

LEXINGTON
LifeTimes
A CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL
WINTER 2018



ABOUT THIS JOURNAL

The Friends of the Lexington Council on Aging are pleased to support the publication of LEXINGTON LifeTimes: A CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL with one of their first Bright Ideas grants. The Bright Ideas mini-grant program was started by the Friends in 2017 to encourage innovation in senior programming and to enrich and enhance programming for seniors at the Community Center.

The journal grant proposal, submitted by Mimi Aarens, was to establish a publication that will showcase creative content from Lexington seniors (aged 60+), such as short fiction, essays, poetry, photography, artwork, and cartoons. The publication is overseen by a volunteer editorial board which sets the criteria for submission, and solicits and selects entries for inclusion. Distribution will primarily be electronically with a limited number of printed copies available.

*This is the first edition of what we hope will be a continuing twice-annual publication that displays the creative talents of seniors who live or work in Lexington. The second edition is planned for Summer 2018. If you are interested in having your work considered for a future edition, please see the submission guidelines on the Friends of the Lexington Council for Aging website:
www.friendsofthecoa.org*

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My Father's Violin

BY DON COHEN

DURING THE LAST TWO decades of their lives, my parents moved from the house I grew up in to a condo, then to an apartment in a continuing care community, shedding possessions along the way. Even so, the task of clearing the place out when my mother died (four years after my father's death) was long and difficult. I know many in my generation have faced similar chores: disposing of furniture and dishes that are no longer in fashion but aren't old enough to qualify as antique, discovering what various charitable organizations will and won't accept, leaving bags of familiar shoes and clothing out on the curb for the garbagemen, going through the miscellaneous contents of drawers to find the few items someone might use. And of course sorting through papers and photographs, stopping again and again to read or stare, to remember and occasionally be surprised by evidence of a moment you had not known about.

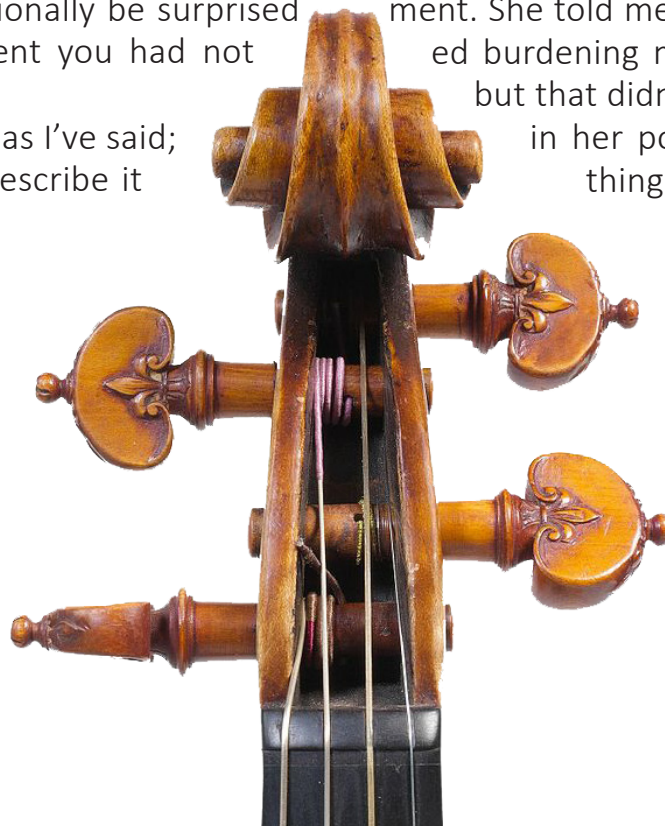
It's a familiar process, as I've said; you don't need me to describe it

in detail. What I want to talk about is this one thing: finding my father's violin in its worn black case on the shelf of the closet of what had been his bedroom those last years.

Now it's on the dresser in my bedroom. I see it in the morning and again before I go to bed.

I was surprised my mother kept it because of how much she had resented his playing, as she resented anything that took his attention away from her during the many years of their marriage. Even his going off to work in the morning wounded her, though she recognized the necessity. As infrequently as he played his violin, that was worse in a way, because it was a choice, and because he was right there in the same room, ignoring her. She never complained openly but her tragic silence radiated the grief of abandonment. She told me many times that she hated burdening my father with her needs,

but that didn't stop her from opposing in her powerful, oblique way anything that might give him a few



moments of freedom. I think it cost him an effort to play, knowing how it affected her. I suspect he would have played longer and more often if she hadn't minded so much, but that is only a guess. Certainly no one in the family ever discussed the issue or admitted that there was an issue to discuss.

My father was a scientist who scrutinized complicated molecules for a pharmaceutical company. He was not a demonstrative man but his focus was intense, almost frightening. My mother craved the embrace of his powerful attention. When he gave it to his music instead, it was like an eclipse of the sun for her.

I'm tempted to say he was transformed when he played the violin, but that's not right. He still seemed entirely himself: straight-backed, stolid, dignified. The difference—the transformation—was in the sounds that came from the violin, the emotion the music revealed that he never expressed in other ways. Not that he was an especially skilled musician. He played those simple pieces correctly but deliberately. Most were folk tunes—"Shenandoah" was a favorite, "You Are My Sunshine", "Oh Susanna." He played a version of Dvorak's "Humoresque" so slowly that it became a kind of dirge. (The first time I heard it played on the radio, I thought there must be some sort of technical glitch that sped it up, or else a crazed violinist gleefully tearing through what was supposed to be a melancholy meditation.)

When I was a child, my father's playing fascinated me and made me uneasy. I felt something like awe when he and his instrument filled our quiet house with sound. At the same time, I didn't want him to have those feelings and especially not the sadness that surged from the strings. I just wanted him to be my father.

He showed no interest in music aside from his violin playing. He didn't listen to the radio or own recordings. I don't remember my parents ever going to a concert.

I have no idea when he learned. In his youth, I suppose. But what I knew about his parents, my grandparents (who died when I was a baby), is that they were serious, sober people, a minister and a school teacher. The few stories my father told about his father always came down to admonitions against the sin of pride. He learned that no matter how well he did something, he might have done better; no matter how good he was, he fell short of the perfection of Jesus. I don't think of his childhood home in rural Pennsylvania as an environment that would encourage fiddle playing. Somehow, though, he acquired a violin and worked at it enough to learn the few songs in his repertoire.

At the end, those nine months on the Memory Unit when he had forgotten so much, he still played his music (every day now!), those songs indelibly preserved in his hands, in his dwindling mind.

After his death, my mother managed surprisingly well without him, given how needy she had been, or seemed. Possibly the pain of loss was balanced or cushioned by the pleasure of survival. Maybe she discovered that the independence she had dreaded offered its own satisfactions after all.

I don't know. I don't understand as much of the why of people's behavior as I once thought I did. I no longer believe I can judge lives as fulfilling or frustrating, kind or cruel, successes or failures. I don't know what to think about my parents. Now that they are gone, their stories concluded, I only have memories and a few tender questions that I don't expect will ever be answered. ♦

Words and Music at Summer's End

BY MIMI AARENS

Robert and Stan
And Mollie and me
Are in the courtyard of the Boston Public Library
Surrounded by sun-bleached arches and balconies
And a multitude of listeners,
Quietly breathing in Pinsky's words and Strickland's notes,
Swaying to the oboe, the clarinet, the saxophone, and
Tap tapping to the beat of Robert's poetic phrases.

White-haired couples and lunchtime visitors sit silent
On the tiled and granite edges
Of the rainbow-colored, well-tended gardens,
Rapt in the conversation of words and music.
A toddler boogies to the pulsing jazz.

An end-of-the-summer noontime breeze
Gently wraps around our bodies and I see
Mollie's earthen-brown hair kiss her forehead
As she embraces her knees, quietly resting her chin on folded fingers.
At eleven, she's not too young to hear Stan's improvised responses to
Robert's cadences.

She and I will remember this day of unblemished blue sky,
Of 'Finagle a Bagel'
And our chilled toes in the sparkling fountain at Copley Square.

Piano Lessons

BY DALE C. FLANDERS

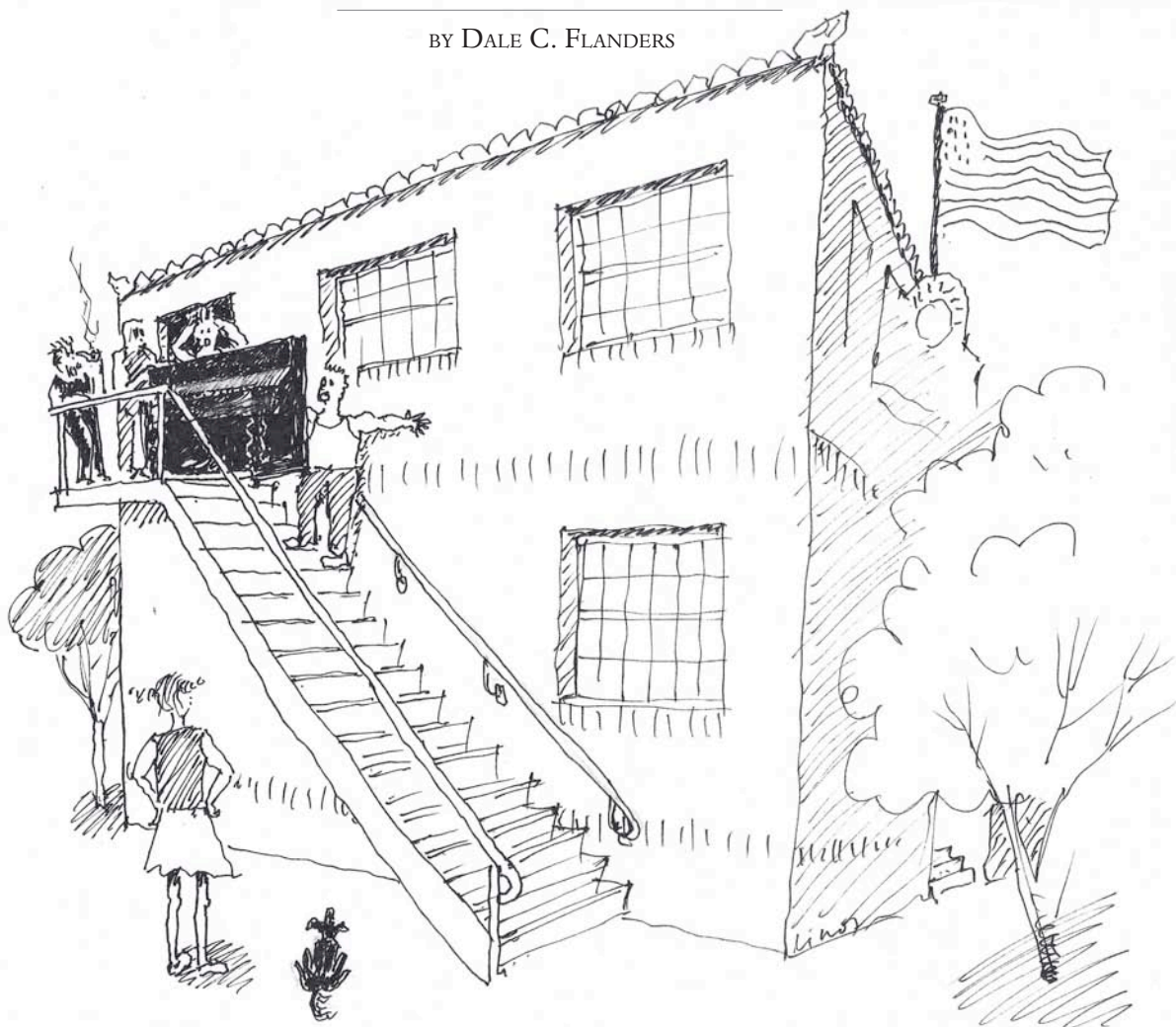


ILLUSTRATION BY LINOS DOUNIAS

WHEN I WAS ELEVEN years old, my mother decided that my sister and I needed to become more sophisticated. Playing piano was sophisticated. A woman at our church gave lessons, but we had no piano in our home. Always frugal, my father tracked down a used piano for sale. He paid \$25 for it. It was upstairs in the American Legion Hall in the next town.

The second floor of the hall was reached by a long, steep, straight and open outside staircase. Continuing to be frugal, my father convinced three of his friends to help and borrowed his great uncle's 1951 Ford

150 truck. The plan was to wrestle the piano down the stairs, lift it into the truck, and deliver it to my parent's bedroom. I went along to watch.

All of the men were my father's card playing buddies. Thank God they were all teetotalers, considering how it all went. Someone would have been at least crippled if anyone had even half a "snoot full."

The piano had genuine ivory keys, and was an upright made of solid mahogany with a cast iron frame. It had small brass wheels that made deep grooves in the spruce boards that were used to make a "train track" across

the worn hardwood dance floor of the Legion Hall. The four of them pushed it to the door that went out onto the landing at the top of the stairs. Those outside stairs looked rickety.

The piano sat halfway out the door. Millard held up his hand.

“Hold it. Let’s look her over.”

He thundered down the stairs to the ground level. The rest of us stood crowded together on the landing taking in the view.

Millard Fogg, perhaps the brightest of the group, was clearly worried about the strength of the outside stairs. Standing on the ground level, he craned his neck, examining the rather rotten looking and skinny posts that supported the stairs. After a moment he began slowly shaking his head.

“I wonder if that piano came UP those stairs?”

Roy Fairbrother, a burly farmer, puffed on his pipe. He just wanted to get on with it and go back to haying.

“Maybe it didn’t go up these stairs but, by God, she’ll come down!” Roy said with a snort.

Millard slapped his shirt pocket, searching for his cigarettes. He found the pack, knocked one into his hand, pulled out his lighter, and began to puff. The smell of it led my father and Carl Burgess, the other member of the group, to search for their own Lucky Strikes and Camels. While they all took a break to get up their courage, I tip-toed down to the ground level and looked up at the piano and stairs from Millard’s perspective

Carl Burgess was chosen for this task by my father for his physique. Carl was five feet tall and six feet wide, with not an ounce of fat on his body. It looked to me like he could have picked up the piano by himself and just carried it down the stairs. At least that is what I first thought, such was my admiration

for his natural strength.

Carl flicked a stray piece of tobacco from his lip and shot a stream of smoke from his pursed lips.

“We’ll take her one step at a time. She’ll come easy.” Carl said.

“Hope so. Maybe.” Millard muttered.

He finished his cigarette and ground it out on the pavement. Carl and my father tossed their cigarette butts over the railing. Roy kept his pipe clamped in his teeth like an adult pacifier. All the men sucked in their guts and tightened their belts. Millard climbed the stairs and joined the others. I stayed on the ground level to watch the show.

I don’t believe in anyone having the ability to foretell the future. I didn’t believe in that then or now. But in those moments before they began to move the piano into position at the top of the stairs, I realized I had a special talent for recognizing the physics of real world situations and predicting in my imagination the complex path of objects. Although, in this case, the path was not all that complex, at least for the piano.

I saw it all a minute before it unfolded. A small slice of the future. I felt cold fingers zip up my spine. I was too young to call out a warning; after all, what did a kid know?

They wheeled the monster piano out onto the rickety landing at the top of the stairs. Carl was at the ass end of it. Millard was on the downhill side and my father and Roy lifted and shoved from the keyboard side. The wheels squeaked.

“We’ll take her one step at a time,” Millard commanded.

I heard Carl give a soft grunt, and the leading edge of the piano projected over the first step. Millard backed down a step.

With another grunt from Carl and a gasp or two from Roy and my father, the piano moved forward until two or maybe three

feet of it projected beyond the first stair.

“OK. OK. Get her right at the balance point, and then we will lift up the back and slide her right down,” Millard said as he backed a couple more steps down the stairs.

Roy pulled the pipe out of his mouth for a moment.

“Shouldn’t we take off the wheels? Won’t they catch on the treads of the stairs?”

“Naw,” Millard replied, “We’ll just bump it down. It’ll go easy.”

“Want me to lift her now?” Carl grunted. He took a fierce grip on the thick mahogany end of the upright.

I think Millard had some premonition too. He moved a couple steps away from the piano down the stairs.

“Here she goes!” Carl said.

He lifted the back. The piano tilted until it was at the same downward angle as the stairs. It was much easier to see how steep the angle of the stairs were from the ground level. They were steep.

Roy watched Millard move down and away from the piano.

“Hey Millard, shouldn’t you stay close to it so you can hold it in case it begins to slide?”

And, as though it was a command that the piano heard, at the word “slide,” at that very moment, it began to slide.

“Grip! Shit!” Was all I heard Carl say.

Millard rotated in a flash, moving out of the way of the plunging behemoth. He clung with his back to the skinny railing as the piano accelerated by him. My father and Roy stood with their hands under the now missing piano. Roy dropped his pipe. My father’s mouth fell open. Carl threw his hands in the air.

“JESUS H. CHRIST!” Millard shouted.

There was a zipping sound of rising pitch as the piano hurtled down the stairs. The brass wheels weren’t rolling; they plowed the wood from the edges of every wooden

tread. Splinters flew in the air.

At the bottom of the stairs, the piano crashed to a stop when the wheels took off the last tread and struck the pavement at the bottom. Every key of the piano sounded. It was a thunderous 88 note chord. The finale of that performance.

I ran up to the piano, expecting it to be shattered. The four momentarily paralyzed men jumped into action and thundered down the stairs.

“Well, she came down all right! Didn’t she?” Roy commented redundantly.

My father bent down, examining the wheels and the leading edge of the piano. Nothing seemed obviously broken. We looked back up the stairs. Two grooves the width of the wheels made a straight line from the top landing to the still embedded wheels in the back.

“Let’s get her flat on the ground and take a look.” Millard said.

Carl eased around to the front. He lifted the piano with another mighty grunt. The four men staggered, and huffed, and swore until it sat on its four wheels on the asphalt behind the truck.

My father lifted the cover over the keys. The ivories grinned at us. Nothing broken there either. He played each note. It was no more or less in tune than it had been before its ride down the stairs.

Roy retrieved his pipe, cleaned it, and filled it from the pouch in his pocket.

We looked up at the ruined stairs.

“Have to get those fixed. Could you do it, Carl?” My father asked.

Carl was a carpenter. He scratched his chin.

“How much did you pay for the piano?”

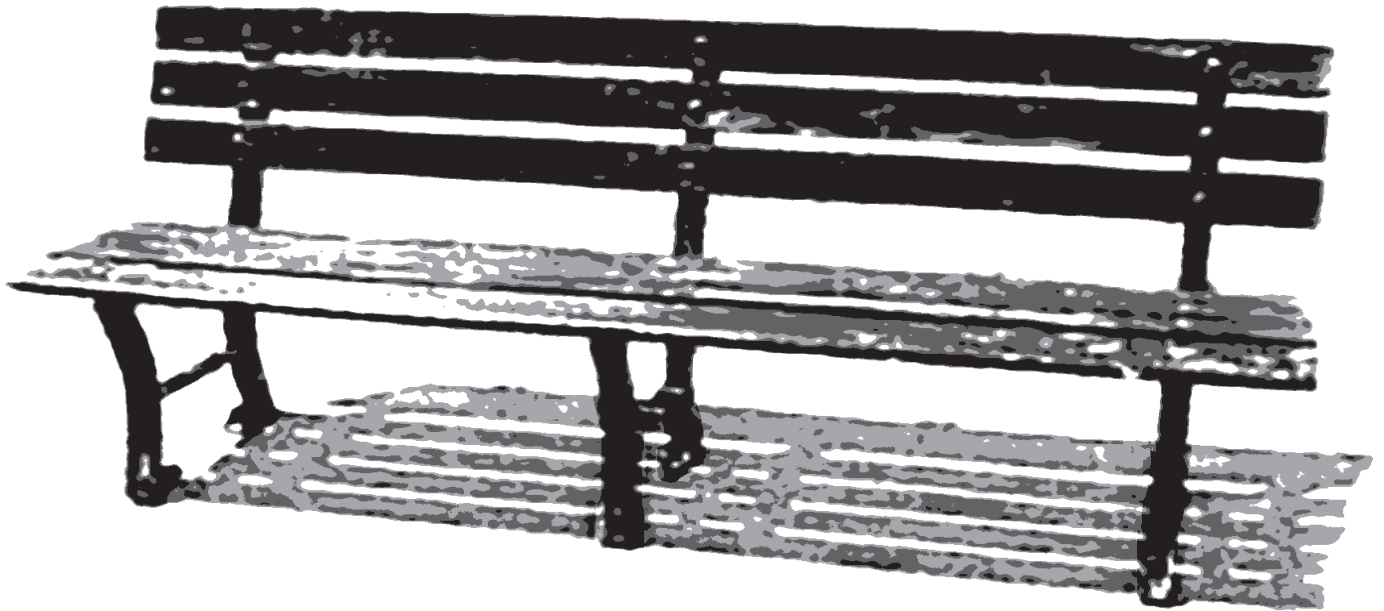
“Twenty five dollars.”

Carl grunted.

“I can fix the stairs but it will cost more than the piano.” ♦

The Bench: 1965

BY CHRISTIN MILGROOM WORCESTER



JONATHAN AND I take turns sipping cool water as the other holds down the hard, silver handle of the bubbler. When it's my turn, I stand on the second step carved into the cement fountain for small children, because I am still shorter than five feet. As water trickles from my chin, I giggle and look toward Jonathan's grin. Laughing, he stands tall beside me. He's handsome in the sunshine with his tight, brown curls. We're not allowed to spend time together after school, but this playground empties by late afternoon. We feel safe.

I've ridden only six blocks on Beacon Street from Holly Road to Dorset and through the back, dirt driveway into the Angier School

playground. He's ridden all the way from West Newton to Waban to be with me; I love him for that.

The green, wooden benches edging their way around the baseball diamond draw us to them; it's that or the cold metal of the monkey bars. Pointing to my corduroy skirt, with a bow and extended arm, Jonathan chooses the bench. "Even if you weren't wearing that skirt, I'd rather sit beside you." We settle in with just a bit of space between us. Quiet at first, we're startled when my bike topples down behind us. We laugh as he slides off the bench to right the bike.

His parents forbid any out-of-school activities. They've explained they trust their son to do the right thing and assume he'll leave "that white girl from Waban where she belongs." My mother, a Baltimore banker's daughter with a law degree and a conscience, likes Jonathan. His father is a judge and his mother a "professional woman." My father, a Gloucester fisherman's son with a college degree and a factory, despises Jonathan without knowing he exists. My father would hate the "uppity" judge and condemn any mother not home with her children. Jonathan and I meet despite what our parents want and expect of us; we know what is right. After all, it's 1965.

Jonathan and I hold sweaty, teen hands. I wonder how his large, dark hand holds my small, light one so gently. We talk and laugh too loudly until we relax into the calm of the deserted elementary school field. We've barely kissed, and only when we're alone; we'd never chance it in public. Our families watch the news and we've all talked about the troubles in Southie. Our social studies teacher taught us about Rosa Parks' courage and the power of Malcolm X. And, we understand we must be careful. Even in Newton. So, it's enough to talk and share sun and October breezes, for now.

We like our classes at Warren Junior High, and we often talk about teachers. Mr. Vann earns our loudest laughter as we joke about his behavior. Jonathan reminds me about the time the squat "monkey man" put a pencil in his ear and walked 'round the classroom to encourage our attention to some readings. All we noticed was the blunt end of the yellow pencil going in, and Mr. Vann examining the eraser when he slid it out. Few social studies facts held our interest compared to that.

We chat about Mr. St. Pierre, and Jonathan jumps up off our bench to imitate St. Pierre's

strut and mimes the man's delicate pull of his handkerchief freeing it from the suit jacket pocket. With his book of Shakespeare in one hand and hankie in the other, St. Pierre minces in front of his desk. We watch and we listen. At any moment, he might stop and demand an answer after reciting a line to us, "This above all: To thine own self be true." Jonathan's miming is flawless as he softly pats the imaginary handkerchief across his lips then commands, "Stand, face the class Miss Christin. Speaker?"

We giggle. Jonathan sits back down beside me then shifts a half turn so he's facing me. My hand on his knee assures him I prefer it that way. Within minutes, he removes my hand. His face stills. He drops my other hand from his as I lean into him. Puzzled, I tilt my chin upward. His body now facing forward, mouth barely moving, he whispers, "See the guys on bikes across the field? There, near the back of the gym? Move to the end of the bench, now." I shiver at Jonathan's cold command and, out of surprise, obey. My throat too small as I swallow, I slide then sit forward as Jonathan pushes back against the hard, green slats. With back straight, shoulders up and chest out, he looks bigger. I feel smaller.

As the group of boys approaches, I see my oldest brother, Freddy, among them. I relax and turn to reassure Jonathan everything's fine. He doesn't even answer me. With a side slide of tires, each boy stops at the fountain in a spray of dirt and pebbles. After a gulp from our bubbler, they pretend to ignore us. Then one by one they circle their bikes around our bench. I don't understand what's wrong, but I feel cornered. Words tip-toe up my throat and stop on my tongue just behind my front teeth. In a mix of anger and glee, my brother's face threatens. I've learned to remain calm despite a pull inside my chest. Smiling to charm, I look up and

say, “Hey, what are you guys doin’ here? Is there a game?”

Freddy’s friend, Hank, catches the handle bars and steadies the bike for Freddy to get off. He approaches and grabs my arms then yanks me off the bench into his body. His eyes never let go of Jonathan’s eyes, “What are you doin’ with him?” Startled by the force of his words, I feel my knees lock. His growl continues, “Dad’s gonna’ kill you.” I flinch with each word thrown and know to stand still until the ugliness leaves him.

When he turns to grin at his friends, I wrench my wrists free of his clawing grip. “What the hell does that mean? Leave us alone, Freddy, we’re just talking.”

Without word or warning, he slaps my face. My cheek burns red, then I notice Jonathan’s paled knuckles gripping the edge of our bench. I rub my cheek, but hold my tears so he’ll know I’m OK. Jonathan doesn’t move. I search Freddy’s eyes before shoving fists at his chest and yelling as anger replaces my fear, “Are you crazy? Mom’s gonna’ kill you for hitting me. There’s nothing wrong here except what you and your buddies are doing.”

Next, Freddy spits words toward Jonathan’s expressionless face, “He’s the wrong color. I’m goin’ home and Dad’s comin’ back. Better take your bike and move. Dad hates people like him—you’re gonna get it this time.”

I stare into his wild, angry eyes and wonder from where they come. I know he doesn’t want to hurt me; he’s showing off. He’s learned I won’t back down. To those forming a sneering circle he calls, “Let’s go. She’s done.” He taunts me with his Tom Selleck smile gone bad, and his eyes glint with pleasure as he pushes me back down beside Jonathan’s rigid body. A loud snickering follows the trail of bikes Freddy leads away from us.

Jonathan remains motionless until the last boy kicks our bikes down behind the bench and circles away. Then, in an unfamiliar tone, “You understand. Right? I couldn’t help you.”

“It’s OK. There were just too many guys with Freddy. I’ve told you about his temper; he’s hit me before. They’d never really hurt me.” Jonathan stands. I watch him lift our bikes from the ground and roll mine to me.

“That’s not the point. I wanted to help you, and I didn’t get up. We’re in ‘White Waban’ and they would hurt me. I’m the wrong color here. Like your brother said, ‘What are you doing with me?’”

I smiled up at his glistening eyes. “We’re friends, Jonathan. Don’t worry, we’ll figure this out. We can be like Rosa Parks, but on a playground bench.”

He shook his head and frowned down into my eyes. “You don’t understand. I had to sit and watch. I couldn’t help you.” Jonathan fixes a smile in place then leaves me before I can respond.

I watch his back while he pedals away. As tears drop onto my skirt, I grip my handlebars and slowly circle around the diamond. Then I sit down but on a different bench before navigating the rutted driveway out to Dorset Road. For the first time I can remember, home is too few streets away. ♦



←—————→
A VISUAL ARTS ESSAY

Water

WATERFALL AT LU-SHAN

*Sunlight streams on the river stones.
From high above, the river steadily plunges—
three thousand feet of sparkling water—
the Milky Way pouring down from heaven.*

BY LI BAI (LI PO), 701-762, CHINA



Ashuelot Dawn

PAMELA MARSHALL



Pemaquid Lighthouse

ARTHUR SHARENOW



The Lighthouse off the Oregon Coast
ARTHUR SHARENOW



Reunion
EMILY PASSMAN



Reflections in the Abagadasset River in Maine

DAVID EMERSON



Why Not?

FRANK HAZEL

E. A. Ammah: Custodian of Ga Culture

BY MARION KILSON

About the time I was ready to write a thesis for my doctoral degree, my husband was invited to come for a year as a visiting professor at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. We had two very small children, who came with us, so I needed to find a topic for my thesis that I could work on in Ghana.

In looking around, I discovered the Ga community living in Accra. The Ga were an unusual African urban community in so far as most African cities are built by immigrants. Usually, there was a colonial center and people came to work in that center from other places and so the population grew. The Ga, on the other hand, I learned, had always lived in Accra, so the city grew around them. They were the long-term urban population rather than one that was based on people coming from elsewhere. In other words, they formed the core of Accra.

This meant, in part, that they had access to Western education and occupational statuses earlier than other people, but it also meant that they could continue to observe some of their own traditions. They could keep traditional kinship structures for instance. They could keep traditional religious patterns, although they might be involved in Western religions as well. So, they were an interesting group from that point of view and I decided to study them.

People at the university said, well, if you're interested in the Ga, the person to talk to is a man called E. A. Ammah. Mr. Ammah had made a lifelong study of his natal Ga culture.

He'd lectured and written extensively about Ga topics over the years. So, I went and met him. At first, he kept me at a distance. What did this white woman want with the Ga? What was she planning on saying about them? A British anthropologist had previously published a book about the Ga which, as far as Mr. Ammah was concerned, was inaccurate and full of wrong assumptions. With me, he assumed the role of watchful teacher. I had topics I wanted to talk about and he would answer my questions and then he would give me homework to do. This formal pattern went on for a while but then our relationship began to change. He invited me to events and ceremonies with his family. I witnessed a naming ceremony during which an infant goes from being a 'thing' to being a person. I went to funerals with him and to one of



his daughters' betrothal ceremony. Then, there was the election of a new king and because Mr. Ammah was the head of one of the three royal families, we got to go. He even brought me to the initial conversations about the selection of the new king.

Though he has since died, I will always remember Mr. Ammah as a man of dignity and intellect, someone for whom I had a great deal of respect. I cherish the privilege of the time I had with him. The piece below is dedicated to him.

FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR
BY PAMELA MORIARTY

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, I found boxes of my Ga research materials that had been hidden away for twenty years in an upstairs closet. Among my research notes, field diaries, preliminary analysis of song lyrics, Ga-English dictionaries, and Xeroxed copies of articles on Ga culture, I rediscovered long forgotten manuscripts and articles written by E. A. Ammah. He had been one of my most important mentors in studying the culture and society of the Ga people of southeastern Ghana.

After starting life as a fisherman when a young boy, E. A. Ammah went to school. He completed middle school before beginning a long career as a clerk in the national railway department in Accra. Throughout his career Ga ethnography was his avocation. He told me that he refused to accept positions outside Accra lest he lose opportunities to study his natal culture. His reputation as an authoritative ethnographer was appreciated throughout the Ga community and beyond. He had assisted several university faculty members in their Ga studies. He was the first Ga person to speak on the radio about Ga traditions and had published several essays in Ghanaian newspapers over the years. The rediscovery of my collection of Mr. Ammah's papers led to the decision that my next big project would be editing and publishing a compendium of his work.

After deciding to try to publish his writings, I began to read my field diaries to track my interactions with Mr. Ammah. I found

references to experiences that I remembered and those that I had forgotten. I had forgotten that several times he had told me that he was very suspicious of "Europeans"—a term Ghanaians used for white westerners, and that he did not appreciate the condescending ways in which researchers—especially anthropologists—often interacted with and wrote about Africans. Despite being white and an anthropologist, I managed to escape his censure and over time to gain his trust. I had forgotten that in 1964, he claimed that he did not know his birthdate, but in 1968, he told me that he was born on July 16, 1900.



Mr. Ammah

I remembered how his position as head of one of the three royal houses had made it possible for me to attend meetings and ceremonies surrounding the installation of a new Ga king. I had forgotten how he had gotten so annoyed with ceremonial missteps at the king's enstoolment that he had threatened to write the Ghanaian government to invalidate the

ceremony. Although other members of the royal council dissuaded him from sending the letter, he refused to help the councilors to prepare for the ceremonial presentation of the king to his people. Nevertheless, he took his place on the dais beside the king at the ceremonial presentation by virtue of his office as head of a royal house.

E. A. Ammah became an invaluable mentor to me as I sought to understand Ga culture and society. At first we met in rather formal interview sessions twice a week. These

sessions continued throughout the ten months I was in Ghana, but he soon began to invite me to attend various ceremonies surrounding the installation of a new king, the life transition rituals of members of his extensive kinship network, and the cycle of religious rites surrounding the cultivation of millet for various gods. Accompanying me to these events often involved considerable dislocation in his personal life. More than once we met at 4 a.m. to attend a ceremony; once it was after 2 a.m. when I left him at the gate to his compound. Although he occasionally withheld information by professing ignorance of a subject which weeks or even years later he discussed freely, he never consciously distorted information and openly acknowledged the limits of his knowledge, especially during my second field trip in 1968 when I focused on Ga religion. Although such integrity was an inherent aspect of his personality, it related also to his definition of my potential role as an accurately authoritative communicator of information that he had gathered over the years. I believe that was why he entrusted copies of his papers to me.

A close reading of E. A. Ammah's published and unpublished pieces reveals that his ethnographic vision had two principal components. The first was ensuring the accurate recording and interpretation of Ga institutions and the second was positioning Ga culture within the context of other world cultures. The first was a concern from the time he began researching traditional Ga religion in the 1930s and the second seems to have emerged in his writing in the early 1960s. Important as his essays on Ga polity, kinship structures, life transition ceremonies, and religion are, the truly remarkable essays are his comparative ethnographic essays in which he examines correspondences between Ga religion and other cultural traditions.

Examples of such correspondences include the mediating role between human beings and God of the saints in Roman Catholicism and of the gods in Ga religion, and the ritual parallels of purification and prayer of the Passover feast of Judaism and those of the Ga harvest festival of Homowo. In comparing Ga thought with other traditions E. A. Ammah drew upon a variety of sources including *The Bible*, articles in *The Hibbert Journal*, notable anthropological monographs on African and Latin American societies, and various encyclopedias as well as Islamic, Indian, and Buddhist teachings.

What are the roots of E.A. Ammah's ethnographic vision? Why was it so important to him to insist on the accurate recording of his own culture that he was willing to sacrifice career advancement by refusing to work outside Accra? What did he hope to achieve by showing correspondences between Ga philosophy enshrined in religious songs and those of major world religions? Although I can only conjecture about the roots of his ethnographic vision, I think his pride in his cultural heritage, his awareness that Ga culture was less studied and less well known than other Ghanaian cultures such as those of the Ashanti and Ewe peoples, and his wish to demonstrate the sophistication of African thought contributed to his years of research, reflection, and writing. His papers serve as a tribute to the vision of a man who once proudly proclaimed:

Why go to ancient Greece

And other far off lands,

In search of golden fleece?

'Tis here, where Ghana stands.



Trail Lake Ranch, Dubois, Wyoming

BY MIMI AARENS

Ruffles of rushing water

Wrap around the granite rocks.

Are they born from the droplets of cumulus clouds

Or the ice field high on Middle Mountain?

Will they wander through the high grass meadows

Passing the Russian Willows' undulating grayness

And the riparian marsh

Where cottonwoods grow?

Breezes of the Wind River

Tumble into the valley

Dancing with the greenness of life here.

They murmur around the cabins

Before ascending the sandstone cliffs

Where Ancient Sheepeters left

Multitudes of marks

We call

Petroglyphs.



What a Way to Be

BY IRENE HANNIGAN

“MY NAME IS JAN,” she said as she gazed around the table at the gathered group of aspiring poets, “and I’ve always wanted to write a poem. I decided that at the age of ninety-three it was about time that I tried.” She never mentioned that she was a prolific author of young adult and children’s books and had even written two books of humorous and poignant essays about being old when she was in her eighties.

When she called me a couple of days before our next class to ask for a ride, I was happy to help her out. I live close by. “Now before you say yes so fast,” Jan said, “you need to know that I don’t move very quickly, my hands don’t always do what I want them to do and on top of that I come with a walker.”

“That doesn’t bother me,” I said. “I’m retired; I’m not in a rush anymore.” What I didn’t admit was that, after a little sleuthing on the Internet, I discovered she had written *The Hungry Thing*—a book I had enjoyed reading to my second graders when I was a teacher. How could I resist the opportunity to get to know the author and perhaps have a chance to talk with her about writing? I was an avid writer and poetry was a new genre for me, too.

When I arrived in the lobby of her building, on that cold day in January, she spotted me immediately. She waved her hand in the air, shook her head and yelled out. “You see, I warned you. I can’t even zip up this friggin’ jacket. What’s wrong with it? Can you do it for me?” I tried not to smile as I zipped up her jacket before heading out to my car. While she situated herself in the front seat, I wrestled her walker into the back. I took a

peek over her shoulder to be sure she was buckled in; we were off to our poetry class.

“I’ll bet I’m the oldest person you know,” she stated as we drove. She happened to be right. A few days later when I asked if I could visit her she remarked, “Why in the world would you want to hang around with an old lady like me?” I told her I happened to have a few good friends who were in their eighties, and hoped that might satisfy her. Did Jan think I was too young to be her friend, as if there were an age requirement for friendship? Perhaps at her age she had all the friends she either needed or wanted; it does take time and energy to make a new friend but, in the end, it didn’t take us very long at all.

Jan and I often told each other that we met at exactly the right time in our lives. As she was learning to navigate the new terrain of assisted living, I was entering my own land of retirement without a map to guide me. While I was initially attracted to Jan because she was a writer, the more time I spent time with her, the louder a voice inside me said, what a way to be.

In addition to our weekly poetry group meetings, which eventually met in her studio apartment, I visited Jan at least one other time pretty much every week. I enjoyed learning about how she was spending her days. While reading and writing were the only two pastimes we shared, she loved hearing about the drawing courses I was taking, the writing workshops I was offering and the piano lessons I had just begun. As I responded to her questions I realized how productive my days were and how much I was continuing to learn and grow.

Whenever I arrived at her apartment, I would find her sitting at her weathered wooden desk in front of a refurbished desktop computer that had an oversized monitor to accommodate her failing eyesight. Somehow, even with neuropathy, she was still able to find her way around the keyboard with its faded letters and temperamental keys. In one corner of the desk there was always a vase overflowing with fresh flowers that her daughter Anne replenished every few days when she visited.

“Oh, Irene, I’m so glad to see you,” was always Jan’s greeting. “How about a cup of tea?” I filled her electric pot with water, pressed down the lever and put my jacket on top of her motorized scooter, which she parked right inside the door and had affectionately named Joey.

In addition to our afternoon tea parties, Jan also kept a huge bottle of Scotch on hand, which she offered me on many a Friday afternoon, providing I would pour. She much preferred our conversations, as well as the camaraderie of her poetry group friends, to any of the activities and social events arranged for the residents.

“Why would I want to join everyone for drinks?” she asked me one afternoon when a caregiver knocked on her door to say they were serving margaritas downstairs. She then pointed to a decorative sign displayed under plexiglass on her desk with the letters ITOFTS. She often pointed to it when a knock on her door signaled an invitation to join in a sing-along or another social event. It stood for—I’m Too Old For This Shit. Jan told me that she had never been a joiner and wasn’t about to start now. She knew how she wanted to lead her life and realized how fortunate she was to be able to do so for so long.

Some of our get-togethers also occurred at a nearby Starbucks. Jan loved being able

to drive herself there atop Joey. Usually she arrived first and would claim a seat at an outside table. But on other occasions, when I was the first to arrive, I’d spot her whizzing through the parking lot, pedal to the metal, wind in her hair until she expertly negotiated the ramp and came to a full stop beside me.

As much as Jan enjoyed having Joey transport her to various nearby locations, taking a car ride was also a treat. “Is this an ice-cream-for-lunch day?” Jan would inquire in an email in anticipation of our afternoon visit. During the summer months we made the rounds of various nearby ice cream stands. “Now don’t forget the Styrofoam bowls,” she was quick to remind me. “Why don’t you just keep a bag full of bowls in the trunk of your car?” We had decided that even the kiddie cup portions were generous enough to share. Black raspberry with chocolate sprinkles was our favorite.

Whether we were in Jan’s apartment or at Starbucks or having ice cream together we never ran out of things to talk about. Jan liked to say that all she did was write, but I could tell she was thrilled with her discovery of poetry. She said writing poetry enabled her to explore her own mind in a manner that was both new and satisfying. She also loved having a project to work on and she predicted that the sketchbooks I was now maintaining would also be a gratifying project. Jan was right. Eventually my sketchbooks included writing and my journals contained illustrations. Jan helped me to see that any creative endeavor coupled with continuous learning is the route to sustained happiness as we age.

Jan and I were friends for three years, until the day she died in her sleep, exactly two weeks after the publication of her final project— her second book of poems entitled *The Other Shoe*. ♦

The Politics of Food

BY ROBERT ISENBERG

MY FRIEND ALFIE invited a new acquaintance named Vinnie to his home. Vinnie had recently arrived from Italy. Alfie was trying to brush up on his Italian as they conversed in the kitchen. He had put some chocolates out for Vinnie. Alfie noticed that Vinnie was devouring almost all of the chocolate. Finally, Alfie said, “Do you know that too much chocolate isn’t good for you?” Vinnie replied, “My grandfather lived to one hundred and seven!”

“Was that because he ate a lot of chocolate?” asked Alfie.

“No,” said Vinnie, “it was from minding his own business.”

When Governor Dukakis ran for president in the eighties, for some reason he advised that we should all be growing Belgian endive in our backyards and munching on it, rather than junk food. I believe this cost him as many votes as the tank photo.

People don’t want to be told what to eat and what not to eat! Part of Bill Clinton’s charm and access to the average voter is that we all knew his taste in food was as disgusting as ours.

Look what “Who would you rather have a beer with?” did for “W”!

Recently, the press revealed some of President Trump’s food favorites. This could be the number one reason Trump hates the media. After all who among us wants the world to know that we had Kentucky Fried Chicken for lunch?

It was also reported that the President had lunch with Chris Christie. The President was explaining to the governor that although he could order just about anything, he favored the White House’s version of meat loaf. This no doubt endeared the President to millions

of Hillary’s “deplorables.” The press also reported that the President loves steak well done with lots of ketchup. I presume Heinz.

Governor Christie’s response was, “It doesn’t matter to me, as long as it’s food.” Steak with Heinz ketchup could change John Kerry’s mind regarding President Trump, since Secretary Kerry, for better or worse, is married to none other than Teresa Heinz, inheritor of the Heinz name and a lot of that fortune.

We’ve all seen that waiter’s look in a so-called fancy restaurant, when we have the nerve to ask for tartar sauce for our Chilean bass that was brushed with a hint of lemon. It could be worse. We could have asked for mayo or, heaven forbid, ketchup. It may not please the waiter, but if you’re a politician it’s a vote getter.

How much did the issue of food have to do with Hillary’s demise? In my opinion, lots. I’m sure that if Hillary had asked for Kraft’s Thousand Island instead of French vinaigrette on her kale salad, she would be president today. As a matter of fact, had Hillary cried out to the waiter, “Hold the kale and bring on the iceberg,” we’d be talking a landslide.

Somehow, we knew that when she did indulge in junk food, it was with a great deal of guilt.

Guilt is not something President Clinton or President Trump ever experienced, certainly not over food.

The 107-year-old man had it right, “Mind your own business, especially when it comes to food.”

I’m sure that before we read this article, most of us had soaked up the countless reasons why the presidency was won. Now we can all be thankful for this simple and totally correct explanation.

It’s all about the food, but remember to keep the food simple, stupid! ♦

A High-Quality Date

BY MARLENE SCHULMAN

THE RITUAL STARTED on Saturday morning of the big day. First, the hair—either an appointment at the hairdresser’s or a home job, which entailed a shampoo, the application of a gelatinous liquid known as wave set, and the winding of individual sections of hair in clean rags to ensure glamorous curls in stick-straight hair. After consultations with friends, the decision as to what to wear was made.

In the late afternoon, a bath was in order, with due care not to disturb the hibernating hair. A short rest was next, followed by an early supper to provide energy to proceed with dressing. The worst was the girdle, a now obsolete and unknown undergarment that was *de rigueur*, even if there wasn’t much of anything to hold in. Anyway, it held the garters which held up the nylon stockings with the seams down the back. Not only had space travel, transistors and silicon computer chips not yet been invented, but pantyhose and seamless stockings were still wonders of the future.

After the installation of the underwear, which included, of course, the ubiquitous Maidenform bra, the application of makeup and perfume was next. Sometime during this phase, the rag curlers were removed, and the resulting hairdo closely resembled the electric coiffure of Elsa Lanchester as the Bride of Frankenstein. This catastrophe was corrected by the use of yet more wave set, and set it was—like hardening cement on the driveway.

Then it was time to put on the dress, the ankle strap, high-heeled, open-toed platform shoes, and appropriate jewelry. A small evening bag held lipstick and an

honest-to-goodness cloth handkerchief, as Kleenex was not yet in wide use on dates. Pretty leather gloves, although never worn, were an absolute necessity. Then there was nothing further to do but wait for the blind date to arrive. All my dates were blind, as no one who had actually met me ever asked me out.

The doorbell rang and there he was, whoever he was. After reciprocal appraisals and uneasy smiles, the date began in earnest. All else was prologue. Maybe we went to the movies, a wise choice as it negated the need for much conversation, or maybe to the Totem Pole dance hall in Newton. This was considered a very high-quality date and usually included another couple.

Although kissing on the first date was not generally thought to be proper, sometimes it happened. It took place at the secluded Chestnut Hill Reservoir, where cars somehow found their way in the darkness. Then, a whole new set of problems presented itself. Which way to turn the head to prevent an encounter of noses? Then there was the problem of the pressure of the teeth against the inside of the lips. You see, the open-mouthed kiss was far in the future and tongues were not even under consideration at that time. If there was some fumbling taking place in any area below the chin, I never felt it through the layers of dress, sweater and winter coat, but still one has to allow for the possibility that it might have happened. Then there was the awkward “Goodnight” at the door, which was really the final good-bye, as they rarely, if ever, called again. ♦

My Bad Idea

BY REBECCA BAKER MORRIS

IT WAS SPRINGTIME in Massachusetts. There was no time to lose. It was time to plant new flowers, bushes and maybe a tree in my garden. I called Doug, my landscaper. He arrived the next week so that we could review the possibilities.

I asked him what type of trees he had at his nursery. I wanted something unique. I always wanted something unique or quirky or striking or whimsical or all of the above. While his stock was exceedingly healthy, it was sometimes boring.

“Do you have a ginkgo tree or a holly tree?” I asked him.

“No, I don’t have either tree at my nursery. Becky, over the last three years, I have planted a redbud tree, a pea tree, a Japanese umbrella pine and two Japanese thread leaf maples in your yard. Not to mention all the bushes and flowers we have planted. You can’t see a single house or neighbor from your backyard. You do not have room for one more tree in your yard!” Doug was emphatic. “You should live on a farm. Then, you could have all the trees you want.”

I smiled at him and thought, we will see about that. I buried that thought and began my rounds of local nurseries and not so local nurseries. I went to New Hampshire for wild flowers, Connecticut for peonies and online to Dave’s Organic Garden for nasturtium seeds. Dave’s Organic Garden promised huge orange flowers that sat atop green leaves that looked like miniature lily pads and formed long trailing vines. I hoped the nasturtiums would be like the ones I saw at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in April which streamed 20 feet down from the balconies surrounding the courtyard.

Next, I drove to Weston Nurseries in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, and quickly filled my cart with Japanese rose colored peonies with yellow centers, pink poppies with black centers, and multi-colored portulacas.

My basket was full, so I walked back to the cashier. That’s when I saw it: a weeping blue spruce about 3½ feet tall. So perfect, I thought, for my winter garden, my favorite view from the family room. It needed a friend, of course, so I bought a dwarf Korean pine tree 1½ feet tall. It was a little crooked and had long floppy blue-green needles. Very whimsical. Just right, I thought.

After I paid for my new trees and flowers, I watched as the nurserymen arrived with a front loader and put my trees and flowers into the back of my old-fashioned station wagon. The front loader rang no bells in my mind. It should have.

On the drive home, I thought happily, I can do this. I’ll put the weeping blue spruce in the wheelbarrow, dig a hole, and slide the tree into the ground. No problem.

Arriving at my house, I backed the car up our sloped driveway, got out of the car, and opened the cargo door of my station wagon. I went to the garage, took out the wheelbarrow, lined it with a garbage bag, and positioned it as close to the back of the car as I could. Then I grabbed hold of the spruce tree and pulled with all of my might, groaning and grimacing the whole time. It didn’t budge or wobble. I couldn’t move that tree even a centimeter.

I stood there staring at the tree in frustration. Its humongous root ball was staring me in the face. I hadn’t noticed it before when the spruce tree was standing innocently on

display at Weston Nurseries. It was clearly too heavy for one man to lift, let alone someone like me who weighed 114 pounds and was not known for brawn.

Do you have a solution or not? I asked myself. Well, I could call my son and daughter. I could hear them laughing at me already. No. No. Maybe, just maybe, I thought, I can push the tree out of my car with my legs.

I climbed into the back of the station wagon and positioned myself behind the tree. It was a very tight fit. I was curled up in a ball with my knees pulled up to my chest and my back braced against the seat behind me. Slowly, I began to push, and the tree began to move. Yes! I pushed that tree right out of my station wagon. It landed with a splat and smashed that wheelbarrow flat. The front wheel flew off, rolled down the driveway, and into the street.

I realized I had to admit defeat. I could not dispose of the evidence. At least, I thought, I can get rid of the wheel in the street and what's left of the wheelbarrow. I grabbed hold of the garbage bag underneath the tree and pulled it a few inches away from the newly pancaked wheelbarrow. I left the weeping spruce tree stranded in the middle of my driveway, put the wheelbarrow in the trash, and made a call to my landscaper. "Doug, I need your help. I bought a tree, but it is too heavy for me to plant."

"But Becky, you didn't buy the tree from me."

"I know." I replied. "I bought it in Hopkinton, but the nursery is unwilling to drive to Lexington to plant just one or two trees."

"Alright," Doug answered, "I'll be over tomorrow morning."

The next morning, he arrived at my house with three men, a wheelbarrow and a frown. His wheelbarrow was much sturdier than mine, of course. I watched the men lift the tree into their wheelbarrow and almost drop it. They tried not to show any emotion on their faces when this happened, but the startled looks in their eyes betrayed them.

Once in the backyard, they dug a big hole, and with more respect, gingerly lifted the tree out of the wheelbarrow and slid it into the hole. Next, they planted the little dwarf

Korean pine a few feet to the side and in front of the Weeping Blue Spruce. They stood back and admired their work. They all agreed. The trees looked just right.

Doug was still frowning though. "Next time, call me before you buy a tree. I have weeping blue spruce trees too, you know," he said, looking me directly in the eyes. "If I don't have it, I can al-

ways order a tree for you."

"Not to worry," I replied. At least his attitude about no more trees for me had shifted. "Thanks for your help."

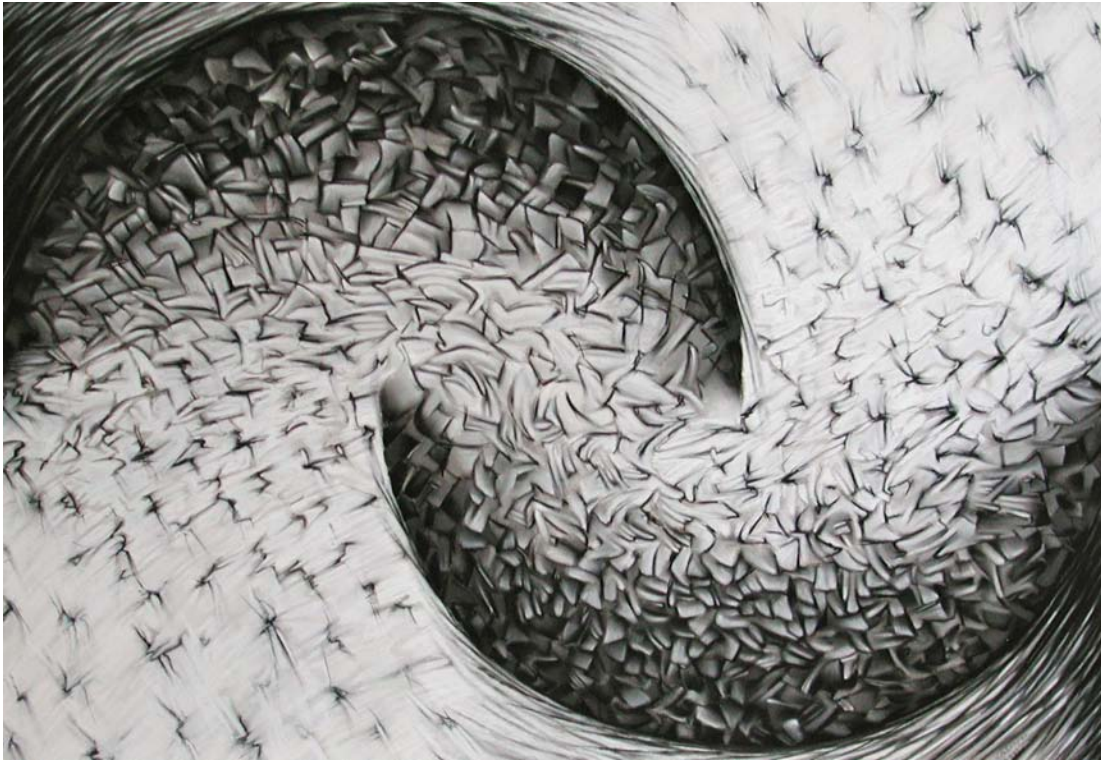
Six years later, my son moved the dwarf Korean pine tree to his house because it was getting too big for my garden. It is now fifteen years later and the tree is twenty feet tall, not a dwarf at all. As for me, it's spring again and I am at Weston Nursery searching for more unusual specimens. Is that a black bamboo tree I see? Yes! It is. I put it in my cart. ♦

DRAWING BY JUDITH COOPER *Courageous Conversation*



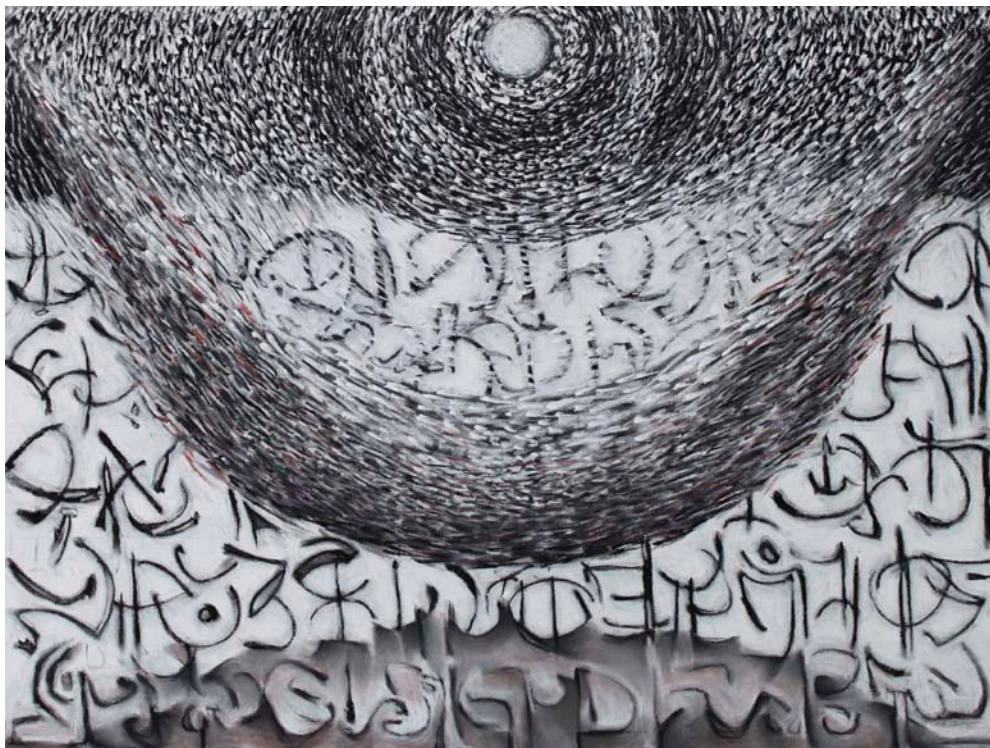
Drawings: Deep Energies & Visions

BY JUDITH COOPER



Paradigm Shift

PASTEL



Visitation

PASTEL

CONTRIBUTORS



MIMI AARENS, has been teaching memoir writing at Lifelong Learning Centers around Boston for 14 years. Her recently published memoir is *Mah & Me: Brooklyn Memories*. She is a mosaic artist and former marketing communications and public relations specialist.



DAVID EMERSON is a software engineer who has enjoyed photography most of his life. His artistic vision is to combine an instinct for composition with digital processing to convey a personal impression of the world that will resonate emotionally.



DON COHEN'S plays, *Length of Stay* and *Celestial Mechanics*, have been performed as Munroe Saturday Nights readings. He has received a Massachusetts Artists Foundation playwriting fellowship. *Pilgrims of Mortality*, his collection of short stories, is available from Amazon.



DALE FLANDERS graduated from MIT in Electrical Engineering. After working for Lincoln Laboratory and Lasertron, he founded Axsun Technology. Since leaving Axsun, he consults on optical products, works for a cancer therapy non-profit, and is writing a memoir.



With degrees from BU and Lesley, JUDITH COOPER taught art in public schools for 30 years. Since retiring, she has focused on her own art and facilitates workshops around creativity and self-exploration. See her work at www.jcooperstudio.com.



IRENE HANNIGAN, teacher, writer and retired elementary school principal, is author of *Off to School: A Parents-Eye View of the Kindergarten Year*, and *A Principal's Journey: The School as My Classroom*. She now offers study groups at Tufts' Osher Center.



Born in Greece, LINOS DOUNIAS graduated from Athens College, was a Fulbright grantee, and received his MA at the U. of Illinois. Before retiring, he was a partner at the architectural firm Arrowstreet Inc.



FRANK HAZEL (born 1918) has taken pictures since he was a teenager. His two goals when composing a photograph are: to create layers in the image, and to capture a moment when people stop noticing the camera.



ROBERT ISENBERG is the humor columnist for both the *Lexington* and *Bedford Minuteman*. He also performs his work.

REBECCA BAKER MORRIS has been writing memoirs and short stories for the last three years and hopes to compose a compendium of family stories. Previously a mutual funds executive, she now runs a writing group in Lexington.



Anthropologist MARION KILSON received her PhD in 1967 and retired as Graduate School Dean at Salem State University in 2001. Her previous publications include eight books and numerous articles on African and African American topics.

With degrees in Art and Education, EMILY PASSMAN had a successful career as an educator and graphic designer. Her work is in many private collections. Member of the National Association of Women Artists, she continues to teach privately.



Lifelong artist, LYNNE KLEMMER works in her Lexington studio where her focus for the last 9 years has been her Inuit Influences series. See more at ldk-art.com

MARLENE SCHULMAN and her late husband Joel wrote a column in the *Lexington Minuteman* featuring dogs and cats available for adoption. Now living with her beloved cat Dusty, she is still writing, inspired by Tom Daley's memoir workshops.



PAMELA J. MARSHALL is a composer of music for chamber ensembles, orchestra, and chorus. She is also a French horn player and does photography and website design. Her music is available at www.spindrift.com.

ARTHUR SHARENOW worked for many years as director of two camps in New Hampshire. After retiring, he took up photography and writing. His first memoir, *37 Summers: My Years as a Camp Director*, was recently published.



PAMELA MORIARTY has admired Marion Kilson's writings on the Ga since they met in a writing class. A retired special needs teacher, Pamela was born and raised in Dublin, Ireland and has been writing for a number of years. Her most recent publication is a memoir, *What Happened to My Mother*.

After teaching English for 35 years, CHRISTIN WORCESTER retired and began her writer's journey by creating pieces for her memoir—a work in progress. She actively volunteers in several community programs in Lexington.



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