

LEXINGTON
LifeTimes
A CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL
ISSUE 2 | SUMMER 2018



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ABOUT THIS JOURNAL

The Friends of the Lexington Council on Aging funded the first issue of LEXINGTON LifeTimes: A CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL with a Bright Ideas grant. The Bright Ideas mini-grant program was started by the Friends in 2017 to enrich and enhance programming for seniors in the Lexington community.

This journal showcases creative content from Lexington seniors (aged 60+). It features short fiction, essays, poetry, photography, artwork, and cartoons. The publication is overseen by a volunteer editorial board which sets the criteria for submission and selects entries for inclusion. Distribution is primarily electronic with a limited number of printed copies.

This is the second edition of a twice-annual publication that displays the creative talents of seniors who live or work in Lexington. The third edition is planned for Winter 2019. If you are interested in having your work considered for a future issue, please see the submission guidelines on the Friends of the Lexington Council on Aging website:

www.friendsofthecoa.org

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FRONT: *In from the Garden*
BY JEAN M. HART
BACK: *Salt Marsh Shorebirds*
BY CATHY PAPAIZIAN

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The Coming of Hyun Mee Kim

BY BRENDA PRUSAK

IT WAS 1982, the second year of our second marriage. We lived in Lexington in the only house we could afford. I was almost forty. There was no child in our life. This was the year that my husband and I decided to adopt a child from Korea. We knew our ages had eliminated the possibility of our adopting an infant. This was our only chance to have a child.

We made an appointment at the adoption agency where we were introduced to our case worker, an Indian woman named Homai. She told us we would first take a class on adoption with other prospective parents. Next she would visit our home for a home study. We were assured that the home study was designed to help the agency place the right child with us, though privately we called this the “Snoop Study.”

On the day of the home study you could see your image on every table top. Current affairs magazines were neatly arranged. Cookies had been baked, the house glowed with healthy plants. I tossed the dreary fern into the trash. What kind of a mother would keep a dying fern around?

The doorbell rang sharply, like the first plunge into freezing water. “Please come in, Homai.” The three of us moved into the living room and awkwardly sat down on the couch. I could hear my own breathing. Could she? Homai shuffled through her briefcase and pulled out a stack of papers. Will this be an inquisition or merely questions?

“So Larry,” she smiles, “you’re an only child, you didn’t grow up with siblings. You never had that chance to bond with others than your parents. You didn’t have to negotiate sharing toys. Will it be difficult for you

to have a child in your life now that you’re forty? How will you share tasks with Brenda? Who will change the diapers?” Hmmm, that’s a good question I think. Then Homai turns her attention to me.

“Brenda you’ve been a teacher for a long time and you have three sisters but that’s very different than being a parent. As you know, once a child is assigned to you, you’ll have to stop working for a full year. What challenges do you see in that for yourself?”

That one’s easy to answer. I’d wanted to be a teacher and a mother from the time I could line up my dolls and stuffed bears in front of the fireplace every day after school. Are there right and wrong answers to these questions? We follow our plan to gloss over our own tricky beginnings in life. Can we be less than perfect and still have a child?

Afternoon light fades. Homai glances at her watch. “I think we’ve covered everything I need to know. Do you have any questions for me?” We silently wonder if we’ve passed the test. Homai leaves. Larry and I turn to each other for a comforting hug. A few days later we hear we are qualified to be parents. We are told that we are smart enough, financially stable enough, sufficiently clean and moral enough to have a child placed with us. What if all pregnancies were so carefully determined?

The waiting begins. Month after month is ripped off the calendar. I allow myself one phone call a month. I don’t want to appear anxious. At the end of six months a child is found for us.

I remember the call from the agency. “Brenda this is Homai.” “Yes?” Was there a problem? Did they need another recommen-

dation? Had she seen the dead fern in the trash on her way out of the house? Maybe someone thought of a reason we weren't suitable to be parents. "Brenda, I have a picture of the child you've been assigned to. I can't tell you any more than that. I can give you an appointment tomorrow at 3:00." "Homai we could come today. Would that be possible for you?" "Don't worry Brenda. The photo will be safe in my desk. I'll see you tomorrow at three."

I rush to call Larry at work. His secretary tells me in a deep yawn that he's in a meeting. "Please interrupt the meeting. This is important." I hear Larry's annoyed voice, "Bren I told you I'd be in a meeting. What is it?" "Sorry to interrupt dear but I heard from Homai. We're going to have a child." This is the moment when birth parents see the ultrasound of their child, and it's the same moment for parents who adopt to feel a heartbeat. "Bren, this is such good news. I'm really happy. Can you believe this?"

Now I'm jumpy, what can I do with myself? Shall I make phone calls to everyone? No wait, what if something goes wrong? What if we learn that this child has serious cognitive problems, or that she will need surgery, or that she has eight siblings? Could we adopt the whole brood? Fantasies race through me. Middle of the night fears grip my attention as much as the sweet fantasies of bonding to our daughter. Can love heal earlier trauma? Is love enough? Am I enough?

Outside Homai's office we sit in two straight back chairs. There is nothing to look at but that black door to her office, the passageway to happiness or sorrow. I tug at my skirt, inspect Larry's shoes, study my shoes.

The door opens. All begins well but then we hear a catch. Homai tells us, "I can only let you see this photo. No questions please. You have to make the decision now. Do you want this child?" I look into Larry's eyes, he reaches for my hand, and we both say, "Yes, we want to adopt this child." Homai stands up to embrace us.

Homai then gives us a small photo of a barely over two year old girl named Hyun Mee Kim. She weighs 30 pounds and is all of a yard long. She appears to be in good health. Hyun Mee was photographed in a small outside play area of her orphanage. There is no smile on her face but we see an expression that seems to call out, "Take me. I'm yours. This is all that I am. I can give you no more." Her dark hair has been pulled back into ponytails. She's been dressed in what would be a "good" dress for the occasion, a white sundress with stripes down the front. Her bare legs give no hint of the days to come when Hyun Mee will compete in marathons and teach



*Hyun Mee at her orphanage
September, 1982.*

her own two sons to ski.

It's this little photo I carry with me at all times. My fingers find it tucked safely in my bathrobe pocket, I prop it up at the dinner table, it sits beside me as I drink my morning coffee. Hyun Mee is my secret companion, always there. I have no swollen belly but I do have a child growing in my heart. I share our precious photo with family and close friends. Some ask, "What happened to her real parents?" Are we not real enough?

Returning from shopping I hear the phone. It's Larry's excited voice, "Bren, sit down." Oh God, just speak Larry. "It's Saturday." Hyun Mee arrives on Korean airlines at Kennedy airport on Saturday, February 18th, 1984.

I can not get away from clocks. I lie in bed throwing the covers on and off. I'm never hungry. Whatever I wore yesterday is on my back today. Our kitchen shelves are stacked high with odd Korean packages. Magically I think I will understand the Korean instructions.

Hyun Mee's room has my studied attention. Years of teaching small children has developed my knowledge of children's literature. There are oversized books with no words, tiny books that invite small fingers to explore. Some books pop up with surprise monkeys, some books have tapes to sing her lullabies at night. Many more books and toys are hidden in the attic. I don't want to overwhelm a child who's never had anything to call her own. Simplicity will work. We'll make chocolate pudding pictures on the kitchen floor for her dad to see when he comes home from work.

Our plan is to fly to New York the day before. We'll use the apartment in Greenwich Village our friends have lent us. Friday is a blur. We traipse through Central Park, our eyes searching for families with children. We return late to the apartment where I plan to have an exquisite soak before we go out for a last romantic "couples only" dinner.

The phone rings. I panic. I hear Larry saying. "Tonight? The plane is in Anchorage now? You mean she's arrived, she's in Alaska?" We learn someone from the adoption agency forgot to figure in the international dateline. "Hyun Mee is here! Cancel that lovely dinner date, Larry. Let's quick get to the airport."

At the airport we're directed to a separate area. Here other families with an entourage of friends wait for their expected children. Half hours slide by slower than the ice on glaciers. The far door opens. In a flurry of cries, tears and shouts babies are delivered

to outstretched arms. There's no Hyun Mee among them. What if at the last moment her birth mother decided to keep her? Are we not going to be parents after all? We watch in remote silence as small groups of families gather their balloons and stuffed animals. We're left behind, alone.

The vast room expands into a deep silence. I try willing the door to open again. I negotiate with God, "Look God, if you give us Hyun Mee I promise..." Suddenly the door bursts open. We're confused. We see a tall pilot striding purposefully toward us, the Korean stewardesses in their high heels straining to keep up with him. They are all beaming smiles at us. Then I see tucked in the pilot's arms a tiny little head poking out. I can only see matted black hair; the rest of the petite body is hidden in the blue of the pilot's arms. Can I trust the Universe after all? Is this really Hyun Mee?

The pilot ever so gently places Hyun Mee in my arms. I enfold her tightly. With immense joy I feel her tired body nestling into my body. She rests her head against my chest. I whisper to her over and over again, "You are so perfect, so beautiful, so very much loved." I look into Larry's eyes filling with tears. I feel the tears rolling down my cheeks. The pilot and stewardesses all have wet cheeks. Hyun Mee looks at all those teary faces, she scrunches up her own face, and then she too begins to cry. ♦



2017 Christmas photo of Hyun Mee (now Kim Olenic) with family

The Gift

BY TAMARA HAVENS

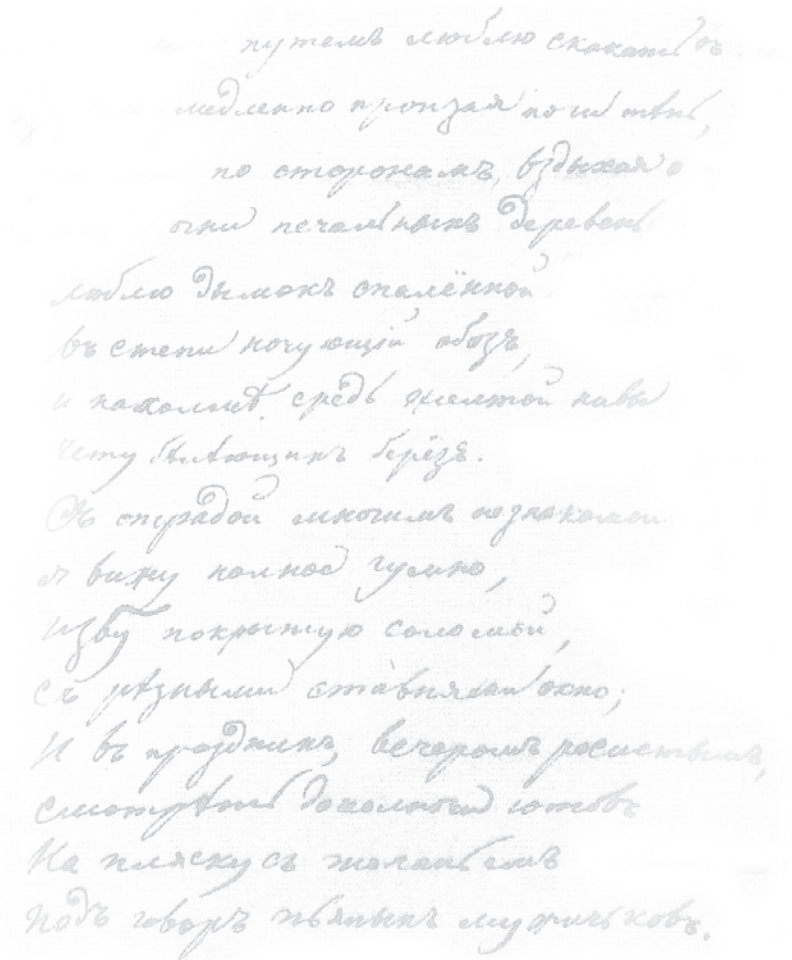
My grandfather hands me
a frayed Russian reader
to teach me to read,
write in our native language.
So important, he says,
wagging his finger, reminding me
of the stick he'd tap
through his gymnastics class.

We practice pronouncing sounds
of the alphabet, similar,
not similar to English.
He stretches his mouth
opening, closing
like a rubber band,
slides his tongue forward
and back on the roof of his mouth.
I repeat the sounds, my voice wavers.
Frowning, he helps me again,
sketches the side of a head
with location of tongue to teeth.

He lays out paper,
fine lines drawn across
for both large and small letters.
I dip pen into ink bottle,
hear scratching sounds of the nib's point.
Blobs of black ink drip
onto paper along with wobbly letters.
Peering through slipped wire glasses
perched on his nose,
he tilts his head.

Let's try again, he says, shows me how to
turn the pen, twist it, not to let ink spill,
to make curls on the ends of letters
as if painting the petals of his flowers
on canvas.

He helps me connect letters to form words,
lays his hand on mine, leading me.
I feel the shapes of each letter
pass through my fingers
into memory.



Living My American Dream

BY YU-CHI (LARRY) HO

I ARRIVED FROM CHINA in the US at Los Angeles on September 1, 1950. I was sixteen and on my way to Boston where I had been accepted as a freshman at MIT. My god-sister and her brothers, whom I had known since I was nine, met me at the airport. They looked after me, showed me around, drove me to San Francisco. I was able to speak in Chinese with them. It helped me with the strangeness of everything else and my homesickness.

Four days later, they put me on a train to Chicago, where I would change trains for Boston. For the first time, I was alone, in a strange country. I had to find my own way. My English was not so good. I whiled away the time on the long train ride by reading “Etiquette” by Emily Post, hoping it would teach me how to conduct myself in America. I had no idea how to use the dining-car so I ate pre-packaged sandwiches and fruit that I had in my bag.

It took us twelve hours to get to Chicago. Thankfully, they had “Travelers’ Aid” stations in all the terminals, so I was able to get the directions I needed to take a taxi from the station I’d arrived at to the station where I would catch the train to Boston. I made my first venture into speaking English by saying to the taxi driver, “The traffic is very heavy.” I still remember that moment, sixty-eight years later!

The Boston-bound train arrived in Boston late the following afternoon. I had a pamphlet with me that gave me the name of two hotels in Cambridge, where MIT was located. I decided to book a room in one of the hotels and register at MIT the next day. However, the hotel clerks in both hotels took one look at this skinny, Chinese kid standing in front of them and firmly told me they had no available rooms.

I didn’t know what to do. I returned to the taxi that was waiting for me outside the second hotel. The driver took pity on me and asked me if I knew anybody at MIT. In my admission letter, MIT had given me the name of another student to contact when I arrived, but all I knew about him, apart from his name, was that he was married and lived in the married student dormitory. The taxi driver kindly helped me locate the place and, fortunately, the student was at home.

He directed me to the East Campus dorms where most entering freshmen lived. The taxi driver drove me across campus and, lo and behold, to my relief, I found my name and room assignment. With this information, after thanking my taxi driver who had been so kind to this young kid from a foreign land, I was able to register and check into the room.

By that time, it was eight o’clock. I was hungry, not having eaten, but I was too tired



Here is a photo taken on September 2, 1950 (68 years ago) at Knotts Berry Farm in California when I first arrived in the US.

to look for a place to get dinner. All I wanted to do was sleep. I'd somehow managed to get through my first day in the US truly alone.

The next morning, I found the new student information office and everything went smoothly after that.

So it was, sixty-eight years ago, I began life away from home. What a life it has been! Perhaps not a typically American life, some might even say a boring one, but a wonderful ride all the same!

1. After finishing school, I worked at the same job for forty-six years before retiring in 2007.
2. I have been happily married to the same woman for fifty-nine years.
3. We still live in the first house I bought.

4. All my children went to the same kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, high school, and university.

5. I had the same insurance agent (for my home, auto, liability, and life insurances) for over 54 years. After his death, I now have his son who took over the business.

6. I was my lawyer's very first client and, though he has now retired, I stayed with his younger law partner.

7. I used the same CPA for my income tax preparations for over fifty-four years, until he retired.

Fortunately, my wife and I are in good health. We savor every day, and I often say, "I am a lucky guy. I have lived and am still living the American Dream.

Thank you, America. ♦



Here is a picture of the whole family (see how it has grown) taken during Thanksgiving 2017

I Am from a Tropical Island

BY JACQUELINE L. McSHINE

I am from a tropical paradise,
A mere speck in the Caribbean Sea, 10 degrees north of the Equator.

A boat ride away on the Orinoco gets you to Venezuela.
On the horizon is Mother Africa.

Our rulers were first Spain then England,
In this century we self rule as the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

I am from the two-room house on the Western shore,
Where doors and windows were left unlocked.

Outside was the dark kitchen no paint could change,
The privies in the yard, the breadfruit and the coconut tree,
The chickens and the ducks roam free.

Freshly caught fish, the fisherman's catch from last night in the Boca,
Kingfish, redfish, shark, salmon and carite.
Important for the meal of steamed breadfruit with coconut milk and fried fish.

The seaside, the small boat on the sea wall,
The plank of wood you jumped off in high tide,
The stingray lying stealthily, the still shallow water.

I am from the wet windy morning after the storm,
Walking the beach, shells, broken bottles, starfish, jellyfish all washed ashore.

I am from my Grandmother's house in County St. George,
Tapia and mud walls, wooden framed windows, floors and doors,
Outdoor kitchen of wood, a fireside and iron coal-pot for cooking
In cast iron and enamel pots and pans. Healthy country eating.

School holidays among cousins, aunts, uncles living next door,
Friends everywhere, walks to the river.

My grandmother of French-Carib heritage,
Sunday 4 a.m. getting dressed to walk to church.
The constant pang palang of the rain on the galvanized iron roof,
The soft light of the kerosene lamp casting shadows everywhere.

I am from dry, hot, humid days and nights, hilly terrain, vegetable gardens.
Rice swamps, cane fields with cane arrows dancing in the breeze along the highway.

I am from freedom, fun and family.
Long walks with cousins, country roads, cocoa and coffee estates.
The picnics under the fruit trees,
Mangoes, cashews, sapodillas, cherries,
A bellyful of happiness.

Uruguay Memoir

BY MARIO C. GRIGNETTI

In 1998 my wife and I started spending the winter in my old country, Uruguay, renting a little house in a small beach town east of Montevideo. During our long stays we wrote “Chronicles” for our friends and family in the States. This one, from January 1999, is about an encounter with an old classmate, Pedro Szerenchy, whom I hadn’t seen in 40 years.

ACADEMIC STUDY IN URUGUAY is like an obstacle course. You attend classes, edit your notes, study your books, but the only thing that really matters is to pass the exams at the end of the year. A written part, a practical part, and finally the dreaded orals in which you are left alone for 45 minutes in front of three professors who grill you with questions or ask you to develop a subject or theme. I still feel the butterflies in my stomach.

The only way to prepare for this ordeal is to hitch up with what in the 50s we called a collective, a group of students pooling their resources, and study and cram together for weeks at a time. Individual strengths are shared, work is divided, Socratic dialogue becomes a survival tool, you work your tail off, and in retrospect you have a wonderful, close, bonding time. You make friends for life. That was what Pedro Szerenchy and I became between 1949 and 1954.

In addition to studying Mathematical Analysis, Projective Geometry, Analytic Geometry, etc., Pedro and I shared a love of movies, theatre, plastic arts, music, poetry, and literature. When I became involved with the woman who was to be my first wife, Noris, the three of us became inseparable friends. Together we discovered Eisenstein’s *Potemkin*, *Alexander Nevsky*, and *Ivan the Terrible*; together we heard Neruda reading his poems, together we bought the cheapest seats to Walter Giesekind recitals, Jean Louis Barrault’s Moliere plays, and Vittorio Gassman’s unforgettable *A Streetcar Named*

Desire, Alfieri’s *Orestiad*, and *Commedia dell Arte* plays. And then I got really sick with TB and was out of commission for months.

But Pedro stuck around. I had an acute episode of “pleuro-pulmonary congestion” as they called it, with high fever and excruciating chest pain from which I recovered slowly over a period of weeks. Pedro kept coming to visit. He taught me to play bridge, we analyzed the Beethoven Waldstein sonata to death, and he kept “studying” Mathematical Analysis with me in spite of his having passed the exam in the interim.

One Sunday my uncle Sirio, the real father figure in my life, came to visit while Pedro was with me. My uncle was a cellist in the National Symphony Orchestra, which at the time had also a competent and very gay “Corps de Ballet,” and he pointedly started expostulating against the “shameful spectacle” these guys and their “admirers” flaunted to anyone passing by. How disgusting the whole thing was and how widespread and insidious this perversion was. Pedro sat through the whole thing without saying a word, but a few days later he sat me in front of him and told me that he was homosexual, and who some of his partners were.

He had never made an advance or a pass on me, ever. But the prejudice and revulsion were too strong in me at the time, and slowly (or perhaps not so slowly) I began to break away from him. I found new study partners, and thereafter saw Pedro only occasionally. The break was never official, overt, or declared, but was painful, especially for him.

One day, after Noris and I were married, he came to our apartment to tell us the greatest news. The most desirable female engineering student in our class, the French and Italian speaking, cultured, rich, pretty woman with wide blue eyes, Colette, and he, the impoverished Hungarian, Pedro Szerenchy, were going steady. He spent hours telling us about it, about how wonderful she was, gently flapping the four fingers of each hand against the thumb to describe how her eyelids and long eyelashes opened and closed. Noris and I listened as long as we could but then we went to bed. He followed us into the bedroom, laid down on the carpet, and continued talking about Colette. We fell asleep. And we never saw him again.

I learned that they had gotten married and had started what was to become a very successful structural engineering partnership. But they never had children and I always doubted whether the marriage was ever consummated. Years and years later, during one of our visits to Uruguay I called him and talked about getting together but I never followed it through. I just couldn't do it.

But the years go by and you feel that time is getting short and things that need to get aright acquire a kind of urgency. So one night while I was looking for some information on the website of the Uruguayan Association of Engineers I saw the advertisement for a lecture on "Tall buildings of Malaysia" to be given by Pedro Szerenchy, got his email address, and contacted him.

I started my message with "Pedro, mi querido Pedro," told him a little bit of my life during the last 40 years, and reminisced about the good old times, for instance when we reenacted the Pskov sequence in *Alexander Nevsky* (the Teutons have torched Pskov and gloat over the death and destruction they have wrought), I playing the tremulous

chords of the Prokofieff score on the piano and he shrouded in a white sheet, holding a broom for a lance and with his head in an aluminum pasta-boiling pot impersonating Hubertus, the evil Teutonic knight. He replied promptly and agreed to get together some time during our stay in Uruguay.

And so today at noon he and Colette came to our little house in Solis. Age has taken its toll on face and body, but even if his countenance had changed beyond recognition his distinctive voice would have given him away. They were both especially kind to my wife, Janie, speaking good English, and she promptly won them over with the particular warmth and sympathy she exudes. I said it was over 40 years since we had last talked, to which he quickly pointed out that we had talked over the phone once but he let it go at that. We sat down, talked about the old times, current interests, his near electrocution in the bathtub due to faulty wiring in their electric water heater (he can be very funny), Marcel Carné movies, Maria Tipo (I had her Goldberg Variations CD playing) and that brought up the subject of my own piano playing. I played a tape of my renditions of Debussy preludes and Chopin's G minor Ballade and he was very moved and so was I. We toasted our rencounter with champagne, and vowed to get together many more times during our two-month stay.

After about two hours we started saying our good byes and walked them over to their car. At this point I took him slightly apart, held his shoulders in my hands, looked a him in the eye, and said "I am sorry". He gave back a couple of quick and barely noticeable nods—but what nods!—and left.

Pedro passed away last year. We enjoyed 20 years of close, warm friendship. ♦

On Leaving Ireland for America

BY PAMELA MORIARTY

I walk along the riverbank
And pass an ancient willow tree
Bowed and creaking
A faerie tree
Its spaces filled with crackling silences

The river swings past
Molten gold from its journey through the bogs
The smell of peat rises in ribbons of river mist
Twisting in and around the branches of the tree

A jeweled kingfisher flashes up and down
Hunting the sapphire and emerald dragonflies
My feet crush a cluster of golden primroses
Releasing their sweet, river scent
A pair of ebon jackdaws fuss at me
From across the glowing water

The tree begs my indulgence
To stop and keep it company
It speaks to me of slow summer days
The sweet treacle smell of drying hay
Of full-bellied, drowsy bees
Vociferous frogs
Gliding butterflies
And of winter nights snapping with frost
When the moon shouts down from a velvet sky
Filled with chattering stars

Startled by the tree's lucent discourse
I hurry past
A deer peeks out
And leaps away
Alarmed by the tree's urgent whisper

I turn
The great willow leans over to watch me go
And the river sighs

To Pippin

BY BEN SOULE

O heir to the denizen of Abyssinian desert crevices
and to the watch-keeper in the shadows of grain-filled urns,
I stared into your half-blinking slitted yellow orb,
looking for something I could only hope to see.
What can I know of you?
We shared the same space, air, warmth, pillow,
but your world and mine could not both be held in one vessel.
I knew only that your attention
calmed me,
restored me,
and allowed me to approach the threshold of ineffable wonder.

And you stared into my lidded black-hazel-white concentricity –
were you looking for something?
Or were you merely waiting –
each moment passing unobserved, unjudged?
Was there ever one moment when something
quickenened
inside you,
absorbing a faint trace of me?

And now,
as silent paws carry you
to your quilted patch of eternal sunlight,
my unrequited gaze blurs, and my soul opens to the universe,
flinging out the question –
did it matter to you
that there was a crooked leg to curl against,
a knuckle to rub your face on,
a human eye to look into?
And I hope,
beyond knowing,
that you pad away
carrying a speck of me
in you.



Animal Instincts



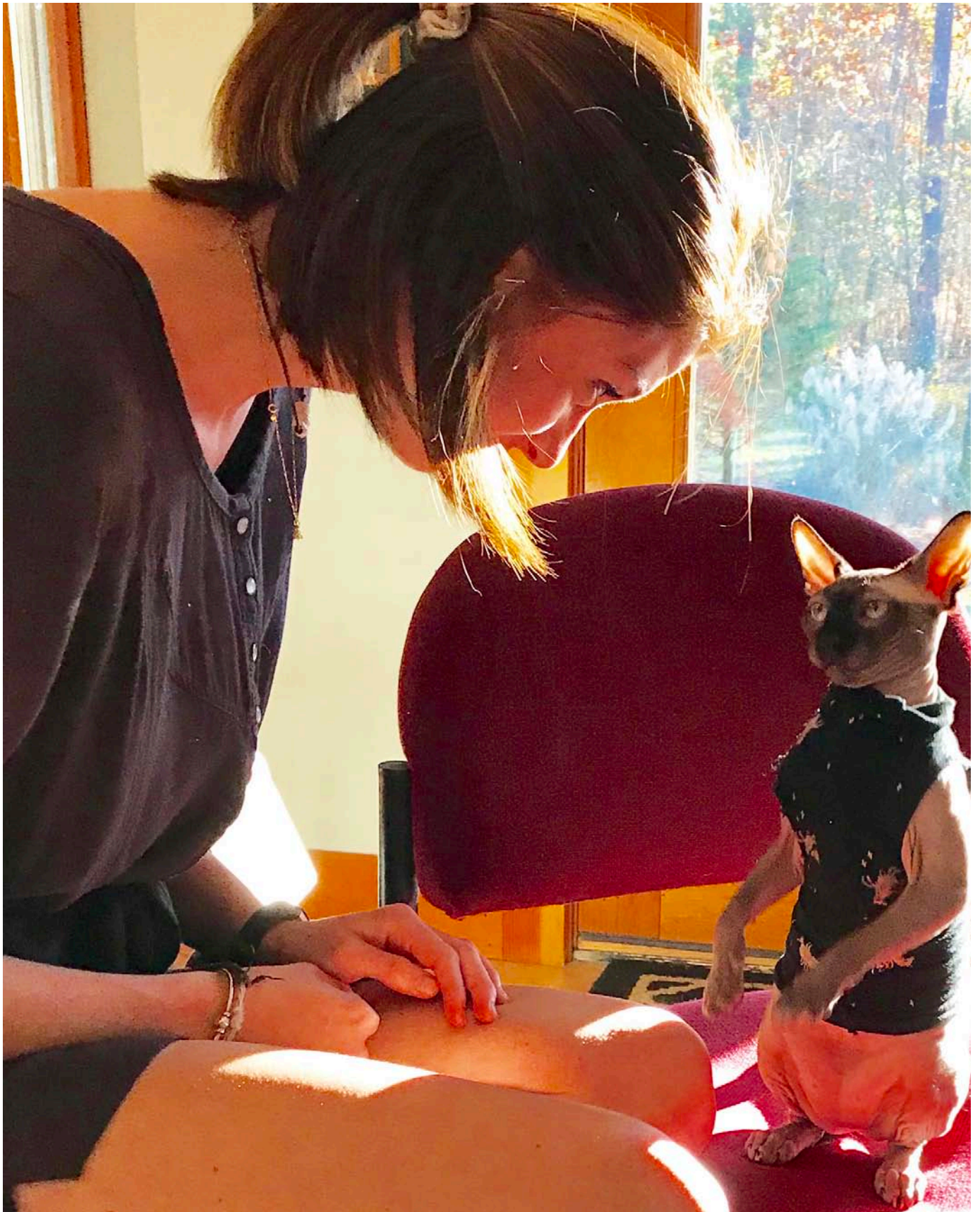
CATHY PAPAZIAN
Plover at Chapin

Cotton, machine appliquéd and quilted
25" x 27"



CATHY PAPAIZIAN
Blue Moon Heron

Cotton, machine pieced and quilted
25" x 37"



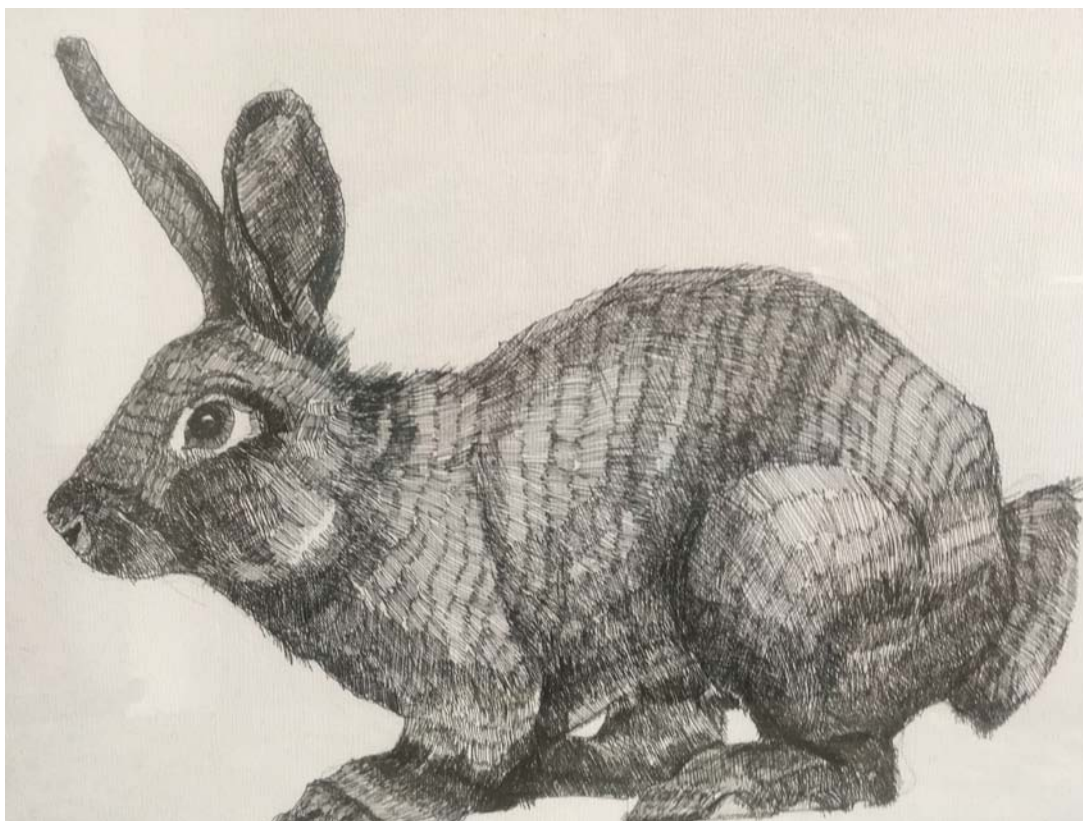
JANE BARNETT GRIGNETTI

A Meeting of Minds and Hearts



JANE BARNETT GRIGNETTI

Bird Bath Boss



MARY O'HANLEY
Pensive Rabbit

Pen and Ink
14" x 11"



DEENA L. DUBIN
The Wonder of Owls

Photo transfers to polymer clay mounted on canvas backing
12" x12"

Optical Field

BY NANCY KOUCHOUK

Three owls land at dusk outside the window,
arboreal raptors within arm's reach.
Taken by surprise, we are
kneeling statues below the sill.

One owl stretches its neck, brown-white
feathers ripple down its spine like a river.
Reptilian claws clutch the
cranked-out window frame.

Perched on a wire, another swivels his head
listening to our held breath. Flat disc-face,
yoke-yellow beak, he radars vision.
Cooing sounds rattle the air.

From high above in cavities of ancient conifers,
they wing their noiseless dive to drink the wind.
Stone walls hide the chipmunks' scurry.

A parliament of owls flits and preens,
blind to our august captivity.
Transfixed in the gloaming,
we are weighted by folded limbs.

The Friday Night Rituals

BY ESTHER ISENBERG



THE WELL-SCRUBBED, gently worn to softness, pure white tablecloth had settled smoothly against the surface of the kitchen table, with an even drape all around. In the center of the table on the cloth rested a plate on which lay a plump oval of braided bread, the Challah. Its modesty was protected by the cover of heavy deep blue satin embroidered with gold and silver Hebrew letters, proclaiming “Shabbat.” It was meant to be shared by those who gathered together to literally and figuratively break bread. To the side was a crystal glass with a gold trimmed edge, awaiting the wine and the Kiddush blessing by the man of the house. In front were two cherished, delicate-

ly embossed silver candlesticks, which had travelled from Warsaw over a hundred years earlier. They had passed from maternal loving hands to maternal loving hands through three generations. Probably the fourth generation would never be interested, but maybe a granddaughter would care enough to lay claim to them. For now they were here, holding the simple candles which when kindled would begin the time of separation from the priorities of the week, the time of slowing down and noticing.

She gazed out the window watching for the setting of the sun through the dark forms of the surrounding trees’ winter branches and

checked the time also, so as not to miss the specific moment of transition at 6:10 PM EST. The kitchen towel covered her head and she reached for the box of matches. At precisely 6:10, she fussed nervously with the match, but managed to start the flame before the clock changed to 6:11. She tried to still the shaking of her hands and could not help noticing the brown spots and wrinkles on their skin that she still expected to be clear and smooth. Yet now the candles' lights shone steadily. She reached out into the air surrounding them, making large circles toward her heart. Four times she encircled them, sent loving thoughts to her beloveds of every time and every place, and whispered the ancient blessing, hearing in her head a perfect rendition of the melody. She then removed the candles from the kitchen table and ever so carefully carried them to the kitchen sink. She breathed a sigh of relief as they rested steadily on the stainless steel bottom. He was always chiding about the risk of lighting the candles, of leaving the candles unwatched; but still bound by tradition, she would never blow them out. They had achieved this compromise. If they were not to sit and watch the candles slowly burn down and out, then into the sink they went where there was no danger of burning down the house, but each precious flame could still find its own path to mortality. Having performed her womanly duty, the wine glass and Challah could sit on the table. No problem there.

Kitchen towel removed, fingers having been run through her hair to fluff it out, she moved down the stairs, through the basement, where she picked up the car keys and pushed a button to open the garage door. They had named their new Subaru "Goldie." At the time it was one of the few things the whole family agreed upon. Goldie was spacious and dependable, with room for five and

their luggage, and all wheel drive to take on winter challenges. How often had they travelled as a family with two kids and the dog in the back seat, or later, after the dog was gone, with a chosen friend of one of the girls, joining them on a ski trip or an adventure at the beach? Goldie was also perfect for picking up one tired guy with personal luggage and heavy sample bags as he returned from a work week of hard travel to home and to rest. Somehow, Goldie had always had plenty of room.

Her coat, scarf and mittens were in the passenger seat where she knew she couldn't lose track of them. The car would soon be warm enough. She wouldn't need them. She reached over for the driving cap he had chosen for her, that was on the top of the pile. She set it at the jaunty angle that made him smile and couldn't help but notice that it had the effect of making her eyes look larger and brighter and her cheek bones charmingly angular.

"To the airport," she said very loudly and then sighed repeatedly as she cautiously backed up the steep driveway onto their quiet street. "On the way," she declared and sighed some more. Friday night traffic was always a challenge wherever you were going, but airport traffic was specifically complicated: local hockey matches being played in rinks to be passed by with cars parked randomly by anxious parents not wanting to miss a moment, people with theatre tickets rushing to be on time and cutting in and out, the Celtics playing, or the Bruins... all adding to the massive volume of the others on the road. She tended to stay on the right, tightly focused on what was directly in front of her. Sometimes horns were blown, but she refused to take them personally. Sleet changing to snow was predicted for this evening's weather. So far just sleet was coming down,

but twelve miles took an hour and a half to traverse. Finally she was there.

She headed for Terminal C and pulled into the special stopping spot for those picking up passengers. She rested, letting her eyes close for a moment.

Startled by a sharp banging on the hood, she looked up toward the strapping State Trooper declaring, "Get moving! If the passenger isn't here, you can't wait here. Get moving! Now!!" He waved his hands fiercely and rapidly.

She dreaded circling at the airport. As frequently as she had done it, there were always slight changes. Everyone was impatient, around you and behind you. You had to be in this lane, then that lane. Signs were hard to read. If you made a mistake, you exited the airport and then had to deal again with the chaos beyond. To her the other drivers seemed even more edgy than usual with the low visibility and the slippery roads. She understood. They didn't have Goldie to help them get through. If they felt the need to express themselves with crude gestures or "whatever," she understood.

This time she chose to try for more mercy and gain time by stopping at terminal A. There was no specific parking lane, but many places right in front. She pulled in and took a deep breath. Yet soon there came a bevy of Troopers. Were they all overwhelming, tall, and strong?

"Move it...plane arriving. Move along. You cannot stop here, Madam! Move it!!" Even Goldie seemed disgruntled as she started up unevenly.

Around and around she went: stopping, being chased, following the maze to return to rest for a little bit, and then to be moved on again. This time as she pulled into "C" the trooper approached "Goldie's" window. Almost kindly he said, "No more planes coming

in tonight, lady. It's time to go home."

Surprised she looked at her watch. It had somehow become 11:30 PM.

"At least the traffic will be light, even with the snow accumulating," she thought. This time, she followed Exit signs from the airport.

Arriving home at 11:59, she started to skid as she slid down the snowy driveway, but with foot off the brake, she steered Goldie into the garage, then applied the brakes, skillfully coming to a stop in the perfect spot. With her cap returned to the pile on the passenger seat, with Goldie tucked in the garage, the car keys back on their hook, she moved heavily up the stairs. Her hips ached, her low back hurt, but at least she should be able to sleep. The candles were no longer burning in the kitchen sink. Had he been there, that would have pleased him. Long dark shadows from moonlight, passing through snow-specked windows, filled the kitchen. Despite the intense patterns of blackness, she could see the outlines of the glass and Challah, waiting in their places on the table. She didn't need to see the phone to reach for it. She listened for messages. She heard a daughter's voice.

"Good Shabbos, Mom. Where are you? How come I can never get you, even on Friday night? Anyway, you remember Suzy? My supposed best friend whom we never heard from? Well... she called. The strangest thing happened. She was tossing out old newspapers and saw Dad's obit for the first time. What's it been...almost a year? Anyway...she was like so impressed by what was written about him and wondered how you could get along without such an awesome guy in your life? Anyway...like I was thinking about you too. Hope you're having fun tonight. Sleep well... Bye..." ♦

Remainder of Two

BY IRENE HANNIGAN

HE APPROACHED THE COUNTER to make his annual purchase of long stemmed roses. In recent years he had abandoned the florist in favor of a local farm stand. His wife said the flowers there were just as fresh and beautiful and, as the number of roses he purchased increased by one each year, the price became a bonus. This year he requested an even 34 to commemorate, not their wedding anniversary, but their first date when they were sophomores in high school.

He eyed the assortment of flowers displayed in the corner of the newly renovated market—fragrant pink carnations, feathery purple asters, assorted varieties of daisies, and many mixed bouquets, until he spotted the roses.

“How may I help you, sir?” the woman behind the counter inquired.

“I’d like three dozen red roses,” the man said. “But just wrap them in one bouquet of thirty-four.”

“I don’t understand,” she responded quizzically. “You mean you don’t want the full three dozen?”

“No, I just need 34 but I’m more than happy to pay for three dozen.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed an older woman who was bemoaning the high prices at the farm stand as her daughter was eyeing some flowers.

“How about these daisies, Mom?” she asked holding up a happy bunch.

“How can you spend money on flowers that are just going to die?” was her mother’s sharp response. “I’m getting tired. Why can’t we just get what we came here for?”

The younger woman shrugged, shook her head, and put the flowers back.

“Sir,” the clerk said continuing their conversation, “one or two of the 34 might die. Wouldn’t it be nice to have a replacement or perhaps you could just put the other ones in a bud vase?”

The man wasn’t sure he knew what a bud vase was or if his wife had such a container, but he didn’t say so. The woman, after all, was just doing her job.

The clerk gathered up the three dozen roses and stepped away to wrap them in what he hoped would be the one bouquet he had requested. He watched as she attached a lovely red bow to the huge bouquet.

“Oh, that’s perfect,” the man said when she returned to the counter with a second package. Without a word, the woman handed him the additional two roses complete with a sprig of baby’s breath and fern.

“I’m sure you’ll find something to do with the extras,” she said.

The man turned with his bundles and headed toward the cashier where he found himself behind the same young woman and her mother he had noticed before. The mother was now complaining about the long line.

After paying, he headed out to the parking lot. Once again, in front of him was the young woman. She was now carrying a shopping bag in one hand and holding an umbrella over her mother’s head with the other. The clerk, who had told him he would find something to do with the extra flowers, had been right.

As he walked back to his own car, he overheard the woman’s mother say to her daughter, “Now why would that man do such a thing?” ♦

The Shot of a Shout

BY MARY MELVIN PETRONELLA

I heard the shot of a shout
From a passing car, pregnant
With a canoe, and felt
The shot was aimed at me.

As my heart hid, I felt
The splatter of another's fear
And saw the shout had struck
A mother — with child.

The echoing words:
"I hope your baby dies,"
Had been aimed at a mother!

She walked on, not glancing
At child or at me,
Yet the shot, aimed
At one, had hit three.

We'll die, I, mother, and child,
All three. But the heart
Of the shouter has
Died before we.

To Reno

BY MARY LEVIN KOCH



THE WOMAN TAKES HER NAIL and scrapes a four-inch opening on the frost-lined window. “Nebraska now,” she murmurs absently.

A view of the wide, flat, snow-covered cornfields creeps into the compartment. Kettle-colored smoke pours up and out from passing chimneys that sit atop plain, abandoned-looking homes. There is an absence of human activity along the station platforms and the towns disappear almost immediately, as if they hardly count. It is mid-February and too cold for anyone to be outside.

Her daughter sits impatiently just opposite, swinging her legs back and forth. The plaid smocked dress she wears is wrinkled after a day and a half on the train and her curly

brown, Shirley Temple hair needs combing. The woman beckons the child onto her lap and fishes for a brush from her small overnight valise.

They had boarded the train in Pittsburgh, lugging one large suitcase and an overnighter, dressed in coats recently purchased by the woman’s father. He wanted them each to have something new, something fresh. The woman’s is made of wool tweed that falls just below her knees. A sensible coat, heavy, and it seems to the girl to weigh her mother down. The child’s green wool, double-breasted coat has brass buttons sewn on a strip of velveteen that extends across the middle. When buttoned up she feels constricted. Oh,

how she longs for warmer weather, to wear fewer clothes, to run free.

At first the train ride seemed like a great escape. Their private compartment, also paid for by her grandfather, turns into a sleeper at night, one berth atop the other. The little girl sleeps below in case she rolls over and falls out like she did one time in the big bed at her grandfather's home. She is only three and misses her own familiar bed and the little house on Porter Street where she and her parents used to live – all gone now. They belong to another family – strangers. The initial excitement, the adventure of going somewhere new on a train, has worn off, and the two of them rarely leave the little compartment.

In the beginning there was the changing countryside to entertain them. They played a game pointing out homes or apartments trying to imagine who lived in them and what their lives were like. They sang songs quietly, nursery rhymes, and looked at the one picture book brought along for the journey.

They took lunch at noon and dinner at six in the dining car. Both the tablecloths and the napkins were starched and replaced after each meal – one whiter and stiffer than the next. The waiter was polite and talked to them in a low, sympathetic voice that sang of the south.

They made up stories about the other passengers, most of whom were men who wore khaki-colored uniforms like her mother's good friend, Bob. The soldiers gathered in the dining car smoking and talking in clipped, deep voices. They smiled at her and especially at her mother who smiled back.

There were men in business suits who sat nearby, reading a newspaper or looking out the window, sipping cocktails at dinner. These men reminded her of her father, dressed in his white linen suit when he last visited, even

though it was winter. He had flown directly to her from some warmer clime and had no other clothes into which to change. There were only a very few women on the train and almost no children. The little girl tried not to complain, but she was lonely and felt confined; she fussed in spite of herself.

After dinner this evening her mother explains that tomorrow they will arrive at their destination. The train station will be a large Mediterranean-style building, like those her mother remembers from a trip to Europe – the grand tour she made with her parents just after high school and long before she was married.

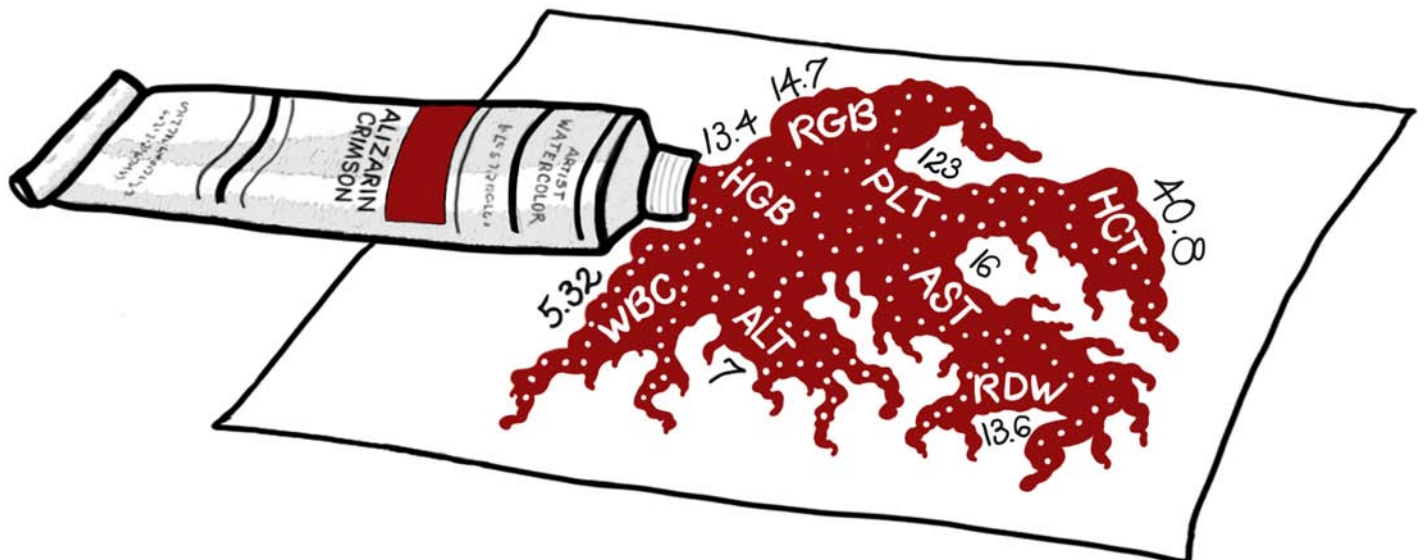
The icy window in their compartment is clear now. Her mother sits very still and gazes out at the passing night. The child watches and laughs. It is as if her mother is seated side-by-side, next to her twin. When she finally turns away, her eyes are closed and in a low, scarcely audible voice she begins to hum.

While they prepare for bed, her mother speaks more about what comes next. They will move into a furnished room, in a guesthouse, where there will be other children with their mothers – all of them living there for six weeks. They will take walks down the dry, dusty roads and pretend to be cowgirls. The weather, her mother promises, will be warmer than Pittsburgh. They will be able to eat lunch outside by one of the many fountains where, if the wind blows off the high desert and they sit close enough, the water will tickle their faces.

The tallest fountain, the child learns, stands fourteen feet high. When they go to see it, on their final day in Reno, her mother plans to toss the gold band she always wears into its waters. Then the two of them will depart for Salt Lake City where a new ring will take its place. ♦

Painting by the Numbers

POEM AND ILLUSTRATION BY ELAINE ADLER



Six long months to wait
for a new drawing.
Three vials fill with my
beautiful alizarin crimson paint.

What numbers will they write?
Will they continue to creep,
drawing outside the box?
Or will they dance and spin
within acceptable limits?

I wait with strangers
scattered around the room
with a common bond.
We wait to learn our fate.
We sit composed and accepting
on this beautiful blue-skied day,
squinting in the bright light
pouring through the wall of windows,
grateful for a clear day for the drive
after a week of snow piling high.

Those with immune systems
weakened by toxic drips
are masked against unseen germs
that hover around us.

Hats and scarves
warm their hairless heads,
and I find myself embarrassed
by my shock of long silver strands.
I've not yet begun to pay my dues.

I wait to see the artist
who holds the numbers painted
by those tubes of crimson.
While I measure my fate by
the size and proliferation
of swelling nodes,
he goes by the numbers,
by the book.

Together, we will write the next chapter,
and the next,
and the next,
until the final chapter writes itself.

On Bamboo

BY JIM JONES

THE APPEAL OF BAMBOO, I'm sure, is ancient; but for some reason, in the '60s and '70s that appeal crystallized into action. The word got out that it could be grown and should be grown and indeed there were places to get it.

But first, just which of the many species and types of this giant grass should one get? Actually, that was fairly straightforward: the ones with tall shining stems that bear delicate leaves that flutter and glisten in the wind! (And these are the ones described as "spreading.") For us in the north, one genus in particular had the elan and hardiness to fulfill our bamboo dreams: *Phyllostachys*.

Thus caught up, in 1967 I ordered *P. aureosulcata* (Yellow-groove bamboo), and so the epic began. After a false start in its culture, which the plant quite shrugged off, I found the right niche. And then niches. And watched it spread, shimmering in the sunlight. So enthused was I by my success that I fired off an article to a gardening magazine.

But, you know, I'm really more of a flower person, and so after a few years I went into a phase of hacking it back and replacing some of it with color. And that worked just fine – as long as all lingering rhizomes were grubbed out. This approach proved satisfactory for rather a while, until I began to feel

my age. Finding myself still faced with a large, obdurate, jungly mass, I decided something more must be done. So I called the Franklin Park Zoo.

It wasn't as though I thought they had pandas to feed! But I could easily picture this fine tropical-looking plant fitting right in amongst the displays. They agreed, and in short order two strapping fellows showed up and the three of us, with some considerable effort, set to work exhuming a satisfying mass of rhizomes. Off the booty went, destined to grace the grounds of the zoo – except for one area that I hung on to, just because it does have such an impact. (There also remains a patch down the street from the time a neighbor begged a piece, but that has shown no movement in this direction.) In any case, now being onto its ways, I enclosed this remnant with a 2-foot deep ring of stones, well cemented together.

And this is where the story begins.

The main characters are the rhizomes – the thick, questing roots of the plant – and the culms – tall, sturdy stalks that have reached more than 20 feet high and can be used for all the things bamboo is used for (adjusting for scale). Thus, in my circumscribed grove, the questing rhizome was met by impenetrable rock – until up they arched over the



upper rim of the barrier, to enthusiastically plunge into the ground below.

The next step: set up a border patrol. Once spotted, escapees could be ripped from the ground – with all due haste, given the speed at which the rhizomes snaked along underground, a succession of mini-culms marking their paths.

Nonetheless, it soon enough became clear that, as far as the plant was concerned, this little game could go on forever. By then, it was equally clear that such was not true for myself. The decision was made: even this patch must go!

I was pretty sure I could come out on top in this phase by starving it to death. The plant's

life cycle would play into my hands: though nominally it is evergreen, each culm retains leaves for only two or three years, then endures as a bare (though not unsightly) stalk in the midst of the newer green culms. My strategy was to pounce on every newly sprouting culm before its leaves could ever expand, cutting off photosynthesis then and there, and wait and see what that would get me.

What I got was a surge of teeny little culms. I trimmed them back, trimmed the next year's perhaps smaller batch, then, last year, applied grass-killing herbicide, with at least suggestive results.

Next year: bye bye bamboo? ♦



The Varied Life of a Wine Merchant

BY JOEL BERMAN

ON A COLD WINTER'S NIGHT in Burgundy, after a day of non-stop tasting in icy cellars, a colleague and I dined at his rustic, unpretentious hotel located outside of Meursault. We chose it not for the food but because they would allow us to bring in as many "sample" bottles to the dinner table as we could manage. And they would graciously provide us with spittoons.

After a completely forgettable dinner, tasting eight or ten equally forgettable wines, suddenly looming over our table was a tall, 50ish, ruddy-faced, Ichabod Crane-like Englishman, who was clearly perturbed.

We really hadn't taken any particular cognizance of anyone else at the sparsely attended restaurant but, as the man and his rather rotund wife were seated across from our table, I did notice them glancing our way periodically, I thought rather inquisitively.

I guess I was wrong as the English gentleman without preamble said, "I want to let you fellows know that you were making a disgusting spectacle of yourselves,



gurgling and spitting all that wine. My wife was repulsed."

It had been a long day. From the corner of my eye, I saw my colleague about to get up to confront the man. I put my hand on his arm, as if to say "stop." Having not yet lost my sense of humor, I turned to the man and said, "Sir, we are very sorry if we offended you or your wife but we are wine merchants. We need to work through dinner trying various wines to see if they meet our quality and price standards; the restaurant knows this and accommodates us. But look, we have all these bottles on our table that we can't possibly finish. Please, allow me to present you with a few to take home, so as to make amends."

The man's face lit up as he turned to his wife and said, "Oh Milly, these nice gentlemen are wine merchants, one from America! They were kind enough to offer us some wine to take home." She squealed appreciatively, and we gave them three or four bottles that were of no interest to us. They left beaming.

Me, I wiped the sweat from my brow. Just another day at the office. ♦

CONTRIBUTORS

ELAINE ADLER is a language pathologist, editor, writer, and calligraphic artist. Her work as a hospice volunteer has inspired her poetry. Her artwork can be seen at elaineadler.com.



JOEL BERMAN has been a resident and wine merchant at 55 Massachusetts Avenue in Lexington for fifty-five years. His submission is an excerpt from his book, *So You Want to be a Wine Merchant*.



DEENA L. DUBIN has been a member of the Polymer & Beading Guild at the Lexington Arts & Crafts Society since 2005. She primarily works in polymer clay experimenting with various techniques.



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JAMES L. JONES worked as a physicist in the MIT Radiation Protection Office. Active in many garden organizations including the Lexington Field and Garden Club, he has written books and articles on gardening.



MARY O'HANLEY is a (mostly) retired social worker who has enjoyed living with her husband and raising their son in Lexington. She draws and paints, having studied under wonderful local art teachers.



With degrees from the Universities of Wisconsin and Georgia, MARY LEVIN KOCH has worked in art museums, published scholarly articles, and coauthored a book on Athens, Georgia. She began chronicling her family's history after retiring.



Having retired from geriatric social work, CATHY PAPA ZIAN enjoys creating art quilts inspired by nature. Since childhood, she has been drawn to the colors and patterns of fabrics. She is influenced by the beauty of Cape Cod.



While living 8 years in Egypt, NANCY KOUCHOUK wrote and edited at American University and Cairo American College. Her work with a blind poet, an anthropologist who discovered an isolated tribe, and a flamboyant storyteller, continues to color her poetry.



MARY MELVIN PETRONELLA is coauthor of *Victorian Boston Today: Twelve Walking Tours*. Having taught at both Bentley College and the Gardner Museum, she is a board member of Beacon Hill Seminars, and president of the Boston Browning Society.



A retired Registered Nurse from the Caribbean, JACQUELINE L. MCSHINE is an avid volunteer in Lexington. OWLL poetry workshops with like-minded people sparked her creative juices to compose poems in response to troubling events.



BRENDA PRUSAK has for many years taught in both public and private schools across the country. She currently teaches yoga in Lexington. Having studied memoir writing with Tom Daley, she is now working on a collection of family stories.



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Having lived in Lexington for most of his life, BEN SOULE has worked as a carpenter/contractor and a software engineer. He expresses his creativity through singing, acting, writing, woodworking, designing board games, and creating original Christmas cards.



O.W.L.L. COURSES FOR OLDER, WISER, LIFELONG LEARNERS

Lexington's Older, Wiser, Lifelong Learners program (O.W.L.L.) began in 2013 thanks to a grant by the Dana Home Foundation to fund the Friends of the Council On Aging's (FCOA) vision for an affordable, accessible, inclusive, collaborative community-based Lifelong Learning Program to serve Lexington seniors aged 60 and over. O.W.L.L. is self-sustaining and sponsored by the FCOA in partnership with the Council on Aging. The program offers new knowledge in the fields of literature, science, history and the arts, using community-based experts and retired faculty.

Learn about the upcoming fall semester!
Join us at the Lexington Community Center for our
WELCOME RECEPTION
Thursday, September 6 at 3pm

O.W.L.L.'S FALL 2018 SEMESTER COURSES

Americans in Italy: Stories of Edith Wharton and Henry James

Thursdays, 2-3:30pm, beginning Sept. 27 with Vincent Petronella

In stories by Edith Wharton and Henry James, encounter noteworthy Americans traveling and living in Italy. Explore not only Italy but the theme of innocence vs. experience, which arises from a nuanced conflict between new and old-world customs.

The Entertainer and the Invincible Eagle: Joplin and Sousa, American All-Stars

Mondays, 3-4:30pm, beginning Oct. 29 with Margaret Ulmer

Scott Joplin and John Philip Sousa are today virtually synonymous with "ragtime" and "march"; but their paths to greatness were vastly different. Explore their histories, music, and legacies.

Standing Ajar: The Poetry of Emily Dickinson

Fridays, 10am-noon, beginning Sept. 14 with Tom Daley

Examine the work of Emily Dickinson, who is considered one of the greatest poets of the English language. A performance of the instructor's play, *Every Broom and Bridget—Emily Dickinson and Her Irish Servants* will conclude the course.

Five Microbes that Changed the World

Thursdays, 2-3:30pm, beginning Oct. 11 with Mary Allen

What makes microbiology different from other areas of biology and why is it so important? Viewed through history and science, learn how microorganisms have changed the course of human history and our own lives in positive and negative ways.

Africa's Promise: Twelve Critical Challenges

Tuesdays, 10-11:30am, beginning Nov. 6 with Robert Rotberg

Twenty-first century Africa promises enormous growth along with serious challenges. This course will provide a full and balanced report on the peoples and countries of sub-Saharan Africa and the challenges that must be overcome to bring prosperity and happiness to all.

The Musical Lives of Felix Mendelssohn and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel

Thursdays, 10am-noon, beginning Nov. 8 with Dotty Burstein

Siblings Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn shared a close relationship based on mutual love of music and prodigious musical talent. Explore outstanding works of each composer, the role of gender in musical expression and opportunity in the 19th century, and the significance of their legacies.

Boy Plays Girl Plays Boy Plays Girl: Love in Shakespeare's As You Like It

Wednesdays, 10am-noon, beginning Oct. 3 with Elizabeth Kenney

Have fun engaging with Shakespeare's complex examination of romantic love and gender through one of his most interesting female characters, Rosalind, who spends most of the play disguised as a boy.

Find expanded course, instructor, and registration information at WWW.FRIENDSOFTHECOA.ORG

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