

L E X I N G T O N
LifeTimes
A CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL
ISSUE 9 | WINTER 2022





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ABOUT THIS JOURNAL

Four years ago, the Friends of the Lexington Council on Aging first launched the bi-annual publication of LEXINGTON *LifeTimes*: A CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL with a grant from the FCOA-funded Bright Ideas program. This ninth issue showcases the creative talents of 24 seniors who live or work in Lexington.

An editorial board of volunteers sets the criteria for submission and selects entries for inclusion. Distribution is primarily electronic with a limited number of copies printed.

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You can support the Journal, and the activities of the FCOA, by making a gift to the Friends of the Lexington Council on Aging. If you wish to be recognized as a Patron, please note this on your check or on the donation envelope or online form. Please help to keep this popular publication going!

Submission guidelines for future editions as well as information on how to support the Journal and FCOA can be found on the Friends of the Lexington Council on Aging website:

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ON THE COVERS

FRONT:

Ghost-Skaters

BY PETER SHAW

BACK:

Chapin Tree in Winter (detail)

BY CATHY PAPAZIAN

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The Time-Traveler's Window

BY JAMIE KATZ

THE HOUSE SITS in a contemporary, self-contained community built in the 1950's. It was designed as a small starter home for young families, but like many other families, the family never left but instead expanded and renovated the house over the years. It is now an older home than some and has plenty of room but falls far short of a McMansion. For a number of years, it contained a family of six plus a small menagerie of animals. These days, the house is more than ample for what my wife and I need.

Most of our friends enter the home through the front door and take a quick left into a large room with the kitchen on one side and a dining area on the other. The dining area on the right has two large floor-to-ceiling picture windows that look out over a deck to trees and a swampy area in the back of the house. The view draws rave reviews and provides us with birds and squirrels for our viewing pleasure. In the winter, with the leaves off the trees, we can see coyotes, deer, fox, and other animals wander through the swamp. The most unusual animal I've seen was a martin, with its black and furry tail flowing behind it as it ran across the snow. Spend a

day working in the city, as I still do, and the view through the picture windows at the end of the day always brings peace and pleasure.

But if, instead, you walk into the large room and look left, toward the kitchen, you will see a modest-sized, square window sitting above the main large sink. Look through it and you

will find a view of our small neighborhood road, an old stonewall, a variety of trees, a house across the road with an adjacent path. to a community pool, and a pond. Plenty to look at, even as the view is the same every time I wash the dishes.

As long as the weather holds, we will see neighborhood friends walk in both directions on the road. Standing at the sink to prepare dinner, or to clean up, the street often presents a small parade of swimmers, walkers, bikers, dogs,

and kids, some of whom wave up to the window in a greeting. And in the winter, a glance out the window shows us the snow that we've shoveled or are about to shovel. So the window over the sink is my sightline to neighborhood life.

But when I sit at the dinner table, on the other side of the room, and look toward the kitchen and the square window, I see



something else—a window in time. Standing in front of the window, I see my mother cooking, cleaning, walking, waving, and talking.

My mother died on September 30, 2001, just after 9/11 and a three-year battle with cancer. It's twenty years past and I still see her in the kitchen in front of the sink and the window. All she did from her command post was feed bodies and souls. She would hand out food and snacks and ask her four kids about school, homework, friends, sports, activities at home—and then she would tell us to go play outside.

My mother was never a gourmet cook, but she prepared traditional meals, in abundance. Her vegetables were often overcooked, but she did very well with turkey, stew, pot roast, and macaroni and cheese (using a superb combination of at least three cheeses and browned on the top). At the sink, she'd peel potatoes for potato salad or mashed potatoes, make jello salad, or put together a green salad. My father regularly traveled for work so my mother did much of the kid-rearing, even as she worked as a school librarian. In addition, she went back to school for her Masters degree and made dinner every night until she was too ill to do it.

Over many years, she also fed dozens of youngsters from the neighborhood with snacks and drinks. Some of those kids came because they were our friends, some came because they were hungry, and some because they just wanted to be around my mother to talk. She made sandwiches by the dozens for family trips—summer ones on a sailboat, and in winter, ski trips. When I went to college and came home with a few friends one weekend, she was in her glory and cooked a turkey, a ham, and a roast beef for dinner before we headed back to the dorm.

She made all those meals in front of the square window looking out over the street. There were no trees in front of the house when I was young, so she had a clear view out and her neighbors had a clear view in. While she worked, she waved at the walkers or stopped to look at colored leaves from autumn trees that had fallen on the pond's surface.

One October, before she became ill and while she was making dinner, I asked if she wanted to take a drive the next weekend with my wife and me to New Hampshire to look at the foliage and the mountains.

“No, thanks,” she said. “I have the prettiest view in the world right here.”

The day will come when my wife and I will leave the house for somewhere else. New owners will move in. They will have purchased it in part because they love the view from the big picture windows in the dining area. Over time, I also hope they will come to treasure the view from the smaller window over the sink.

Once we leave, though, the real magic of that window will disappear. It will still give a lovely view outside to anyone standing in the kitchen. But the views that I see from the other side of the room, the ones with my mother in the kitchen showing her love of family, friends, food, home, and a small pond, will have disappeared, no longer a window in time. ♦

Homes Where the Heart Was

REALTOR SONDRA LUCENTE creates mixed media memories of family homes.



Reading (2014)



Sapphire Estate (2017)



Somerset (2017)



Hilltop (2015)

Sisters of the Heart

BY VICTORIA BUCKLEY

Sara and I sit in the dusty wind
Heat radiating from the ground
Small patch of precious shade
In the blazing hot desert.
She says "I wait so long for you,
Do I say it right way?"
She grabs my hand; I say
With my forgiven errors,
"Te falto siempre, mi amiga"
("I miss you always, my friend")
I am thirsty for our talks.
A boy races by us, stopping
To hug us both – his smile
Is missing teeth.
Sara says that Jose lived on the street
And the scars on his head were
"Like how do I say – ashtray?
His tooth with a hammer"
Her eyes get softer as she tells me
More – "I cannot keep him legally
Government says no to me
Never helps just no
But I love him – he needs us"
So many children need her home.

She wants to hear about my work
So I squeeze her hand and say
"Conozco un hombre qui tenga dolor"
("I know a man in pain")
She stills me with her hand
"English slow por favor para mi"
("Please for me")
I share anguish from the mental wards
As I tell her about the demons a man
Battles every day in his mind
And also about the woman beaten
Who cannot get away.
We have many stories, many burdens
Small broken pieces and hurts.
We are the sun on the white concrete walls
In our small circle of shade in the desert,
Sisters of the heart.

The Visionary

BY NANCY KOUCHOUK

Soothsayer, tell me,
Where is our village
once held together by four-legged herds?
Canal by the Banyan has left us with thirst.

Soothsayer, tell me,
Where is the flute man who breathes music
in footsteps? Vendors pocket their hands.
Minarets broadcast prayers at noon.

Soothsayer, tell me,
Why do runes carry secrets?
Sufis spin circles? Your eyes open wide
at the dregs of my upturned cup.

Soothsayer, tell me,
Does hunger migrate? The City is bursting
with people unknown, native to nothing
but heartbeats their own.

Soothsayer, tell me,
When the bread's done, do you hear
whispering wheat grass? Women sing
as they swaddle their babies, cook by the fire.

Soothsayer, tell me,
Will my fears let go their stones?
The hem of your robe sweeps
a path clear behind us.
Tell me we drink from the same well.

Landing in Boston

BY TAMARA HAVENS

As the fog disperses,
the Boston skyline appears.
My fingers wrapped around the ship's
railing feel red and numb.
Stomach is queasy after
nineteen days on a cargo ship.

Memories of storms, crossing
the Atlantic, loom
before me. High winds rocked
the ship like a seesaw.
Walls of seawater smashed
into us, water crept under
the gunwale, coiled around
our feet like a snake; but

we anchored ourselves to
each other, to the railing
and posts. *I can't give up.*
I can't give up.

We waited five years
for this visa to the US!
And my father shouting,
"We're going to make it.
Have faith!"

The sun cuts through the clouds.
Ribbons of pastel colors
unwind across the sky.
A red tugboat appears
alongside to guide us
to south Boston
where deckhands
prepare to unload
us with the cargo.

A Special Christmas Eve

BY HAL FARRINGTON

CHRISTMAS EVE at St Joseph's church in Somerville was a special time for its' parishioners. The Church highlighted with brilliant colors, the holiday decorations, and the meeting with friends from other parts of the city not seen on a regular basis, as they participated in the yearly tradition of their faith. This one though was quite special, because my best friend, who was part of the choir, was going to have an important role in a surprise for all the parishioners. But, what he and the choir didn't know was that the surprise they expected, turned out to be something even more of a surprise.

It was Christmas Eve day, the choir and Father Foley were rehearsing the songs for the midnight mass at Saint Joseph. "It's a special night boys and I want things to go just right. The songs are fine and all your voices are like the angels you are."

"Thank you Father," said the choir in perfect harmony. Father Foley smiled, nodded approval and straightened up to his six foot four frame. A big strong Irishman, full of fun and a man the kids of the parish looked up to. He paused for a moment then looked at little Norman Wyatt, the smallest boy in the choir, but the possessor of a



beautiful alto voice. “Now, Norman, do you remember what we’ve been practicing and what your special part will be?”

“Yes, Father, when you sing out ‘and the angels lit the candle’ I will light the large candle on the chandelier, and using the rope and pulley, move the chandelier to the center of the church ceiling, where all the parishioners will see it.”

“That’s right, Norman, now let’s go through it once more.”

The choir sang their songs and on cue from Father Foley saying, ‘and the angels lit the candle’, little Norman lit the candle and moved the chandelier to the center of the church ceiling.

Finally it was Christmas Eve night. A light snow had been falling for several hours, placing a white blanket over the old, gray slated roof and red bricked sides of Saint Joseph’s church, hiding at least for one night, the soot and dirt built up over the last eighty-two years. Its large cracked stained-glass windows, illuminated by the lights within the church, displayed a brilliant array of rainbow reds, greens and royal blue colors on the snow-covered sidewalks below.

Along those sidewalks came the parishioners, climbing up the worn brick stairs, then taking their seats in the rows of pews as they had for many years. The church was full, not a place for one more in all the rows of benches. The choir, neat and starched to the hilt, their voices ringing out heavenly as never before.

Father Foley was indeed pleased as Mass continued. Then, at the predetermined moment, the Father began the part of the Mass that would signal the chandelier to be lit and moved to the center of the church ceiling, where all below would see the beauty in the simple but meaningful symbol of the candle; the Star of Bethlehem shining over

the manger where the baby Jesus lay.

Turning to the parishioners, he sang out, “And the angels lit the candle.”

He waited for a few seconds but nothing happened. Sensing that Norman may not have heard him, he repeated the phrase, but a bit more loudly.

“And the angels lit the candle!”

The parishioners were silent, as was Father Foley. Sure but you could hear a pin drop. Then, from far above them in the choir box, came the pure alto voice of a scared little ten-year-old Norman Wyatt...

“But, but, the cat wet on the matches!”

Then, something wonderful happened. Maybe it was Christmas Eve and the feeling of joy and hope or maybe it was to relieve poor Norman’s fear that he had somehow failed in this important task and was in big trouble.

Almost in unison, the parishioners gave out a soft laughter, put hands together and lightly clapped to show their support and understanding. Even Father Foley, maybe shocked by Norman’s candid description of the problem, saw the humor in what had occurred.

Well, the Mass continued on, dry matches were found, and the candle finally made it to its final destination.

At the end of Mass, folks started back to their homes, some for a get-together with neighbors to celebrate the coming day, others home to wrap those presents bought at the last minute so as not to be found by wondering children.

But, you should know, as special and wondrous as a midnight Mass was, the parishioners will never forget that Christmas Eve at Saint Joseph’s church and that magical night when they celebrated the birth of a special child and made another little boy feel he was pretty special, too. ♦

Our Portable Tree

BY IRENE HANNIGAN

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING, MOM?” Ted asked as he ran into the backyard with Sean and Casey, his new two friends trailing behind him. Despite the myriad of other tasks that I could have been doing as a new home owner, I was sitting at the picnic table in front of a large mesh canvas surrounded by an assortment of pre-cut packages of yarn. While Ted knew that I loved to knit and quilt, he had never seen me working with the kind of materials that were spread out before me.

“Hey, that’s cool,” said Casey who immediately knew what I was doing because she had spotted the picture on the package propped up in front of my tall glass of lemonade. “My mom has one of those skirts she always puts around our Christmas tree every year except ours has green trees that look like they’re holding hands. I like the little white ducks.”

“I do, too,” Ted chimed in as he fingered the wool that I was punching into the holes. “Where’d you get that wooden tool?” he wanted to know. “Can I try?”

It didn’t surprise me that Ted would be intrigued. From an early age, he loved to play with blocks and legos and K’Nex. He fancied himself a builder and could also amuse himself for hours with boxes of various sizes and shapes. It was always fun for me to watch him play and I was always willing to supply him with tape, glue, scissors, and anything else he needed, including a pair of helping hands. His talent proved fortuitous

the year we decided that we would depart from our tradition of getting a live Christmas tree.

Ted had just turned five and I wondered how he would react to our decision. Like many children, he had come to associate the season with the incongruity, to my way of thinking at least, of having a gigantic evergreen tree in the living room. For his Dad, however, it was the season of an itchy nose, watery eyes, and lots of coughing. When it finally occurred to us that the Christmas tree was the reason for his distress, we decided it was time to change our tradition.

When the time came for us to look for a tree, we headed to a nearby garden shop instead of strolling among the sweet scented Balsam fir trees at the farm stand near our home. Ted was a bit puzzled until he realized that what the garden shop lacked in fragrance, it made up for in glitz and color.

“Let’s take our time and look around,” Dad advised. “This is going to be a tree we’re going to have for many years.” It took us a while to stroll through the winter wonderland but eventually we had a sense of what the options were and were able to narrow down our choice to a few that were in our price range.

“I vote for that one,” Ted said pointing to a tall stately pine. Look how tall it is. It’s going to reach right up to our ceiling.”

“I was thinking about that one, too,” I said.



“Isn’t it amazing how it really looks like a live tree? But do you think it’s going to fit in our living room?”

“Let’s check,” Dad said as he got out his tape measure. He twirled the tree around so we could examine it from all angles. He grinned as he said, “I think this one will be just fine. After paying for our purchase we were told that we could pick up the box in the loading dock area of the store.

“A box?” Ted asked. “How’s that big tree going to fit into a box?”

“Don’t worry,” we assured him. “We’re just going to have to put it together so it will look exactly like the one in the store.” Ted’s eyes lit up.

“You mean we’re going to build the tree?” he asked. “And we get to put it together every year? And I’m going to help?” We both nodded our heads, grabbed his hands, and headed off to pick up what he always referred to as our “portable tree.”

For the first few years, all three of us assembled the tree together. I was in charge of handing out the color-coded branches in the sequence in which they were stored in the box. Ted’s job was to place each branch in the appropriate opening on the pole-like trunk and Bob was in charge of stringing the lights, which subtly reinforced the unspoken truth, that the lights were a man’s job. Once the tree was colorfully glimmering, Bob left it to Ted and me to hang the ornaments. We were a good team and as Ted grew older, he took increasing responsibility for setting up the tree, especially the lights.

“Let’s put on some Christmas music,” Ted always suggested.

“I’ll make some hot chocolate,” I always replied as I headed to the kitchen.

I knew that by the time I returned with our drinks, Ted would be rummaging through the big red box in search of his prized baseball

ornaments that had appeared in the toe of his Christmas stocking in past years. I knew he would hang them first and they would all be in close proximity to one another despite my suggestion that we spread them out a bit. He had his favorites and he gradually realized that I had mine.

It always amazed me that I could tell a story about most of the ornaments on the tree. Some I had collected before I was married. Others I had made. Many had been gifts from my students or colleagues or relatives. I shared some of my stories with Ted but many others I kept to myself unless Ted asked. Although Ted’s focus was on the here and now, I knew that as we were decorating and talking, as well as not talking, Ted was making memories of his own as I continued to make mine. I knew that one day, in the not too distant future, I would be decorating the tree alone. I could see myself hanging the paper Christmas tree with all the glitter that Ted had made in daycare and I would hear him saying “Do we really have to put that on the tree this year?” even though he always knew the answer.

At some point I knew Ted would have his own tree in his own home. I had a hunch Ted’s tree might even be a real evergreen tree. I was betting that when that time came he would finally be willing to take his assortment of baseball ornaments instead of entrusting them to me for safekeeping. I wondered with whom he would be decorating his tree and what childhood memories and stories he would recall and share. Would he want some of his baby ornaments or the hand-painted ones his grandmother had made? How about my origami birds? Maybe he would even ask me for the rug skirt with the little white ducks that would remind him of our first Christmas in our new home. ♦

“To Thine Own Self”

BY ESTHER ISENBERG

On a perfect early spring afternoon,
In the clear air and bright light,
Seated at the head of
A table of gaily chattering folk,
His daughter just turning eighteen,
He lowers his head,
On which the hair at his temples
Is just turning to gray,
In the midst of all this,
He has the need to say. . .
“Everybody’s lonely.”
He doesn’t look up,
Doesn’t seem to care if
Any there can hear.
Softly spoken as it was,
Yet the phrase reverberated round
Until all other sound
Retreated.

His beloved daughter,
Just coming of age
Is clearly smitten
With the handsome young man
Whose hand she
Holds and caresses.
Her auburn tresses,
Brushing his shoulder,
As she leans close to him,
And closer even.

“Everybody is lonely,”
He now says more clearly,
As he struggles,
For surrender,
As he tries to conceive,
Of allowing her,
To move toward a future,
Other than the one,
He had not until,

That moment understood,
Might be his fantasy.
This young man is secular and *“other.”*
Blue eyes, blonde hair,
Western, Republican,
Engineer, not artiste,
Tall, strong, well built,
Christian, not Jew,
With a warm winning way,
And a charming smile,
And no clue at all of,
What is due and owed to,
Their history.

He looks toward his wife,
Who later will say,
“Right church, wrong pew,”
Using those words few,
To summarize the disaster,
Coming towards them,
Faster and faster.
How will they share
Recipes and holidays,
Celebrations and rituals?
How will they be trusting family,
When all the subtlety,
Of language and expression,
Will sink into the deep depression,
Of intense cultural separation?
His vision of the future,
Once assured,
Is blurred.
How can he find sweet consolation,
As he encounters this isolation?

“Everybody’s lonely,”
He now clearly shared.
Yes, he has decided.
He wants to be heard.

Pretty In Pink

BY MARY LEVIN KOCH

AS CHRISTMAS APPROACHES, Bill and I think long and hard about what to give our six-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, who still believes in Santa Claus. We want it to be special. Eventually we settle on a new bicycle. Soon after Thanksgiving, I'm off to Sears to order a bike. It is pink and accessorized with a bright-yellow battery-operated boom box, a white straw basket and a set of training wheels. Before leaving the store, I make sure it will be assembled. I'm remembering my father's oft-told tale of my first red bicycle. It arrived in a gazillion pieces on Christmas Eve and he had no idea how they fit together until a friend came to the rescue.

Why a pink bicycle? Well, I want the bike to look girly. In Athens, Georgia, where we live, pink is THE color favored by all pint-sized princesses. Elizabeth is a tomboy; I am hoping the color pink will tickle out a smidgeon of femininity. Little girls can be so mean; I don't want her teased because she is different. I don't want her to draw undue attention to herself as I do. A transplant from the northeast, I stand out for my left-of-center politics, my religion (or lack thereof). I favor black slacks and oxford white shirts while my peers dress in pastel blouses and flirty skirts. I can absorb any smirky looks that come my way; I'm uncertain if my daughter can.

Three days before Christmas, I receive a call that the bicycle is ready for pick up. Elizabeth is in school but our two-and-a-half year-old daughter Claudia is at home helping Bill decorate the tree—a seven-foot Fraser fir. Before I leave, I tell Bill—insist really—that he keep Claudia away from the sunroom windows when he hears me return. My plan is to stash the bicycle in a crawl space just below.

Arriving home, I noisily make my presence known. As I wheel the bike towards its hiding place, I hear a tap, tap from above. Looking up, two faces are pressed against the windows; Bill and Claudia are waving to me. I walk inside fuming. “Mommy,” Claudia asks “What were you pushing?”

I say with as much conviction as I can muster, “When I finished shopping I found a bicycle in the car with a note from Santa's elf. This is a present for Lizzy and is too large to fit down the chimney. Santa wants me to take it home until Christmas morning.” My own little white lie—stated with absolutely no guilt. “Promise me you won't tell your sister.” And Claudia does just that. In the days before Christmas I monitor the girls' conversations and I'm confident our secret remains safe.

On Christmas morning, the girls rush downstairs to see what Santa Claus brought. When Elizabeth spies the shiny pink bicycle, she is truly surprised and shrieks with glee. The kickstand securely in place, she jumps on the saddle, turns on the boom box and pretends to pedal off to see her best friend. That the bicycle is pink is irrelevant. Elizabeth would have loved it no matter the color.

Meanwhile, Claudia too skips around the den squealing over the new bike apparently just as surprised as her older sister. It is as if she has never seen it before! Hmmm. Is my sweet youngest child putting one over on me? Does she already know the fine art of deception—an art she will perfect in her teen years? Or is her lack of recall a problem? All sorts of uncomfortable thoughts race through my head. Whoa, I tell myself, slow down. Take a deep breath. Relax. Worry about this later. Let Christmas take over the day. ♦

Dancing in Place

BY LEE BRAMI



HE STARTS TO DANCE, an impromptu little jig, as I'm washing the dinner dishes. He asks how he can help with the dishes as he dances.

"You can dance for me while I'm drying them," I say.

He stands still for a moment, then sticks out one leg, then the other, while he throws out his arms, palms up, almost waving, and calls out, in a sing-song voice,

"You put your right leg in,
you put your right leg out,
you put your right leg in,
and you shake it all about..."

He smiles and I smile back, turning away from the dishes. Then I can't help laughing, it's so charming and goofy.

Dancing in place the whole time, he keeps his arms and legs moving. I love it when he does this. He doesn't dance often. Whenever I ask him to take dance lessons with me, whether ballroom or the tango, he says *no, he can't dance*. But I think he knows how much I love his impromptu jigs. In the middle of drying the pots and pans, I come over and dance with him, facing him, copying his version of the Hokey Pokey, singing along. We link arms, swinging around, this way and that way.

My husband has Parkinson's, and I know he won't always be able to dance, or even walk, but while the dancing lasts, I'll embrace every bit of joy I can. ♦

Wonderland



CATHY PAPA ZIAN
Chapin Tree in Winter (2021)

Photography



SUSAN ENGLAND PERULLO
Mountains and Ice (2014)

Photography



CHARLES KETCHAM
Winter's Willful (2020)

Photography



RUIMIN WENG
Harrington School (2017)
Photography



CATHY PAPAIZAN
Clothesline (2019)

Photography



CHARLES KETCHAM
Quarry Ice Fall (2010)

Photography

Certified Wildlife Habitat

BY VICKI BLAKE

LAST FALL, MY HUSBAND AND I were standing by the kitchen window when we saw something moving outside. Peering into the trees, we saw a mother raccoon with 5 smaller babies (or so we assumed). Didn't do a paternity test.

Sometime in May, I noticed a funny smell in the basement. "Andy, why does it smell like someone has been smoking pot in the basement?" "I'm not smoking pot in the basement," was his reply.

Father's Day rolls around and we are sitting on the back deck eating breakfast. We see a raccoon walking towards us, dragging a back leg. It goes under the deck. It hits us – the smell in the basement is from a raccoon living under the porch. For some reason, I google symptoms of rabies, and one is paralysis in hind legs. So now we have a rabid raccoon living under the porch.

On Monday I call animal control. An officer comes holding a long tube with a noose at the end, but he doesn't find the raccoon. He recommends that we call an exterminator who will come with a trap. A guy comes the following evening, puts a live trap filled with marshmallows and tells us to call when we see something in the trap. The very next morning there is a raccoon in the trap. The guy comes back and takes the trap away and \$650 in cash. Andy spends a couple of days under the porch, shoring up any holes and putting up chicken wire so

there is not an easy way for another raccoon to move in. We figured that was the end of that story. Nope.

A few days later, a neighbor shows me a picture he took – a raccoon walking in the same trees where we saw them last fall. It looks healthy so I tell him I am not going after all raccoons in the neighborhood, just unhealthy ones.

About a week later, we see another wounded raccoon in the backyard. Animal control comes again, this time two officers, no equipment. They see the raccoon. They say, "Well, maybe it's not rabies, maybe it got wounded some other way. We don't want to shoot it because it's next to a stone wall and the bullets might ricochet. Best to let nature take its course." Off they go. So now, Rocky, (as we have named it) lives in the back garden. He shows up to graze at dawn and dusk. He finds a box near the

side of the house, by the trash bins, where he sleeps. This is good, as we can see him out the dining room window and know when it is safe to go out into the yard. He's a sound sleeper.

We take a short vacation. When we get back, poor Rocky has expired next to his box. Nothing left but fur and bones. Rest in peace, Rocky.

I apologized to my husband, "I didn't know last year when I put that NWF sign up that they could read!" ♦



Is That a Chicken in Our Woods?

BY GARY FALICK

ONE DAY IN AUGUST, my wife noticed a bright orange appendage near the base of an old tree in the shaded area of our yard. On closer inspection it appeared to be some type of growth, consisting of a cluster of shelf-like rounded shapes, mostly perpendicular to the tree trunk. They were all bright orange, with a white contrasting border around the edge of each one of these miniature shelves. Assuming it was some sort of fungus, but having scant knowledge of such matters, the obvious next step was to consult with my friend, Mr. Google. He did not disappoint.

In addition to multiple photos, many of which were almost identical to ours, there were descriptions of the fungi and things one should know about them. It turned out

we had a nice specimen of a species known as Chicken of the Woods. More significantly, every write-up mentioned that it is edible and especially tasty. Despite all of these testimonials, we were reluctant to proceed without reassurance from an experienced personal acquaintance. Who might be able to help?

We are members of Lexington At Home, an organization of Lexington Seniors wishing to remain in our own homes as we age. The current membership is about 150, representing a broad range of interests and experiences. We share information on all sorts of topics, so the next step was to broadcast the following email to everyone.



Hello Lexington At Home Members,

As you can see in the photo taken yesterday, we appear to have a nice Chicken of the Woods specimen in our backyard. We are not experts in identification but everything we can find on the web supports this identification and describes it as edible and especially tasty. If any of you are more knowledgeable and would be confident harvesting it for your own enjoyment, just let us know. Otherwise we will continue to enjoy observing it. You are welcome to come by for a close-up look too.

Regards, Gary & Bebe

Our efforts were repaid almost immediately! In just a couple of days we had a variety of replies. Two people were eager to come to the house and collect some samples to cook and eat. One of the respondents was away on vacation and would not be able to get here until she returned a week later. A few others sent photos of growths on trees they had taken recently on nature walks but were clearly different from what we had. They didn't know the identity of their images either. A couple of replies suggested that another name for the fungus is Hen of the Woods, also the name of a Vermont restaurant. Although there is such a species and restaurant, we learned the species is not the same as Chicken of the Woods.

A day or so later, the first person arrived. She mentioned that she had been a member of the Boston Mycological Club for years and had enjoyed Chicken of the Woods many times. She was delighted with the condition

of the specimen and took a few shelves, carefully breaking them off the cluster. The next day she emailed that they were delicious! We began to think seriously about a taste testing for ourselves but decided to wait until the other person who had expressed interest had a chance to get her samples. She arrived when she said she would, but by then the cluster had become a dull orange and was no longer as fresh looking.

Nonetheless she took samples for her use.

At this point, our Chicken was clearly past its prime, or so it seemed to us. Should we or shouldn't we? One web article mentioned that the fungus becomes crumbly and less flavorful as it ages. Maybe it was a rationalization, but we finally decided to wait for our first taste of Chicken of the Woods to be from a freshly harvested sample at its prime. That will probably be a while coming, but it will happen—maybe? eventually? someday? never? ♦



CHARLES KETCHAM
A Winter's Requiem (2019)

Photography

Political Wisdom: Oxymoron or Noble Quest?

BY JAY KAUFMAN & LARRY PRUSAK

WISDOM. IT'S EASIER TO NOTICE when it's absent than to define.

And sadly, even if it is not completely absent, the word "wisdom" is rarely heard and is only infrequently detectable in the wrangling that passes for debate in our public life. Across cultures and the centuries, wisdom has been considered the ultimate virtue. The classical Greeks stressed *phronesis*, a word we might translate as "practical wisdom," acting wisely in the world, doing the right thing for the right reason. Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln come to mind.

We could use some of that virtue today. In its place, we see appeals to credentials, data, analyses, opinion, and, worse, the invitation to be loyal and orthodox in how we think and what we do.

We've all had the good fortune to know some very smart people. And we've also brushed up against great wisdom or great acts of wisdom from otherwise ordinary people. We certainly know that lots of data and facts do not make you smart, and that not all smart people are really wise. Lots of knowledge does not wisdom make. Who among us has not had a really smart teacher who couldn't deliver, couldn't convey infectious curiosity, couldn't engage, couldn't invite us into learning?

Politicians, like teachers, come in all flavors and history confirms what we know to expect: Wisdom is as scarce amongst those in public office as it is in the public. The people we elect are no better – and no worse – than the people who elect them. Isn't it fair to say

that more wisdom would be a good thing? Maybe we should go back to seeking, even demanding, it.

So what are the dimensions of wisdom that we should look for in those we invite to lead us? And what qualities should those of us called to serve work to nurture?

CURIOSITY

While we may think we want our leaders to have all the answers, isn't it true that our best politicians, like our best teachers, are adept at focusing us on essential questions and keeping people at the table long enough for shared answers to emerge? Leading with curiosity requires great listening skills, being open to new ideas, and having some healthy detachment, even skepticism, about one's own ideas and beliefs. It requires as well experimentation and improvisation, and the will to risk dead ends and missteps.

And it requires joy in learning, in exploring terra incognita, unknown territory.

COMPASSION

Do we not need our leaders to be compassionate, to have genuine caring for others, an ability to put themselves in the shoes and hearts of those they serve? Absent compassion, they may be in a position of authority but they will fail a key test of leadership. It is striking that President Obama was mocked and criticized when he said he wanted this quality in a Supreme Court nominee.

*Joy in learning;
curiosity in life;
and compassion
in all we do.*

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For all the attention to THE leader, wise leadership in our public life is anything but a solo sport. Doris Kearns Goodwin speaks of Abraham Lincoln’s “team of rivals” to account for the remarkable accomplishments of his administration. The ability to listen to and work with others with opposing views and the will to bring different voices together in a chorus is a mark of a wise leader and a wise citizen. Can visions and goals be clearly articulated and aligned? Is there a sense of shared accountability and responsibility? Is smart risk-taking rewarded? Are diversity and voices of dissent honored?

MODESTY

It’s said of the wise that the older we get, the more we recognize how little we know. This helps account for the fact that politics is a sport for the young, but statecraft requires the seasoning of time. We want (and think we need) our leaders to be smarter and wiser than we are because we want them to provide us with protection, direction, and order. And we want this even more in challenging times when dislocation (climate change, the great disparity of wealth and power, and a painful legacy of racial, religious and ethnic divides come to mind) is all about us. Donald Trump was elected in part because some of us fell for his promise to take worries off our hands. He had the answers, even to the questions we couldn’t quite formulate. How immodest. How inaccurate. How impossible. How undemocratic.

CAUSE AND COURSE

We can aspire to wise leadership animated by a cause that is just and a course of action to pursue it effectively. Absent both a noble and ennobling purpose and the will and skill to get it done, we risk an ignoble leader or an ineffective dreamer. Henry David Thoreau spoke to this kind of leadership: “When you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost. Now put foundations under them.” In his script for the movie Lincoln, Tony Kushner wrote words the President offered to Congressman Thaddeus Stevens who was berating him for his lack of a moral compass. “A compass..., it’ll point you True North from where you’re standing, but it’s got no advice about the swamps and deserts and chasms that you’ll encounter along the way. If in pursuit of your destination you plunge ahead heedless of obstacles and achieve nothing more than to sink into a swamp, what’s the use of knowing True North?”

*It ain’t what
a man don’t know
that makes him a fool.
It’s what he thinks
he knows
that just ain’t so.*

(ATTRIBUTED TO
MARK TWAIN)

Moral compass, swamps, wisdom, indeed. In a democracy, our fate is in our advocacy and our votes. May we exercise them wisely. May we find and elect men and women who are wise—curious, compassionate, collaborative, modest, animated by just causes and effective. And may we nurture these qualities in each other and ourselves. ♦

The Archer

BY JOHN R. EHRENFELD

The old archer stands strong, steadfast, and grand,
His bow of yew as trusty as his heart.
In his quiver, each arrow's future planned,
Waits for the chosen moment to depart.
Now, the arrow, straight as his thought, is set.
He pulls the string and powers up the bow.
His hawk eye focuses on the target,
And, tuning for the distance, he lets go.
The arrow, that was so carefully wrought,
Speeds to its desired end in a flat arc.
But a gust of wind bumps the flying thought;
The arrow goes wide of the archer's mark.
How many times has my arrow strayed,
Missing the mark I carefully laid?



A Taste of Freedom

BY SARAH GEROULD



Their recipe, a future of assault and roast in hell,
But open door, sweet prescient breeze, an oily frying smell,
Pushed their escape from cold dark walls and fear of sharp demise,
And freed them from a dungeon dank, to mount on pillow skies.

The night was fresh, the air so quick when they at last broke free
And fled into the gossamer clouds, no more a detainee.
Night turned to day, the lights winked off below the moonlit view.
The dawn sent starlight drifting off, the sun to warm them through.

So sit with me and close your eyes, and float with them in air.
Let cares be dropped like so much dew, be still and be aware.
Remember those whose fates are worse than yours by quite a lot.
And give yourself this tranquil time to fly with them in thought.

Re-Reading Old Letters

BY MARION KILSON

FOR SIXTY YEARS THE LETTERS LAY UNREAD, stored on the third floor of my summer house in New Hampshire. Most of them were penned between 1956 and 1959. Last summer I reread the letters from 1958-59, because they record a pivotal year in my life. Rereading those long ago letters, I found not only messages I remembered but messages I had forgotten.

In the summer of 1956, I enrolled in a German course in Harvard Summer School with the thought that someday I would need to know a second foreign language for a graduate school program. On the first day of class as the instructor finished describing the course, a young, lanky African American man who was draped across a chair in the back of the room asked, “Can I learn enough German in this course to pass my language requirement for my doctorate?” As we filed out of the classroom into the mid-day sun, I went up to the young man and said, “You asked just the question I wanted to ask.” That was my introduction to Martin Kilson.

At the time I was twenty and he was twenty-five; I was a rising Radcliffe junior and he was a fourth year Harvard graduate student. As he would describe us many years later, I was “from an upper middle class WASP family” and he was “from a lower middle class African American clergy family.” He told our grandchildren at our fiftieth wedding anniversary that in 1959 “when we went out on a Saturday night date to a movie in Cambridge or a folk music concert by Pete Seeger in Cambridge or Boston or to a classical music event or a play around Harvard College, we knew that some people would give us a nasty look, because a white

American girl and an African American guy shouldn’t be dating.”¹

Until August 1958, although most of my good friends knew Martin and of our relationship, very few of my relatives were aware of it. My aunt with whom I had lived since early childhood knew about it, was distressed by it, and tried hard to dissuade me from continuing it. When I returned from a summer trip to Europe, Martin and I told my aunt that we wanted to marry and that over the summer he had found an apartment in Cambridge for us. Then came the deluge of opposition from significant members of my family.

My great uncle, the family patriarch, met with Martin and he met with me. He then wrote me a letter in which he made three major points—that “the argument and the judgment of those who love you must have great, if not conclusive weight;” that “A case as conspicuous as yours would inevitably be exploited to the crushing humiliation of your dearest relatives and friends...and would heighten rather than lessen racial prejudice;” and “that you should sever your relationship with M.K. and see no more of him.”

My Episcopalian minister uncle wrote a rather different letter. Disavowing any wish to “exert pressure upon you in your marriage plans,” he began by stating that he did “not consider a marriage between races as being intrinsically wrong and knew of successful ones.” He went on to detail some important considerations, such as the need to consider other people who will be deeply pained by such a marriage. “If you have children, they will be exposed to prejudice. Although you may feel this is your only chance for a happy

marriage, that is unlikely. Sometimes it is better to deprive oneself of something not bad in itself to avoid giving pain and offense to others.” Finally, if I ultimately decided to marry Martin, my uncle’s house would always be open to me.

Two of my three older half-sisters weighed in. One was utterly opposed to the idea of my marrying Martin Kilson and the other feared that it would be “many generations before interracial marriages are acceptable” and that “while there is nothing against interracial marriage really, there is everything against it actually.”

At last, in the midst of great emotional turmoil, a compromise was reached. I would go away for a year to think about my future. If at the end of that time, I still wished to marry Martin, my family would accept my decision. Then my undergraduate thesis advisor pulled all sorts of strings to secure me a place in the MA Anthropology program at Stanford for the Fall semester. Late September found me in Palo Alto.

In mid-October I wrote to one of my relatives about my perceptions of how I came to find myself in California. “What I realized after I had been here only a very short time was how fully I had been emotionally brainwashed by my family. And this was very significant not only for what it revealed about me but also about them. I am *not* bitter, but I really was amazed in thinking back at the different varieties of [oppositional] approaches from emotional-rational to pure emotion...So it was largely because of the hurt that I was causing all of you and that you were causing me that I left. I’m not convinced now that it was the wisest

decision but I made it and I’ll stick to it.”

And so I did. Throughout the academic year letters between Martin and me flew twice and thrice weekly from Palo Alto to Cambridge and from Cambridge to Palo Alto, punctuated by the occasional telephone call and telegram. One February telegram brought news that Martin’s application for a Ford Foundation Fellowship to study political development in Sierra Leone had been approved. Another in May brought the welcome news that he had at long last passed his German exam and would be getting his

PhD two weeks later. The letters told of academic milestones and extracurricular activities as well as heartache. Martin wrote about how he managed his tutorial responsibilities for six undergraduates with

writing his dissertation which ultimately earned him an “excellent” evaluation from his reviewers; about preparing meals for friends and attending occasional dinners with friends at their homes or in restaurants around Cambridge and Boston; about continuing to participate in the Friends’ Service Committee’s socialist discussion group, about attending visiting lectures given by Paul Sweezy of *Monthly Review*, by Thomas Hodgkin, the Arabic/African Studies Scholar of Oxford University, and by the Kenyan politician Tom Mboya; about preparing to write review articles; about giving another guest lecture in Zbigniew Brezezinski’s course and being a panelist on the Friends’ *Africa Toward Freedom* program.

I wrote about being the only woman in a cohort of six or seven graduate students; about my Sunday archaeology class in which I dug up a skull only to have the instructor

“while there is nothing against interracial marriage really, there is everything against it actually”

take over my digging quadrant; about sharing poetry and play readings with Anthropology classmates; about rejecting a marriage proposal from an old friend who knew of Martin's and my plans but visited to press his suit anyway; about whether I wanted to study anthropology further and become an academic or pursue another field; and as the year went on about dealing with the manipulations of my thesis advisor who kept insisting on minute changes up until the submission deadline. Both sets of letters conveyed our mutual longing to be with one another and our aspirations for the future.

In addition to Martin's and my correspondence, there was another set of weekly letters winging between Cambridge and Palo Alto—those between my aunt and me. We kept one another informed about our activities. In late January I wrote to her "I think a lot about you these days—about my responsibilities to you as well as to myself. It's something which I have thought about for a long, long time, but this Christmas brought it back again more forcefully than before. Yet I still persist in feeling as I did in the fall that I do want to marry Martin. But I wish that in being true to myself—you in accepting it were not being untrue to yourself. I suppose this isn't too clear, but what I mean is that I love you very much and am deeply grateful for so many things, and I hate to make you unhappy."

At Christmas time I came home to be a bridesmaid, to see Martin, to introduce Martin to family members adjusting to the probable outcome of my year of reflection. Finally, with Stanford MA degree requirements completed, I arrived in Cambridge just in time for Martin's PhD commencement on June 11, 1959. I don't remember where we sat for the ceremony, probably on the steps of Widener Library. We were married two

months later in a small wedding at which my Episcopalian minister uncle officiated with a gathering of members from both our families and several friends in attendance. Within the week we had set sail for a term in Oxford and for the first of five research trips to West Africa before returning to Cambridge in the winter of 1961.

LET'S TAKE A STEP BACK for a moment and think about the national picture on Black and White interracial marriages between 1959 and today. In 1960, the United States census reported 51,000 Black and White interracial marriages while in 2016 the figure was 470,251. While Gallup reported that in 1958, 4% of Americans approved of such interracial marriages and 94% disapproved, by 2013, 96% of Blacks and 84% of Whites approved of such marriages.² My family's response to our proposed marriage was not only in step with national views, but also reflective of their lack of personal experience with African Americans as colleagues or friends. While after my marriage most of my relatives became supportive of me and my biracial family, the only one who did not speak to me for twenty years was my youngest half-sister who was married to a controlling Alabama-born medical doctor. After our eldest sister brought us together when I was attending a conference in Washington, D.C., we did begin to see one another again.

1959 was a transformative year in my life— from that year onwards I was part of a biracial household and family. That's why you'll find "1959" opens many of the electronic devices in and around my house. ♦

1. Martin Kilson, *The Story of Marion D. de B. Kilson & Martin Luther Kilson, August 8, 1959 to August 8, 2009*. Presented to the Kilson Family at Hancock Inn Dinner, August 9, 2009.
2. *Gallup Minority and Relations Poll*, 2013.

Timeless

In 2015, photographer LANCE PRAGER made this series of New England digital images in a style emulating Ansel Adams.

Below: *Lexington Bell Tower*

Next Page Top: *Lexington Green – First Parish*

Next Page Bottom: *Old North Bridge – Concord*





Dignity

BY ANITA MYER

He stood dazed and wistful
Repeatedly making the sign of the cross.
The remains of his father
Filled a small, white cardboard box
Still shrink wrapped,
And still containing the return address
Of the crematorium in Scranton.
The boy, disabled and shy,
Had come by bus to say good-bye.
He bent down to read the cards
From the sprays next to the gravesite.
A dozen relatives, awkward and graceless,
Stood in scattered groups
Quietly ignoring Leo's only son.
The priest bustled into the cemetery
Bible in hand,
Pausing only to find the deceased's name
And momentarily bonded the group
With a prayer.
Later, he watched as the grave digger
Stoically filled in his father's grave,
Gently tamped down the earth,
Then tossed the spade into the wheelbarrow
And the gritty truck
Limped and clattered away.

CONTRIBUTORS



VICKI BLAKE has been living, gardening and creating art in Lexington since 2002. Prior to retiring she was a marketing product manager.



LEE BRAMI 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.

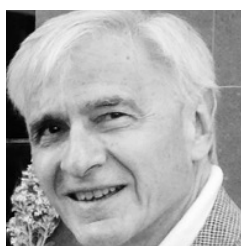
VICTORIA BUCKLEY, MS, OTR/L, CCAP is an occupational therapist and clinician with



over 35 years of experience in mental health. She is a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 9 and chairs the Lexington Commission on Disability.



JOHN EHRENFELD came late to poetry. A long-retired MIT-trained chemical engineer, he returned there after working in the environmental field for many years. He authored *Sustainability by Design* and *The Right Way to Flourish: Reconnecting with the Real World*.



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



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

SARAH GEROULD, an artist and tree advocate,



lives in Medford. A Painters Guild member at LexArt, she creates landscape and vegetable paintings with a human touch. Her poems accompany many of her vegetable paintings.



IRENE HANNIGAN, a retired educator, enjoys writing and sketching. She has recently been exploring poetry. Her 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. Her work explores her family's struggle to escape persecution in Egypt by moving to America.



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



JAMIE KATZ, who lives with his wife in Lexington, has published two novels, *Dead Low Tide* and *A Summer for Dying*. He is the General Counsel of Beth Israel Lahey Health and the Co-President of the Lexington-based Youth Counseling Connection.

JAY KAUFMAN is the founding president of Beacon Leadership Collaborative, a nonprofit dedicated to enhancing public sector leadership. From 1995 to 2019, he was a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives.



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



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



With degrees from the Universities of Wisconsin and Georgia, MARY LEVIN KOCH has worked in art museums, published scholarly articles and coauthored a book on Athens, Georgia. Now retired she chronicles her family's history and their current comings and goings!



While living eight years in Egypt, NANCY KOUCHOUK wrote and edited at American University and Cairo American College. Her past work colors her poetry.



SONDRA LUCENTE paints house portraits, some on commission, some out of interest. She works in mixed media, in what she describes as 'a very illustrated style'. Her portraits are highly individualistic and include many intricate details.

DR. ANITA MYER maintained an office in Lexington center as a neurofeedback psychologist for many years. A former English teacher, she continues to enjoy a creative writing group with her Lexington friends. She has previously written columns for the Lexington newspaper.



CATHY PAPAZIAN is a retired geriatric social worker who enjoys art quilting, amateur photography, and collects beach treasures for collaging. Much of her inspiration is influenced by the beauty of Cape Cod.

Now retired from positions in higher education, high tech, and the life sciences, SUSAN ENGLAND PERULLO (Foley) enjoys early American history, genealogy, and photography—especially the opportunity to capture special moments in time.



LANCE PRAGER has lived in Lexington since 1982. He started working as a photographer in his teens, and was an official photographer at the 1972 Democratic and Republican conventions in Miami Beach.



LAWRENCE PRUSAK has been a consultant, writer and researcher in the knowledge and wisdom fields for 30 years. He served as senior advisor to NASA, the World Bank and McKinsey, and teaches in Columbia University's Information and Knowledge Strategy program.



PETER SHAW, a semi-retired software developer, had an early job in a photo lab and has been smitten with photography ever since. On vacation it's not unusual to find him heading to the beach at midnight to capture the stars or spending hours capturing time lapse images of the waves.



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

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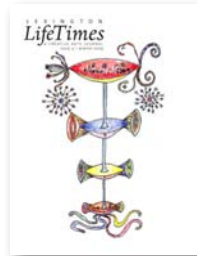
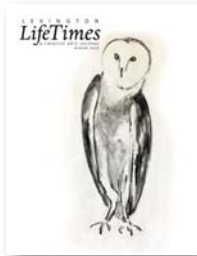
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