know how they feel about me. On a few occasions Steve has said welcoming me into their home when they did was perfect timing. A few weeks after they started teaching themselves to play me, the pandemic struck New York. Soon there was a shutdown and they were remaining at home more than usual, and there I was in the right place at the right time. Knowing that I’ve brought great joy to two nice people, makes me feel like a hit song. Together, we are becoming one happy musical family.
THEIR BONES WILL GLOW

By Wendy Trontz

Madam Curie discovers a way to separate out radium
Wins Nobel Prize in physics in 1911

Radium glows in the dark

Some claimed radium had health benefits
Radium-infused water the new “snake oil”
“Your complexion will glow with radium face powder”
Watch numbers painted to glow in the dark

Women paid a penny a dial
Told to “point” the brush with lips then dip in radium
Paint more dials make more money

Women became sick
Complained of strange symptoms
Company doctor told them they had syphilis
Afraid of being shamed hid their diagnosis
Women started dying

Consumer advocate group hired doctor
Women were examined
They all had radium poisoning
Women sued the company they worked for
Newspapers made the case a national sensation
Sick women became known as Radium Girls

Case ended in a settlement in 1928
Radium poisoning would take the girl’s lives
Geiger counters clicked at their graves

Radium used on watch dials into the 1970’s
The Radium Girls bones will glow for a thousand years
THE WATERS WILL CLAIM HER

By Wendy Trontz

Born under the sign of Aquarius
Water was her destiny

Summer 1959 the Catskills
Precocious six year old
No lifeguard at pool
The diving board called to her
Jumped off board
Went directly to the bottom
Looking down saw the light blue bottom
Looking up a light beckoned her
No knowledge of how to get to the surface
Fought her way to the light
Found herself on the surface

Rockaway Beach, summer 1963
The buoy way out in the ocean called to her
Destination reached
The ocean grabbed her, took her down
Fought and fought the undertow
Resolved to surrender herself to the ocean
The ocean decided it was not her time
Found herself on the surface once more

Like the Sirens beckoned to Odysseus
The waters of the world call to her

Swam through schools of fish in Bermuda
Came face to a face with a baby barracuda in the waters of Aruba
Open Water Certified in the waters of a flooded quarry in Pennsylvania
Swam through underground caverns In the Devil’s Den Sinkhole in Florida
Floated on the waters of the Dead Sea in Israel

Knows someday the waters will claim her
When will that be?
Only the water knows.
WE SHARE THE SUNSETS

By Judith Veder

hearing the red as it spills
all the way from there to here,
from my Hudson to your sea.
We share these days,
the silence of them,
no words and melodies
from here to there.
At the moment of the light,
we hear a stillness come.
I know it.
Without it, there is a
lonely whiteness and emptiness.
And always they come,
those night visitors, signaling to each other
“Pssssttt….it’s alright to come now.”
Tiptoeing into corners, checking the rear,
sentries into my dreams,
they set up camp, establish a dugout here, a foxhole there.
entrenched, they become.
I turn in a plea to someone besides me—
“do not count on the kindness of strangers or lovers,
the strangeness of their kind is to be feared.”
A MEMOIRY
BY Judith Veder

I remember that windsent breeze of cardamom and mint
through a window break.
I remember us
under a sheet someplace in a place called south of
before the moon rose
before the first star appeared
before running naked to the edge of the sea
in the still warm wet sand,
promising each other with the sound of the surf,
Love
as only young people can promise.
Soon after morning, on the long ride home,
clouds forming shapes of hearts near the window,
I blew kisses to the sky and you--
And then later waiting for the baggage to arrive,
it being time to return home,
you
were
gone.
THE EYES HAVE IT

BY ANITA WEISENFELD

When I take off my glasses
The world becomes a blur
But then I find that I don’t mind
‘Cause some lovely things occur
The mirror says I’m thinner
The wrinkles, not so deep
My eyes appear much brighter
As if I’ve had more sleep!
I still can see my loved ones
And friends that I hold dear
In fact, my sight’s of no concern
When special folks are near
Can’t see the numbers on the scale
But who cares any “weigh?”
I sure don’t need to be depressed
Before I start my day
Of course, I need my specs to read
And drive and watch TV
The “nuts and bolts” of life are things
I really have to see
Those special things I want to see
May cause my eyes to strain
But they’re so worth the effort that
You won’t hear me complain!
THE SUNDAY FOOTBALL BLUES

By Anita Weisenfeld

When the Super Bowl is over
Forgive me if I cheer
It means there’s no more football
At least till fall that year
Can’t follow how the game is played
And goodness knows, I’ve tried
Men running up and down a field?
4th and 10? Off side?

I get the Sunday football blues
The games go on so long
My favorite shows can’t air on time
I’m sorry, but that’s just wrong!

Why must there be a post-game show
To analyze the plays?
The game is OVER, let’s move on
Don’t understand the craze

The goal’s to score a touchdown
While running with the ball
I think you have to stay upright
Can you score if you fall?

Beyond that, I’m without a clue
The games make my eyes glaze
I much prefer the movies
To fill up my Sundays

I welcome that brief span of time
When football games don’t air
Pre-season play starts much too soon
Can you tell I don’t care?

So, when the games begin anew
And the Sunday blues appear
I’ll simply count the days until
I once again can cheer!
WINGSPAN

BY PAUL WOJCIK

Why
Do we think
We can glide with ease?
The ugly flying machines
Polluting the sky with noise,
Come close to the sun
Fall apart
Down

We
Do not know
How to fly at all.
The providence of sparrows
Soaring through the atmosphere,
Gracefully
Up

Trees
Tower above.
Reaching away,
Colliding in the breeze.
Living beyond us
Bounded in
Earth
NO POEM TO OFFER

By Paul Wojcik

The restlessness of this moment.
No poem to offer.
It does not work. A real snake pit.
I am in a fight to find myself.
Can I force a poem? Can it flow out of me?

Being contrived becomes my enemy. I feel like
I am trying to escape from prison.
I need to think about tomorrow.
Being stuck in the present,
I need to pull from the past.

Where to go?
I need to find the road not traveled.
Let us go then, you and I.
The place where others usually don’t go.
Another time, another day, another space in time.
The clock is running out.
WHAT IS LIFE?

By Perlita P. Wolahan

Life is when you were born and you cried for the first time
Life is getting momma’s cuddles for a long time you know
Life is milk and mushy food to make you grow
Life is the first time you babble a word
Life is the first time you crawled and walked to and fro
Life is going to nursery school, pre -K and kindergarten
Life is learning to ride a bike and falling many times
Life is bruises and scratches and more
Life is first grade to college and doctorate
Life is working from Monday to Friday, Tis hard work you know
Life is having friends always on your side
Life is achieving goals you dream for you
Life is getting older too
Are these the only meanings of life?

Well No!

Life is the joy and sorrow in front of you
Life is gaining and losing; sadly, you lose your loved ones before you
Life is letting go of some memories and people who disliked you
Life is bouncing back from defeat, rejection and woes
Life is looking back at your steps and seeing the more mature you
Life is loving yourself and others around you
Life is smiling at peace even when your body aches from any illness or so
Life is giving and receiving wisdom, wealth, time and knowledge too
Life is praying to God for a healthy you

This way you can witness your life to those around you
But more so, to see newborn infant go through life from the beginning like you
You see,
Life is from innocence to wisdom
Celebrate both while you can
Then patiently wait for life’s surprise when your life ends
For life begins all over again…. 