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A CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL
ISSUE 7 | WINTER 2021



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ON THE COVERS

FRONT BY CATHY PAPAIZIAN
Sunrise in a Chaotic World

BACK BY RUIMIN WENG
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On the Cover

BY CATHY PAPAIZIAN

LITTLE DID I KNOW when I began this piece in early January of 2020 that, eleven months later, we would be living in truly chaotic times: the world would be on fire, a coronavirus would be raging, and America would be going through one of the most controversial presidential campaigns on record.

At New Year's 2020, I was ready for a new quilting project. With the days much too dark and way too short, I was looking for something to immerse myself in to combat the winter doldrums.

I began by sorting through the left-over odds and ends in my sewing room from other projects. Along with a book by Rayna Gillman, *Create Your Own Free-Form Quilts: A Stress-Free Journey To Original Design*, that I had picked up from the "free table" at a recent quilt guild meeting, I started playing around with some of her ideas. I especially liked her suggestion of using her grandmother's fearless approach to color, a sort of "anything goes" style. When I took pieces that had already been sewn together, slicing, dicing, and rearranging them, new and interestingly mismatched designs took shape.

While working on quilts, I often listen to National Public Radio. One prominent daily news report was following the bushfires that were burning out of control in Australia. Even though I have never been to Australia, nor do I know anyone who lives there, I could not get those disturbing stories out of my head.

At the same time, Greta Thunberg, a young, outspoken environmental activist, had just

been named TIME magazine's "Person of the Year." As the youngest person ever to be so recognized, she gave a simple and jolting message, "Our house is on fire," which was, indeed, the case for thousands of people's homes in Australia.



Climate change is getting closer to home for all of us, as the horrific fires around the world from Australia to California are warning us. Those jarring news reports kept swirling around in my head, along with the US political strife of the impeachment trials. Chaos is all around us.

Without a design plan for my project, the creative process of putting squares together and then adding borders and inserting different colored strips, started to look like crazy window frames. Straight lines were not important and less symmetry fit better with the state of my mind. The combination of fabrics, solid colors, geometric designs, florals, stripes, polka dots, checker boards all together added to the whimsy of the piece. It began to evolve into what looked like a housing complex.

To complete the top, a colorful sunburst fabric from my stash gave a glowing, fiery, sunrise effect and inspired the title Sunrise in a Chaotic World. As I was finishing the piece, the subconscious impact of the daily news shifted to Covid 19, the presence of which was forcing us all to shelter-in-place.

We were all inside looking out our windows hoping a new day would soon be dawning. ♦

The Christmas Elf

A MEMOIR BY DEBORAH WEINER SOULE

MY FATHER was born to an Orthodox Jewish family, his parents both Russian immigrants. Like so many of their day, they had left the pogroms and the meagre life in Eastern Europe and sailed for the shores of New York, to be greeted by the Lady with the Lamp and a life of poverty on the lower East Side. They made the move up the Hudson to Newburgh after a few years and started life in a tenement, with my grandfather picking up work as a tailor while my grandmother cared for the six children of the family.

My father, the youngest, sang in the synagogue choir and remembered how gentiles observing Christmas had their peculiar holiday traditions. One boy, he told me, received a stocking full of coal for his misdeeds. But years later, my father fell in love with a shiksa—a non-Jew—and they married and set up life in Canaan, New York and later in New Haven, Connecticut. Although my mother had converted to Judaism (she later said, “to please Oscar’s parents”), they started seeking a religion that they could share equally, and came to Unitarian Universalism, a progressive faith in the Protestant tradition, but which embraced many religious practices and beliefs.

And so it was that Oscar became the Christmas Elf. He went for this holiday, hook, line, and sinker: loving the tree (often one we went out in the fields and cut), the lights, the shining decorations, the gifts, the spirit of plenty which he, growing up as a poor kid in the tenements, had never experienced.

That love was a blessing to me, his only child. As a child of the 50s and 60s, I felt all the wonder and magic that writers talk about when something unexpected and wondrous

occurs. Oscar created the magic as he imagined it should be. Christmas Eve dinner, enjoyed by just the three of us, featured the best steak, along with baked potatoes and peas ... and a chocolate dessert, with a little champagne, even for me! Maybe not haute cuisine, but pretty nice for the middle class family whose dad had come from a crowded apartment with rats running across the floor.

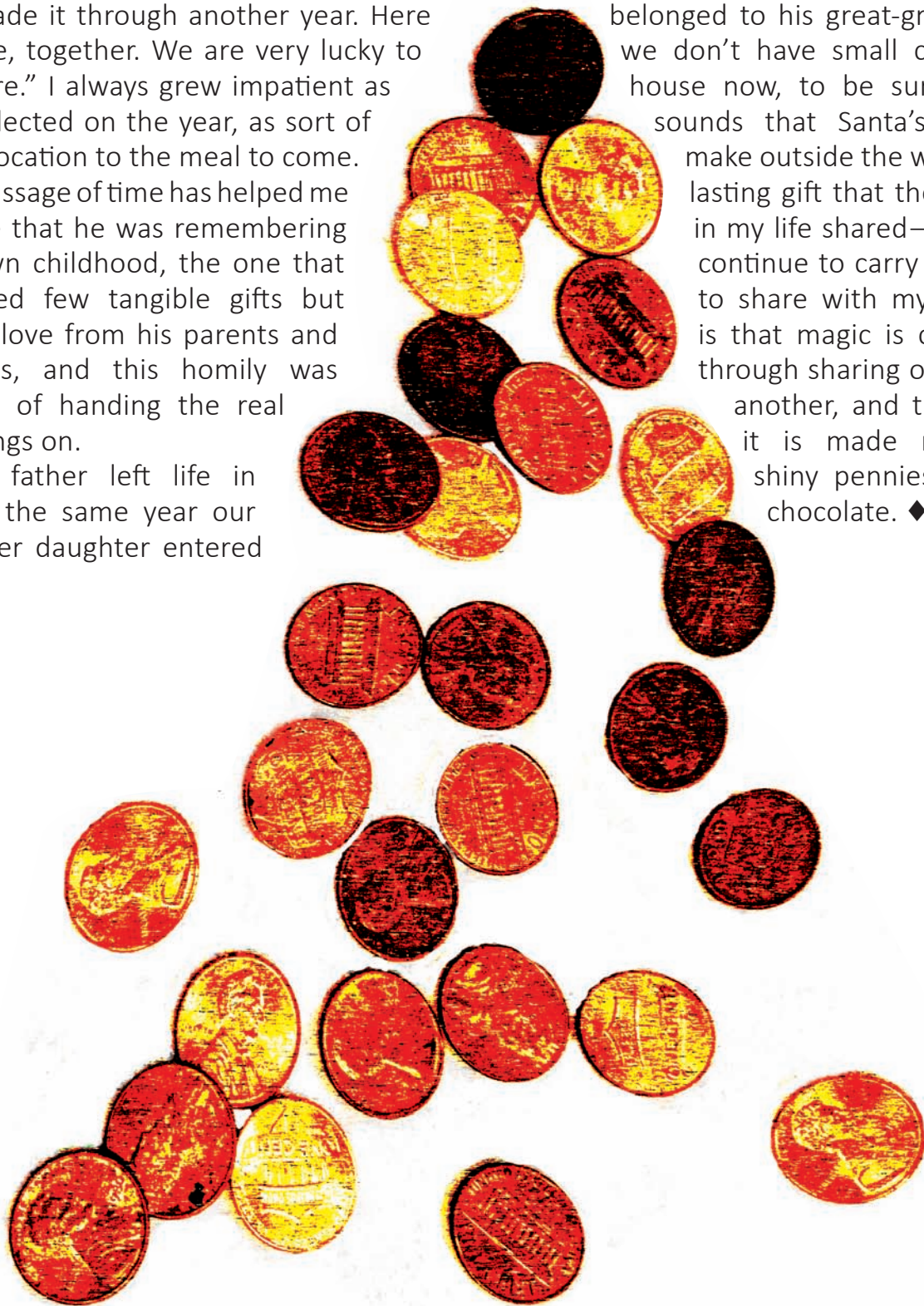
He was not focused on reading from Luke or Matthew—that would have been a bridge too far for a man who came to Christmas through the back door. But he pulled out an old leather-bound copy of the writings of O. Henry and turned to “The Gift of the Magi.” That was the story he wanted to share: how even the poorest of people focused on others and sold the few riches they had to make someone else’s holiday happier. A social worker, this was the work of Oscar’s life, made real through literature.

Oscar had a set of sleigh bells hidden away for occasional use and I, tucked in my bed and drifting off to sleep, would hear them, which made me sure that Santa was outside my window in his sleigh. Oscar got two rolls of new pennies from the bank and, after I went to bed, sprinkled them over the gifts that appeared under the tree. They were accompanied by some foil-wrapped chocolate balls, and all the treasure glistened and glimmered. A pirate’s treasure could be no better than this, and I loved harvesting the loot the next morning as I came out from my bedroom. My dad would smile and say, with real delight, “HE came! Look at this!” Lighting his pipe and setting a fire in the fireplace, he would watch with deep pleasure as I tore the wrappings off each gift.

Later there would be a dinner with friends or sometimes, members of my mother's family. As we sat down, my father, dressed in his red Christmas vest, would sit at the head of the table, look around, and say "Well, we made it through another year. Here we are, together. We are very lucky to be here." I always grew impatient as he reflected on the year, as sort of an invocation to the meal to come. The passage of time has helped me realize that he was remembering his own childhood, the one that involved few tangible gifts but much love from his parents and siblings, and this homily was a way of handing the real blessings on.

My father left life in 1993, the same year our younger daughter entered

the world. Our Christmas Eve dinner tends toward fondue, not steak, and I've been the one to sprinkle the shiny pennies and the chocolate balls under the tree for quite a while. Ben's got the sleigh bells that belonged to his great-grandfather, and we don't have small children in our house now, to be surprised by the sounds that Santa's sleigh might make outside the window. But the lasting gift that the Christmas Elf in my life shared—the one that I continue to carry and have tried to share with my loved ones—is that magic is created simply, through sharing our love for one another, and that sometimes it is made real by some shiny pennies and a bit of chocolate. ♦



Season's Greetings



RUIMIN WENG
Magnolia in Snow (2020)

Photography



CHARLES KETCHAM
A Retired Mariner (1985)

Photography

Pondering the Pandemic

BY IRENE HANNIGAN

Life as we knew it is over—at least for the next few weeks.

THIS WAS THE FIRST SENTENCE in my March 15, 2020 journal entry in what happened to be the start of a new journal. Several months ago when I impulsively purchased it from an artist at a craft fair, I wondered when I'd use it. Unlike the simple spiral bound journals to which I am generally drawn, this one seemed quite out of character for me. Perhaps I considered it only fitting that, with its cheerful yellow batik-like cover and hand-stitched blank pages, it would be a perfect choice to see me through this incongruous time. I was right.

I have, in fact, maintained a journal writing practice for well over forty years. While each one has served a different purpose, depending upon my need to write, a notebook of some sort has always been my silent stable companion. Always available at a moment's notice, to listen without interrupting to my rambling recollections and random reflections, I need only to uphold my end of the conversation, which, for me, takes the form of periodic uncensored "free writes." It is also a place where I store an eclectic collection of the quotes and poetry of others whose words resonate with me. In recent years, my journal has also been the repository for quick pen and ink sketches and "word photos" that capture my thoughts and impressions.

What I wasn't prepared for during the month of March was how often I would make an entry and how all of my entries would focus on how I was dealing with life during this unprecedented time in recent history.

My March 18 word photo entitled *Fruit Bowl on our Kitchen Counter* was revealing.

The fruit bowl was filled with eight bananas, five apples, and two oranges. Bob starts peeling the Chiquita labels he hates off the bananas as he tells me about his failure to connect to his first Zoom class. I unconsciously join him peeling off the labels on the Gala apples. He smiles at me and says, "What we have control over." I say, "We can work on the price tags on the wine bottles next."

A few days later, Bob's Suffolk classes via Zoom were proceeding with relatively few glitches. However, while we might have taken the price off a bottle of wine or two or three, it was not because we were having dinner with friends. Since mid-March, it's always dinner for two at our own dining room.

Forefront in my mind during the first few days of March was how to develop strategies and routines to help me cope with this crisis. In addition to free writes, word photos, and pen and ink sketches, I also made lists such as the following one on March 21 based on tips from *The New York Times*.

- *Have a structure to your day.*
- *Get dressed and look good.*
- *Don't binge watch TV.*
- *Eat regular meals.*
- *Count your blessings.*
- *Take a walk.*
- *WASH HANDS. . .WASH HANDS. . . WASH HANDS*
- *Find indoor "amusements"—board games, jigsaw puzzles, crossword puzzles, and other hobbies*

Despite my best efforts to have a reasonable structure to each day, it was still a challenge to keep track of what day it was, as revealed in my March 24 free write entry.

When will it finally occur to me that I'm not going anywhere? Today I have a writing group meeting and when I woke up I thought I'd be heading to the LCC even though I should have remembered we'd scheduled a Zoom meeting. After taking a shower, I even picked out a sweater that would be presentable (purple one with the quilt pin) before I realized I could attend the meeting in my bathrobe and no one would know.

Another word photo entry on April 18, entitled *A Snowy Saturday*, reinforced the challenge of keeping track of time.

The forsythia is laden with snow this morning and our picnic table is covered with at least three or four inches. Now in addition to not quite knowing what day it is, it's going to be hard to remember what season it is especially since Bob started whistling "Winter Wonderland" as he was making his coffee.

If there is a slight silver lining to this "new life," it is the fact that I have been much more open to, and in fact thankful for, the various ways that technology has allowed us to keep in touch with family and friends.

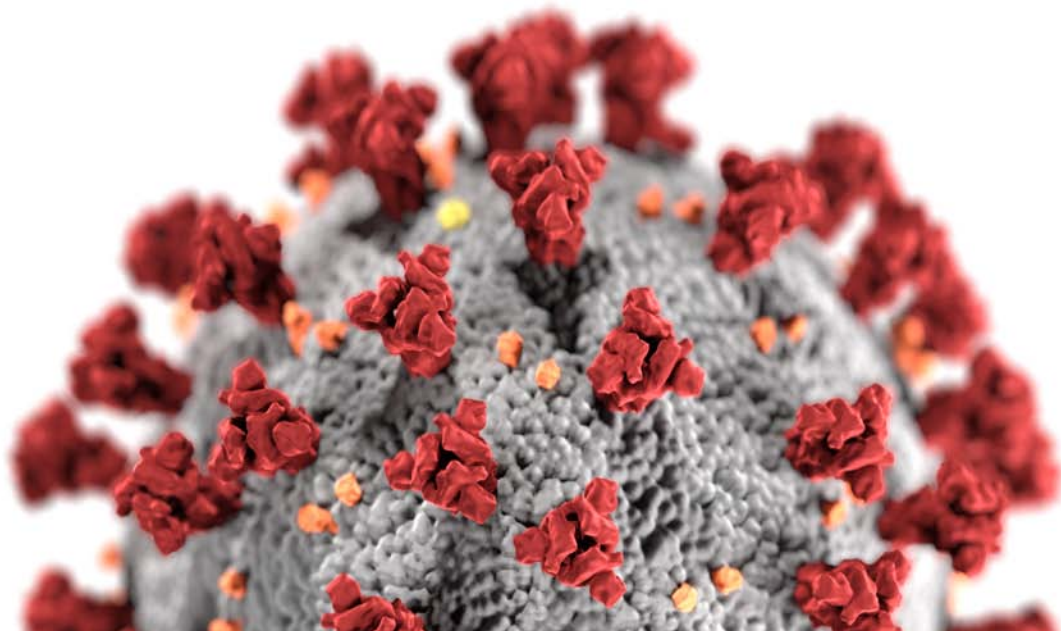
I am getting to be a fan of FaceTime! We check in regularly with Ted and Shannon and their little pup Gardy. Yesterday we had coffee with Betsy and Drew at 1 p.m. after our Sunday morning brunch of waffles and sausages. (That's how we knew it was Sunday.) At 7:30 we met with Tom and Maxine in San Diego for wine and then there's Zoom! It's hard to believe that we boomers have become Zoomers.

And finally this David Hollis quote found its way into my journal for safe-keeping and sums up how I am feeling as April nears its end—

"In the rush to return to normal, use this time to consider which parts are worth rushing back to."

Something tells me we're going to have a lot of time to ponder this thought. ♦

Please note: This piece was first published (July 2020) on WritingThroughLife.com



Silent Night

BY BEN SOULE

ONE DECEMBER YEARS AGO, my wife Deb and I were pleased to be invited by a friend to go Christmas caroling in his neighborhood in Brighton. It's something that makes the Yuletide season special—the chance to join with friends for mulled wine or spiced cider and a frosty stroll to sing to anyone who might want to listen—a quiet neighborhood in Acton, the bustling sidewalks of Lexington, and once, a paid gig at a raucous party hosted by the Myopia Hunt Club, where—as I sang, dressed in Dickensian attire—a drunken guest dropped his dinner on my shoes.

We joined the group of ten or so at David's apartment. After a warm winter beverage, we sang a few carols to warm up our voices. David explained that we would sing at houses nearby and our last stop would be to honor a special request from someone he knew.

One of the mysteries about singing for people is that you never know how they will respond when you arrive at their door with jingling bells and stamping feet. Some peer through the window with their children, pointing and smiling. Some open the door and call for the rest of the household to come listen, sending you off with thanks and a "Merry Christmas!" Sometimes it's a single person in the doorway, seemingly embarrassed by the attention. All you can do is sing, and hope that this moment of connection across a threshold will make a small difference.

It was a chilly but pleasant walk through the hilly neighborhood that early winter evening. At each house we would sing two carols, always departing with the familiar "We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

Our toes were getting cold and our voices a bit ragged when we were approaching the last house, an aging triple-decker. We rang the bell and were buzzed in. The dark narrow stairway wound to the third floor. The door opened and we stepped into a small kitchen, neat, sparsely furnished, dimly lit. In the corner of the room was a small woman, simply dressed, stockings feet, hair brushed back with a few strands on her face. In her arms was a small child, wrapped in a blanket.

David said, "Let's sing." We did. "O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant" seemed to overfill the small room. "Joy to the World, the Lord is come" did too. But "O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie" seemed a better fit. As we sang, she watched us carefully. Her expression gave us no clue to her thoughts.

Then David whispered, "Silent Night." We started softly: "Silent night, holy night. All is calm, all is bright." We sang the second verse, "Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia." We could see her eyes glistening in the low light. Third verse, even softer, "Son of God, love's pure light." Her eyes blurred as we repeated the first verse, the tears falling on the sleeping child in the warm blanket. "Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace." A moment of silence passed, each of us looking across the room at the other. Then we retraced our steps down the stairs and out to the street.

I think about that night, the woman and the child, every year when I sing "Silent Night." What was her story? Where is the child—grown now? Did it matter to them that we sang in their kitchen at Christmastime years ago? The only answer I have is—if we have nothing else, we can always sing a song. ♦

Angel on a String

BY LEE BRAMI

I'm not your average angel. I'm voluptuous, and back when I was new, I was stunning: blowing on my gold-painted wooden trumpet while I flew in place, hanging by a string from the ceiling, my feathery wings quivering with any random air currents. Like my trumpet, I am also spray-painted gold. All of me.

I've been hanging here now in his office for over 25 years. Imagine.

When she first saw me at the gift store on the corner, I could tell by the way she eyed me that she wanted to buy me. She chose me as a Christmas gift for her husband.

He was immediately charmed by me. I could tell right away. Sometimes he would look up at me from his desk, enjoying my curves and my graceful flight-in-place. But now, my trumpet is broken, and taped together with ugly white tape. My wings are so frowzy they're starting to molt. And they never dust me! A little dusting would definitely lift my morale.

But she's been staring at me lately, and I don't like that look. I think she's seriously considering snipping my string. I think she should reconsider. It's not like they've stayed the same during these past years. A lot of her glitter has worn off, too, and he's looking pretty care-worn. But once I'm down, she'll probably tuck me away in a box. Or worse.

I just have to hope for a last-minute reprieve: a sudden, recovered recognition of my unique gilded beauty. And of the need for some overdue dusting! ♦

There is Rejoicing

BY JACQUELINE L. McSHINE

Because I volunteer at the Hospital as an Eucharistic Minister
I see frail and ill patients who lie in the beds.
Because they sometimes have visitors,
I pray for all of them.

Because some are touched by the prayerful words,
Which release their emotions,
Because their eyes fill with tears and noses turn red,
I know the spirit is working in them.

Because on this day I greet a frail senior and his younger visitor,
I introduce myself and tell them the reason for the visit.
Because I am here to pray with the patient and to offer the Eucharist,
Because the prayers ask for healing and forgiveness, they receive the Eucharist.

Because as I leave the room the visitor follows me,
I soon hear his report of the accident of the previous night
With a car parked outside his home.

Because he recently lost his job he didn't report the accident.
Since he had no money, he left the scene.
Because he heard the prayers of repentance he acknowledged his wrongdoing.
He will now visit his neighbor to report the accident.

Because "There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner repenting
Than over ninety-nine upright people who have no need of repentance,"*
Because today the prayers touched a soul,
There is Rejoicing.

* *New Jerusalem Bible, Luke 13:7*

Silenced Mourner

POEM & SCULPTURE BY STEPHEN SHICK

across memories of a redwood cathedral
my heart moved to sadness

across red and gray lava rocks
my eyes followed the fire line
over a field of yellow grass
to the place where
a flock of crows gathered
to sing a mourner's song
into the burned-out sanctuary

across the fire line their song drifted
to the top of a charred column
where I see her
her eyes piercing eternity
her broken wing on
the ground below
her voice silenced
unable to join the
song crossing
the fire line



Silenced Mourner (2020)

Woodcarving of Wild Cherry & Black Walnut
12" x 16"

A Bolt from the Blue

FICTION BY STEPHEN D. SENTURIA

IT WAS AN ORDINARY MARCH DAY. I was walking through the canyons of downtown toward my job. Crisp blue sky, bursts of wind that changed direction at every corner, the bakery smells competing with diesel exhaust from the buses. As I rounded the corner, there they were, arguing. A hulk of a man in a navy blue coat with shaggy dark hair escaping the edges of a matching ski cap; she, a little bit of a woman, in a brown coat, no hat, brown straight hair. She said, “You have no right...” and then he slapped her. Hard. Hard enough to knock her sideways. “You bastard,” she screamed. “Get away from me.”

I stopped, as did a dozen others, forming a loose ring around the couple. He paid no attention, reaching for the collar of her coat. “If I ever even think you’re going to see him again, I’ll kill you.”

Through her tears, “But he’s my friend. That’s all. My friend. Don’t you understand the idea of a friend?”

“Don’t give me that friend crap. He’s hitting on you, you’re leading him on, and it’s got to stop.” Then he noticed the crowd. “What are all you looking at? Get the hell outta here and leave us alone. Or do you want some of what she’s getting?”

The circle of onlookers stepped back a bit, and the man next to me said “Should we get a cop?” I nodded, and he went looking. I desperately wanted to intervene, but I was frozen in place, my stomach knotted with fear. He was big and strong and angry, and I’m just me, basically a coward. Been that way ever since I got clocked in the high school gym when I stupidly told a jerk to stop behaving like a jerk. It left me with a creaky jaw joint, a perennial reminder of that one-punch loss to a bully.

And then it was over. He grabbed her arm, pushing past two women who were watching, dragging her with him, she no longer protesting his ownership. By the time the cop came, there was nothing to tell him.

As we dispersed and resumed our normal paths, I noticed my pulse throbbing at something like double the normal rate. I couldn’t get the image of that poor girl out of my head. He had struck her right out in public, and she yelled at him, but she didn’t run away or ask for help. She actually left with him. Was he going to beat her some more? Would he end up killing her? Shouldn’t I have said something? Could I have? ♦



Perspectives

BY VICTORIA BUCKLEY

I am weary after work
Heading down the shiny long hall.
The tiles reflect my day in
Sharp disinfectant—
When will I learn to say no?
Did I forget something?
How will I ever get the work done?
Who do they think they are
Thinking that about me?
Do they really mean that?
My shoes clatter and tap,
Crisp, spurring me on,
Happy sounds, erasers
Of my thoughts.
A man slowly approaches,
Arm folded at the elbow, wrist floppy.
His leg drags, extra weight
Somehow unconnected yet still attached.
He stares at his cane
That steers his body
Doggedly along.
His walk is the artful
Dance of practiced attention,
Graceful and extravagant.
We are closer now as
He starts to cross my path.
I pause on my crutches and say hello.
He stops and looks at me,
His grin, large and friendly,
Yet sagging at one corner.
He points with his cane, balancing,
To an open doorway.
“I must go give thanks,”
He says, turning into the chapel.
I smile all the way to my car.

How to Leave Socks on the Floor

BY JIM BALDWIN

“OOOOHAAA. OH MY GOD.” The scream came from the kitchen. I was sitting in the living room, reading calmly. I gradually arose and asked, “what’s up?” as I ambled toward the scream. My soul-mate wife and I have been together 35 years, and I’d heard this scream before.

As I arrived at the scene of the crime, she was looking at a pristine kitchen counter, but for the invasion of several offending crumbs. Looking over her shoulder at me and pointing at the offenders she commanded, “Look at these crumbs. They’re everywhere.” Knowing well the source of the crumbs, I said as I often did, “well, really there’s only a few of them and they’re not quite everywhere.” As I tried to establish this as fact, I pulled open the trash drawer and deftly swept the invaders off the counter and into the bin, never to be heard from again.

We were playing our assigned roles, my wife and I. She comes upon the crime and wonders as maybe Sherlock Holmes would, who could be responsible in this home where just two people reside.

I arrive innocently on the scene, observe it, and fix the problem magically without admitting responsibility.

In this case, as with most others, I was busted again—the leaver of crumbs from cookies I’d smuggled in the house in my jacket pocket and stashed deep in a cupboard in my secret hiding place. We’re, as usual, trying to keep sugar out of the house. Supposedly, it is bad.

But sugar is a digression. The point is that my wife is incredibly tidy and immaculately organized. As our real estate agent said one day marveling at how little work would be

needed to get our house market ready, “She sleeps neat.” Our condo is like the inside of a museum.

We are polar opposites on the neatness continuum. She is fastidious. I am a mess. Or, in my defense, I was. She has worked with me, perhaps on me, for all of those 35 years to the point where I have edged ever closer to the middle of that continuum. But there is, she says, still much room for improvement.

Take closets for example. Opening hers is like a visit to one of those perfect display racks of women’s dresses at “Needless Markups.” And under the clothes, the shoes lie perfectly arrayed, gleaming as the light shines on them, each one pleading, “Pick me! Pick me!”

My closet is, well, different. Pants and shirts are free to roam at random. On a shelf above them, one might find the sweater I was wearing yesterday among sweat pants, bike shorts, and last night’s T-shirt, each of them wondering where they are and knowing they’re not where they should be. And the floor of my closet is even more interesting. Depending on the season, almost anything can be found there—a stray tennis ball, a pickle ball paddle, a mitten who’s lost its mate, a backpack.

But my wife has had her impact over all these years. The hangers bearing the random shirts and pants all point in the same direction to the back of the closet as if given the order, “Left Face!”

Until, that is, the moment will inevitably come when I have to ask her out of desperation, “Where the hell are my blue sweat pants?” a question that implies, of course, that she is responsible for the

mystery of their whereabouts.

“Given the condition of your drawers and your closet, it’s a wonder you can find anything,” she’ll reply. Then, tersely, “They’re folded neatly on the dryer. I washed them yesterday. They’d walked down there by themselves.”

Her spectacular neatness is the natural outgrowth of organizational genius. She can think in file folder order. Not only can but does. For her, names of folders come naturally, logically, and because of that everything is “in its place,” and easy to find. It is reflected in the appearance of her desk. A few neat piles all arranged geometrically waiting for their portrait to be taken, keyboard in the middle, mouse on mouse pad, like a frog on a lily, and coaster for the coffee cup just above and to the right of everything. Of course the mouse pad and the coaster have matching designs on them. As one walks by, her desk beckons, “Hey! Sit on down and we’ll just rip right through whatever work you might have.”

Passing by my desk, one might hear, “Hey! You! Psst. C’mere. Can you help me get outta this mess?” My laptop sits in the middle where it should with the trackpad immediately to the right, but sometimes they’re both hard to find under the pile of papers and randomly labeled folders. My mind does not think in file folders; it is afraid of them. I never know whether to label the file “utility bills” or have separate files for “gas” and “electric.” Worse, I never remember which I’ve done. Fortunately, my wife took over those jobs. When I file something there is a good chance it’s lost forever. So I don’t. If I can’t see it, it’s lost, which is why so many items have to be visible on my desk.

So, naturally, there are random items cluttering it. A tooth brush here. 5-year-old iTunes gift cards there. A bumper sticker

saying, “McGrath Ky. Defeat Mitch. Defend Democracy,” that hasn’t made it to my bumper yet. An expired gift certificate for a FREE PIZZA at Bertucci’s. Carefully stowed meditation chimes in their protective bag. And under it all, hidden, is the key to my life. My to-do list. From two weeks ago.

This morning I got out of bed and as I was walking to the bathroom I happened to look under a chair next to our bureau. There I saw her socks on the floor.

Wait! This was a moment. Her socks are never left on the floor. They are either packed together, “where they should be” with all their other friends in her tidy drawers, or in the dirty clothes hamper waiting to be washed.

My socks are occasionally left on the floor, apparently randomly thrown there by someone. They may be within hailing distance of each other. Maybe not. At some point later in the day I will probably be asking my wife where they might be.

Now, amazingly, her pure white, fuzzy, winter warmer socks are on the floor, too. But they haven’t been haphazardly tossed there. They are nestled perfectly together, not in a ball, but fully stretched out and paired in identical positions with the bottom one just peeking out under the outside edge of the top one. It is almost as if a set designer had placed them there for an instructional YouTube video to be titled, “How to leave socks on the floor.”

Seeing them this morning caused me to do two things. First, I took a photo of this moment and texted it to my kids, all boys, with a caption, “‘How to leave your socks on the floor.’ You guys will certainly understand this.” Second, they made me realize that I might just be one of the benefactors of her organizational genius. ♦

Three Poems

BY CAROLYN LEVI

VINYL

Setting the record straight
Settling the tone arm into the groove
Holding my breath in the on-ramp hiss
That the needle makes before there's music

SNOW

when our neighborhood hawk takes a titmouse, she leaves behind feathers
like a teenager tossing empties from a car window.

if there has been snow, wings imprint in it.

when you look at the sun? then close your eyes?

like that.

BISCUITS

You must have cold hands to make fine biscuits. Biscuits will not flake if the butter binds the flour too tightly. Bakers with warm hands may use a pastry cutter or a food processor. Rub between forefinger and thumb until particles are the size of peas. You must be ready to let go. If hands are still warm, memories will linger. They will not layer, form voids, break cleanly at the margins. You will have gone too far. In summer, hold ice until an ache rises through the wrist. Begin again.

A Flush Beats a Full House

BY RICHARD GLANTZ

“THE HOUSE IS EASY TO FIND,” Barry said, “it’s at the end of the road, on top of Avon Mountain.”

Piece of cake, I thought, with Henrietta, my trusty GPS, to guide me. I’d been to Barry’s house before, but it’s been years.

It was a steep climb on the twisting road up the hill, with newly manicured lawns in front of architect-designed homes, many with a vista overlooking the surrounding valley. Suddenly, Henrietta announced, “Arriving at #80, on the left.”

I turned down the driveway, parking next to a white German coupe. “A BMW, eh,” I mused, “Barry’s ship must’ve come in.”

I rang the doorbell, but no one answered. I rang again—and then a third time—but no one came to the door. Oh, well, I *am* twenty minutes early.

I turned the door knob, just checking. Oh, my, the door opened. “Hello,” I shouted, “anybody home?” Hearing no reply, I stepped into the two-story high front hall, and again shouted out my presence. How nice, I thought, Barry must’ve figured he might be late, so he left the door unlocked. That’s great, because the coffee I had at the rest stop back on Interstate 84 to keep me awake is now clamoring to get out. I remember the bathroom was on the right, behind the stairway. Thank goodness, Barry changed the bathroom sink here. The old bathroom had a high-tech control, requiring a visitor to plead with Alexa to turn on the lights and the sink. Now, there are good old standard faucets. He changed the wallpaper in here, too.

I came back out into the hall, which he had repainted from celery green to smoky beige. Calling out again, I was greeted with silence.

I wandered into the splendid kitchen with its familiar dark cabinetry and high-end appliances. The kitchen used to have two dishwashers, but now there’s only one. With all their children grown up, they don’t need such a well-equipped kitchen anymore. On the island was a bowl of grapes, and I helped myself to a bunch. How nice of Barry to set out a snack for me, just in case he’s late!

On the kitchen wall were family photographs. Wait a minute! How come I don’t recognize anybody in this wall of photographs? Was my last visit so long ago that their faces and bearing have changed?

[You know where this story is heading, right?]

Barry should have been here by now. I looked at the front door again—there was no house number on it. I went back to the street—no number on the mailbox. I guess in wealthy neighborhoods in Connecticut there’s no reason to identify your residence—or lock the front door, for that matter.

Nervous, I went out to the street once more, and it was then I saw there was one more home higher up on Mountain Drive. I went over to that home, rang the doorbell, again to no avail. Again I tried the door knob, and again the massive front door swung open. I entered this home, called out, and again was greeted by silence. Yes, there’s the bathroom behind the stairway, but I have no need of it now.

Well, I’m five minutes early, so I’ll stand here. At least their mailbox has an “80” on it. At that moment, Barry’s wife came out of that very bathroom, and greeted me with a cheerful, “Hi, Gleeble,”—her college nickname for me—“you’re exactly on time.” ♦



*Top left: The author weaving the first blankets in Brookline;
winter and summer blankets and the flock of Corriedale sheep.*

Our Island Cottage Industry

BY JOHN GRACE

WE WERE READY FOR SOMETHING ELSE. My late wife, Carolyn, and I were in our early fifties and had together practiced law in Boston for nearly 50 years—I mostly at the state and local level while Carolyn was a litigator with her own firm. In 1990, public confidence in government was falling along with public budgets. The practice of litigation was becoming increasingly nasty. One night, Carolyn said to me, “I don’t like the sound of my own voice anymore. It’s your job to get us out of here.”

Where to go was easy. We had a small summer house on Swans Island, Maine, a small fishing community with a year-round population of 350. It’s reached by ferry from Mt. Desert. In the late 1800s over a hundred fishing schooners fished the Grand Banks from Swans Island. More than ten percent of all the fish landed in the United States were landed on Swans Island. Today, the island has a thriving lobster industry.

Though the Island was politically conservative (and would later vote for Donald Trump in 2016) while Carolyn and I were both liberal Democrats, we had long wanted to live year-round on Swans Island and now, with our children grown and educated, we could. But, we wondered, what would we do once we got there?

Our first serious thought was that we might weave and sell summer blankets made of wool. Wool is light and cool at night when it’s hot and humid yet warm in the morning when the temperature and humidity drop. Unlike cotton blankets, they never feel heavy or damp when it’s humid.

We had used some of my grandmother’s summer blankets and found them perfect for

the hot nights and cool mornings of summer. When we tried to buy more summer blankets, though, we found that nobody was making them anymore. So, we thought, would that be something we could do?

There was a flock of Shetland sheep on the Island. Their wool was perfect for summer blankets. The blankets would be all natural, using just the colors of the wool itself—white, black, grey, and brown. We were encouraged by a widely respected industry report (the Faith Popcorn report) predicting, accurately as it turned out, that natural products would be in demand in the years ahead.

The idea that people would want all-natural summer blankets handmade from wool grown in Maine was “on trend” for nine out of ten trend indicators in the report. On the other hand, we had heard that running a business on an island was a good way to make a small fortune out of a large fortune.

We looked into the idea for a year or so, visiting small textile mills and one large mill in Eden, North Carolina that made 20,000 blankets a day. There, the manager told us they had made a summer wool blanket several years earlier but that it “didn’t go,” adding “we couldn’t sell more than 2,000 blankets a year.” We realized then we might have a business. If the big guys were not interested in 2,000 blankets year, there would be room for little guys like us.

I worked for several weeks as an unpaid apprentice in the weaving room of a small mill making cotton blankets to see if we would like the work. I thought we would.

Knowing next to nothing about weaving and textile design, we decided one of us had better go to school. I called the Rhode

Island School of Design and to my surprise and delight, after an hour on the phone, I was admitted as a special student. I took Weaving 1 and Weaving 2 and, for my final project, I made 20" by 20" samples of the summer blankets we planned to make.

We took these samples to a one-day craft show in Blue Hill, Maine. That day we sold 8 queen-size summer blankets even though we had to tell everyone we had never made a blanket before, didn't have a loom on which to weave them, and it would be at least six months before we could deliver them.

By the summer of 1993, we knew there was a market for handmade summer blankets and it was time to get started. We chose a name—Atlantic Blanket Company—and called our blankets "Swans Island Blankets."

We bought an AVL air-assisted hand loom able to weave blankets eight feet wide. We set it up in our family room and made our first sixty blankets while still living in Brookline.

In June 1994, we started to build a barn to live and weave in during the winters on Swans Island. By August we were already weaving and selling summer blankets from Swans Island. Our cottage industry was under way.

We sold all our summer blankets at retail, first on Swans Island, then at local Maine craft shows, then at shows in New England and New York. There were many crafts for sale at these shows and sometimes more than one hundred exhibitors. We were the only ones offering handmade, all-natural summer wool blankets. People loved them. At one show, a customer elbowed his way through the crowd around our booth and said "I bought a blanket from you last year and it's like sleeping in heaven."

All our early blankets were summer blankets woven from a fine-gauge yarn in natural sheep colors of white, black, grey, and

brown. Then our customers started asking for a wider range of colors and for winter weight blankets. Carolyn taught herself how to dye yarn with indigo, cochineal and other all-natural dyes. I designed a winter blanket woven in two layers from a heavier gauge yarn and soon we were making both summer and winter blankets in a full range of natural dyed colors in addition to the natural sheep colors.

By that time, we had three looms and several Island residents working with us, helping to weave and finish blankets. Eventually, we had six full-time helpers, made several hundred blankets a year and became the second largest employer on Swans Island after the General Store.

Each year we would take a Day Away to learn more about textiles and the world beyond Swans Island. One year, Carolyn took the entire company to New York City, leaving me at home to mind the store. Many of the company had never been in an airplane or seen New York and some had never been out of the State of Maine. It was quite something to see the Atlantic Blanket Company walking down Wall Street with their sleeping bags on their way to an artist's studio for the night.

I had now been elected a Swans Island Selectman. There was no campaign. All I had to do was answer one question from an anonymous Island caller the morning of Town Meeting: "If we elect you, will you do it?" I said yes and an hour later Town Meeting elected me, a liberal Democrat from Brookline, as one of their three Selectmen. It seemed our shared interests and values were able to get us beyond political differences.

After mainly selling at craft shows in New England, we started to sell blankets at shows around the country including Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, DC, Atlanta, Chicago, St. Paul and San Francisco. There were often

hundreds of exhibitors but we were still the only one offering handmade all-natural bed-size summer and winter weight wool blankets.

In 1996, we won a Blue Ribbon for Excellence at The Smithsonian Craft Show in Washington, DC. We realized it was time to tell our story to a larger audience, one beyond craft shows and local newspapers. Indeed, several major magazines were now eager to tell the story of the two lawyers who left the law to make wool blankets by hand on an island in Maine.

In February 1999, our story appeared in *Martha Stewart Living Magazine*. By then we were quite used to having our story told but this was different. During the three-week period it takes for the magazine to be fully distributed, we received an average of seventy telephone calls a day from people who had read the story and wanted to know more about our blankets. Some calls came after midnight from people thinking they were calling a 24-hour call center and apologizing when they realized they were actually talking to us directly. It took us eighteen months to fill the blanket orders generated by the story and, when we told our story on Martha's television show, there was another rush of interest in the blankets.

Following the article in *Martha Stewart Living*, many good things happened. Someone in public relations asked if he could take pictures of the blankets and get a catalog designed for us for free. We soon had a beautifully designed catalog for which we had only to pay the cost of printing.

Another person asked if he could design a website for us in return for a small percentage of sales and the Internet became a convenient way to sell our blankets between craft shows.

Soon after we started making blankets, we needed more wool than was available on

Swans Island. We bought wool from other Maine shepherds and started our own flock of Corriedale sheep for summer blanket wool. The wool for our winter blankets came from a flock on Nash Island, an uninhabited island 35 miles east of Swans Island, where we went each year on shearing day both to help with shearing and to select wool.

We greatly enjoyed our cottage industry on Swans Island and came to love being part of a broader craft movement—the late 19th and early 20th centuries—a movement that celebrates the making by hand of everyday things of beauty that brighten the lives of the people who use them and are available at reasonable prices.

In hindsight, it all seemed rather easy but we had a lot of help. My weaving teacher and several fellow craftspeople helped us solve design and production problems along the way and they, along with many of our customers, became our very good friends.

In 2004, as Carolyn's health declined, we sold the company to one of our customers and the business, now known as Swans Island Company, moved to Northport, Maine. See www.swansislandcompany.com. It's now less a cottage industry and more a modern, mainline company, making and selling a range of woolen goods as well as blankets. The owners no longer live on the premises or go to retail craft shows though the company sells at both wholesale and retail levels. Their handsome, handmade wool blankets include many of our classic designs and still represent the very best in craftsmanship but, unfortunately, retail prices have more than doubled since our day.

Let me know if you're interested in a blanket. I may be able to get one for you wholesale! ♦

Home Bound

These two watercolor and ink paintings were created by JOANNE BORSTELL for a commissioned series of Lexington Housing Authority properties.



Greeley Village 1 (2020)

13" x 19"



Greeley Village 2 (2020)

13" x 19"

Love Fuel

BY NANCY KOUCHOUK

Flush with power, a brazen sea scrolls for desire.
Salt sprays the air; foam licks the surf: taste of desire.

Sweet bakery scents drift over hard sand at low tide.
Eager joggers salivate, stupid with desire.

A young girl, her bikini strap ripped, runs past boys
ogling the wink of her breast: fugitive from desire.

Fathers dig a fortress waging war against the tide.
Daughters wayward on the rampart, restless with desire.

A mother's briny tears beseech the soft roar of waves,
her child long gone under the sea—tortured by desire.

Heat lightning flickers above dunes.
The poet feeds her paramour blood oranges—alchemy of desire.

Seeing Red

THERAPY

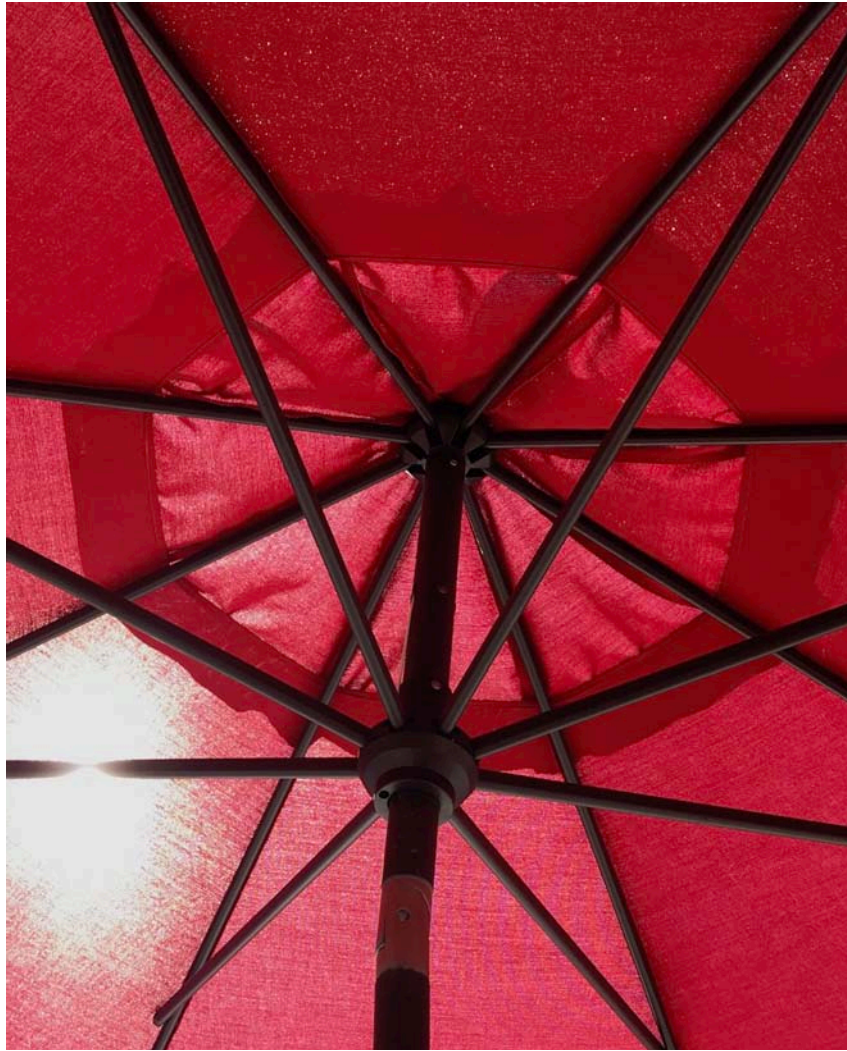
My bright red yarn bowl
Is now filled with TheraBands.
Is this the future?

BY JOAN SCHOELLNER



KATHY SANTOS
Sunrise Over the Smoky Mountains (2017)

Photography



JUDITH CLAPP
Starry (2019)

Photography



SANDY MILLER-JACOBS
Tel Aviv Beach (2020)

Photography

Still Alive at Great Meadows

BY TAMARA HAVENS

From the high tower, I see lily pads
almost cover
two ponds, planted
to crowd out
water chestnuts, algae and carp.

At water's dock, I peer down.
Tall yellow flowers sway
in the wind like beacons
of light on landing air strip
as Canada Geese pass.
Some flowers transform
into thistles, round bells
filled with seeds
to feed geese, ducks, even muskrats.

At the water's dock, I see not all is lost
to the lily pads. A narrow canal runs
between two ponds. At one end,
Canada Geese flutter, quack,
and tackle plans
for next flight South.

At sundown, a pair
of foot-long turtles
crawl out of Concord River,
shake off drops of water,
prepare for moonlit rendezvous.

Hidden behind cattail reeds, sits
a three-by-two-foot muskrat nest
of twigs, weeds and mud.
The black furry muskrat dives
under to furnish his inner abode.

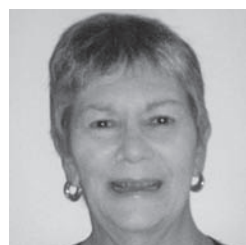
On the outer edge
of nest, a blue heron perches,
bends to preen his feathers,
straightens, stretches
long, thin legs
into a ballet pose.

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 widely.



LEE BRAMI, 71, has lived in the Boston area since 1973, and in Lexington since 1987. She has been writing short memoirs and short fiction for the past 20 years. A passionate reader of fiction and non-fiction, she reads to her husband every day while he makes dinner.

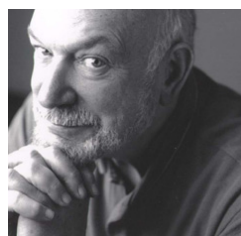


VICTORIA BUCKLEY, MS, OTR/L, CCAP is an occupational therapist and clinician with over 35 years of experience in mental health. She is a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 9 and chairs the Lexington Commission on Disability.



JUDITH CLAPP is a long-time amateur photographer. Recently she has been using an iPhone as well as a 35mm camera.

After receiving degrees from MIT and Harvard, RICHARD GLANTZ spent most of his career managing engineers at Digital. Upon retiring, he began compiling a memoir only to discover his life story held zero interest, even among his family. His rich store of anecdotes and incidents make up his family album.



JOHN GRACE spent his life practicing law in Boston, mostly in the public sector, before moving to Maine and founding the Atlantic Blanket Company with his first wife, Carolyn, who passed away in 2015. He now lives in Lexington with his second wife, Anne, whom he first met in fifth grade.



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*, is available on Amazon.



TAMARA HAVENS, a retired ESL teacher, was born in Egypt to Russian-born parents. She volunteers teaching English to internationals in several communities.



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



While living 8 years in Egypt, NANCY KOUCHOUK wrote and edited at American University and Cairo American College. Her past work continues to color her poetry.



A long-time Lexington resident CAROLYN LEVI is a retired scientist/educator who devoted most of her career to improving public understanding of science and nature. Several years ago, she became fascinated by poetry, by the imagery and meaning a few well-chosen words can convey.



A retired Registered Nurse, the late JACQUELINE L. MCSHINE was born in Trinidad, moving to Lexington in 2009 where she was an avid volunteer. OWLL poetry workshops sparked her creative poetic juices inspired by personal experiences.



SANDY MILLER-JACOBS used her camera to teach preschool through graduate students. She finds it provides a new way for her to view the world as it brings into sharpness nature, cities and people.



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



KATHY SANTOS has been taking pictures since she was an 8-year-old living in Idaho. She uses her web design vocation to fund her photography avocation.



JOAN SCHOELLNER, 73, is semi-retired, working part time as an editor. For the past 15 years, she has worked for Pimsleur Languages. She works out three times a week and maintains her interest in sports of all kinds.



STEPHEN SENTURIA is a new resident of Brookhaven at Lexington. He began writing fiction when he retired from MIT after 36 years as a Professor of Electrical Engineering. He has published two novels and is deeply enmeshed in his third.



STEPHEN SHICK is a retired Unitarian Universalist minister, and the author of two Skinner House books of poems, prayers and meditation, *Be the Change* and *Consider the Lilies*. His poetry and video Momentary Meditations are published weekly on the Rachel Carson Council website.





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



DEBORAH WEINER SOULE is a religious educator serving congregations in the greater Boston area. In her “spare” time she operates The Delicious Dish, a local catering company, and can often be found on stage in musical or theater productions.



RUIMIN WENG worked in the conference business before retirement. He is an amateur photographer mostly in landscape and nature photography. ♦

←—————→

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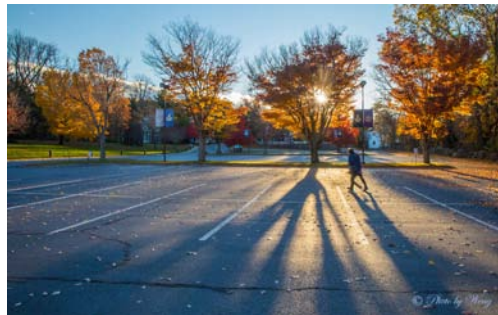
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