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# LifeTimes

A CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL  
ISSUE 4 | SUMMER 2019



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*Deer Isle, Maine*

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# *I Didn't Die Today*

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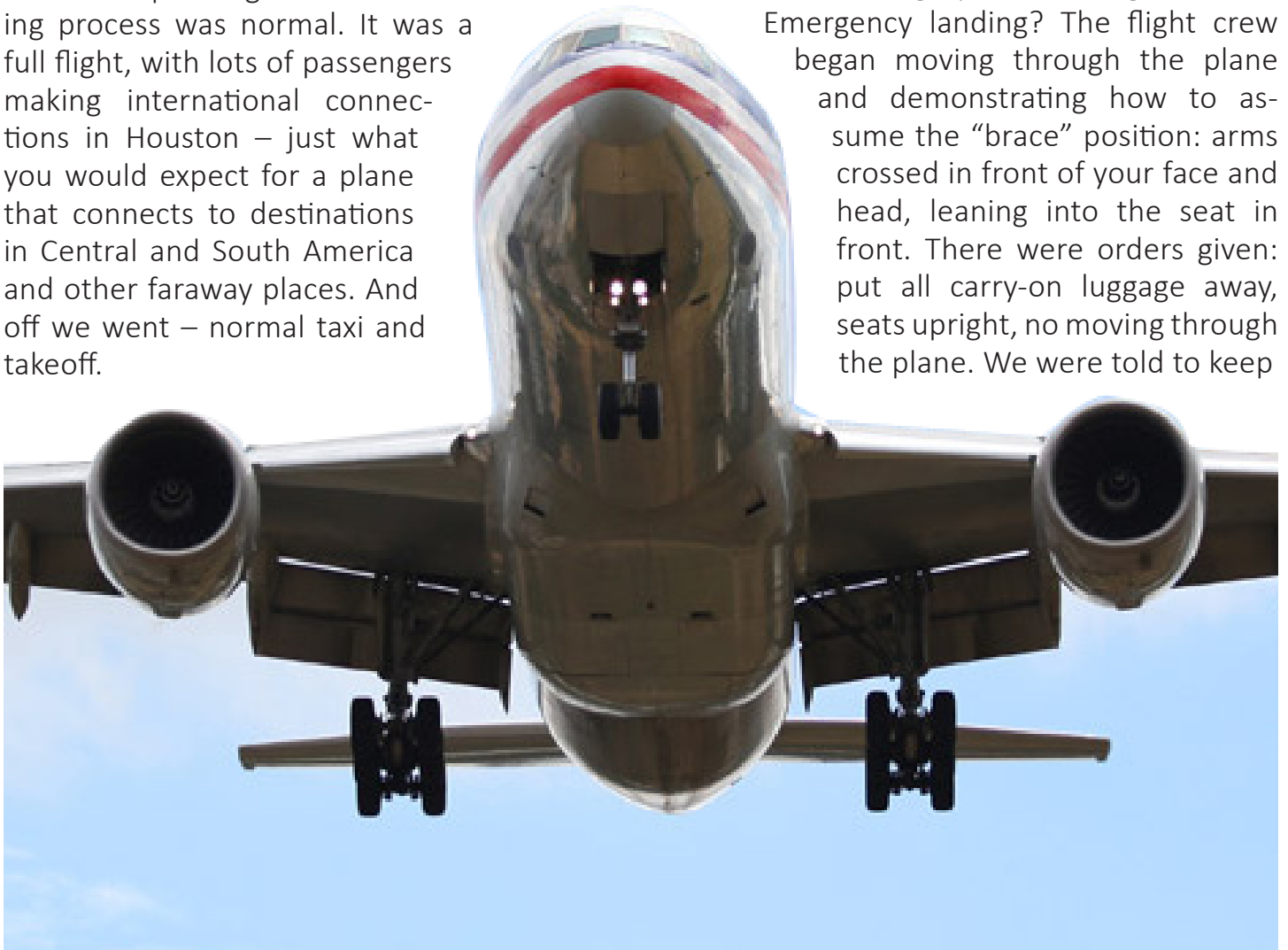
BY DEBORAH WEINER SOULE

I HAD NO PLAN TO DIE, really. It was just another business trip, a flight to Houston to attend an annual conference of religious educators where I would be connecting with colleagues, doing some continuing education and seeing some beloved friends. Five days, no big deal. But that's not how it turned out.

I had booked a flight on the airline I never like to fly on – motivated by lower price and a direct flight at the time I wanted to go – landing at the larger of Houston's two airports. I got my usual aisle seat – I like to be able to get up and move around without climbing over other passengers – and the loading process was normal. It was a full flight, with lots of passengers making international connections in Houston – just what you would expect for a plane that connects to destinations in Central and South America and other faraway places. And off we went – normal taxi and takeoff.

I pulled out my book and started to get into another chapter of an engrossing account of the current political administration, told through the eyes of a renowned investigative journalist. At about the time the flight crew would normally begin their service, the pilot came on the PA. "Good afternoon, folks," he began. "We have encountered some mechanical problems on the plane, and we need to turn around and head back to Boston. We expect to be there in about thirty minutes. The flight crew is going to prepare you for an emergency landing."

There were gasps on the flight. What? Emergency landing? The flight crew began moving through the plane and demonstrating how to assume the "brace" position: arms crossed in front of your face and head, leaning into the seat in front. There were orders given: put all carry-on luggage away, seats upright, no moving through the plane. We were told to keep



our window shades closed, but some opened theirs. There was almost no sound on the plane. The silence was, I remember thinking, the sound of people praying and preparing for what could be a crash, or worse.

I sat there, thinking to myself. About what I had accomplished in my life, what had meant the most, about those I loved. This was probably what those brave souls who died in a field in Shanksville, PA in 2001 were thinking before their flight went down. This is what happens when you start to realize you may have only minutes left to live. I was befuddled. Twenty-five years ago, to the day, my father had died after a heroic battle with ALS. How could it be – on All Saints Day of all days – that my time was up as well?

I pulled out my phone. I took it out of airplane mode: if I was going, screw the ban on phones in the air. I decided not to text my children – it would be too alarming – but sent a note to my husband: “Mechanical trouble. Plane headed back to Boston, preparing for emergency landing. I love you.” I wanted him to know that much: that I loved him. I shoved the phone in my bra – as I had done before when no pockets were available – on the left side. Then, I thought more: “If the plane crashes and I survive, having the impact of the phone next to my heart could be a bad move.” I switched the phone to the right side of my bra. Better, I thought. Then, I grabbed my driver’s license and put it on the left side of the bra. It might help identify me after the crash, I figured, so that was a smart move too.

And that was it...no more planning. I could see out of the window where someone had raised a shade. We were coming in. I said to the two passengers to my right – demonstrating, as neither spoke English easily, “Brace now.” Oddly, the flight crew was making no other announcements, so it seemed

like it was up to me to tell the passengers next to me when to brace. I didn’t see the fire trucks that were lined up along the runway, although the registered nurse I talked with later had seen them all.

We came in hard, but dammit, we landed in one piece. A cheer went up in the cabin. Thank God, thank someone and something... Whatever the flight crew had done, it had worked and we were on the ground. There was no fire, no explosion, just the sense of “oh-my-God” that rushes through when you think about what might have been.

We deplaned through a jetway and were led to another gate in Logan Airport, waiting to find out what would happen next. The flight crew was led off for debriefing interviews. The ground crew, trying to be helpful, handed out \$20 vouchers for food or beverage. Amidst the conversations that sprang up among us – we had all survived this, together – I started hanging out with the nurse from New Hampshire. I found out that she had been seated next to a retired airplane mechanic. He had heard the airline workers talking about how the plane was too heavy – too much luggage, too many other containers being transported to Houston – and then, when we were struggling to gain altitude, one of the engines went out. The pilots had to dump fuel as the plane tried to make a return to Boston...a situation that could have gotten a whole lot worse, very quickly.

Then, a text message came in from the airline. To acknowledge the “inconvenience we had experienced,” the airline was offering me either a \$100 travel voucher or 2500 miles on my frequent flyer account. I laughed ironically. “I always wondered what my life was worth,” I said to my new friend. “And now I know: \$100 or 2500 miles.” Not much, really, for such a frightening experience. Except for one thing: I didn’t die today. ♦

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# *Frustration*

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BY ESTHER ISENBERG

The frustration mounted.  
Mountains of emotional intensity grew higher then higher.  
From what? For what?  
She had searched the first floor, expecting it to appear where  
She thought she remembered it definitely was.  
It had been carefully placed.  
An actual published piece in a hard cover embossed forever book.  
It was to be there always.  
She was sure she knew where it was. It was clear in her mind's eye.  
So very REAL.  
Yet it is not to be found.

Scanning bookcases. Turbulence rages as the mind remembers  
The intense commitment to each world within each book, pamphlet, video, CD.  
The hoped for insight, the deep feelings provoked and then...  
Where did they go?  
Character names are forgotten, plot lines confused.  
In the moment when she had been present to them, they were  
So very REAL.  
Now they are slightest shadows.  
How could she possibly find them all again?  
Take the time? And even if she did, it would  
Not be the same.  
They are not to be found, not as they were.

Even as she climbed the stairs  
To search in the other spaces where she was  
Most certain it was not,  
She knew what she knew, but did  
Not want to know.  
There is no forever book to be forever found,  
Only this moment and the next.  
Even for the immortal words, the eternal tales,  
There are only moments of engagement with our shifting souls.  
Then they are gone, perhaps to be reencountered,  
But not to be found, not as they had been,  
So fresh and new, brimming with mystery  
And the hope of forever.

# The Kindness of Strangers

BY KIRAN VERMA



AS THE PLANE CIRCLED before landing, my husband leaned over to peer out of the window and asked a person sitting next to us, “What is that white stuff on the ground?”

Our fellow passenger answered, “We call it snow.” And my husband and I collectively said, “Oh!” It looked strange but sort of magical I thought.

It was late in January and we were just arriving in Rochester, New York, after a long flight from New Delhi, India. We had been married for all of five weeks and I was accompanying my new husband to the US because he wanted to train in Psychiatry and had accepted a residency in Rochester, New York. We came down the airplane steps on to the tarmac, with me in a silk chiffon sari and wearing fashionably appropriate matching strappy sandals on my feet. I promptly slipped

on the ice that had seemed so enticing from the window in the plane. A minor mishap I argued with myself and not an omen for things to come. So I picked myself up, smoothed out my sari, and set forth to continue on with our new life.

The hospital staff where my husband was to train was kind enough to arrange a room in one of the hospital buildings where we could sleep. We were also offered hot food in the hospital cafeteria free of charge. Nice, I thought, as we dealt with our travel weary bones. The next morning my husband met with the Director of the hospital and was told that he was welcome to keep eating in the cafeteria but his wife, I, would need to make other arrangements. The Director also informed my husband that it was the policy of the hospital that my husband could only be paid the end of the pay period, that is



after he had worked to earn that pay, and that would be at the end of the month in about four weeks.

This was a kind of catastrophe for us as we had very little cash on hand. In the late sixties India, due its weak economy at the time, was very tight with foreign currency and only allowed travelers to carry eight dollars each out of the country. We had managed to supplement our sixteen dollars with some extra cash that our family had arranged by asking around from their friends living abroad. But after a few cab rides and a glass or two of celebratory champagne along the way, there was very little cash left. So, what were we going to do?

My husband went to work the next day, which also happened to be a pay day but not for him as he had to wait till the next pay day at the end of the month. I worried all day and wondered how terrible would it be if we asked our families to once again ask their friends for help. I wondered how much food cost in America and how much would it cost to feed me for four weeks.

When my husband came to our room that evening I asked if he had thought about what we were going to do. He looked at me, smiled, and said, "I have something for you." Then he handed me a paycheck for one month's pay that had been made out to a Dr. Max Abanio but had been signed over to us. My husband told me that Dr. Abanio had come to him and handed over his paycheck saying, "I know you need the money so here

is my paycheck. I don't need it right now so you use it and pay me back when you can."

I was stunned. How did this happen? Who was this Dr. Abanio and why did he give us so much money when he did not even know us? My husband told me that Max, as we came to call him, was another resident in the program. My husband had just met him. Max was from the Philippines and had been

in the program for about a year. Max had overheard my husband talking about our predicament due to the hospital's pay policy and had decided that we needed help and that he, Max, was going to help us.

I have often wondered why on that day Max did what he did for us. We had no longtime friendship with him. We were not from the same country. We did not share a common culture or religion. The only conclusion I have been able to come to is that, apart from the obvious

commonality of belonging to the human race, what we did have in common was that we were all strangers in a strange land and he knew only too well what that meant.

So, if the slip on the tarmac had been a rude beginning, and the hospital policy a sobering reality check, Max's amazing generosity was just the comforting hand we needed to feel that it was going to be all right after all. With the money Max gave us we bought not only food but also coats, hats, gloves, and, yes, ugly snow boots for me even though I have to admit they were warm and looked quite good with my new American jeans. ♦

*So, if the slip on the  
tarmac had been a  
rude beginning and the  
hospital policy a sobering  
reality check, Max's  
amazing generosity was  
just the comforting hand  
we needed*

# Art in Bloom



KAREN PETERSEN  
*Mourning Cloak* (2015)

Watercolor  
11" x8.5"



DEENA L. DUBIN  
*In the Tropics (2014)*

Polymer Clay with Pearls & Glass Beads  
5" high



CAROLYN FLEISS  
*Garden Offering #3 (2017)*  
Acrylic  
6" x 6"



JOANNE BORSTELL  
*Tulips (2018)*  
Watercolor and ink  
5" x 7"



JUDITH CLAPP  
*Fungus on wood*

Photograph



CYNTHIA BRODY  
*Bloom Where You Are Planted* (2019)

Acrylic and photo collage on canvas  
40" x 30"

# Taste of Sahara

BY NANCY KOUCHOUK



I ride my bike to town today.  
Workmen sip black tea on curbs.  
A river of red runs by their feet.  
Ramadan is over.  
Slaughtered animals are  
shared with fellaheen.  
Tables of Mercy steam with food.

Goat lady waves. Children, oddly  
familiar in my son's hand-me-downs,  
stop to ring the bicycle bell.  
A donkey refuses to get up  
from the road. Smell of roasted  
corn from charcoal brazier  
waters my words.

Ahmad twists bags of fruit  
onto each handlebar, tells me:  
"One day, insha'Allah, I will say  
'Massachusetts' and make you proud".  
Toothy laughter echoes. Cups clink  
in their saucers. Flower man  
frequents the café with fragrance.

---

# It's a Girl

---

BY JUDITH CLAPP

IT WAS 1965. My colleagues and I were recent college graduates on our first jobs. We were helping develop an automated system so advanced it had never been done before. We had high expectations that we could do the impossible.

When the project began, we were a closely-knit team of equals. As the system design grew, so did the organization and its bureaucracy. I was one of the few women technical managers. I felt proud and lucky to be head of my own team developing and integrating parts of the system software. Most of the other technical managers had engineering degrees and designed the hardware. Women were hired as software programmers, or to teach people how to write software, jobs considered by the engineers to be lower level “women’s work.” As one engineer said:

“We had to study 5 years to get our engineering degree and you women have no technical education at all. Some of you even majored in music!”

As we neared some critical deadlines in our work, I acquired a deadline of my own. I was pregnant, with no idea what the rules for pregnancy were in this job. If anyone on my team noticed my growing bump, they were probably too shy to say anything, until the day a visiting colleague walked into the lab and shouted:

“Don’t any of you dumb guys know a pregnant female when you see one!”

That afternoon, I was informed that I would have to terminate employment immediately and leave the premises. When I went to the personnel department to request a leave

of absence, they explained that I wasn’t eligible for a leave:

“Our policy only covers leave of absence for personal family reasons, such as your illness or a death or illness in your family.”

I protested: “What could be a more personal reason than having a baby?”

“No one has ever asked to come back after having a baby,” they replied.

Out I went. Within a few days, I got a worried call. My project’s deadline was slipping.

“Would you consider returning as a consultant to continue directing the team? You’ll have to work in the lobby like a visitor because our insurance won’t cover you inside the building.”

I eagerly accepted. To my delight, my salary as an hourly consultant was twice what it had been as a full-time employee. Fortunately, my husband’s insurance covered medical expenses.

The lobby had a few pieces of furniture, a reception desk, and critically, a restroom. I sat on the sofa while the rest of the team took turns on the floor, hovering over our work. Whenever we needed to use the computer, someone would run inside and bring back the results—no networked remote terminals or desktop computers. Decks of punched cards had to be carried to the giant computer inside the building.

Happily, I delivered both the project and my daughter on time. After my brief increase in income as a consultant, I was rehired at my former salary. Shortly afterwards, the regulation changed. Women could now take a leave of absence to have a baby. ♦



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# *At the Carnival*

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BY PAMELA MORIARTY

I first became aware of you  
As I watched the young girls ride the roller coaster  
Their bright faces hurtling past me  
Eyes abolt in joyful terror

You rested inside the curve of my belly  
A warm round bud  
Undisturbed by the cries of the carnival  
You probed the I and the you and the we  
Forced me to open my secret places  
Where you could snuggle and grow  
Until

It was time to take our ride  
The slow climb to the crest  
I pull and stretch and grip  
Slowly, slowly to the top until  
With a great swoop  
The roller coaster sweeps us down, down  
I know I scream  
Then up and up to another crest  
Slowing toppling over

And oh what a wild heaving glorious screaming cursing hanging on  
ride

The wind rushes through me  
Shakes me to the marrow  
Up and over  
Down and down  
I am alive as I have never been  
Every bone and muscle and sinew shaped anew  
Every nerve and hair and nail afire  
We ride the dark wind-tunnel together  
In a clash of bone and blood

And now you lie here  
On the curve of my belly  
A freshly opened flower  
Squinting up at me

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# Spencer's Hill

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BY HAL FARRINGTON



THE SUMMER IS, for an adult, a span of time. A few weeks between June and September, nothing less, nothing more. For kids, however, it's a time of magic, wonder and endless sojourns into one daring adventure after another. On one such warm summer night, while I was sitting on the porch thinking of nothing in particular, the soulful sound of a train's far-off whistle sparked a memory from when I was a young boy during the late 1940s. The war was over; family and friends were reunited; stories were told and retold over dinners in every home in the neighborhood. This is one of those stories.

Summer time, in the early morning. The sounds of the coal-black steam engines moving through the Somerville train yard carried up on a warm breeze to my attic window. Mom had just put pancakes on the table. The smell of hot syrup was traveling upstairs just as quickly as the Saturday morning sound of her voice.

"Hurry up, Sonny, Billy. Breakfast is on the table," she called. "Don't let it get cold."

"Come on, Billy," I yelled, trying to manage running down the attic stairs and putting my T-shirt on at the same time.

"Come on yourself." Billy flew by me two steps at a time. He was my ten-year-old cousin. Two years younger than I, shorter and broader built compared to my skinny frame. He had a shock of blond hair that always seemed to stay in place while my thin black mop was always in my face. We took turns staying over at each other's house during the summer. This time he was staying at mine for the weekend.

"Sit down, Billy." Mom issued her second request.

"Ok." Billy replied, tipping over a glass of milk while reaching for the pancakes.

"William! You're a bull in a china shop!"

"Hey, leave some pancakes for me!"

"Forget it; I was here first!"

"Sit down. Be quiet. And eat!" Mom was starting to crumble under the "Billy" pressure now.

He settled in with elbows circled around his captured pancakes. I slid into my chair, making sure the milk was out of harm's way as I reached for what was left of the pancakes.

"Eat up, you two. Your Uncle Andy will be here any time now to take you blueberry

picking. And you know him; he doesn't like to wait."

Yeah, I knew him, tough as whiskers. He was in the Merchant Marines during the war. When he had time, he would write to me. China, Australia, New Zealand – all the swell places I'd read about in *National Geographic* down at the Somerville Library. We were almost through eating when we heard a car stop in front of the house. I ran over to the window and spotted my uncle getting out of his car, a real super 1938 Plymouth.

"Hi, Uncle Andy!" I called down.

He looked up and waved.

He was a big man, well over six feet tall, with huge shoulders, a barrel chest and hands so large he could pick up a watermelon with just one of them. Mom said his manners could use some smoothing, but I think deep down he wasn't always as tough as he made himself out to be. Still, with his steel gray eyes and rough, weathered face from years of seafaring duties, when Uncle Andy said something, you'd listen!

"Ready ta go, boy?"

"We'll be right down. Come on, Billy. Bye, Mom."

"Wait, take your lunches. Tell Andy to stay for supper, we're having beans and corn bread."

"Ok."

We ran down the stairs into the dark hallway, then out into the morning sunlight, eyes squinting against its brightness. Andy was leaning against his car, arms folded over his chest.

"Come on, boys. Hop in."

We'd drive a while through the city but once onto Route 2, the views would change quickly. Three-decker houses would become single-family homes with trees and fences. Those would change to farms and woods, and finally, stretches of long, winding coun-

try roads.

"How many blueberries will we get, Uncle Andy?" Billy yelled over the sound of air rushing by the open car window.

"Depends, been hot and humid these two weeks. Maybe two, three pails." Billy smiled and turned back to look out the window at the scenery flying by. Billy liked Uncle Andy. They got along pretty good. After Billy lost his dad a few months back, Uncle Andy became kind of a second dad to Billy. No one ever figured out why. It just worked out that way, I guess.

"Did ya bring your lunches?"

"Yep, we're all set. Oh, before I forget, Mom said you have to stay for supper. We're having beans and corn bread."

"Sure, I'll stay. Your mom will probably make a blueberry pie."

"*The Lone Ranger* is on tonight, Billy. Do you want to listen to it?"

"Sure, and *Inner Sanctum*, too."

In the summertime, we could listen to the radio without having to turn it off at nine like on school nights. In summer, nine only meant lights out.

"Look," Billy cried out, "Spencer's Hill."

Back in the early thirties it had been a sand and gravel pit. Now it was deserted. In front of us was the part that gave Spencer's Hill its name: a sandy slope that angled down at a steep grade. Nature had reclaimed some of the pit with small shrubs and patches of grass cover, but the slope always stayed exposed with its sand and rocks shining in the hot sun.

It was close to nine by the car clock when we pulled into the yard. It had gotten even hotter, maybe eighty degrees. It would hit ninety for sure. Billy and I jumped out, took off our shirts, grabbed the pails, and started to run towards the path that led up to the top of Spencer's Hill.

“Hold on! You’ll burn yourself alive! Put those shirts back on!”

We put the pails down and grabbed the shirts.

“Put this on, too, or you’ll get eaten by mosquitos.”

Uncle Andy was talking about citronella, a lotion that you rubbed on to keep mosquitos away. Uncle Andy would say something only once. So we put the stuff on, put our shirts on, then started up the path.

It wasn’t a hard climb. The exposed part of the hill was about 150 feet from top to bottom, but the path wasn’t as direct, so it was several minutes before we made it to the top. Squirrels clicked out warnings and the crows joined in with their yells, both resenting the fact that we were entering their private romping grounds.

All around us were tons of blueberry bushes. We started in picking, Uncle Andy careful not to damage the berries while Billy and I raced each other to see who could fill his pail the quickest.

“Don’t eat em. Save em for your mom’s pies.”

“We won’t,” I yelled.

“Not much,” Billy shot back laughing.

The morning settled into a routine. Heat beetles were in high pitch, and the squirrels had accepted our being around. The bees and mosquitos zooming in were driven off by the smell of citronella. Uncle Andy was resting under an old weathered chestnut tree, but we didn’t want to stop, our pails were nearly full.

“How you boys doin’ there?”

“Almost finished, Uncle Andy. My pail’s full. Billy, once yours is, we’re done.”

“I’m done now!” he answered back, getting impatient to explore the hill.

We ran over to Uncle Andy to show off the berries.

“Looks good. Leave ‘em here, and go look around, but stay within earshot.”

I watched my uncle eating his sandwich beneath the cool shade of the tree, followed his far-away gaze out over the meadow and the winding road below. I thought of all the places he had been and all the oceans he had sailed.

“Do you miss the sea, Uncle Andy?” He continued his stare but shared some of his thoughts.

“Sometimes, boy, sometimes,” he muttered back, “but not today. Run along. Ya got an hour, that’s all. And stay out of trouble.”

“Aye Aye, Sir!” Billy shot back in his best sailor’s voice.

We took off towards the slope to look around.

“Hey, look at that!” Billy yelled out.

It was a rock! Four feet high and about the same around. Perched on the edge of the slope looking like a giant bowling ball!

“Bet we could move it!”

“Roll it down the hill!” we both cried out.

Now, no longer a rock, but a plane. It was a B-17, ready for takeoff to go bomb the Axis!

“I’ll get a stick. We can use it to move the rock. It’ll fly down the hill!”

“Ok, I’ll clear around it.”

Billy accepted my ideas on blind faith. Partly because he was younger but mostly because it didn’t matter much to him as long as we were having fun. In a while I found a strong limb.

“This will do it.” We pushed the stick into the ground just in back of the rock and started to lift against it.

“Go, go!” Billy yelled, “It’s moving.”

The sand in front of the rock started to give. It moved easier now with each push. Slowly at first, it began its descent from the top of the slope down to the pit below. As it started to pick up speed, its run changed

from a gentle roll to an erratic bounce, then into great bounding leaps! It was even better than we had imagined, until ... fate stepped in.

"Oh no, oh no!" Billy's cries were not needed. I could see just as clearly what was happening. The B-17 on its last leap had changed its flight course and was heading straight for the Plymouth! It was no longer a Flying Fortress speeding over Europe, high above the explosions of flack from enemy anti-aircraft guns. It was now a low-flying Grumman Hellcat dive bomber, skimming over the bullet-rippled blue-green waters of the Coral Sea, heading for its target!

In those agonizing few seconds, I wondered how long it would take to pay back Uncle Andy for damages at fifty cents a week.

"Wow it stopped, it stopped!" Billy yelled jumping two feet into the air. "Look at that, it stopped!" We ran down the path, over to the Plymouth. The sand, softer here, had slowed down the rock's forward motion just before it slammed into Uncle Andy's car!

"What are ya down' down there?" Uncle Andy's voice bellowed down from the top of the slope.

"Nothing. Just looking at the car."

Billy nodded his head several times, trying to say something, but nothing coming out.

"Come on boys, grab these pails. Time to go back home."

We went back up the path promising fate that this was the last time we'd pull a stunt like that. But fate, knowing Billy and me, would not take too much stock in our promises. We got the pails and empty lunch bags and started back down.

"Did ya notice this big rock next to my car when we drove in?" Andy asked, his voice a little gruff.

"No, don't think so, Uncle Andy." Billy volunteered.

"Maybe we were too busy getting the pails and stuff." I added, trying to reinforce Billy's answer.

"Funny, don't remember it either. Well, hop in. Let's head home."

I wasn't sure, but as he got into the car, I thought I saw a grin, for just a second, break across his face.

He looked down at me and winked. "Come on, boys, what are ya waitin' for? Get in."

"Will you stay for supper, Uncle Andy?" Billy asked as if to get this rock business out of his mind.

"Sure will!" Yelling over the sound of the car engine roaring to life, "Sure will. Looking forward to beans 'n cornbread and that blueberry pie."

He did stay for supper, and afterwards Billy and I went upstairs to listen to the radio shows. I could hear my folks and Uncle Andy talking and laughing. It was a nice sound, kind of a "home" sound, kind of like when I'd have a big warm blanket wrapped around me on a cold winter's night with the snow blowing against the attic window.

"Come on and listen, Sonny," Billy yawned. "The Lone Ranger has started."

"Ok Billy, ok."

We lay back on the bed, listening to the sounds from the radio, and the family talking downstairs. Billy was starting to fall asleep. I thought of how quickly the day had gone by, hoping that it would never change, Billy and I exploring and school still over a month away.

But, school did start. Still, of all last summer's memories, the trip to Spencer's Hill rates as the best. Well, except for the time Billy and I went fishing near the old abandoned Thompson mansion. A thunderstorm with its ominous rain-filled clouds had come out of nowhere, and . . . hold on now; let's wait a while, that's a story for another time. ♦

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# Locked Out

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BY TAMARA HAVENS

As a supervising mechanic  
of diesel trucks, my father parks his car  
in front of a large hanger,  
a secret airbase in Egypt  
run by the British.

The gate, surrounded  
by a large barbed-wire fence,  
lightly bathed orange by the rising sun,  
is chained with a large padlock.

The runway and hanger lie  
motionless like dead carcasses.  
The desolate sand  
stretches out asleep.

Clutching the lock,  
he shakes the chain,  
with fingers, bloody,  
stinging, raw.

He yells out;  
the wind stirs,  
whistles, sweeps  
him down. Needles  
of sand whip his face.

A black cloud starts  
to mushroom inside him,  
*No . . . no*, he mutters.  
*How could they? They moved out  
without me, promised they'd take  
me before the Germans came!*

Trembling,  
he stands alone,  
locked in.

# My Childhood in Nazi Germany

BY EVA AROND

WHEN SPRING ARRIVES, I am reminded of the parks, gardens and flowers of my childhood in Hamburg. Our neighborhood was some distance from the city center. Our apartment house stood near the corner of a busy hub for local transportation where five streets met, like outstretched fingers of a hand pointing to different destinations.

A short distance from our apartment, in the opposite direction, was the subway station. On the far side lay the banks of the Alster canal, one of several that branched out from Alster Lake in the heart of the city. On special occasions, we would board a ferry from the landing at the end of our block and take a leisurely cruise into downtown Hamburg.

Near the boat landing lay an oblong gated garden. Though I never saw anyone tending it, Hawthorne trees flourished there, and iris and summer phlox, dahlias and chrysanthemums. To me, it was “The Enchanted Garden” that I alone knew about.

In spring, I would be drawn to our living room by a powerful fragrance of white and purple lilacs, brought by Frau Maas. She would be in the kitchen having coffee with my mother. Frau Maas was a large and lively peasant woman with a warm, generous laugh. The two women met in the dry goods store where my mother worked for Uncle Martin, husband to my mother’s older sister, Julia.

As a Jew, Martin could employ only Jewish staff. The store was popular and patronized by local women who valued its quality mer-

chandise at fair prices. My mother was popular, giving good advice to women customers who chose her rather than Martin to wait on them, some purchases being too delicate for masculine eyes.

After Kristallnacht on November 8, 1938, many foods became scarce and most were rationed. Koshering meats was forbidden by the Nazis. Since my mother observed strict Jewish dietary laws, we stopped eating meat and traded our precious meat stamps for other scarce foods like eggs, sugar, and cooking oils.

Frau Maas participated in this forbidden black-market. She and her husband farmed a few acres that produced vegetables and eggs in abundance. Their little farm, a remnant of an earlier market garden era, was situated on the edge of the Hamburg City Park, an easy 15-minute walk from our apartment.

Sometimes Frau Maas was unable to make her weekly visit and my brother Alfred and I were sent to the farm instead. The farmhouse had no electricity or central heating. There was an outhouse in the rear of the garden. Activities took place in the kitchen where dried herbs and corncobs hung from the rafters, while chickens ran freely about.

We always brought home a bouquet of seasonal flowers, eggs and vegetables. I especially loved the sweet peas that Frau Maas cultivated. In turn, we brought her eggshells and potato peelings that my mother saved in a tin can behind the dust mops. These were to be ground up and fed to the chickens.



My mother ran a small, secret, and undoubtedly dangerous black-market in food stamps with several neighborhood women. This continued beyond Kristallnacht and the trashing and closing of my uncle's store. She helped supplement the meager diets of family members who lived nearby. Two beggar women regularly rang our doorbell on the second floor and left with scraps from our pantry.

Looking back at my childhood, I believe this was the best part of my mother's often tragic life. She was a valued person in her community, and was truly fearless in a time of crisis and danger. As for Frau Maas, I wonder: was she actually anti-Nazi in her beliefs, or simply a decent woman without prejudice toward her neighbor?

THE AIR-RAIDS STARTED soon after the beginning of the war with England, in September 1939. The order to cover all windows was the strictest yet from the authorities. My mother used old blankets and rugs; we soon acclimated to living in darkened rooms. Wardens patrolled the streets looking for any chink of light.

The air-raid siren could sound at any time after dark. Our building had six apartments, two on each floor and two separate basements, which became shelters. One group accepted the presence of our Jewish family; the other was "Judenfrei" (free of Jews).

Frau Doelling lived one floor below us. She was elderly and childless. Her husband, a blind man, sold newspapers at the end of our block accompanied by a large, bad-tempered dog. She was a frequent visitor, seemingly unaware or indifferent that we were Jews. "Are the Tommies coming tonight?" was her concern.

Herr and Frau Schultz lived in the apartment next door. Every Christmas Frau Schultz invited us to view their Christmas tree. Their

teenage son, Reinhold, was a Hitler Youth – he pranced up and down the stairs on air-raid nights in his Nazi uniform as a warden of chinks that might draw the enemy. My brother Alfred never spoke to him at those times, though they met and played ball in a nearby park each spring. Frau Schultz was often in our kitchen for cooking advice.

Three tenants used the "Judenfrei" basement: a woman dentist (an outspoken Nazi), and two other couples. One of the men was the chief of police of our district. He never acknowledged our presence; his wife, however, always called out a greeting. The last of the neighbors wore the dreaded black Nazi uniform. To him, we were invisible.

WE ALMOST MISSED THE BOAT that was our last hope of escaping to America. As refugees fleeing Germany, we were put on a train and sent to a non-German port – Lisbon, in our case. My parents, my fifteen-year-old brother and I (age eleven) waited for ten tense days in Berlin, queuing up daily at the American consulate for exit visas.

It was early June, 1941, late to be emigrating. Rumors of an imminent German invasion of Russia abounded. In Berlin we stayed at the apartment of four elderly sisters known to us as "The Four Graces." As a young woman, my mother was an apprentice in the provincial department store owned by the only married sister, now a widow. Golly Hoffman was a stout, benign woman, who was in charge of the household. Her sisters were gentle and frail, wore old-fashioned gowns and hair in pompadours, seemingly preoccupied with sewing and mending. With our few remaining food-ration stamps added to their own, they managed to provide us at least one meal a day.

My brother was a natural hustler. He ran from store to store in search of lines – something unrationed was being sold, never mind



what it was. He also earned tips carrying groceries for people waiting on those lines. It was a risky business for a Jewish boy from Hamburg and a stranger to Berlin.

The brief sojourn in Berlin ended when, exit visas in hand, we boarded the train for Lisbon. The four of us shared a compartment with four other refugees. At night, our train car was shunted to a railway siding as we crossed the borders of France and Spain, to be picked up the next day by another train on its way to Portugal.

Each refugee was permitted to leave Germany with two small suitcases. Ours were half-filled with my father's books. At each border crossing, guards came aboard, checked our passports and searched our suitcases. The books elicited suspicion and laughter. For five days we hardly slept.

Our companions were a middle-aged couple from Hamburg, their five-year-old daughter, and an unattached young man who turned out to be from my mother's hometown of Melsungen. Our group of eight survived the confinement – though not without petty bickering over allotments of food and space. We three children were the bachelor's special target, and we detested him.

In Lisbon, we all decided to stay together. A taxi took us to a pension on a street lined with tropical trees. For me, Lisbon was like Paradise, a place of flowers and fun. Though another ordeal of waiting began, this time on the arrival of a boat that would take us to New York, we were light-hearted, even euphoric. Portugal was not at war and we could walk anywhere. With money one could shop, eat bananas, peaches, even cherries! Food was abundant.

On daily visits to the American Consulate, my father received reassuring news that we were booked to leave on the next boat for New York. He was given ten dollars per

family member. A small celebration ensued at our pension, where our group of eight toasted fortunes-to-come in America. The festive occasion ended abruptly with a phone call from the Consulate. A refugee boat was at the dock, due to leave within the hour.

Amid panic and hysteria, two taxis arrived in time to rush us to the dock. There, we found our way to the holds with separate areas for men and women, already filled with shipmates in triple-layer bunkbeds. My father bribed someone with eight of his precious dollars to find bunks for us.

I became seasick with the first motion of the ship and remained so for a week, though most days were calm and sunny. I lay on a tiny deck surrounded by a group of young girls entrusted by their parents to the care of two heroic French nuns. Their chief task appeared to be the teaching of an impossibly difficult song. Months later I realized that I had learned to sing the American national anthem.

We arrived at Staten Island before dawn on June 21, 1941, in a heavy fog that obliterated any view of the Statue of Liberty. Then, before we could disembark, we were inspected for lice and given a crude re-vaccination. Finally, we passed from the ship to solid ground where we were met by summer's steamy heat. Being Saturday, the Sabbath, neither of my mother's siblings, orthodox Jews, could meet us. This duty was relegated to my non-orthodox uncle, Siegbert, who led us from Staten Island, via ferry, then subway northwards to Washington Heights in Manhattan. My mother thus broke a Sabbath proscription for the only time in her life.

The next day Germany invaded Russia. All German borders were closed and emigration stopped. The following Saturday, June 28, was my twelfth birthday. I didn't know it then, but it was the end of childhood. ♦

# *From Away*



CHARLES B. KETCHAM  
*America 2018 (2019)*

Multi-media  
10" x 6"



CHARLES B. KETCHAM  
*Once Upon a Tide (2018)*

Photograph



SANDY MILLER-JACOBS  
*Umbrellas Color Jerusalem Street*

Photograph



SANDY MILLER-JACOBS  
*London from Ferris Wheel*

Photograph



HARRY FORSDICK  
*Cumington Barns (2018)*

iPad, ProCreate



HARRY FORSDICK  
*Hancock Round Barn (2018)*

iPad, ProCreate



HARRY FORSDICK  
*Beach Chairs (2018)*

iPad, ProCreate

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## Chance Encounter

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BY BRENDA PRUSAK

FROM THE BALCONY that provided an extended view of the beautiful Gulf of Mexico, I could see the young boy on the beach. I knew he was staying with his aunt next door. "I love him but he's a loner, just prefers his own company to mine or to anyone else's. I watch him from afar though." The boy was fine boned, small. I could just see the tip of his sun-bleached blond hair; maybe he was nine, maybe ten years old.

I could see he was excited; he was creating something but what was it? He shifted and adjusted his weight from one foot to the other. I knew I had to see what was he doing so I went down to the beach. I wanted to keep a respectful distance from him. No one else was on the beach; it was only the two of us. I could see an unusual sand castle was being constructed. The boy's long fingers moved quickly, pushing the sand up into two tall domes, one slightly higher than the other but each one with matching pointed tops. At each corner of the rectangular castle were smaller similar domes. The entrance to the castle was designed with a peaked roof, almost like a portico. A perfect smaller doorway below the entrance gave the castle its proportion. Knights would have moved through that doorway. In front of the doorway was a long, lowered drawbridge made of carefully arranged pieces of driftwood. A wide, deep moat surrounded the castle. The bottom of the moat looked like a zen sand garden, a garden of small rippled sand waves that curved around and around. How did the boy know how to get the exact right consistency of sand to water? The sand had to be just wet enough to hold the shapes but dry enough to not fall apart. The castle was

taking shape the same way a poem slowly emerges into context and form. The boy ahead of time had found sand dollars from the beach that he'd bleached into a brilliant white. One had been placed just below the apex of the roof; the other marked the entrance of the drawbridge. Some were placed on the smaller domes.

The vision for the castle flowed through his fingertips faster than fish darting; nothing separated what was in his head from the work of his fingers. He was absorbed, lost in his own creation. I could feel the intensity of his aliveness, his absorption in his vision. The two of us stood alone on the empty beach, a creator and an observer.

Then it was done. The boy wiped his hands on his shorts, stepped back and mindfully walked around the castle. Now and then he stooped to sculpt more at this end or subtract more from that. He critically weighed and judged each part. Suddenly he saw me. "It's very beautiful," I said. He looked a bit puzzled but stepped slightly closer to me. That's when I saw the color of his eyes, the color of cerulean water over a Caribbean reef. Who was he?

"Thank you," he looked down at his feet. It was the way he said "thank you" that caught me off guard. It was genuine, humble, but there was a knowing in it that said yes, my castle is now finished. I wanted to know this young person. What else had he made, when did the idea to build a castle come to him, did he draw, did he write? I instinctively felt our time was over, so let him slowly walk away. In my head I wanted to yell out, "Wait, you've left something behind. You can't just walk away and leave your vision alone on the



beach. You can't walk away as if you'd discarded an old wet T shirt."

All through the afternoon the sun and clouds played over the castle. Now and then a beach walker stopped to admire it or to take a picture. Like a thousand-year-old Irish castle it was impervious to all, including the lapping of the waves behind it. It alone steadfastly held the boy's vision.

At sunset I looked again. Now it was framed by the dancing streaks of the dying sun, soft

pinks, reds and gold illuminated it. The evening chilled. Night came to the beach. The castle stood against the white of the moon and the thickening clouds. Early in the morning I saw it still rising above the small waves. It had endured the night but for how long would it last? I did the only thing I could and took a picture of it. All things return to their origins. The sand castle too would slowly dissolve wave by wave back into the sea. ♦



PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR, PROCESSING BY PAMELA MARSHALL

# A Durgin Park Memory

BY GARY FALICK

THE LAST HELPING of Durgin Park's wonderful Indian Pudding was served on January 12, 2019. The same for everything else on its menu. That was the day the venerable Boston institution closed its doors for the final time. Even though it had been a number of years since I had eaten there, I was tempted to join the throngs for one final taste. Instead, I decided to forego the experience since it could not compare to that of an MIT freshman in the autumn of 1954.

I grew up in Saratoga Springs, NY. We had taken many trips to New York City, but my first trip to Boston occurred in September,

1954, when my parents drove me over to begin my MIT education. They had never been to Boston either. Over and above the anticipation of this new beginning, the ride was memorable for another reason. It was shortly after Hurricane Carol had made a direct hit on southern New England. There was devastation everywhere. The Mass Turnpike was yet to be built, so we drove along Route 2, encountering repair crews from all over the Northeast working feverishly to restore power and other services. When we stopped for lunch in Greenfield, I enjoyed my first taste of clam chowder in New England.



How strange, they left out the tomatoes! We stopped to refuel near Concord and I heard my first New England accent as the attendant updated us on local conditions. It was becoming clear that, although we were only a few hours drive from upstate New York, things were somewhat different here.

To prepare for life in the Boston area, I had conscientiously pored through the information packets that had arrived during the summer. I learned about this special Boston restaurant named Durgin Park. After dropping my luggage at the dorm on Memorial Drive in Cambridge, we decided to try to find it. In those days, before GPS, we didn't have any idea of how to find our way around Boston and Cambridge. Adding to the uncertainty was concern that another storm was approaching. My parents were planning the return trip that day. So, after a half-hearted attempt, they returned me to my dorm and bid farewell. It was a good move. Another storm moved in and I later learned they got as far west as Westminster before stopping for the night and allowing the storm to pass.

The following weeks were a blur of activities. I pledged a fraternity and moved into the fraternity house on Bay State Road in Boston before ever beginning classes. That was standard procedure at MIT in those days. Then there were various orientations, receptions and meetings, a physical examination, and finally the rigors of physics, chemistry and calculus. In a rare moment of leisure time, I finally made it to Durgin Park and learned why it was such an institution. The long lines waiting to get up the stairs and be seated, family style seating, the sassy waitresses, the huge slabs of roast beef dangling off the edges of the plates, the giant servings of strawberry shortcake and for me, this incredible dessert called Indian Pudding!

In years to come I learned that local writ-

ers referred to the Durgin Park version of Indian Pudding as the gold standard of that New England specialty. Their version, based on granulated corn meal and black molasses, baked for at least 5 hours, melded into a gloriously tasting conclusion to the meal, especially when served with a generous scoop of vanilla ice cream melting into the warm mixture. No other version that I tried elsewhere ever measured up.

So it was with great anticipation that I awaited my parents when they returned to visit me part way through the first semester. By then I had settled in and learned how to get around Boston. There was no question in my mind where we would have dinner. They had to experience Durgin Park. They were perfectly content to go along with my choice. Little did we know just how unique our experience would be.

We dutifully joined the line of customers and were soon seated upstairs at the red checkered tables alongside some other diners. My folks were in awe of the roast beef but when my favorite dessert, Indian Pudding, arrived, the vanilla ice cream melting into the warm, textured corn custard, my mother took one look and declared, "That looks awful!" Our waitress didn't say anything and walked away. The next thing we knew, she reappeared, wrapped a napkin around my mother's neck to form a bib, and began spoon feeding her the Indian Pudding! She would not stop until Mom finally conceded that it really tasted fine!

That incident has been told and retold in our family gatherings over the years. However, whenever my mother visited us, throughout my undergraduate and graduate years at Tech, or in eastern Massachusetts ever since, her refrain was always, "Let's try some place new." She never returned to Durgin Park, but I certainly did!◆

# Border Passage

BY NANCY KOUCHOUK

Two taxis pull up at Cairo Airport.  
Family spills out chattering,  
double-cheek kisses, left and right.  
July sun hammers our heads.  
Male relatives corral my  
husband into a black sedan.  
In the women's car, one sister  
clasps my hand tightly. I am a  
citadel of sensations.

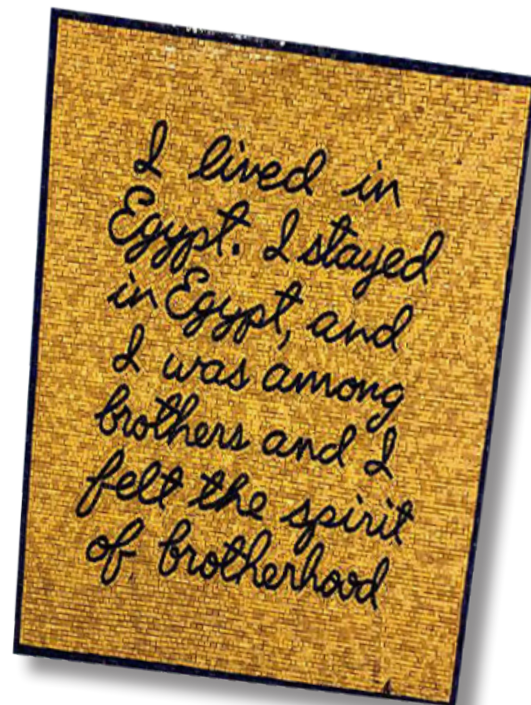
Call to prayer wakes me.  
I sit bolt upright. Arabic  
echoes from speakers, bounces  
off minarets in the strange  
night of my husband's country.  
His father travels by train  
to meet me. A stroke stops his heart.  
Three-day funeral gathers the clan.  
I have no language.

White stucco villa is home,  
veiled in bougainvillea.  
Five mango trees stand sentry.  
Heavy, ripe, globose fruit  
falls on earth. Skin splits open,  
sticky sap seeps into parched soil.  
Young boys scale thatched fence,  
pillage sweet pulp. My garden  
holds me in a vast hug.

Ramadan begins.  
Dead summer heat. Fans revolve  
slowly. We fast sunrise to sunset.  
Footsteps slacken, donkeys bray,  
goats bleat all withering day.  
Cannon booms from fortress above.  
Legions praise Allah, this day done.  
Moon's silver crescent finds me,  
carpets my journey.

We drive barren, desert road  
to Alexandria. Thirst stops us.  
Split melon juice runs down our chins.  
The car put-puts past a dead camel.  
Dust becomes sand becomes sea.  
Hoarse surf whispers. Mico appears.  
Her cotton dress billows. She laughs,  
enfolds her son, cradles my cheeks.  
I find my earth mother.

We zigzag across continents.  
Cairo-Boston-Cairo-Boston:  
cities beloved like ancient trees.  
We cradle daughter, then son. We  
pray for Ashraf, Mico, Scheherazade.  
Our caravan careens towards hope,  
dodges farewells on rutted roads.  
Banana palms wave in the rear view.  
Kneeling, standing, sweating, we cleave  
to baggage that cleaves our world in half.



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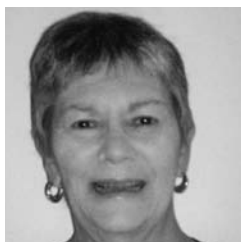
## CONTRIBUTORS

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EVA AROND has been a Lexingtonian since 1960. Following a career in geriatric social work, she pursued her lifelong passion for books as an antiquarian book dealer. She is also a lover of the arts and an avid gardener.

JOANNE BORSTELL studied at Salem State and Massachusetts College of Art. She works in various mediums and has exhibited in several collections, both local and to a wider audience.



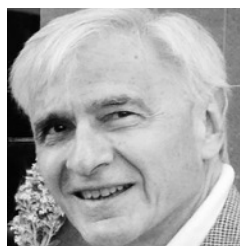
CYNTHIA BRODY is a mixed media artist and licensed family therapist living and practicing in Lexington. She has been combining photo collage with acrylic paint for over 40 years in a surreal style, and practicing psychotherapy for nearly 30 years.



JUDITH CLAPP is an amateur photographer who enjoys writing.

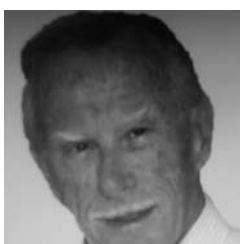


DEENA L. DUBIN has been a member of the Polymer & Beading Guild at the Lexington Arts & Crafts Society since 2005. She primarily works in polymer clay experimenting with various techniques.



GARY FALLICK serves on boards of groups devoted to helping seniors age in place, including Lexington At Home. During his career he wrote numerous articles for technical magazines and trade journals. He writes the alumni notes column for his MIT class.

HAL FARRINGTON has lived in Lexington since 1963. He is 83, married, and has been writing since the mid-nineties. He enjoys putting pen to paper, and has published several pieces in magazines.



CAROLYN FLEISS is a retired clinical Social Worker who has been making art for 25 years. She has lived in Lexington for 37 years with her husband having raised three children here who are currently harboring their five grandchildren in various cities around the country.



HARRY FORSDICK is a retired computer scientist who was involved in the invention and development of the Internet. After retiring he had more time to explore the visual arts of photography, which led him into drawing and painting.





TAMARA HAVENS, a retired ESL teacher, was born in Egypt to Russian-born parents. She volunteers teaching English. Her work explores her family's struggle to escape persecution in Egypt by moving to America.



ESTHER ISENBERG has an AB from Vassar, and an MSSW from Simmons. She is a Certified Yoga Teacher and a Teller of Tales.



An Emeritus Professor of Religion at Allegheny and Smith Colleges, CHARLES B. KETCHAM has been an amateur photographer for his entire life. Though his photographic interests have been general, he has concentrated on photos of the North Shore of Massachusetts, Scotland, and Rome.



While living eight 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.



SANDY MILLER-JACOBS used her camera as a way to teach students from pre-school through graduate levels. She now finds it provides a new way for her to look at the world as it brings into sharpness nature, cities and people.

PAMELA MORIARTY is a retired special needs teacher. She came from Dublin, Ireland to America in 1960. Her most recent publication is a memoir, *What Happened to My Mother* (Amazon).



KAREN PETERSEN is a retired Lexington teacher, married to a farmer. She has been a resident since 1975.



BRENDA PRUSAK has taught in schools across the country. She currently teaches yoga in Lexington. She is now working on a collection of family stories.

DEBORAH WEINER SOULE is an interim religious educator serving congregations in the greater Boston area. She also operates The Delicious Dish, a local catering company, and can often be found on stage in musical or theater productions.



KIRAN VERMA has lived in Lexington since 1986. She is Chair of the Department of Accounting and Finance at UMass Boston.



LYNNE YANSEN, a resident since 1969, retired after a career as a clinical social worker/psychotherapist. She is a member of many local art, garden and historical associations. Her work can be seen at: [www.Lynneyansenart.com](http://www.Lynneyansenart.com)



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