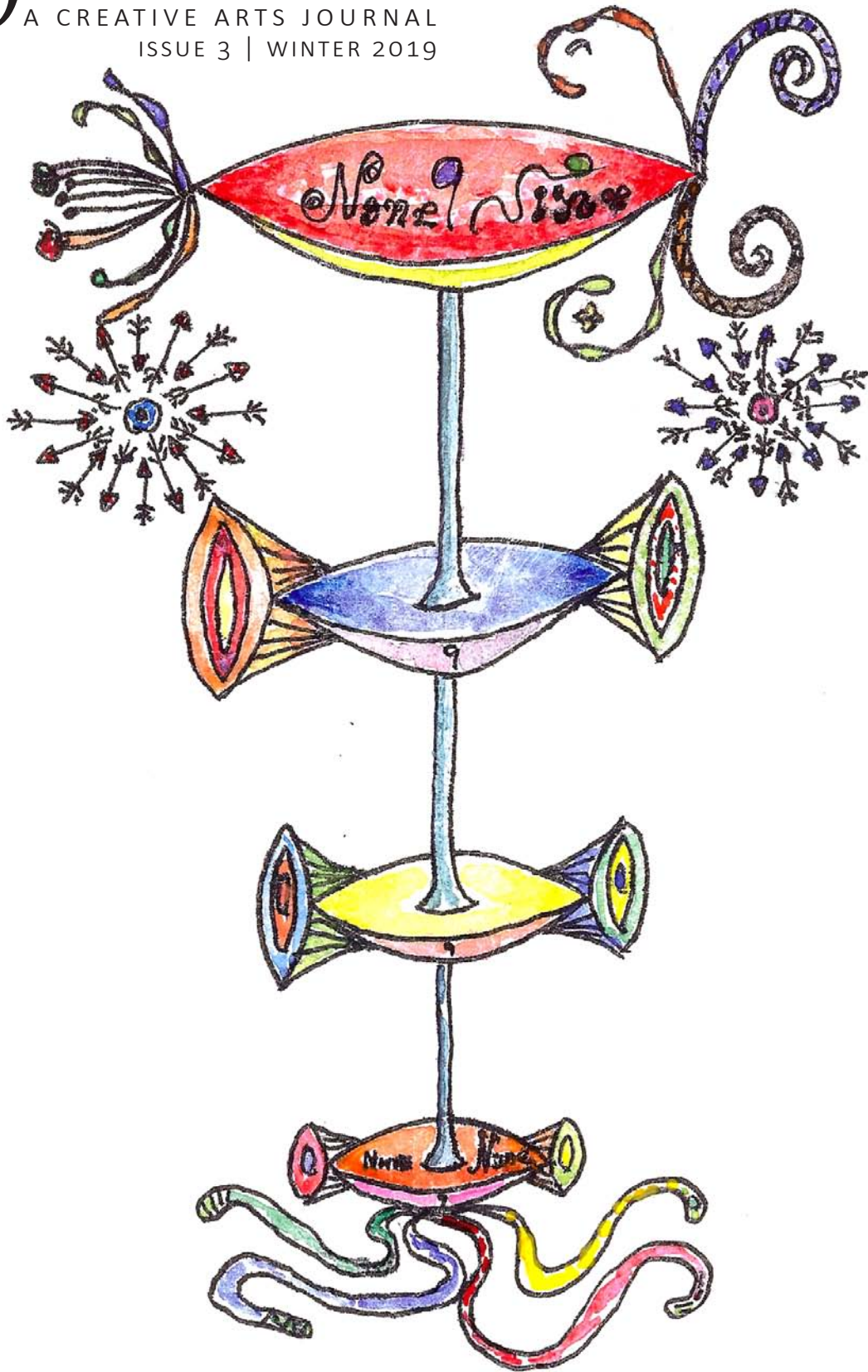


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LifeTimes

A CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL
ISSUE 3 | WINTER 2019



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*The Friends of the Lexington Council on Aging are happy to sponsor this third edition of LEXINGTON **LifeTimes**: A CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL. This twice-annual publication, which showcases the creative talents of seniors who live or work in Lexington, was started in 2017 based on a Bright Ideas grant proposal from Lexington author Mimi Aarens. The Journal is overseen by a volunteer editorial board which sets the criteria for submission and selects entries for inclusion. Distribution is primarily electronic with a limited number of printed copies available.*

Starting with the Summer 2018 edition, the Journal has gratefully received underwriting support from local businesses, recognized on the front and back covers. The Friends can extend this opportunity to others wishing to express their care for and about Lexington seniors. If you would like to become a Journal underwriter, please contact the Friends by sending an email to friends@FriendsoftheCOA.org or by mail to:

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ON THE COVER

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FRONT: *Nine*
BACK: *Time Beast*

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Winnowing

BY JAMES BALDWIN

MY DEAR, SWEET 59-YEAR-OLD soul mate wife has suddenly emerged from the basement, rivulets of tears trickling from both eyes. Trying to talk while she cries, she struggles to get the words out. “I—need you—to help me with this—decision.”

My initial reaction is surprise and concern. There are, after all, lots of tears. But then I smile both inside and out because in her arms she is clutching five stuffed animals.

Each of the five has a name. The largest is a tiger, Elaine, named in honor of one of the several older sisters who bestowed the beast on my wife. There is a skunk named Louella, a panda named, of course, Teddy. Piglet is there, too. The quintet is completed by a small baby duck known to my wife as Laurie’s Duck. Laurie is another of my wife’s older sisters who had, for

reasons unknown, abandoned the creature many years ago. My wife, being my wife, naturally adopted the orphan and has loved it ever since, despite its unromantic but historically accurate name.

And now she arrives in the kitchen in rather desperate straits with this entourage of ragamuffins.

Recent empty nesters, we are now moving out of our family home of 15 years into

a cozy condo. We are at the “winnowing” stage. Winnowing is not that easy. It makes us adventurers in a jungle of family memorabilia, discovering and recovering ancient clippings, trophies, baseball cards, letters, meaningful T-shirts, photographs (oh there are endless photographs) and now, today, the stuffed animals.

Had we considered it in advance, we probably would have expected to be emotionally ambushed somewhere on this adventure, but the power of a rediscovered letter home, a photo of the two older boys holding their little brother and now the stuffed animals is still shocking, somehow debilitating yet exhilarating at the same time, and bitter-sweet.

It seems that time has passed not just way too fast. It seems to have utterly disappeared.

And now the stuffed animals.

They aren’t my stuffed animals. They are my wife’s. She’s discovered

them in the bottom (naturally) of a trunk, under the eaves in a remote corner of the attic. While she is, in fact, the one who packed them originally (and how many times now since she was, what, 12 years old?) she was still caught off guard, her emotional detectors at parade rest when Elaine and friends suddenly appeared bringing with them the power of countless sweet and innocent memories.



Totally surprised, she was overcome by their sudden appearance at a time when we are supposed to be winnowing. Countless times in the last few weeks she has been the strong one, rhetorically asking me, “when is the last time you used that?” as I clutch one of somebody’s old lacrosse sticks. The words of some wise but emotionless person ring in my mind. “When in doubt, throw it out.”

But these...these are the stuffed animals. Every morning, for years, they were carefully, comfortably arranged on their bed. Clearly, they are not lacrosse sticks or soccer balls. They are something else entirely.

Yes. They are now several shades of grey darker than in their youth. Most of the furry parts have coalesced into various little balls scattered about their worn cloth skin. Elaine the tiger came with two piercing, metallic blue green eyes (somewhat like her donor). Once mesmerizing they are now a dull plastic green. Their dilapidated condition, though, matters not a whit to my wife. Their faces are as lovable as ever. These were her “friends,” her confidants. They were loyal and true. They were sources of solace. They were dependable. They were always there for her.

And now, faced with this painful decision she is paralyzed. It is a moment when I see several of the sides of my wife. There is, as always in times like these, the practical side. We won’t have much space in the new house. If we don’t exercise some good judgment and discipline in the winnowing process, we’ll be out of storage space in short order. And these are scruffy old stuffed animals, for goodness sake. “I haven’t even looked at them since we moved in here 15 years ago,” the practical wife reasons through the tears.

Seconds later the years of love and friendship overwhelm her reason, and she stammers that she knows she has to toss them. But that reality is a bit too much to bear, and

she needs me to do what good mates do in these circumstances. Help her come to a difficult decision.

Initially, I have to admit to chuckling at the scene. Her tears and emotion seem disproportionate to the downright forlorn and rag-tag group of animals her arms encircle. My years of experience save me though, and I recognize that I’m on the border of dangerous territory, a territory with which most husbands are quite familiar, and risk being disrespectful of her feelings. This is not recommended.

Catching myself, I search for the words that might calm her and provide the wisdom she’s looking for. This, too, is a mistake. She has a gene that allows her to see through any manipulation. No, she will demand to hear what I really think, what I would do, not what I think she wants to hear.

So I proceed with care. I explain that I know what those animals once meant to her, not that they’ve lost any meaning over the years, mind you. I venture that we’re entering a new phase of our mutual lives together and that this is the perfect time to move on and leave things like this behind in a literal sense, although I acknowledge they will always be with her in spirit. I say these things with as much calm as I can muster, but honestly am not so sure of them myself. Will I, for example, be able to discard my son’s first baseball glove? I am not so sure.

Then I watch with great interest and, admittedly, some trepidation as my wife’s practical and emotional selves grapple with compromise. Through her tears she reasons.

“Well, I—can’t just throw them—away,” she stammers and the very thought of that brings more tears. Then she arrives at the compromise. “I need to help them find a new home,” she decides.

With that she marches outside to the

curb, Elaine et al in hand, where we have left an array of other items also looking for new homes: bookshelves, desks, bins of toys, the remains of thirty years of family life that seem to disappear magically once deposited at the curbside.

At this point I lose track of this drama as I focus on the next box to pack. I don't realize that my wife has reentered the house and resumed her winnowing tasks. Not having seen her for what seems like a long time, I go outside to check, and she's nowhere to be found. I imagine the worst. I envision her, despondent, wandering the neighborhood trying to cope with her grief.

I get to the curbside to a touching scene. Each of the five animals has been carefully placed. Elaine on a bookshelf. Louella perched lovingly on the edge of the toy bin. Each one looking outward at their hoped for rescuers. But each one quite—alone. I can only conjure that my wife has assumed that one person who would take the whole lot of them is very unlikely. So each one is adorable, but quite alone, abandoned, plaintively searching and hoping to be rescued by a passerby, someone who may have more sympathy for their plight and appreciation for the pure unconditional love that only a stuffed animal can bring.

As I witness this scene, I think of my wife walking off her sadness as she trudges through the neighborhood.

Then my eyes settle on those of Laurie's Duck, and it hits me. The animals unleash all the memories for me as well. All the Little League games. The backyard games of catch. The games of h-o-r-s-e at the basket in the driveway. The stories. The love. They all come cascading down on me, and I, too, am ambushed. Standing there at the curbside before an audience of five stuffed animals, I am amazed and powerless as my own tears

flow freely just as all the memories do, recognizing the age of innocence gone by in a flash.

Now I'm operating purely on emotion. There is only one thing to do. I quickly but tenderly gather up Piglet, Elaine, Teddy, Louella and Laurie's Duck. They do not need a new home. They have one, and so it shall remain. And I have to confess, the feeling of them in my arms really helps. I am doing the right thing.

Much as my wife started this drama, I enter the house with my arms full of stuffed animals, my eyes full of tears. I am both surprised and relieved to hear her footfalls echoing in the now vacant kids' bedrooms upstairs. She isn't sadly pacing through the neighborhood after all.

I call to her and ask her to come to the top of the stairs where she peers down and sees me laden with her friends. The woman I love bursts out laughing at the sight. She, of course, had departed from her place of sadness. She had accepted that the universe would find them a new home, and it was time to move on, but she hadn't taken me with her to that place. Didn't even realize she had to.

Smiling, she comes down the stairs and embraces all of us. Together we laugh at the poignant absurdity of it all. Together we place each of them, Piglet, Elaine, Teddy, Louella and Laurie's Duck, snuggled close to each other, in the corner of the living room couch. We assure them that they will be moving with us.

We take iPhone photos of the group to keep for posterity, and to remember this crazy moment.

Perhaps only they know that there will be another trunk in another remote corner of the attic in the cozy new condo. ♦

Helpless

BY IRENE HANNIGAN

Only a lamppost
remains
at the street's edge
where the white Cape
with black shutters
and red door has been
for generations.

Every single maple and pine—
chopped, hacked, severed, split,
enlarging the parcel of land
that was big enough
for so long
for so many.

The backhoe's jaws
crunch the shingles,
bash in the windows,
crumble the foundation,
devour the bricks
of the latest victim
as I wait for the epidemic
to spread to the
house across the street
from mine
that is
FOR SALE.

Leaving Home

BY DON YANSEN

I LEFT HOME September 5th, 1959, determined never to return. Five years earlier, my father moved our family of five, without asking, from suburban Seattle to a small island five miles from the Canadian border. The island had 50 fulltime residents and three children in the one-room schoolhouse.

Our new home was a dilapidated, unheated farmhouse built by subsistence homesteaders in 1895. There was no running water or indoor plumbing—no tv, a hand cranked phone on a 20 party line and a two-seat outhouse down the hill a ways. The house came with 200 acres of forest and poor, rocky, farm land. Everything needed fixing, 5 miles of falling down fences, collapsing hay barns, the homestead itself.

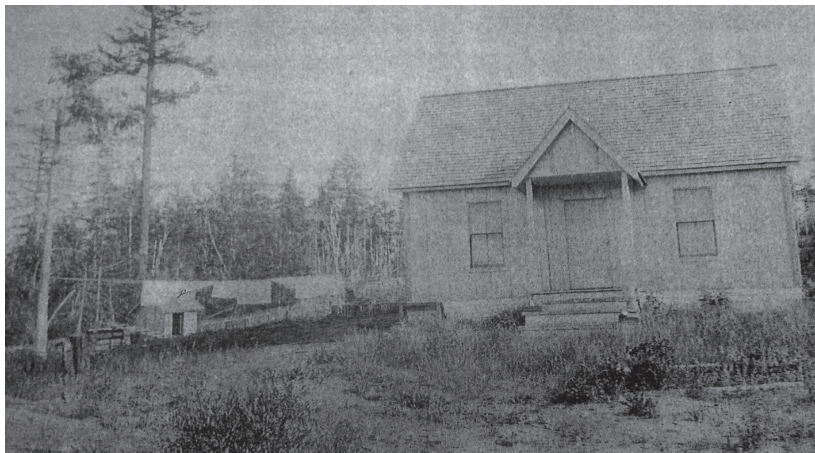
Initially, it was exciting for a boy like me, living the rural farm life—felling trees, chopping fire wood, driving tractors, pickup trucks, hunting and fishing year round—but by my mid-teens the “Little House on the Prairie” had turned into my nightmare.

I was lonely. There were no other teens. With a father whose parenting style was “my way or the highway” and an evangelical Christian mother, immense, unspoken frustration brewed. I felt imprisoned.

By 16, I was obsessed with getting as far from the farm as possible, but was afraid to tell anyone. I began living two lives: a secret, silent life—one filled with interesting people,

teens, lots of girls my age—and the real me. Outwardly, I went through the daily motions of life on the farm like a robot—a dreaming robot.

In the Fall of ‘58, I applied to MIT and to my joy, and my father’s amazement, they accepted me. From the moment of my acceptance, I was simultaneously petrified and impossibly overconfident. One moment I would be fantasizing about stepping up to the podium in Sweden and accepting my prize in physics, the next, I pictured flunking all my classes and going back to the farm—a truly horrifying thought.



I imagined Boston teeming with people, yes!—even Jewish people—I wondered if they looked different. I couldn’t wait!

Finally, the day came to leave. On the drive with my parents from our farm to the ferry dock (about 3 miles), three things circled my mind: I was never coming back, I would become a great physicist and finally, I hoped I could figure out how to get girls to take their clothes off. At that point, I knew more about cattle than teenage girls.

Beneath those thoughts, though, an ominous voice whispered, “You can’t manage your life away from the farm.” That voice, unfortunately, was never far away.

Arriving in Boston at dusk, I was let out of my cab from the airport in Kendall Square. The air was nauseating with the smell of soap and chocolate. It was, also, deserted—my

heart sank. I walked over to the back of MIT and was met with old wooden army buildings from WWII. I was shocked. This was nothing like the University Bulletin! It suddenly hit me, I knew no one, this place was old and ugly and I was probably not smart enough anyway. “I can’t do this” rang inside my head. I wanted to turn around, but all I had was a one way ticket and not much money. I had to stay.

The next morning I walked to Back Bay and instantly fell in love with Boston. Thousands of students and young people were moving into apartments, dorms and fraternities. In Back Bay, girls were everywhere. Boston looked like nirvana.

My first class was, oddly enough, Humanities. I was characteristically overconfident for no reason. I came into the class with a new friend from Chicago. As we entered our row in the middle, three boys rushed past us to grab seats right in front of the instructor. From the moment the instructor started speaking until class was dismissed, those boys wrestled verbally to demonstrate that each one knew more than anyone in the class, including the instructor.

They tore apart accepted ideas, proposed new theories, and constantly challenged the instructor. I soon learned they were from the Bronx High School of Science—what was that?

I was aghast—how had they learned so much? More worrisome was—how could I learn enough to even talk with them? Already shy about asking questions, now I was petrified to even open my mouth. If I did, it would be clear to everyone—I was essentially illiterate.

I also had trouble, initially, with calculus. Panicked about flunking such a core course at mid-term, I went to my faculty advisor in the Math department, Prof. Abramson. He

seemed genuinely puzzled by my situation. He looked at me for a few seconds, then advised me to “read the book.” I cringed, thanked him, and left. Walking back to my room, visions of being sent back to the farm flashed in my mind. “No!” I screamed to myself. “Hell or High Water, I will learn this stuff.”

I survived. I didn’t grow to love my college, but I really loved my new home, Boston, and the people that came to live here. I realized most people have their “farm” or “calculus.” Though I moved 3000 miles away, parts of the farm, my parents, are still with me.

Last summer I took my two oldest grandsons on a hike I often did when, as a teen, I needed some alone time. It was a mile or so of bushwhacking west from the farm through primeval forest.

We walked under huge Douglas firs, over sunny knolls covered with 6-inch thick moss, following deer trails everywhere—no roads, no houses, no power lines.

I told them stories of life on the farm when I was their age—the once a week baths in sheep watering tubs, the whole family in one big bed one night during a fierce winter storm, nights of hearts and charades often by candle light, shooting my first deer.

The woods were just as I had left them 60 years ago.

Like a wild bird suddenly freed from a cage so small that it could not open its wings, I flopped along the ground, finally rising haltingly into the unknown, powered by dreams of great heights and far distances.





LYNNE YANSEN
Old Hay Barn

Acrylic on canvas board
12" x 16"

Lunch Lessons

BY GERALDINE FOLEY

ILLUSTRATION BY LINOS DOUNIAS



SHOULD THERE BE a prearranged agreement as to who will explain the facts of life to the children? Maybe a sentence or two in the prenup setting forth whether it falls to the mother to tell the girls, and the father to tell the boys, for instance. Or I suppose, there's always putting a plan in place to move to a working farm so that it could all take care of itself.

It's just that it is all so awkward.

In my own instance the issue was something I hadn't even contemplated. As the mother of two sons, I was blindsided.

I suppose it all started because a pregnant friend had asked if her oldest could stay the day with us when it came time for her to deliver. The families had often visited back and forth and our children were well used to each other.

On the randomly appointed day, I got the call from the mother that she had summoned

her teacher-husband home from school as it was time to collect her for the impending event. They would drop their 5-year-old daughter off with us enroute to the hospital. The husband would come for her after the birth. It all went smoothly, and as planned.

Within the week we got together and met the new little one. My sons did not appear very captivated with this rather inert little creature who had just joined the play group. They looked, asked her name, and then went swiftly on with their busy lives.

However, it seems they were not as nonplussed as it first appeared. This became evident when about a week after that, the question came: "So where do babies come from anyway?" I was gobsmacked.

My sons were 3½ and 5 at the time and sitting at the kitchen table, waiting for their lunch. Astoundingly, it was the youngest son who was making the inquiry. The older one

looked at him admiringly, then looked to me. And so it would go as the eldest remained speechless, as if he were watching a very interesting tennis match, while the younger one did all the heavy lifting with a ceaseless volley of questions, one right after the other, trying to get to the bottom of it all.

I was at the kitchen counter, my back towards them, making sandwiches, multiple sandwiches! I pretty much stayed in that mode until the counter was full of them. I was wondering if I could start stacking them up in the refrigerator. The idea of eye contact throughout this line of questioning seemed more than I was capable of. It was all too much too soon. And I was furious that it was falling to me to be the sole respondent. Why, for the love of Mike, couldn't they address their concerns to himself? No, the explanation of the origins of life was landing completely in my lap and I was practically a kid myself. I gave it my best shot, blithering on about the eggs and the sperm and how they all got together and grew into a baby, in the mommy's stomach, for 9 months. So there you have it.

The child couldn't quite wrap his head around the dynamics and unrelenting follow up clarification was persistently sought. So I went for a book. It was kind of a children's book I had put aside for when the day came. . . But, alas, the day had come, years ahead of my expectations. I flipped through the book with chickens and cows and puppies, with all their respective paraphernalia. Words like "uterus" and the "birth canal" were bandied about. They studied the pictures and considered the words, and still were not quite getting the hang of it. "But how do the sperm get in?" the small man demanded to know. Exasperated, I exclaimed: "For god's sake they get in the same way it all gets out, through the birth canal . . . now finish your lunch!"

That shut him up and they both skulked out of the kitchen and away from their agitated mother. I was drained. I couldn't be expected to paint a complete picture all in one sitting, could I? They were of such tender ages. They would have to fill in the details with their father at some later date, I determined. They didn't need any further information from me any time soon, in my estimation.

Several weeks after that, we were driving into Boston, to meet up with their father, who would then relay them home. I remember it still, exactly where we were (the street next to the Museum of Fine Arts), but most especially, I recall the sound of the sigh that heaved out from the depths of the small boy's being. I knew it was serious, maybe urgent.

I immediately pulled over, turned off the car, turned around, and asked, with undivided attention: "Darlin', what is it?"

With a pause and another pent up exhalation, the tortured little one said: "I just will never be a daddy when I grow up."

"What do you mean you won't be a daddy?" I said, flabbergasted.

"Well, nobody will tell me how to do it," he said soulfully.

"Alright," I said, pausing to collect my courage, "the daddies put the sperm in with their penis." The two boys gave out an almighty shriek, as if someone was being ax murdered.

Given the customary use of their personal equipment, I announced: "It is impossible to go to the bathroom at the same time."

The screaming stopped. . . the dismay too, I gather, as mercifully there was never another question on the subject after that.— And by the way, the interrogator is now the father of three. ♦

What Are Words Worth?

BY ROBERT ISENBERG

A WHILE AGO I wrote a piece suggesting that the word *so* may look small, but it was definitely a bully. I also said that *so* is an obnoxious braggart. I explained what *so* had done to the word *very*.

For many years when accepting a favor or a gift, most people would say, "Thank you very much." *So* being *so* set its sights on *very*. Now people say, "Thank you *so* much."

When *so* applied for this job it showed off by saying, "Look what I can do that *very* can't do!" *So* took a deep breath, exhaled and tiny *so* became *soooooooooo*.

So grinned and offered, "I can be as large as you want me to be. It depends on the size of the favor or the gift you've received."

Now *very* is sitting on the sidelines practicing deep breathing.

I cannot tell you how many letters I received from fans of both *very* and *so*. Fans for *so* were upset that I had implied *so* had been a blowhard in order to get the job.

Very fans were just very upset.

One letter read: "I read your column regarding *very* and *so*. I was FURIOUS! I've been using the phrase *thank you very much* all my life and I'm not about to change now!" Signed, So What.

Another letter: Dear Mr. Robear, "Don't you think there is enough competition in the world? You didn't have to pin *very* against *so* to make your point. This letter was signed, Mr. I. Rate.

Someone just wrote, "Sooooo very troubled!!!"

It seems someone has dared to take on an even more inflammatory subject. I just discovered a book asking to *Banish Boring Words!* by Leilen Shelton. This piece says the

word *said* is very boring. Ms Shelton seems to be saying *said is oversaid!*

I can imagine *said's* reaction after it read this book. I'm sure *said* would have said something like, "After all the times you people have used me, it finally comes to this? I guess you'll finally be happy when it's all been said and done."

This writer doesn't stop with *said*. She wants the reader to be roused. For instance, she cites an example, "He backed away from the growling dog."

Her point is this is a very boring sentence. Leilen's suggestion is, "Slowly and carefully, he backed away from the dog." My suggestion is that he ran like hell from the growling dog. Having had some experiences with growling dogs, the last thing I want to do is move slowly. When dogs growl, I don't worry about being boring.

This author even takes umbrage with the word *boring*. In no uncertain terms, she argues that the word *boring* is boring. How can the word *boring*, which is so devastating, be boring? What is worse than being called boring? Trust me, lady, in the world of name-calling, there are very few substitutes for the word *boring*.

In the article about *so*, I also wrote about *yet*. I mentioned that few people were able to define *yet*. I'm truly grateful for the hundreds of letters I received defining *yet*. Or should I say trying to define *yet*.

Yet's biggest complaint is being misunderstood.

I received a letter, "So is the definition of *yet* 'up until now' or 'at this time'?"

They signed off, "I'll advise, but not yet." ♦

Breathing

BY VICTORIA BUCKLEY

It is another day,
Another 5:30 in the morning.
The machines breathe
Wheezy like an old accordion.
The green and red lines jerk
Across the screen,
Demanding attention.

His hand in mine is cold and dry,
A large bald man lying still,
His stomach a big snowdrift under the sheet.
I hear the sheet rustle like dried leaves.
He cannot speak or see from so far away.
I wish he would return.
His hand squeezes mine;
“Reflex only” they say but I know better.
I squeeze back matching the wheezing
machine.
We stay connected.
There are five tubes in and three out.
Now he twists around in bed,
Restless movements going nowhere.
The beeping machine gets agitated too.
I lean closer, and whisper to him,
“The Holy Spirit is entering you now,
Let it heal you and do not fight it.”

He quiets and the sheet is still again.

The air outside is thick and muggy;
The dawn light is dusky with smog.
There is no noise, no wind.
I pause, tipping my head back,
Leaning hard on my crutches.
I glare up at the gray-gold sky.
I yell, my voice angry and breaking,
“I need a miracle!”
I hear light footsteps behind me.
I peer through tear-stained contact lenses
And see a slight woman with kind eyes
Framed by long brown hair.
I do not know her,
Yet she gently embraces me,
Strong thin arms in a sleeveless dress.
And she says, “Let’s pray.”
We are alone together on this high hill
In the city still asleep at dawn.
I say, “Heavenly Father, come here
And be with him, bring him healing
power.”
She prays, “Lord, have mercy and draw
near.”
We hug each other.
Am I leaning too hard?

I drive to work.
There, the phone light is blinking red—
There is a message—
No more bad news please—
Hold your breath—
Push 2 for messages—push 0 to listen—
“It is amazing—
He is breathing on his own now.”
I breathe out—
Have I been holding my breath for days?

Picture This



MAUREEN BOVET
English Robin

Watercolor
10" x 7"



LYNNE YANSEN
Three Pots On Window Sill

Ink with Watercolor Wash
12" x 15"



MARDY RAWLS
The Chiesa Farm on Adams Street

Watercolor
22" x 28"



MARDY RAWLS
The Morehouse's House on Vinal Haven Island

Watercolor
22" x 28"



JOANNE BORSTELL
St. Brigid's Church, Lexington

Watercolor and ink
18" x 24"



JOANNE BORSTELL
Sacred Heart Church, Lexington

Watercolor and ink
18" x 24"

Ironing Man

BY NANCY KOUCHOUK



His bent posture framed
by the doorway, he sweeps
desert's dust from his
one room shop.
The ironing man labors
over cloth, pressing at seams.
His frayed gallabiya sways
to the clip-clop of hooves,
flute man's trills, and
greetings of the day.

Hand poised mid-air,
he glimpses the floral
fabric of a nubile girl.
He grips rag around iron's
hot handle on its way
back down to work.

Iron meets wet cloth
with a hiss. A bed of red
coals flickers in the half light.
He folds warm linen
with a smile.

He sees her again:
delicate ankles, same
floral dress. She stands
at the fruit seller across
the narrow street.

"I must buy tangerines!"
he says, searching his
pockets for coins.
He hesitates mid-step.
Chickens cluck their
disapproval underfoot.

Minaret calls.
He closes louvered doors,
walks towards the mosque
fingering his amber beads.

Colors of My Messiah

BY CHRISTIN MILGROOM WORCESTER

WHEN CONFIRMED IN DECEMBER 1963, by the first black Episcopal bishop, I become an official member of my church. I receive a white communion wafer and sip red wine from a golden chalice held by the Right Reverend Burgess. Why he is “right” and my priest, Reverend Foley, only “reverend” is a mystery to me. At eleven, I assume being the “Suffragan Bishop of Massachusetts” makes Burgess more correct.

With damp hands I hold my new, red leather prayer book on my knees. A cross and my name are embossed in gold. With a curious fingertip, I trace the letters CHRISTIN LEE MILGROOM and grin. My parents call me Christin only when there’s trouble. My attention, like my moving fingertip, slides up, down and across as I try focusing on Bishop Burgess’s drone. It’s a mosquito buzzing during the wrong season.

Raised seams on my white cotton gloves fight embossing for attention. Distraction shifts to my ever-fidgeting body. I’m too hot. I free arms from sleeves and slide my coat onto shoulders as I’ve watched my mother do. Soon, this grown-up gesture

isn’t enough, so I pull the coat onto my lap. I’m too cold. I tuck the coat behind me and refill the sleeves. Adjusting my hat, I worry my hair will “muss” before the coffee hour following the ceremony. Ceremony... Hmmm. If I’m ready for this honor, I’d be listening not fidgeting. Without moving, I peek at my mother. She glares with eyes that say, “Sit. Still.” I know fidgeting doesn’t fit this grown-up passage into the church community.

After receiving my prayer book at Confirmation four months ago, I decide to become a “faithful servant” to God. That proves impossible. I continue to shift and squirm. I easily avoid Mom’s wrath by appearing to follow along in my book. My quiet gasp and sideways glance assure me she’s too busy praying to notice two cards fall to my lap. The Duty of the Communicant card reads, “Strive earnestly to follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior by patterning his daily habits...” This card doesn’t use *her*, so I decide it is only for boys. I’m

relieved. I’m challenged enough by parental expectations. My focus wanders away after



reading phrases like, “Apostolic Rite of Laying on of Hands. . .”

Each Sunday since Confirmation, I search for comfort on the wooden pew, and stare ahead at the stained-glass pieces of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, for whom my church in Waban is named. Once my mind joins my eyes fixing on colors streaming in with the morning sunlight, I feel calm... for a moment.

The weekly sitting, standing, and kneeling are habitual, so I appear to be dutifully, piously engaged as lips mouth memorized words. Years of sitting quietly between fidgeted minutes in hour-long services fill my head with word placement on the prayer book page. By these words and movements that crowd me every week, I track the time left before bell ringing, incense burning, and hymn singing will end.

Knowing my four brothers are more uncomfortable than I in their wool pants and button-down collars provides little solace. Watching my oldest brother, Freddy, pinch Wally who is pulling at the tie squeezing his neck entertains me. He often forgets the “over, under and around the tree” formula for knotting his tie. Michael dutifully entertains my youngest brother, Carson.

Pinching thighs, shifting bottoms, and stifling giggles doesn't contribute to an uplifting, holy experience. But, we are a family in church. My mother “dresses” the altar during women's guild. My Jewish father sings tenor in our choir. Eventually, my brothers will assist the priest as gowned acolytes. Girls smile in stiff dresses, matching hats, and white gloves. We don't serve the congregation anything but coffee. Once the organ playing begins, the only women allowed near the altar are in the choir.

Wearing elaborately embroidered vestments dictated by the church calendar, Father Foley processes down the aisle flanked

by cross-carrying, taper-bearing acolytes. Choir members in matching cassocks follow. Backs against wooden pews, heads slightly bowed, and eyes gazing upward at the golden cross atop the altar, girls worship. This pageantry fills my Sundays for a decade.

Shortly after my Confirmation, Father Foley transfers, and we leave Good Shepherd. Dad stops singing, brothers stop serving, Mom takes us to Church of the Messiah. Going from shepherd to messiah seems a move in the right direction. Unfortunately, Father Mike's too casual and, surprisingly, I think I miss incense and bells. So, I refuse to attend services. My precocious rebellion rises at age twelve in February 1964.

“Practicing religion is important to our family, Chrissy. We'll have to find a way. You belong to the church and it's what we do.”

“Nope. Father Mike isn't even ‘almost right’ like Father Foley!”

Mom has a plan. The first of many concessions to me follows. On Wednesday afternoons, she drives me to Messiah. I spend one hour in the deserted sanctuary. No sounds. No words. All I hear are my thoughts as they shift into feelings. Solitude sparks an understanding that religious ritual isn't spirituality. I don't need church to feel peace reach into my soul. Temperature's perfect. No brothers poke or pinch. Being gloveless and hatless is the key. This feeling needs no incense or bells.

The wonder of colorful windows around the sanctuary fills my mind. Mesmerized by the afternoon light's dance through the glass, I embrace the rainbowed walls as symbols of God's presence. I kneel. My heart feels prayer; I no longer recite what's in my mind. Mom touches my shoulder as Wednesday church ends. My smile greets hers as I stand. Although creaking, my knees don't mind... ♦

Lost and Found

BY JOHN R. EHRENFELD

The Kolin Torah moves toward the Bimah,
Its story once more being told.
Torn from its home in Czechoslovakia
By Nazi soldiers passing through the town,
Tossed in a pile of exotic artifacts
From other Temples throughout Europe,
No more than a relic of a people lost—
A symbol of the Glory of the Reich—
To be ungraciously put on display in
A Museum—never-to-be-built—
Nor were the false dreams of the horde
That stripped it from its rightful home.

Found by a miracle, after the closing of the war,
Too old and worn to share the comfort
Of the other Torahs in the sacred Ark,
It rests, in its own display case, in safe repose.
The Torah comes alive once more each year,
Moving down the aisles, touched and kissed,
On its way to bare its ancient words
That remind us of our place in time.
It asks us to remember how we lived this year,
And hands us words to guide us through the next.
It offers us a choice to live or die, not literally,
But in the kind of person we will be.

It shouts to us its story: "I have died," it says,
"And so have those who heard the words
That rose from my parchment body to their ears."
Lost, not at the hands of the Great Decider,
Who sits in judgment on this Day of Days.
But by those of men who thought they
Were Better Than All the Others.
Their mistake might just be the error
That Yom Kippur exhorts us not to make.
In its lonely Torah coils, I find the strength
I need to face the challenge of a world
Where Lost and Found do alternate too much.

#METOOSWEET16

BY BARBARA DICKENSON SIMPSON

IT WAS A CRISP LATE AUTUMN afternoon the week before Thanksgiving in Carnegie, Pennsylvania, a small borough of Pittsburgh. I was returning from an afternoon of holiday shopping downtown.

I was walking up our 300-foot driveway and just arrived at the front of the three-story ornate Victorian when the ground floor tenant, Hank, a 30-something stockbroker, stepped from behind a huge old oak.

“Look at my cock, Barbara. I got it hard just for you.”

I’d seen Hank’s penis once and made sure never to look again. I just kept my gaze straight and ignored him, my strategy for the past four years. I went up to my Aunt Louise’s attic apartment where I had been living with her for the past year, since August 1967.

Louise was reading, her main activity every day. Her slope-ceilinged garret contained 12 bookcases each with dozens of hard-bound tomes which comprised the most eclectic library I’ve ever encountered.

“Hank just did it again, Louise,” I announced, as I set my four shopping bags on the sofa to unpack.

No response. “Are you going to do anything, Louise? Talk to Connie?” No response.

“Alright, Louise. I’m on my own then?” I thought to myself. Why wouldn’t she say anything to his wife? She knew I wasn’t lying. Her own sister had told her last summer of Hank’s exposing himself to her for the past three years. Yet Louise remained silent.

Then a moment’s AHA! But WHAT could she do? Perhaps my aunt’s lack of action was rooted less in a lack of will to protect me than in sheer lack of information as to how to get a man to stop engaging in that behavior.

Suddenly I fully comprehended what a ridiculous idea it was to think his wife would in any way be able to do anything. Why would she even care?

All day Sunday I found myself distracted by a growing anger I was experiencing for the first time. Why, I began to question, does this man feel so entitled to do this, to force himself on me? Maybe entitled wasn’t the right word. Safe. He knew nothing unpleasant was going to happen to him. He had touched me once—molested was the technical term—the Summer I was 12, my first visit with my aunt. But it had happened only that once because I made sure never to be alone with him and within his arm’s reach again.

But it was my powerlessness to avoid him that was at the crux of my despair. The layout of the house was such that there was only one entrance to the second floor apartment occupied by aged Mrs. Daly, and our attic. Hank’s first-floor bathroom window was directly beside it and he stood naked behind the huge double-hung window and tapped on the glass every morning when I left for school. He simply listened for my footsteps as I descended the stairs. Then, as I passed the front door on my walk down the driveway, I’d hear more insistent rapping and his calling, “Barbara? Barbara?” Every morning since September 6, 1967. If I went by the back door he just showed up there.

Meanwhile, Dick, my elder brother by three years, was severely mentally ill with paranoid schizophrenia. After he violently destroyed our small suburban tract house in Springfield, VA, a growing city 15 miles south of D. C., I went to my school guidance counselor and asked what I could do to be safe. My

parents were struggling to run their fledgling small hardware contracting business and deal with the complexities of a son whose illness was a source of deep confusion, pain and shame. I was simply overlooked.

Years later my father would explain to my utter astonishment that both he and my mother thought I was unaware on the whole that anything was seriously wrong with my brother. Dad died never knowing that beginning at the age of seven my brother periodically subjected me to scenes of torture, maiming and killing of small domestic and wild animals. I wanted out of that home in Virginia. Thankfully, the guidance counselor suggested I ask my maiden aunt, the 7th and 8th grade history teacher for the past 18 years in the Carnegie school system, if I might live with her.

I presented my case to my parents and Louise. None of them could deny the reality of Dick's house trashings and my obvious knowledge of them. Finding the living room TV set kicked in and seeing my art supplies smeared angrily on my bedroom walls, my parents finally admitted perhaps I shouldn't be there in Virginia, a latch-key kid with a brother prone to escaping from whatever mental health facility he was in.

I knew I'd have to deal with Hank, but then what choice did I have? After a weekend's considerations my father gave his consent and by the next Sunday I was a Pennsylvania resident. The next Wednesday, my first day at school, I became a registered sophomore at Carnegie High School.

As I sat on my bed and wound the key on the back of my clock I saw myself walking up the steps of the Carnegie Police Department. Then I lay my head down and went to sleep.

The next morning I sat in front of Police Chief Bernier describing the above situation. I looked him straight in the eye and I used the word penis. He sat returning into my eyes my intent stare. He asked me a few questions—

He was always home when I left for school at 7:45am? His full name, age, any other incidents of a sexual nature? I gave him five quick thumbnail sketches of exhibitionistic encounters. The Chief said, "I'll pick you up tomorrow and take you to school in my cruiser. I'll meet you at the entrance to your aunt's apartment."

It took a moment for his words to register. He was coming to the house! Tears came unbidden but I turned away quickly. What was wrong with me?

As we walked around the house, the Chief took notes and pointed broadly to each entrance. We were staring into the huge glass cube that formed the walls of the kitchen when Hank strolled in wearing only his boxer shorts. He almost laughingly did a double take then bolted from the room. Hank never bothered me again.

Fifty years later I now do what I didn't do then: I report the news of a resourceful resilient young girl who figured out how she could procure a bit of peace for herself. ♦

*I knew I'd
have to deal
with Hank,
but then
what choice
did I have?*

Back to Torretta

BY SGT. DAN H. FENN, JR., ADMINISTRATIVE AND TECHNICAL CLERK, 767TH SQUADRON



SEVERAL YEARS AGO, my late partner and I were studying a pile of brochures advertising various cruises. We quickly put aside the floating hotels which did not interest us at all and concentrated on smaller sailing ships. One promoted a trip to Northern Italy, from Rome to Naples. Obviously, I had seen most of that area during the war, but Patsy had never been to Italy and was very enthusiastic about the idea, so off we went.

Since the voyage ended in Naples, it occurred to me that it would be fun to take an extra day and go back to Cerignola and to Torretta where I had spent nearly eighteen months as a sergeant in the orderly room of the 767th Bomb Squadron, 461st Bomb Group. Patsy agreed, so we hired a driver and headed east across Italy.

On the drive I suspect, though I am not

certain, that I told her about how and why I found myself on that erstwhile farm in southeastern Italy about sixty-five years earlier. For me, it started back in Kearns, Utah after several military schools, when the adjutant of the 767th Bomb Squadron chose me and several others to join his squadron. Captain Ray Wilcovitz, who later became a judge in New York, was a slight, bright, spry man. I recall particularly the time in Torretta when he volunteered to be defense counsel in courts martial. His acquittal rate was so high that he quickly was shifted to be the prosecuting attorney!

As I told Patsy of my thoroughly undistinguished wartime history, the memories came flooding back and all those comrades from those days came out of the mists of time. Our squadron CO was Major—later

General—James Knapp. We were somewhat anxious when he took over because he was a West Point graduate and we were afraid he would be really GI, which was not the culture of our organization. We weren't like MASH, but weren't rigidly by the book, either. But, though outwardly stern, he turned out to be OK. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

From Kearns, we went to Wendover Field on the Nevada-Utah border, and then to Hammer Field in Fresno, California. The rumors kept circulating that we were going to get furloughs before we went overseas – but of course we never did. The Army was rife with misinformation! I well remember the Bamboo Room in Fresno when I met Tom Collins for the first time. The next morning was a disaster. And I recall calling home—Cambridge, Massachusetts on Christmas Eve. How different communications were in those days—it took half an hour to establish the connection going painfully slowly through LA, Chicago, Boston to reach my home and family.

Then by troop train across the country to Hampton Roads, Virginia and boarding the Liberty Ship, the John Jay. Bunks stacked five high. Two very mediocre meals per day. Totally buttoned down at night. Sailing in convoy across the Atlantic. A wild storm off Cape Hatteras which clobbered all those of our company who had never been at sea before—those fifty-gallon cans strategically placed

around our living space came in very handy!

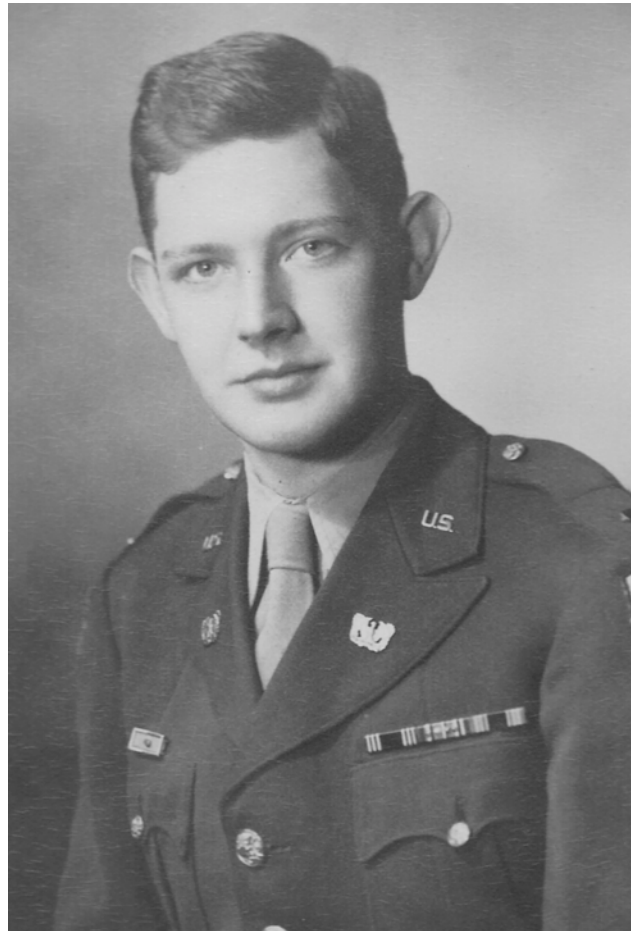
Three weeks after we embarked, we moved past Gibraltar into the Med. At twilight I was on deck when suddenly our Marine detachment rushed up in helmets and flak jackets and started firing. We were under attack by bombers and, we thought, submarines. Since our ship was carrying ammunition, we were

anxious. I was reading a book by Walter Lippman, the noted columnist and pundit, about the post-war world as the explosions crashed around us – until one of my comrades called my attention to the fact that I was holding it upside down. Coolness under fire!

After a week in the Bay of Tunis waiting for a spot to disembark in Naples, we went across the Med to that beautiful harbor, dominated by a smoking Mount Vesuvius, and got off on an upside-down vessel that had been partially sunk. Trucks transported us to nearby Bagnoli where an abandoned school

awaited us. No cots—body bags filled with straw. One night there was a German air raid but we were too stupid to move to shelters so we stayed in the school rooms which had been pretty well destroyed by earlier raids.

Nearby was a hill called the Vomoro, as I recall. At the top was a collection of beehive ovens. I wrote home to my family that I had discovered this absolutely delicious Italian food called “pizza.” No such thing existed in the US at that time.



Soon we were transported to a railyard and loaded into railroad cars for a trip over the mountains to our permanent base. It was, I explained to Patsy, early February 1944. The Italian sun burned warm and bright. And then it got dark and we were up in the hills and it was freezing cold. We lit a little fire in the boxcar to help but the officers thought this was not a good idea and made us extinguish it.

When the sun came out the next day, it was better but still pretty chilly. The train stopped constantly. On one of those pauses, a cook whose name I think was Earl Clark, had to answer a call of nature, so he got off and squatted in a field. That picture still sits firmly in my mind. Suddenly the train started to go. As he was a very big man indeed, there was no way he could catch the moving train. Somehow, he did find us several days later. I always wondered how he made it.

After thirty-six hours, in the middle of the night, we disembarked—somewhere. Loaded into trucks, we drove in the dark—but it seemed to us that the truck drivers didn't know exactly where they were going. We thought we could hear artillery fire, at which point the drivers seemed to change direction. But what did we know and, of course, nobody told us anything.

Finally, we were dumped off in the dark in a field of mud and snow and a few tents. And cold. Very cold. Literally bone chilling cold. And no hope or possibility of warmth. With what—candles? Kerosene lamps? No cots—just the straw-filled body bags. But we did receive a pile of mail from home which had accumulated during our month-long trip on the SS John Jay. Thanks to Hughes Glantzberg's comprehensive and informative book *Al Ataque*, I now know it was a place called Venosa. And I learned that General Glantzberg (then Colonel), the Group CO decided

that Venosa was not fit for man nor beast nor B-24s and back we went into the trucks to move to Torretta.

As Patsy and I drove—were driven—from Naples to Cerignola more than six decades later, I had trouble recognizing the scenery. A big wide highway had replaced the narrow winding road I remembered. When we got to Cerignola, though it had grown considerably, the cathedral, the plaza and other vistas were unchanged. It was eerie to see it again after all those years!

Since the driver had no way of knowing where Torretta was, he had arranged with the local police to guide us out there. Once, again, I saw little along the route that I recognized and, when the police stopped their cruiser and said: "Here is Torretta," I really did not see anything familiar. When I mentioned that fact to the cops, they asked: "What do you remember?" And I told them about the Baron's house which was group headquarters, the bull ring, the farmer's quarters, the olive grove. "Oh," they said, and kept going a few hundred yards, around a corner, and suddenly—there we were. Like Brigadoon. Just as I had left it that day in May 1945. (Captain Wilcovitz had told me a month before that there was an opening for a Warrant Officer in the Mediterranean Theatre and I should take the exam. I studied ARs, took it, got the highest score in the Theatre and got the appointment. The only question I remember was: "How many horses do you have at a Corporal's funeral?" For some reason, I remembered that one! Like who cares?)

As I say, there miraculously, it all was. The building used for flight briefings and courts martial. The chapel across the ravine. The storehouse we used for those horrible movies about "Why We Fight." The chaplain's office. The farm building we converted into an Enlisted Men's club where, under the

watchful eye of Cpl. “Tulley” Thuleson we drank 3.2 beer and smoked cigars. The hill where I sat alone when I heard that my grandmother had died. The cow barn we used as a mess hall, the remains of our squadron emblem still visible on the walls. The flagpole on Group headquarters. The olive grove. The volley ball court. The place where our tent stood, where six of us lived for all those months, just longing to go home. Was it ever wonderful when we got an electric light! And a stove, fashioned from a 50-gallon German drum cut in half with a notch cut out of the bottom to hold a shell casing which, in turn, held the mixture of oil and gas dripping in from a jerry can outside. Fortunately, we had no tent fire, but others did. In spectacular fashion!

It was in that tent that, early in our time at Torretta, Sergeant Howie, who had swiped a parachute and traded it to the British anti-aircraft group on the base for a bottle of scotch and a bottle of gin, had broken open the scotch and we passed it around among the six of us. It was so good, we decided to go ahead with the gin. Big mistake. Inspection the next day. Oh, my!

When I walked into the orderly room, now filled with bales of hay, the ghosts of my friends and colleagues appeared. There was the bespectacled Sgt. Howie. In the opposite corner was the payroll expert, Sgt. Rice. Next door was the domain of Sgt. Geary, in charge of supply with his assistant George Eaton. First Sgt. Fisher from Mahanoy City, PA. And my dear friend, S/Sgt. Ed Latal from Chicago, whose family sent us the most delicious Polish sausages which were heated or cooked on our red-hot tent stove. Ed and I stayed in touch until he died from a fall a year ago.

And then there was “Old Pop” Payne who worked at Group Headquarters. (We called him “Old” and “Pop” because he was in his

early thirties and that was pretty ancient to us in those days.) He was an especially important part of our circle because he had an unusual blood type. The Red Cross would pay \$25 for a pint of Pop’s blood – more than enough to stake us all to a weekend of R&R in Naples.

Then I walked into the smaller room of what must have been the home of a farmer where the officers held sway. Col. Knapp, the CO; Major Herald Bennett, the biology professor from West Virginia, the Executive Officer; Captain Wilcovitz, the adjutant, who scrounged fresh eggs and produce for our mess until some higher authority made him stop. I could see their familiar faces, hear their voices once again as I surveyed those places which once they had occupied. Years later, Ed gave me the key to that orderly room which he had “liberated” when the squadron left to go home, as Hughes has described in his fine and useful book.

I looked at the sky overhead, now peaceful in its lovely Italian blue, and remembered with pain how we on the ground would look up anxiously as the planes returned from a mission, counting the missing places in the formations.

Empathetic as Patsy was, I doubt that even she could comprehend the waves of emotion which I felt, being back in that so familiar place, seeing and hearing once more those long-departed men who had so fully occupied that brief, encapsulated two-and-a-half-year piece of my life.

And as we drove away from Torretta that day, I thought I could hear once again the voice of a GI disc jockey in Italy who called himself “The Great Spectacled Bird,” saying, as he always did at the end of his show, “Take Care of Thee.” ♦

Ming and Me

BY REBECCA BAKER MORRIS

IT WAS HOT in Massachusetts that July. I don't mean seventies hot or eighties hot. I mean nineties hot. Too hot to be outside in the middle of the day. Too hot to sit in the shade.

Too hot not to water my beloved flower garden twice a day.

Yes. Twice a day. Even so, the flowers and I wilted like a southern belle in the heat.

Mother Nature would not best me. I was escaping to a cooler Maine in the morning even if I couldn't find someone to water my garden. I looked wistfully at pink peonies with yellow centers and white hydrangeas laced with pink highlights: an array of pastel hues and sweet fragrance dazzled my brain.

My perennial hibiscus was counting on me. Six feet tall and four feet wide, it had taken over the middle of my flower bed. It had huge dark purplish green leaves and looked like it belonged in "The Little Shop of Horrors." There would be flowers, though, enormous white flowers with tints of purple and yellow the size of dinner plates when I returned home, but only if they were watered.

Hmm, maybe I could ask my new upstairs neighbors. Asking for favors was something I rarely did, let alone asking someone I didn't know. Desperation disguised as courage made me do it. I rang their bell.

A man answered the door. "Hi," I said. "My name is Becky." We shook hands. "I'm Ming." He was slim with short jet-black hair with specks of gray, and brown eyes. I got right to the point. "I'm going to Maine for a week, and I was wondering if you would water my garden while I'm gone." He nodded, "Yes." We went out to the garden, and I showed him what to do. After I finished talking about the flowers, Ming said, "I had a massive heart

attack two years ago. The doctors operated on me for twelve hours. They said I was lucky to survive. I had to spend a whole year in rehabilitation." He had a very soft voice and his English was not clear. I strained to understand him. "Ming, is watering okay for you to do?" I was worried. "Oh yes, it's fine," he said, "But I'm hoping for rain."

I hoped for a lot of rain in Massachusetts but, of course, not in Maine.

When I returned from vacation, I purchased a gift card from Beijing, a local restaurant in Lexington. I rang Ming's doorbell again. "I wanted to give you this for watering my garden." Ming smiled. His eyes beamed warmth and gratitude. No language barrier there. Ming was truly touched, but he said, "I can't eat at Beijing. Most of their dishes contain soy sauce. Soy sauce is bad for my heart. However, when my two sons and their wives visit me next week, I'll take them to Beijing for dinner."

He said something about lunch and lobster. I smiled back even though I didn't quite understand what he had said. Did he invite me to lunch? I wasn't sure.

Three weeks later, I was in the kitchen making a Greek salad for my lunch with a side order of sour grapes. I was in a blue sort of mood with no plans for the day. Chop. Chop. Chop. *Hey, don't take it out on the salad. It will turn to mush if you don't watch out.*

Yeah, mush is what my life feels like. I talked back to myself.

So, sign up for a course. Call a friend. Take a swim. Do Something. Only you can change your life. Nothing like the voice of reality to cut short a good sulk.

The doorbell rang. It was Ming. "Do you

want to go for lobster now?"

"Right now?" I responded.

So what if you hardly know this man and can barely understand him.

So what? This is not like you. . .

I told Ming, "Okay."

"Meet me outside when you're ready," Ming said. Then, he left.

I glanced at my face in the mirror. Blue eyes surrounded by poufy, slightly unruly silver hair which used to be blonde. I gave it a few cursory swipes with a brush and grabbed my purse.

I climbed into Ming's car and said nonchalantly, "So, where are we going?"

"To Wells, Maine. It'll take an hour and a half." I was shocked into silence as we drove to Rt. 128 and headed north.

Wells, Maine. Oh my God! What have I gotten myself into? What were you thinking? That's the trouble. You weren't thinking!

So, there I was riding to Maine with Ming, in the middle of a massive traffic jam on a mid-day Saturday afternoon. The traffic stood still but my thoughts raced ahead. *Hmm, it was going to take much longer than one hour and a half to get there. Maybe I could suggest that we turn back.* I didn't.

With my obsessiveness in high gear, I continued to chastise myself all the way up to the New Hampshire border where Ming pulled into a rest stop and said, "You go to the lady's room."

When was the last time someone told me what to do? I wondered, as I obediently walked to the lady's room. No one told me what to do at home or at the bank where I managed dozens of employees.

I bought a coke and returned to the car, still ruminating about this trip. Ming said, "Soda is bad for your health."

"I know," I replied, as I sipped my drink. *Well, like it or not, you made this decision,*

you might as well go with the flow.

The flow was not so good. It took over three and a half hours to get to Wells, Maine. I attempted to make conversation. Our conversation was like the traffic: It started and stopped all the way.

I could only understand about every third word Ming said. Even so, I learned that Ming was from Taiwan and came to the United States thirty years ago to study computer programming. He went to college in Louisiana because of the warmer climate. When he graduated, the only jobs he could find were in Boston. After the heart attack, his doctors said cold weather was too hard on his heart. As a result, Ming and his wife had decided to move to LA in the spring.

When our conversation lagged, he turned on some music. At first, it was soft and soothing. Then came a reading of the 23rd Psalm. "The LORD is my shepherd;"

"I shall not want." I finished the line in my head. While I am spiritual, I'm not very religious. I preferred silence over psalms. But I could see that the music and psalms were soothing to Ming which was a good thing since the traffic was bumper to bumper and intense.

Finally, a sign appeared for Wells, Maine. *Yes! Thank God!* I cheered silently and glanced at my watch. We had left around noon, and it was now 3:30 p.m. A few minutes later, we arrived at "Wells Lobster Pound" and went inside. Ming ordered two lobster dinners. He turned to me and said, "Would you like clam chowder with your dinner?"

"No thanks," I said, wishing I had said, "Yes," but mindful that Ming planned to pay.

"You can sit over there by the window."

His words rang in my ears. Still dutiful, I sat down at a small bare table by the window across from two large lobster tanks. *This is kind of unusual, his telling me what to do.*

But his words didn't have an officious overtone like some bosses or like an overbearing parent. I decided to let it go.

When he sat down, Ming said, "I bring the youth group from my church up to Wells to go to the beach." He said more but I couldn't quite understand him. I already asked him to repeat himself several times. I didn't want to offend him by asking again so I just nodded.

Our lobster arrived shortly. It was the best lobster I have ever eaten. The lobster was cracked in all the right places and was cooked perfectly. Twelve minutes only. Even the meat in the claw was tender and juicy. I realized that most of the lobster I have eaten has been overcooked with rubbery claw meat. What do I know? I'm from Ohio.

We finished our dinners in awkward silence. I tried to offer Ming some money, but he shook his head, "No." He pointed to the restroom and said, "You go wash your hands while I pay." My hands did need to be washed so I went to the lady's room. Once we were back in the car, I thanked him for his generosity. He nodded and said, "Now, we're going to walk on Wells Beach and watch the sunset."

The beach was expansive and beautiful in the early evening. Ming and I were the only people on the beach. I could see sand, more sand, the sea, and the sun ready to slip away for the day. I rolled up my pant legs, took off my shoes, and waded into the ocean. Ming followed suit.

The waves lapped my ankles, reminding me of what everyone in New England already knows: The ocean in Maine is anything but warm. My pant legs were now soaked and coated with sand.

My feet were cold and demanded I get out of the water and walk on the sand still warm from the afternoon sun.

An hour and a half later, I was getting tired.

I was sure we had walked all the way to the Ogunquit Beach, over five miles away.

I said, "I'd like to go back now, Ming.

"Go back, now? Okay."

Wow! His response surprised me. I realized the only person keeping me from turning back sooner was me.

Slowly, I put one foot in front of the other and walked back down the beach. Ming directed me to sit on some rocks. My legs were stiff, and the rocks were jagged, uneven and tricky to climb. I managed to find a semi-level rock and sit down without falling down and considered that a success. I brushed the sand off my feet and put my shoes back on. The rocks were hard and cold to sit on. My backside shrieked but my legs said, "Thank you!"

Soon I was soothed by the soft rhythmic sound of the surf, a sound that echoes back to a childhood spent beachcombing. The serene look on Ming's face told me he was as enthralled as I was. We left the beach as the first stars appeared in the sky. A soft breeze walked us back to the car.

On the way back home, we drove through the center of Ogunquit. A warm cloudless summer day turned into a warm cloudless summer night. Streams of vacationers filled the stores and milled about on the sidewalks. Not an inch of sidewalk was visible. It felt as if we were in the middle of a party. It was a party I wanted to join.

I bet Ming would have stopped if I had asked, but I didn't. It was getting late, and we had a long way to go. The traffic heading home was surprisingly light. We rolled into Lexington around 9 :30 p.m. I thanked Ming for lunch or was it dinner and a wonderful day.

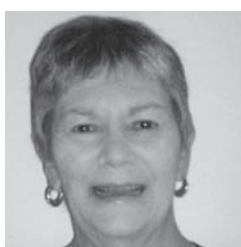
I was still glowing as I prepared for bed and thought maybe, just maybe, I had made a new friend. ♦

CONTRIBUTORS

JAMES BALDWIN is a retired advertising agency principal and high school English teacher. Rediscovering writing in his retirement, he covers sports for Gatehouse Media and the Lexington Minuteman and maintains his own blog at www.Storyguy.net.



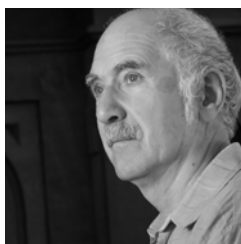
JOANNE BORSTELL studied at Salem State and Massachusetts College of Art. She works in various mediums and has exhibited in several collections, both local and to a wider audience.



MAUREEN BOVET has lived in Lexington since 1981. She loves being outside in nature especially in a garden with bird song. She has studied drawing and painting over the years at several places including the Concord Art Association and the Lexington Arts and Crafts Society.



HAYG BOYADJIAN, Grammy nominee and award-winning composer, was born in 1938 in Paris, France. He started his musical studies at the Liszt Conservatory, in Buenos Aires. In 1958, he immigrated to the USA where he studied at the New England Conservatory and Brandeis University. His compositions, both chamber and symphonic, have been performed throughout the world.



VICTORIA BUCKLEY, MS, OTR/L, CCAP is an occupational therapist and master's level clinician with over 35 years of experience in mental health. She is a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 9 and chairs the Lexington Commission on Disability.



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.

JOHN EHRENFELD, long retired, came late to poetry. An MIT-trained chemical engineer, he returned there after working in the environmental field for many years. He authored *Sustainability by Design* and co-authored *Flourishing: A Frank Conversation about Sustainability*.



DAN FENN was Staff Assistant to President Kennedy, Vice Chairman of the US Tariff Commission and Founding Director of the Kennedy Library. A Lexingtonian for 69 years, he was a Selectman and continues to serve as a Town Meeting Member. He teaches at Harvard's Kennedy School.



GERALDINE FOLEY is a retired psychiatric registered nurse and attorney who specialized in mental health guardianship law. She has lifelong interests in writing poetry and prose, fabric art, travel—predominantly to Ireland, and Irish set dancing.



IRENE HANNIGAN, a retired educator, enjoys writing and sketching. She has recently been exploring poetry. Her latest book, *Write On! How to Make Writing a Pleasurable Pastime*, was published in September.



ROBERT ISENBERG has been the humor columnist for the *Lexington* and *Bedford Minuteman* and other Gatehouse publications. His recently published book, *Why Men Are Suspicious of Yoga*, contains 55 of his amusing essays. He has performed his work at a variety of venues. He can be contacted at robear68@gmail.com



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



Previously a financial services executive, REBECCA BAKER MORRIS has been writing memoirs and short stories for the last four years. She hopes to complete a collection of family stories.



MARGARET (MARDY) RAWLS, moved to Lexington in 1960 and has been much involved in Town politics ever since, though at 91 she has had to slow down a bit! In 1990, she was accepted into the New England Watercolor Society and has shown at a number of art associations.



BARBARA DICKENSON SIMPSON has lived in Lexington for thirty years. She is a weaver, artist, poet and writer. She and her husband, and their 12-year-old doggie daughter live in Upper Turning Mill.



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.



DON YANSEN, originally from Shaw Island, WA, worked in high tech startups for many years, then in international development in Africa and India. He held many different jobs from fisherman to rocket scientist—some more successful than others.



LYNNE YANSEN, Lexington resident since 1969, retired in 2016 after fifty years as a clinical social worker/psychotherapist. A graduate of Clark University, she is a member of many local art, garden and historical associations. Her work can be seen at: www.Lynneyansenart.com





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