



**STONY BROOK
UNIVERSITY**

LITERARY TEA FALL 2020

Cover Photo by Bob Stone

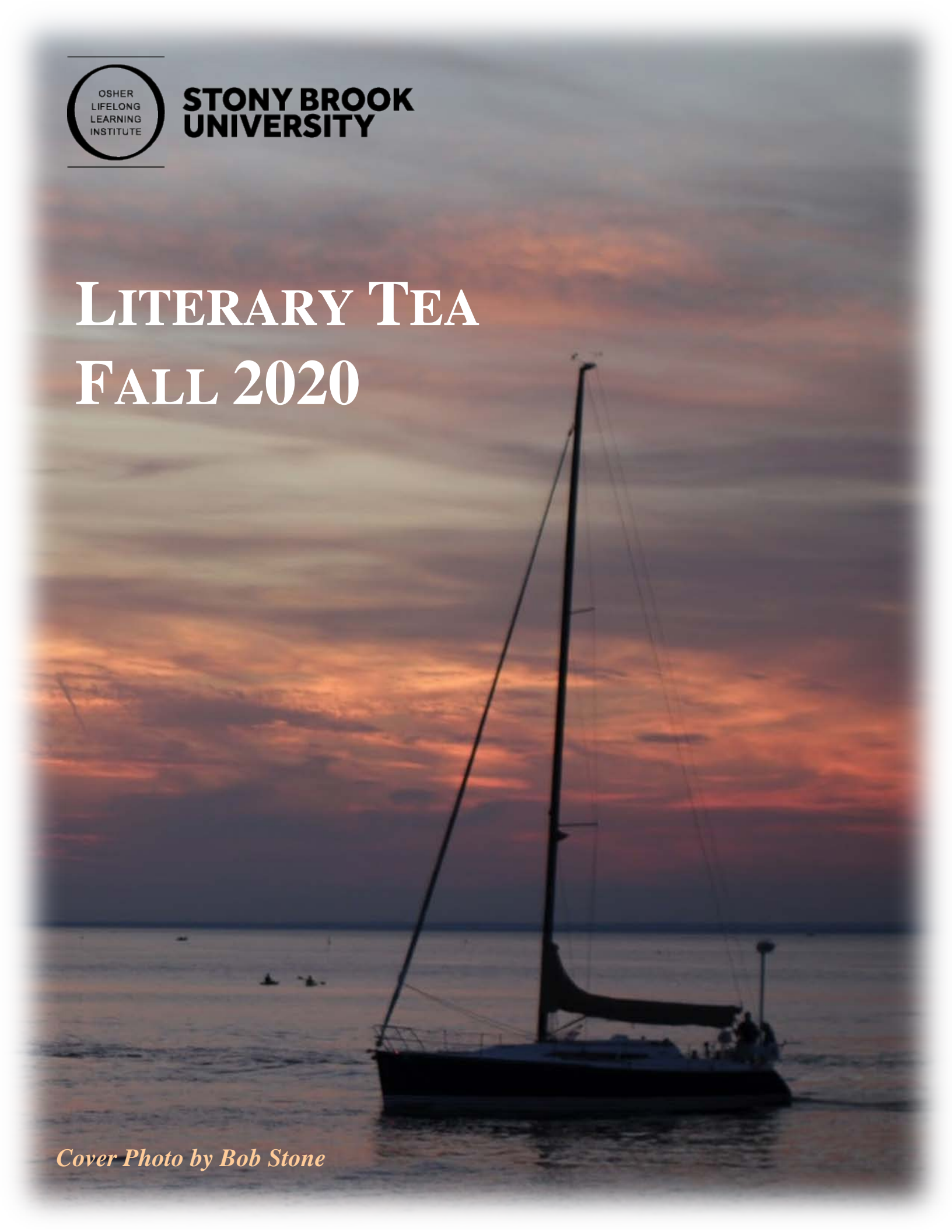




Table of Contents

I “See” Music..... 3
Patricia Ballan

English Comfort 5
David Bouchier

Reflections 2020 – My Cure for The Sameness of Days 6
Sandy Cohen

Reflections 2020 – The Choices You Make Or My Life Is In Your Hands 7
Sandy Cohen

One Day in November 8
Michael Dolber

A Purchase - Revisited..... 10
Sheila Eisinger

All my friends are growing old 11
Len Farano

‘Bout Cactuses, Radiuses and Octopuses 12
Len Farano

The Child of the 60’s..... 13
Lucy Gluck

An Ode 15
Barbara Golub

Brooklyn..... 16
Barbara Golub

Ode to Amazon 17
Irma Gurman

A Quarantine Quandary 18
Irma Gurman

An Ode to Kent State..... 19
Richard E. Hart

An Attic Throwback 21
Bob Hayes

Head Space 22
Bob Hayes

The Obits..... 23
Ron Hollander

Yankel 25
Ron Hollander



The Family Doctor 27
Aldustus Jordan

Hot Air Balloons Over a Field of Sunflowers..... 29
Lily Klima

Sending Curiosity to Mars 31
Robert J. Lang

Melted Into Air..... 33
Mel Lantz

We Fought the Crowd, But the – Crowd Won..... 34
Peter Lee

Brooklyn 1957..... 36
Martin H. Levinson

Covid-19 37
Martin H. Levinson

A Tale of Two Daughters 38
Jim Muckerman

Despite The Tears, He Was Indeed a Man 41
Rachelle Psaris

The 18-Wheeler Truck Driver 42
Rachelle Psaris

A Window to the Future..... 43
Naomi Schlesinger

Covid 19 44
Mary Ann Sommerstad

Revolutions Per Minute..... 47
Bruce Stasiuk

My Spiritual Son 49
Susan Steinmann

Flowers at Calverton National Cemetery 51
Susan Steinmann

Memorial..... 53
Bob Stone

My Closet 53
Bob Stone

The Greatest Poem Ever Written..... 54
Brian Wade

Don't Read This Poem 56
Brian Wade



I “See” Music

Patricia Ballan

During this abominable Covid crisis, I've depended more and more on my music sources to keep me company and cheer me. I never feel alone because my imagination paints me pictures to go along with the songs.

When I hear Handel's “Water Music” I see a barge gliding down the Thames. It is ornamented with banners and flags. On a cushion sits a potentate run-to-fat. He gives an occasional wave to those on the river banks, and besides him sits a beautiful woman who is no longer young-- someone on the style of Catherine Deneuve.

I have only to hear the opening strains of Debussy's “Claire de Lune” and I'm transported to a garden at night with the moon shining through tree branches. My girlhood nickname in Arabic was “Umarrh”, which translates to “New Moon”. I have always felt a connection to the moon, and used to play “Moonlight Sonata” as well as Clair de Lune on our piano. (Now my Arabic nickname would doubtless be “Bederrh”, the Full Moon”!)

Do you know the room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art which houses Persian and Indian miniature paintings? Rimsky-Korsakov's “Scheherazade” comes to life there where images of sinuous, gauze-dressed dancers wind their way gracefully around the caliph's damask-covered couch.

And as accurately as a metronome keeps the beat, Bach's precise toccatas and fugues, accentuated by the thunder of majestic organ music, satisfy my craving for order. Bach is in his gray curly wig, nodding to keep the time.

The flamenco, danced and sung by gypsies; the music pulled from hoarse throats Moorish melodies and hand-clapping, boots sharply striking wooden floors..I see it as if I were there.

Andrea Griminelli's flute gives me the theme from “The Mission” in a tone so piercingly sweet that my heart aches for the doomed faithful in the film.

When I hear Arabic music, the syncopated drumbeats and the sound of the oud , I feel a kinship with the small band sitting in a circle around a fire. Perhaps it's the memory of the race. They play as if to me alone.

What can be said about the voice of Luciano Pavarotti in acceptance of his fate as he sings “E Lucevan le Stelle” and says farewell to his love and his life? Or when he swears that he'll conquer Turandot by dawn in the final sounds of “Nessun Dorma”? Vincero! Vincero! VINCERO!

Can you see the luthier lacquering the mysterious instrument red as Joshua Bell plays through the various lives of “The Red Violin”?



On New Year's Day, after the orchestra plays several polkas and waltzes, I wait for the last (always the last) number after “The Blue Danube” ; The Radetsky March. I'm there at the Musikverein's Grosse Saal in Vienna, waiting for my cue from the conductor to join the smiling audience and clap during alternate choruses. Tradition! Only then will it be a Happy New Year.

September/October, 2020



English Comfort

David Bouchier

England is always a surprise, even to the English. What always astonishes me, as soon as I drive out of the airport, is the sheer amount of countryside that survives. There are vistas of fields and trees and charming villages even in the tightly-packed south-eastern counties. It is the most crowded country in Europe yet, outside the cities, it rarely feels that way.

After the inhuman environment of London’s Heathrow airport almost anything is a relief, and we are heading for one of the most beautiful corners of England. On this late summer journey our first stop is the village of Dedham on the border of Essex and Suffolk. Dedham is at the heart of the area where John Constable lived and painted in the early 1800s.

We will stay a few nights at the medieval Sun Inn, which is right opposite the church. This is a favorite place, in part because it shows the uncanny gift some English architects have for combining old and new styles without totally destroying the appeal of either. The bar and lounge of the inn are kept much as they might have been a hundred years ago, with rough wood floors, dark beams, and plain furniture. Upstairs is accommodation equipped with all modern comforts, and even luxuries, although it has odd-shaped rooms and sloping floors. In such a place you can live in the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries both at once. This may be what the French mean when they talk *le confort anglais* – English comfort. There is, for me at least, something strangely reassuring about sleeping a building so elongated in time.

The uneasy mix of social types in the bar is a reminder of how much pub life has changed. Within my own lifetime each social group in a country village had its own pub, and even its own bar within each pub. The traditional establishment had a “public bar,” which featured slightly cheaper beer, rougher furniture, and games like darts, and a smaller “saloon” with more comfortable chairs and higher prices. Socially speaking the difference was enormous, like the difference between the House of Commons and the House of Lords in the British parliament. When I lived in a village not far from Dedham there were four pubs within walking distance and three more within a short drive, each with two bars. This presented me with a total of fourteen drinking choices. It took weeks of dedicated research to find my proper place in the saloon bar of the Anchor.

This whole charmingly anachronistic pub culture has been swept away. Now there is only a single pub remaining in Dedham, The Sun, with a single bar. The locals have nowhere else to go so they mix uncomfortably: landowners with farm laborers and wealthy city gents with boisterous families of tourists. Like it or not the old pub tradition was a mirror of society, and we knew where we belonged. Now we are all in the same bar, but not all in the same boat.

David Bouchier – from *Journal of the Eightieth Year* (2019)



Reflections 2020 – My Cure for The Sameness of Days

Sandy Cohen

I refuse to be irate
That coronavirus is now defining my fate
For right now there is no definite date
When the vaccines will be out of the gate
So now we all must wait
And remain in a safe and healthy state.

Reading books has been my treasured gift
That gives me a daily lift
Allowing me to float adrift
Among people, places and times wherever each novel shifts.

Poetry also takes up some of my time
As I embrace writing each line
With a unique and meaningful rhyme
In my attempt to make my words sublime.

Cocktail Hour has also now become part of each day
Also word games that my husband and I continually play
So our minds stay focused and don't stray
From making sure that we don't succumb to the monotony that we must chase away.

Last but not least are classes from Stony Brook O.L.L.I
That keep me educated, motivated and busy
With topics from opera, current events, mindfulness and history
I look forward to Zooming in daily
And seeing postage size faces that have become familiar to me
Along with your opinions, intelligence and insight ... which happily
Is a cherished gift in this new reality!



Reflections 2020 – The Choices You Make Or My Life Is In Your Hands

Sandy Cohen

I am Seventy Years Old
And If I may be bold
Sheltering in place is leaving me cold
And, YOU, without your mask, I WANT TO SCOLD!

This is not how I envisioned each Golden Year
So let me make it clear
I had travels and places to go far and near
Africa, Asia, America, Cruises and Animals from Lion to Bear
Each cancellation I make causes me to tear
Although getting the coronavirus is my biggest fear.

Each day the news shows me that I am smart to wait
Since giving up your freedoms you would hate
Social distancing for you should not be up for debate
And your selfish choices are really not great
My only hope is that when you get smart, it's not too late
To seal the finality of our fate!

Now I beseech
Each and every one of you, who believes Life Is A Beach
Please know your callousness and lack of concern puts
Coronavirus within our reach
And that, and that alone,
IS THE LESSON I WANT TO TEACH!



One Day in November

This is adapted from something I wrote in 2013 for the 50th anniversary of the Kennedy assassination.

Michael Dolber

My mother turned 41 on the day President Kennedy was killed. She was only 5 years younger than he was. I was thirteen, a ninth grader at JHS 68 in Canarsie, Brooklyn. Our neighbors were coming over that Friday evening for coffee and birthday cake, and as I sat in my French class sometime after one pm, I was thinking about dinner, cake, and the upcoming weekend. The French language was not foremost in my mind, nor was the idea that in a few minutes I would get news of an event that would turn our history upside down.

Earlier that day, in social studies, we had learned about the Open Door Policy and the Boxer Rebellion in China; and for 40 years, whenever I had to teach my own social studies classes about that topic, I always thought about that day in November.

Toward the end of French class, which was the last period of the day, the principal came to the door, and asked Mme. Siegel to step outside. She returned a few minutes later, looking somewhat shaken, but all she said was that she had received some disturbing news, and then she went right back to her French lesson. We all speculated about what the news might be. Probably some semi-awful thing had happened in school. The idea that an assassination had taken place was unimaginable. It always struck me as absurd that moments after being told that the President had been murdered, she was asking me to tell the class what color the clock was. Yes, that was my question. “La pendule est jaune,” I must have said, certainly without looking at the clock. As we left school for the day, we were finally given the news. Of course, today our cell phones would have told us before Mme. Siegel had even conjugated her next verb. But not in 1963.

I remember feeling shocked and upset, and somewhat confused. Kennedy was not some old guy President, like Eisenhower. He was young and vital, and seemed to a thirteen year old kid to be eternal. We were big Kennedy fans in our house, and I remember being angry and upset when a few kids thought it was a good time to crack stupid jokes about the news. Junior high school kids rarely miss an opportunity for an inappropriate joke, as I later learned. I walked home, and I cannot remember if I was with a friend or not, but in either case I was alone. I got home and parked myself in front of the television, where I would remain pretty much throughout the weekend. The historic impact of what we were seeing was not lost on us.

Our neighbors did come over that evening, and we did have our birthday cake, but it was not much of a party. TV allowed the nation to experience a shared trauma, as Walter Cronkite led us through the entire tragic weekend in depressing black and white. I guess that was appropriate. We saw the arrival of the body in Washington, accompanied by Jackie Kennedy in her pink blood- stained suit. (We learned later on that it was pink). We saw President Johnson (and how weird that sounded) make his statement at the airport; and we were all shocked to see Lee Harvey Oswald shot to death by Jack Ruby that Sunday on live TV. On Monday, school



was closed, and we all watched the funeral, with the unforgettable image of the late JFK Jr., then 3 years old, saluting his father’s casket.

Strange details stick in your mind when these traumatic events take place. That Tuesday morning, November 26, as I got ready to go back to school, the radio in my room was playing a song by the Impressions, called “It’s Alright.” But in truth, it really wasn’t.



A Purchase - Revisited

Sheila Eisinger

There’s a dance supply store around the corner from my house in Saint James.

About fifteen years ago they had a closeout sale on scales, and on impulse I bought one. The scale isn’t the usual scale that tells body weight. This special scale measures the dances you know. You step on it, just as you would a regular scale, but it bears no resemblance to any other scale. The fact is that it intuitively senses one’s dance ability. I used it once when I bought it, made a note on a special pad included in the box then put the scale away on a high shelf in the linen closet.

The other day when I was taking out summer blankets I noticed the box, way up on the top shelf, untouched for years. I hardly remembered it or its contents, but down it came. This strange contraption was rediscovered, to be used today during a new stage in my life. I set the scale up in the bathroom, stepped on it and waited while the scale assessed my DT, my Dance Total, or TDR, Total Dances Remembered. I had lost weight! In dance language, this is anything but a happy scale figure. It means I now know and remember fewer dances than when I had first weighed myself fifteen years ago.

True, today I recognize the music to more dances, but I’ve forgotten steps to dances I used to know, and the new dances I’ve learned don’t add up to more than those I’ve forgotten. Actually, if there were no models in the center of the circle for me to watch, like Jill and Roberta, my TDR would drop even lower. I used to hear a melody, and my feet and brain knew what to do. Now my brain first has to sort out why the music sounds familiar. Sometimes, after one go-around my feet and brain are in sync, and I get a passing grade.

There’s hope for me, I think. Less time spent in the kitchen reading gourmet recipe books and preparing new dinner recipes for my husband and me, and more time tediously reviewing folk dance steps would probably result in a heavier, though less upbeat dance weight.



All my friends are growing old

Len Farano

It seems that all my friends are growing old While I
myself enjoy a vibrant youth
How did this strange dichotomy unfold
That they grew short on time and long in tooth?

Perhaps I'm blessed with genes that just won't quit Or maybe it's
those hours at the gym
Why are they all so soft while I am fit? They all
appear to gain while I stay slim

Of course it might be that I married well That lady
sure has helped to up my game
She's smart, she's cute, she's kind, she's pert, she's swell I have to call her soon...now
what's her name?

She told me to be careful, not to roam
Oh God, I'm lost. Won't someone take me home?

October, 2020



‘Bout Cactuses, Radiuses and Octopuses

Len Farano

Two pseudo intellectuals enamored with contextuials, challenged one another to debate.

“Two podiums or one? How should this thing be done? Shall we share or should we separate?”

“Two podia are fine.” he rejoinders in a line delivered with a coat of smug conceit.

“How singularly rural to ignore the proper plural.” He envisioned his opponent’s quick defeat.

“Au contraire, my unctuous fellow,” came the retort in a bellow, “It is you who fails to make the parts agree.

For if you were in the Noah, you would reverently show a modicum of care for symmetry.

And too obvious to mention is the loss in comprehension when one strays a bit too far from the vernacular.

But you merely seek to fatten your own ego spouting Latin as if starring in some Cecil B. spectacular.”

And so thus he’d neatly won the debate not yet begun as his foe withdrew quite battered from the fray.

As he reveled in his triumph, he suddenly cried “Fie Umph! I wanted one damn rostrum anyway!”

Alas, our Latin scholar now wears a Roman collar and follows the dictates of Popes and Popesses.

He merely hears confessions of sin-tactical transgressions and listens to Caruso singing opuses.

October 2020



The Child of the 60’s

Lucy Gluck

Now that I am writing about my life for the first time, why do I keep seeing myself primarily as a child of the 60’s? I guess everyone does tend to go back to those college years but to me there is an added dimension because of those extraordinary times. As I struggle with the complexities of aging for myself and my husband, I have realized that the exciting and for me exhilarating and liberating 60’s are still affecting me today. I sometimes think that as a child of the 60s’ somehow I thought (and many others I know feel the same way) that we would be immune to things like old age and to what we saw as many of the traps of life.

We felt and still feel that we were totally unique. Somehow our experience would be very different and we would live our lives differently and much better than our parents. I’ve thought this before at other crucial life points- parenting, marriage and relationships, finding a career and more. And each time the lesson followed the same path. We did do some things differently but also had to face the reality of the universality of life experiences and that we weren’t as special or as immune as we wanted to believe. And yet, I still see myself as different from those who came before and after because of the specialness of that time and place to me.

So I’ve been thinking about how I was formed by those times and how strongly they affect me even today. I attended the High School of Music and Art, one of the most wonderful and defining experiences of my life. It was a place where I felt completely at home for the first (and maybe the last) time of my life. Even though I was very young – I graduated at 16- I thrived in that special world. It was the post-beatnik era and I was introduced to the world of folk music, leftist politics, civil rights protests and the rich art and cultural world of New York. I spent time exploring the city, going to concerts, going on museum trips and spending long hours thinking about the world, I had a drawer full of little slips of paper full of my thoughts about life, the world and more.

In 1962, at 16 I left my happy life at Music and Art to go to the University of Wisconsin where I faced an incredible culture shock. I ended up at Wisconsin because I faced the dilemma of many as I got rejected from other private schools and had to go to my “safe” school. Wisconsin was appealing to many New Yorkers because though in the mid-west, it had a strong liberal tradition going back to the Governor Bob LaFollete. I had no idea how different this world would be from what I knew.

Even though I was sophisticated in some ways about art and music and culture, I was very young and very naïve. Music and Art had no football games or any other sports that I was aware of I didn’t even realize until a few years ago that it had a prom which I obviously didn’t attend. I had never dated, never wore makeup, put curlers in my hair or done any of those typical things that most people do in High School.

Here I was in the mid-west in the world of big-ten football, dances, curfews and many, many blond people. I was seen as exotic because of my dark hair and I was even asked once if Jews



had horns! I still remember how I felt like I had just landed as an alien on a new planet and I had no idea how to navigate this new world. I remember feeling incredibly lost and didn't know how to behave and what to do. I was terrified and extremely lonely. And once again, music saved me. This time it was jazz and rhythm and blues. There were a bunch of musicians there some of whom later became famous and once I found that group, once again I was home. I sat on the Terrace of the Student Union and listened to music and talked about music and went to concerts whenever I could.

In those years, protests began against the Vietnam War. I was used to protests in high school where I marched around Woolworths for civil rights but these protests became part of the much larger movement. It did start slowly though. I have a newspaper photo of me and around 15 people marching around the capital building in Madison to protest the war. This fit in with my wish to change and improve the world and over time more and more of us saw this war as so important. Over time it became more as the war protests were joined to a community that saw itself as ready and able to change the world.

After graduating college and I was faced with difficult career and relationship choices my journey continued against the backdrop of these unique times. I ended up in San Francisco where I continued my journey in the place where these years unfolded in dramatic and exciting ways.

When these times are discussed, they are characterized as turbulent, full of terrible dissension and violent. But all I remember is that feeling of freedom, of making over the world for the first time and feeling part of a totally unique time full of hope and a feeling of incredible promise, limitless possibilities and freedom. At what point did our individual experiences feel different and become a movement? How did it become something bigger? Is this how everyone feels about their time or was this time special?

February 2020



An Ode

Barbara Golub

Here is
Another day
24 hours
To while away

91
I've done it all
Friends all gone
No one to call

There was music
There was dancing
There were nights
For romancing

Eggs are boiling
Toast is done
Oh--for past days
When I had fun



Brooklyn

Barbara Golub

Born and bred in Brooklyn
It's "MAGIC" was gifted to me
It made me feel so special
As special as I could be

I roller skated in the streets
And rented a bicycle of blue
Threw peanuts at the monkeys
In the Prospect Park Zoo

After a swim at "CONEY" in an itchy woolen tank
I rushed to "FAMOUS NATHANS" for a five cent "frank"
"Zoltan the Fortune Teller" got my penny at the "ARCADE"
I hoped that his "MAGIC" would give me a passing grade

High up in the elevated BMT
A last glimpse of the sandy beach, setting sun and deep blue sea
The rides at "STEEPLECHASE" and "LUNA PARK"
A history maker for me
Making this the only place in the world where I wanted to be

In our apartment in Flatbush every eve at eight
I listened for the tinkling bells of the "BUNGALO BAR"
Coming down the street
After seeing Dorothy Lamour in a South Sea Island flick
I chose an exotic coconut ice cream bar as a spur-of-the moment pick

My deep love for Brooklyn
Which has lasted 92 years
Will always give me comfort
And chase away any and all of my fears



Ode to Amazon

Irma Gurman

Here comes the delivery van
With my best friend, the Amazon man
Leaving goodies galore
On the stoop by my door
Bringing items as fast as he can

My friend finds an item, I try it
I go to the website and buy it
Convenience is key
And as you can see
It's terrific - no one can deny it

One day my microwave broke
The wires proceeded to smoke
It arrived, I suppose
Before the sun rose
In the morning before I awoke

For your groceries, now and then you
Can check Whole Foods organic menu
I click on the screen
Order clean, order green
It's my favorite grocery venue

For occasions I always request
A gift card cause that is the best
For my oen shopping spree
I think you'll agree
That I'm hooked on th4 site. I'm obsessed!

So keep those deliveries pending
I look forward to what they are sending
It's Christmas in May
I get gifts every day
Let their profits continue ascending!



A Quarantine Quandary

Irma Gurman

As of late, I've had nightmares. I've dreamt
About groceries. I was ferkleempt
The nightmares would start
With the app, Instacart
Delivery times I'd attempt

I'd wake up and get out of bed
Check the website with very much dread
I'd check night and morning
Til the new day was dawning
"No time slots" the mean website said

Unable to find a good time
I tried checking Amazon prime
Or Shipt, Peapod too
What was I to do?
A slot finally opened! Sublime!!

Now my shopper would text me no end
Pictures of shelves she would send
"Do you want substitutes?"
As she scanned the aisles' routes
Different brand? So who cares what I spend?

Now I have what I need, even more
I could open my own grocery store
With a stocked freezer section
And I have a selection
Of fresh fruits and veggies galore

And so I am cooking and baking
Even though "normalcy" I'm forsaking
But I'm happy to tell
That I'm sleeping quite well
Cause from lemons lemonade I am making



An Ode to Kent State

Richard E. Hart

(May 4, 1970)

FOUR DEAD IN OHIO

50 years ago today—a half century of sputtering forth and back, for better, for worse
The Kent State massacre lives forever in American infamy
The day, the moment in history, when America decided to kill its own innocent young
Because they did not believe in its brutal, hopeless war of aggression
Could no longer abide the blood and tears of our slain soldiers, and theirs
No longer believed that our own leaders were telling the truth
And, maybe, they got away with it, with the Kent State slaughter.
In days before our now routine school killings
Four young lives—college students, America’s bright future-- extinguished on their own campus
Mowed down by National Guard—men of their own age but different outlook
Ordered by the governor to maintain the peace, protect property, save the nation from revolution
Four bright lights lost forever.

It was a pleasant early May morning on the campus of Ohio University in Athens
I, along with a small crowd of others, was sitting on the War Memorial (irony of ironies)
on the pastoral, tree-lined campus green, a favorite gathering spot for discussion, gossip
and occasional rallying among those of us long- haired, pot -smoking, free- love radicals who
thought
we could change the world, we who were despised by police captain Cochran
who frothed to get his claws into us at any excuse.
And then the news from two hours north began to trickle in—they’ve killed four of our own
It can’t be true, hadn’t we moved beyond the wanton killings of our sordid past?
NO! CAN’T BE! NOT HERE! NOT NOW! We don’t kill our own at school.
Anger and panic quickly spread across the campus, throughout Ohio, all through the country
American history was making a turn, and things would never be the same.
Within hours martial law was declared, National Guard ordered onto every street corner
of our little college town, then suddenly the campus closed down for the rest of the year.
All a whirl of anxiety, confusion, passion, anger, senselessness—how could this have happened
in America? How could they slaughter their own? Where can we go from here?
Schools across the land shut their doors to what they do, closed down in fear over what was to
come.

It would be years yet before we would win, but win we did, if but only a temporary pause
That war finally ended and perhaps the souls of those sacrificed at Kent State were somehow
vindicated
But was it all for naught? Has our nation learned anything? Does history matter? The military-
industrial complex, the fossil fuel barons, the science haters, the climate deniers, the ultra-
nationalists,
the xenophobes, the captains of industry, the gun-toting terrorists wrapped in the flag, the women



haters, the racists—do any among them recall Kent State? Would such memories sear the brain if the dead, the hated, were one of their kids, or a neighbor kid, or the girl who mowed their lawn, or the class valedictorian or the aspiring Latino lawyer who was their prize student? We forget so easily, so conveniently, so comfortably, and at our never-ending peril.



An Attic Throwback

Bob Hayes

It was early autumn and Hal was up in the old attic. Now that the house had been sold, he had to empty things out for the new owners coming in. He could hear Betty pattering around the living room downstairs. She was getting the first floor in order, or as they say, broom clean.

Upstairs, he was knee deep in boxes, trinkets and old treasures. There were family portraits, lamps and toys, along with his grandfather’s rocking chair. Hal was stunned at all they had accumulated over the past forty-five years. Where to begin, he wondered?

Well, he figured, let’s see what’s in some of the boxes. Rummaging through, he found old family albums and scrapbooks. He glanced through a few and tried to sort out what to keep. There were also a few boxes of the kids’ school day mementos that brought both a smile to his lips and tears to his eyes. Then, there was an old wooden cabinet with a few drawers. He started in, going through the drawers. Now, here were some treasures, he thought. There was a Polaroid camera, a telescope, and a stamp collection in the well-worn cabinet. Then, he spied a dark mahogany box in the last drawer. He went to pick it up wondering what it might be. Ah, it was his old box radio. He had gotten it as a teenager, so many years ago.

Hal was a little worn out with all the searching. He decided to take a break. He pulled up the rocking chair and placed the radio on the table next to it. He turned the volume switch on and got that old, familiar hum as the radio warmed up. As he relaxed in the rocker, the comforting sound of soft static crackled from the old wooden box.

He fiddled with the dial, at first with no success. But then, about halfway through the dial’s spin, he hit pay dirt. The dial glowed and a booming baritone voice erupted from the radio.

“Hang on to your hats, boys. It’s the bottom of the ninth and the Giants have two on. Branca’s coming in from the bullpen in relief. Durocher is talking with Bobby Thompson, the next batter. Branca takes a few warm-up pitches and signals to the man in the box that he is ready.

Thompson’s ready, with Willie Mays on deck. Now, it’s a ball and two strikes. Here’s the pitch, it’s a long drive to left. Oh, boy, it’s gone. A home run. The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant!”



Head Space

Bob Hayes

(The prompt that sparked this story stemmed from famous events that occurred on days in the month of October. The particular event that triggered this story was the launch of the first satellite, Sputnik, in October 1957.)

Like Sputnik I was launched in 1957. But, I’m better than Sputnik in taking up space.

I came first, in January ’57, born in the good old U.S.A.

Ah, space. Space is so exciting to reflect upon. There’s just so much of it. You can ponder the infinite nature of space. Sometimes, when I do I just sit around and sit around. Then, I’m apt to take up an infinite amount of time and space.

Like the universe there is also a lot of space that is up in my head, too. At times my mind clouds up and my rocketing thoughts veer off course. It can become very confusing up there.

It really gets off kilter when the traffic lights in my mind go on the blink. Then, I don’t know whether to jump to my left or hop to my right. My mind gets hazy (guess that’s why my last name is Hayes) and my thoughts become all jumbled up.

But, the space in my mind can be wonderful, too. There is:

- a space for being considerate of other people
- a space to enjoy being around and listening to friends
- a space to write and express myself to others.
- a space to share peace and love with everyone

I guess with so much space up there that my mind – if someone cared to explore it- would look like Swiss cheese.

(I’ll take that on rye, please.)

I guess you could say my mind is holey – that’s H-O-L-E –Y.



The Obits

Ron Hollander

The obits are piling up. Pete Hamill three weeks ago. Now Gail Sheehy of “Passages” fame last week. An era in New York journalism is passing, and with it, the markers of my youth.

Even in my most inflated mind, I could not say I was their friend or confidant. But we did briefly track the same orbit: Worked with Hamill (as did many other young journalists); even shared a girlfriend (sequentially). At a party with Sheehy.

Pathetic how we make feeble attempts to aggrandize ourselves by saying we knew so-and-so. Embarrasses me. But there it is, nonetheless. The memories seem to shout, “Look at me. I was almost known.” Yet now even that fragile link is vanishing.

It was a summer party in the Hamptons. Maybe 1969. No idea who gave it, nor how we knew about it. My girlfriend, Trucia, a reporter for Women’s Wear Daily, and I, at the Post, might have been in a little over our heads. Still, we were a pretty, young couple, and I was getting known for my feature writing. We were up and comers.

I was nervous. I didn’t know many people. The few I recognized were already hot shots, like Clay Felker, the founder of New York Magazine with legendary graphic designer Milton Glaser. And his sometime girlfriend, Sheehy, whose “Passages,” about crises in adult life, would sell 10 million copies and was on the Times’s best-seller list for more than three years.

I clutched my wine glass though I had no idea what was in it, and rarely drank. But it was a comforting prop. Trucia and I had gone in with some friends on a ramshackle summer house in a distinctly less fashionable corner of South Hampton. We were a little full of ourselves, tooling around in my red, convertible Camaro. This party was proof that we were making the “scene,” although our bylines might not yet have merited it.

It was packed, and I did my best to smile a lot and not to say stupid things. Mostly I worried that I wasn’t dressed properly. I was wearing a blue, V-necked, open mesh, woven summer shirt, while it seemed that everyone else was wearing dress shirts with open collars. Certainly Felker, a clothes horse, was.

These five decades later I can’t remember a single moment but this: I am standing in front of a futon-like sofa, looking down at the three people on it. To the right (or is it the left?), a cute woman with short, blond hair is looking up at me. She’s not much older than I at twenty-eight, but seems more sophisticated. I am introduced. She nods her head in recognition of my name. In my mind she conveys a certain approval, even respect; something with her lips. Or does my ego-stroked memory have her flirting? I’m not sure we even speak in the party’s noise. It is Sheehy, and that is the only time I saw her in my life.

So when I opened the Times last week, and just by chance went to the back of the “B” section and saw in a half-page obit that she had died of pneumonia, I was back in that promising night. A night of naïve youth. Of journalistic dreams that never will be fulfilled. Of hopes and ambitions not to be reached. And—always these days—how could that bright-faced, poised, sparkly girl be eighty-three? Even more improbable, how could I then be seventy-nine in a month?

Mercifully the obit had no recent photos, only ones in her prime with Gloria Steinem and Felker, so she glows forever at that Hamptons party. As do I.

Hamill was different. I really did work with him at the old Post, before it became a right-wing, Murdoch rag. Though he as a star columnist and I as a fledgling street reporter bore very different reporters’ notebooks. Still, we inhabited the same, brawling, irreverent city room with its upright



typewriters and editors growling “Boy!” for copy boys who damn well had better run when they were summoned.

I was jealous. He had a column which I badly wanted. So maybe that and hubris led me to chide him one day. He had used Welsh poet Dylan Thomas’s glorious phrase, “the rub of love,” without attribution, and I, eager to show my erudition, called him on it.

“What should I have said?” he asked defensively, throwing his brawler’s chest out in the hallway, his trademark unmade tie hanging down. “ ‘In Dylan Thomas’s phrase...’ “ The derision was clear. But I hung in, and nodded.

Still, we were colleagues. At a Washington anti-war demonstration, we paused on the stools in a coffee shop to get out of the tear gas. My ex-wife, a lawyer for the protesters, happened by. I was proud that I could introduce him to her. “Hi, Pete,” she said, with no awe of the famous man.

I hung out at the Lion’s Head, the legendary journalists’ bar in the Village, where the crowd circled around him. But I was a shy, Brandeis University, non-drinker among garrulous, toss-‘em-back Irishmen, and we didn’t belly up together.

The girl we truly did share, though not at the same time. She was the heiress of a newspaper fortune slumming as a reporter at the Post. She was WASPy, with a straight nose, colored blond hair, and an apartment on Fifth Avenue overlooking the Metropolitan Museum. I was in heady company. It wasn’t clear which one of us had traveled further, the Jewish kid from Ocean Parkway or the Irish kid from a railroad flat.

When Hamill died, craggily lined and in dialysis at eighty-five—another impossibility—his photo was on the front page of the Times. The obit ran a full page, and there were 237 readers’ comments on-line.

For years I’d had a book I was going to send him, a 1926 almanac by his beloved Brooklyn Daily Eagle. I hoped maybe it might trip a very distant recollection of that fresh-faced reporter who wrote good features for a while. But probably not. Too many others. Now he’s gone, and I have no one to whom to send the book. As for remembering that young, promising reporter that comes down to me.



Yankel

Ron Hollander

The subway thundered above, the roar making the room a drum, blazing into every corner, shaking the dishes, stirring the dust.

Yankel did not hear it.

Or his ears heard it, but the sound, so awful it seemed to suck all the air, got no farther. Not to his brain. During the nightmare days, Yankel had become expert at not digesting what his senses threw at him. A subway was child’s play.

He sat with his wife at the kitchen table covered with an oilcloth, the red and white checks under the scream of the Brooklyn subway a mockery of Naples. He counted a sprawled pile of coins by the comforting dimness of a 25-watt bulb. It was the smallest sold, except one for refrigerators. He would have bought that, but the clerk said it wouldn’t fit.

Like all else, the electric bill was a place to save. But there was more. This America was too bright. It was a country that abhorred shadows. Yankel had survived when the world was dark. Sunny days were an affront. He had squinted (his irises had dictated it), but that was all the quarter he would give. Behind his eyes there was never sunlight.

He was impervious to the weather, living in his own dimness. Even in spring, when forsythia yellowed the corner where the subway steps opened to the street, and pussy willow practically brushed him on his plodding rounds from building to building, the rope around the brown-paper pack chaffing his shoulders, he moved in shadow. Bright lights were for those who wanted to see. He had seen enough. All he needed was light to distinguish the coins.

The money was in a scarred leather pouch he kept stuffed behind the fuse box. He knew them well now, but still he studied the nickels and dimes and quarters, feeling like a blind man the faces of those he was told were Washington and Jefferson and Lincoln, fathers of a country he despised for its profligate flaunting of life. He ordered the money in different ways: Stacking the coins by denomination until the towers leaned dangerously; making long, sinuous snakes of quarters or dimes until they all but writhed and struck his browned hand.

The few bills (he could get more, but he distrusted the paper, preferring the clink and weight of the coins) he smoothed and pressed, removing the curl by drawing them over the edge of the table. As the bills slid flat slowly under his hand, emerging as if from a printing press, Yankel leaned closer in the gloom and examined yet again the engraving of the Treasury Building in Washington.

The street around it was immaculate, not a scrap of paper, not a horse’s leavings, not a boy’s marble. Clean as the child’s government that produced this play money, he thought. People in hats and suits strolled on the spotless sidewalk, poised, unafraid, despite the perfect high iron picket fence that protected the building (because, thought Yankel, even this government wasn’t that stupid). A sedan from before the war drove boldly down the middle of the deserted street.

Why was there no traffic, Yankel thought. It could have been early morning, or a holiday. The light was the flat, empty light of Sunday morning before the papers reached the newsstand. But Yankel knew otherwise: Because dumb as this government might be, it was still smart enough to barricade the streets around its buildings.



His hands moved unerringly over the money, stacking quarters and even dimes as surely as a croupier paying bets. He hunched over the stacks, his thin shoulders strained around his ears as if by pushing forward they could encompass the pathetic piles of coins, fencing them off. Yankel’s thin, bloodless, dry lips counted aloud, ignoring Frieda across from him.

“Seventy-six-fifty...seventy-six-seventy-five...seventy-seven.” He knew the totals to a quarter, but he counted anyway in a ritual he had adopted in place of prayer. Yankel had no ambitions for the money. He had no dreams of Levittowns, lawns, nor patios. He snorted at the idea. The substantiality of the coins was an end in itself, confirmation that despite all, he lived. More, he thrived, as the increasingly heavy pouch proved.

Acquisition needed no buttressing. It was not a chimera like home or status. He could put his hand on it, feel it tugging his pocket until he worried that the darning would give. He had a new wife and a child. But it was the money he reaffirmed night after night while Frieda herself sat counting silently, watching possessively the coins disappearing one by one back into the pouch.

The apartment (though to call it that was to elevate the airless warren of rooms Yankel rented illegally) twined around the base of a support column for the subway, down a rickety stair off a winding corridor with one bulb lit by twisting it. When the subway was new, the apartment had been locker and tool rooms for the workers, stained by tobacco juice and the grease from square-toed work shoes. A white clock with black numerals and hands had ticked off not minutes but the coins and precisely folded new bills in brown envelopes that the workers got Saturday afternoons; reward for avoiding yet again the 600 sparking volts that drove the trains.

But that was before the oak paneling in the change booth disappeared under dark green paint and the stained glass in the waiting room cracked and was replaced with window panes. The locker room was closed in favor of one at another station. The tools went into bins secured by large railroad padlocks pickable by boys with their mothers’ hair pins. The mold grew coated with grime in the corners of the shower, and in the toilet bowl where the water was lapped by rats until it evaporated. The lockers rusted, sagging and bending unaccountably though they bore nothing heavier than torn-beyond-mending overalls, abandoned lunch boxes and cracked thermoses, and well-thumbed Police Gazettes. Night-visioned animals tracked over brittle newspapers. Dust shaken down by the subways coated the forgotten rooms draped with spider webs and insects whose cores has been eaten out, rooms for Miss Haversham.

[IN PROGRESS]



The Family Doctor

Aldustus Jordan

With determination and purpose,
he climbed the two dimly lit flights
of stairs leading to the small apartment.
He tightly held a black leather bag
with faded gold initials on the side.
A patient is waiting.

The frayed black suit and wrinkly
starched white shirt reveal years
of unpaid fees not pursued.
Sometimes it might be few a dollars
or maybe a crumbled back dated check
to be cashed at the end of the month.
And sometimes it was a tasty meal.

He spoke with an accent, maybe Brooklyn--Borough Park.
But more like the sound of loved ones— victims
at the hands of some mustachioed paper hanger
bent on destroying a people and ruling the world.

With permission from the elders
he entered the room.
Huddled like sun worshipers,
the elders sat around the warm
comforting glow of the potbelly stove.
For a brief moment he joined them.
After all, he was family too.

With familiarity and respect he weaved through
the circus midway maze of multi-colored
hanging drapes and bed sheets that protect
the privacy and dignity of the five families living there.

Kneeling almost prayerfully next to the young patient’s bed,
he mumbled to himself—a checklist or maybe a prayer.
In silence, the elders watched as he gathered his tools.
Stethoscope, Otoscope, Ophthalmoscope
and an endless supply of tongue depressors.

Beneath his snow-capped eyebrows,
the thick lensed eyeglasses



resting on the tip of his nose
magnified dark colored eyes that
were both alert and in need of sleep.
“Say Ahh,” he said to the patient.

The elders remained silent,
each in their own thoughts.
Illness is never simple, comfortable,
or easily forgotten--they were worried
and lost in the often-agonizing time warp
between examination and diagnosis.

At last he broke the silence,
looked at the patient and said,
“If you like ice cream, come to
my office tomorrow morning.”
I can make you better.”
He patted the patient on the cheek,
stood up, and smiled.

Puzzled, the elders searched deep
Into each other’s eyes for an answer or a clue.
Ice cream?
With perfect timing he said,
“It’s his tonsils, I will remove them tomorrow.”

With a sense of relief and gratitude
everyone moved into the tiny kitchen.
Without question today it is a tasty meal.
He ate slowly savoring each mouthful.

At times like these he loved to tell the family
stories about exotic faraway places
called Maine or New Hampshire.
Places far beyond their wildest dreams

But, today was different.
To no one in particular, he spoke of
a boy from a poor immigrant family
who dreamed of becoming a physician.
A tear rolled down his cheek.

The next morning the tonsils were removed
and there was plenty ice cream.



Hot Air Balloons Over a Field of Sunflowers

Lily Klima

During COVID-19 stay at home isolation, puzzle making became a metaphor for my life. In mid-March, a 300 piece puzzle of a pretty snowy winter landscape, rekindled my joy of having spent, in the high altitudes of Colorado, December holidays with family, A 500 piece puzzle of all fifty USA states' license plates was a reminder that, although my distance driving outings and flight excursions were restricted, I had to take my car out of the garage for weekly twenty minute warm-up runs to nowhere in particular. Most recently, during the ever growing pandemic stress, a 1500 piece puzzle kept my mind engaged and content.

Each puzzle has its challenges but none greater than my latest endeavor. The picture on the box was inviting and did not look too complex. Once out of the box however, twenty-one hot air balloons, of various sizes, with multitudes of patterns and colors, flying through white clouds and blue sky, over a field of sun flowers, lay in pieces scattered and disconnected.

I, like the puzzle, felt broken apart and separated from the whole. My busy social and fun-filled life, had become fragmented and shattered. No one but I could put and hold myself together. I grieved for my life but fortunately did not take the loss personally. Millions were/are feeling the pain. Far too many are literally losing their lives. My task was/is to stay emotionally connected and put the whole picture into proper perspective.

I am safe at home. “Happiness is having what I have.” From my second floor, all seasons atrium, I can see my garden and pond, feed the birds, watch the rabbits and squirrels and feel most fortunate and appreciative of what I have. I set up my workspace. I sorted the pieces by color and patterns and began fitting together the border.



My life is now condensed and contained. I live within parameters, as were the puzzle pieces. From the bottom up I “nurtured” the field of sun flowers. As with working in any garden, this was tedious and time consuming. But, I had plenty of time and it was ultimately gratifying to piece each bloom and leaf together. I swore on a number of occasions that pieces were missing. I would check the empty box, look under the table and chairs and behind cushions for fallen or missing pieces. They remained elusive. With persistence, I remained on task.

At times however, I needed a break and for days stayed away from the puzzle. Always, I returned with fresh eyes to find a missing piece “hiding” right in front of me. I had looked at it, touched it, turned it, but had not seen it! Such is life. Often, I need to step back, let go and rest. With my mind cleared of clutter, a problem can frequently be solved. So it is with connecting puzzle pieces. It takes patience and resolve.

Such a good feeling to breathe life into the picture. The sunflowers triggered a long ago image of such a field I romped through and enjoyed with my husband in the vicinity of Kraków in Poland. COVID-19 stole my 2020 travel plans but not my memory. In the quiet moments of piecing the puzzle together, I experienced a resounding pleasure and peace.

One by one the hot air balloons took shape and lifted my spirits. The balloons were flying high but they could not rise beyond the edges of the picture. As they grew, and filled the sky, I was brought back to how I felt on a hot air balloon ride during a trip to Cappadocia, in central Turkey. Airborne, gently gliding over the “fairy chimneys,” tall cone-shaped rock formations, in silence, with early morning breezes and the whoosh of fire taking me higher over the semi-arid landscape, I was in awe of the expansive splendor of the panorama. To assuage my fears of getting into prohibitive elevations and out of bounds, I was assured that there were limits of how high the balloon was allowed to ascend.

It took me, off and on, almost three months to finish this puzzle. When done, I kept running my hands over it. It felt smooth. It was whole. It was perfect. It was complete. I was fulfilled. From the stillness of my four cornered glass enclosed room, my mind soared; with it, hopes for a worldwide COVID-19 vaccine.

Until then, I will hold myself together and tackle another puzzle...but perhaps only 1000 pieces.

Sept. 2020



Sending Curiosity to Mars

Robert J. Lang

Exploration of other planets in our solar system was the dream of scientists for centuries. Mars was the most likely choice for the initial attempt at making this dream a reality. The first spacecraft to successfully land on Mars, Viking I, arrived on July 20, 1976.

Design work for the project to send the SUV size Rover, Curiosity, to Mars began in 2004. It involved some 3000 NASA employees and 4000 workers from various independent vendors. I worked for one of these outside companies at the time.

Our company, which specialized in microwave components, built part of the landing guidance system which was to control the spacecraft in the last few minutes of the 8 month flight. The component which we made was based on what is called a “8 Way Phase and Amplitude Invariant Power Divider.”

When the spacecraft was finally launched in the afternoon of November 26, 2011 all the people who worked on our part of the project gathered to watch the TV broadcast of the preparation and liftoff. There was good coverage of the action taking place in the control room. Once the spacecraft was on its way there were shouts of success, back slapping and high fives among the launch control people. But wait a minute. This was not an exercise in just getting the vehicle on its way. Our involvement wasn’t coming for another 253 days. That’s when success or failure was going to be marked by the safe landing or disastrous crash on the surface of Mars.

I remembered a meeting our team had with one of the project leaders from NASA. He said to us “Don’t forget. Your stuff has to work. We have no backup for it.” Nothing like putting the pressure on.

The day of reckoning was August 6, 2012. One way or other, the spacecraft was going to be on Mars. It was the job of our component to aid in bringing it down to about 15 feet above the surface, make sure it was level, and hold it steady until the Curiosity Rover itself was lowered on cables to the surface. The cables were then detached and the spacecraft, minus Curiosity, was sent off to land in a safe area.

The time of touchdown was in the middle of the night, but our group was again watching the progress being broadcast from the control room, now occupied by the people connected to the landing. The excitement started to grow. An announcement was made that, by calculations, the flight was over. But we wouldn’t have confirmation of how things went for another half hour, the time it takes for a radio signal to travel from Mars to the Earth.

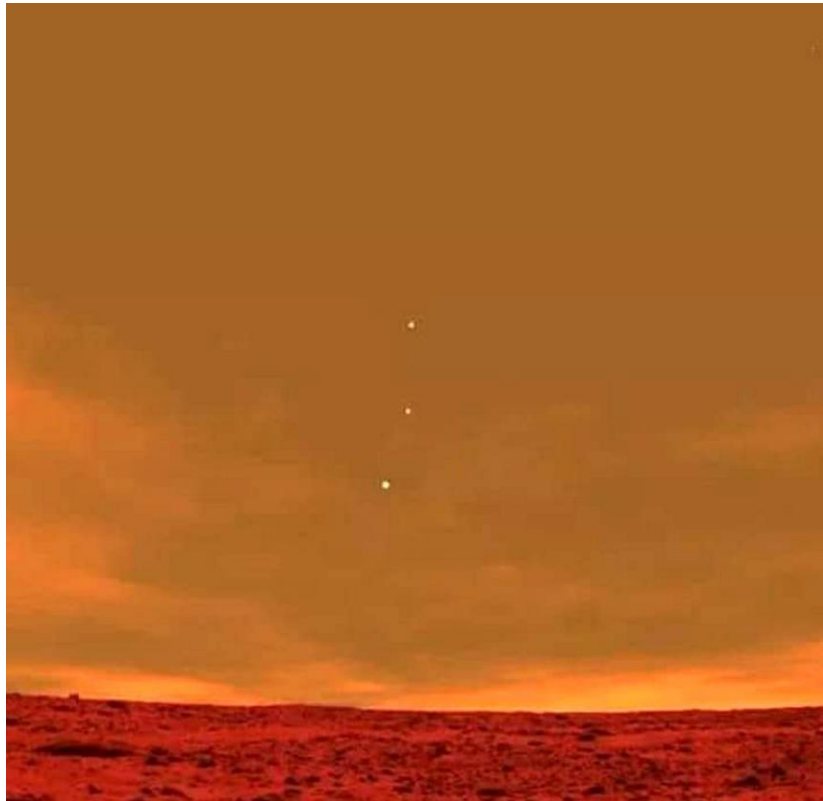
Finally someone in the control room yelled out “We have a picture!” A fuzzy picture of the Martian surface appeared on the TV screen. Success! The Curiosity Rover was safe and beginning the transmission of data.

In the years that followed thousands of pictures and huge amounts of scientific data were sent back to Earth as Curiosity moved around over various types of terrain.

I still find it hard to believe that a piece of equipment that I designed, and which I held in my hands, had actually played a vital role in safely delivering Curiosity to the surface of Mars.

Quiz

This sunset picture shows 3 planets. Venus and Jupiter are two, what is the third?





Melted Into Air

Mel Lantz

Time to get up.

Wonder what time it is? I am guessing 7:45.

I throw back the cover, slip into moccasin slippers, retrieve the slip-on sweatshirt from the back of the chair and head for the TV to check the time, then to the bathroom.

The lake is really clear. I can see a bluegill near that pad a few feet out... and there's a decent bass below, of maybe a foot to 14 inches. Farther along, there's another bass. Time to get out the fishing tackle. I know the fly to use—it has a dark, wooly head and a strip of rabbit skin trailing behind. Wait, the spinning line is all tangled! The line doubles up and back again several times. It will take some work to untangle this. Why am I working on this tackle, anyway. I should be getting my fly rod ready.

My arm is strained. I have to roll over.

I throw back the cover. But, I thought that I just did this. Guess I was dreaming. What time would it be now? Maybe 8:15.

I need to call the insurance company about the car accident. Another call will be to Fidelity to check on the final cost for selling Apple and purchasing bonds from Ameriprise. Glad there aren't OLLI workshops today. Oh, I need to call about the latest changes in the schedule.

For breakfast, I took out frozen pancakes so they would thaw. The new container of maple syrup will be needed.

I really have to go to the bathroom. I am guessing the time to be 8:30.

There are the ceiling tiles. This time, my eyes are really open.

My previous intentions melted into air.

We Fought the Crowd, But the – Crowd Won

Peter Lee

*excerpted from his memoir “Leave ‘em Laughing:
A Brief History of the Pickle Brothers Comedy Team.*

BOOOO! They shouted. BOOOO! They bellowed. BOOOO! They insisted! Judging from the reaction we were getting from the audience, the three-man comedy team, the Pickle Brothers, of which I was a member, was not doing all that well. We came to kill ‘em, but bombed instead. Oh the horror...the horror...

On the flight up to the State University at Buffalo, which will be forever known as “Boofalo, my partners Ron, Mike, and I went over our set for this evening’s performance. By this time, in 1966, we had many successful college concerts and were considered a “hip” act, so there was no reason to believe this show wouldn’t be a success. **WRONG!** We knew we were in trouble right from the beginning when the announcer informed the audience that “The featured act, the (very popular) *Kingston Trio*, would not be able to perform tonight.” The sound of the audience expressing their disappointment was instantly very fear-inducing.. “Instead,” droned the announcer, “we have three guys from Long Island who really think they’re funny, so let’s give them a beak,*The Pickle Brothers*.” The giant boulder that Sisyphus had to push up that big hill was just a grain of sand compared to our burden.

Our act usually consisted of some spoofs of TV commercials, usually deodorants, and take-offs of then-popular quiz shows and dopey sitcoms, performed very fast-paced and broadly with lots of physical shtick. Our roles were fairly clear-cut: Our leader Ron, who resembled a young Milton Berle, played the gruff authority figure. Mike looked like a corporate lackey from the *Mad Men* era, while I, with my ruffled blond hair, was cast in the mold of a Harpo Marx with very strong vocal chords. We started our act and seemed to be doing alright, getting some laughs, when there seemed to be a detectable restlessness from the crowd. Ron and I were doing a sketch called “The Dummy,” where he played an over-eager children’s show-type ventriloquist trying to get through the act with a recalcitrant dummy, played by me, with a permanent manic grin, who is determined to wreck the act. At one point Ron says “Hey kids, what time is it?” Then, out of the deep recesses of the auditorium came the unwanted response, “It’s time for a new act,” which got a bigger laugh than anything we’d done so far.

This was just the opening salvo in a seemingly endless stream of booing, raspberries, and catcalls, which failed to produce any actual cats. From that point on, it was strictly survival time. My flop sweat had transformed my shirt into a big, wet dishrag. As required, we finished our act, and headed straight out to back door in hope of making a quick getaway before the sheriff rounded up a posse to run us out of town. Luckily, a cab was empty, and we tumbled into it. I felt like barking “Grand Central and step on it,” but instead I spent the entire trip looking out the rear window prepared to break the glass and fire at them with my invisible .38 caliber Police Special. As there wasn’t a flight to La Guardia for three hours, and fearing the torch-and-pitchfork mob would catch up with us, we made it to the Amtrak station and hopped on a waiting train headed south to New York City. It was a very long and quiet trip, with each of us wondering if we were “really that bad?”, and “Why the hell am I doing this?” and “maybe working at my Uncle Louie’s glue factory in St. Louis won’t be that bad...”



Not doing well, or “bombing” as we call it, is part of the gestalt of performing in front of a big crowd of people who’ve paid to see you be successful. Every big league baseball player faces a similar barrage of boos on his way back to the dugout after blowing a big lead. As it turned out, we never played Buffalo again, but instead went on to become very successful, with two appearances on both the Ed Sullivan and Johnny Carson shows, as well as our own TV Pilot directed by *The French Connection* director William Friedkin, and over seventy appearances as opening act on tour with the Beach Boys.
You booin’ at me? You booin’ at **ME**????



Brooklyn 1957

Martin H. Levinson

Eleven years old, lost in Prospect Park
with my friend Alan Weberman, a beatnik
who doesn't play stickball, stoopball, or shoot
water pistols but wears a French beret, black
turtleneck sweaters and bangs the bongos.

We're trying to find a way out of a
585-acre urban wilderness in the
heart of deepest Brooklyn with
no maps, canteens, compass,
food or shining stars to guide us.

We're far from Sol's candy store
with its vanilla egg creams, chocolate
Clark Bars, Drake's pound cakes,
cherry lime rickeys and long salted
pretzels in plastic see-through bins.

We're far from the Patio Movie Theater,
with its double features, cartoons,
newsreels and a goldfish pond
in a beautifully tiled lobby to
throw pennies into.

We're far from Jahn's Ice Cream Parlor with
its Kitchen Sink—a jumble of ice cream,
chocolate syrup, whipped cream, maraschino
cherries, and a hodgepodge of other things
that can serve up to six.

We're far from the Empire Rollerdrome,
Ebinger's Bakery, Erasmus Hall High School,
Freddie Fitzsimmons Bowling Lanes and
Ebbets Field, home of the '55 world champs,
'57 world chumps, who left Flatbush for LA.

We're far from college, marriage,
work, retirement and a quiet
home in the country away from
the racket, hubbub and delight
of inner-city childhood life.



Covid-19

Martin H. Levinson

Bad news wrapped in a protein /
a cellular saboteur / a biological
Chernobyl exploding in a
leaderless land / triage tents /
portable morgues / blue latex
gloves on a city street / the virus
kills / it screams you must change
your life / Zoom consoles but
touch is above technology /
no one wants to die alone / a
doctor cries “we need more
beds, protective gear, there’s
no way out but THROUGH.”



A Tale of Two Daughters

Jim Muckerman

For me, “*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*” was a watershed book that has influenced many of my important life decisions until this day. I first read this book during my senior year in college (1965), the same year it was first published, and Malcolm X was assassinated. It greatly influenced my personal perspective on racial discrimination and the lack of equal opportunities in our society.

I remember taking my fiancée (Carolyn Hazel Chapman) home to meet my family (mother, stepfather, and maternal grandmother) during the spring break in my senior year of college. It turned out to be the weekend of Martin Luther King’s “I had a dream” speech. We all watched it on TV together. My family was scandalized; Carolyn and I were inspired. The consensus of my family was, “We don’t believe in discriminating against black people, but they should know to stay in their place...”

Carolyn grew up in rural Minnesota and had essentially no exposure to black people, while I had grown up in St. Louis, MO, attended a segregated elementary school, then the now-infamous Ferguson, MO High School. We were married just after we both graduated from Carleton College in Northfield, MN. We had a child (Andrea Lee) while we were graduate students at the Univ. of Wisconsin. Two years later, we decided to adopt a non-white child, but faced issues regarding the state of Wisconsin’s refusal to transfer custody of a 3-week-old girl (black father; white mother) to the state of New York for the purpose of adoption. I had already accepted a tenure-track research position as a theoretical chemist at Brookhaven National Laboratory on Long Island, so we had to deal with it as a private adoption between us and the state of Wisconsin.

Another issue was that Wisconsin required adoptive parents to be affiliated with an organized religion, but both Carolyn and I were professed atheists, so we both decided to join the Unitarian Fellowship of Bellport, NY to satisfy this requirement. Shortly after our adoption of the mixed-race baby girl (Sarah Jane) was finalized, I successfully defended my Ph.D. thesis and we moved to New York, where we rented a large house in an upscale part of Bellport on Long Island.

Later on, we decided that we should buy a house instead of continuing to pay rent, and we agreed that the location of our new house should be in a racially integrated school district. Looking back, I don’t think Carolyn (as intelligent as she was) ever fully understood the difference between “integrated” and “multi-racial”, and we ended up buying a house in Bellport, NY, which had a school system that included disparate white, black, and Hispanic subcultures.

Andrea started elementary school, and seemed to enjoy both her home and school experiences. At home she and Sarah played peacefully if not noiselessly together in the evenings and on weekends. One of their favorite activities was having “Big Wheel” races



around a large dinner table.

Sarah stayed with a babysitter on weekdays, and Carolyn secured a teaching position in biology at Suffolk County Community College.

At elementary school in Bellport, as mentioned above, Sarah gravitated toward the black and Hispanic factions while Andrea sought to be accepted by the much more affluent white subculture. Each daughter was an embarrassment to the other.

I spent a year’s sabbatical at Oxford Univ. (UK), in 1980-81 with support from BNL and a Guggenheim Fellowship. My family accompanied me, and during that year we traveled by car through a large part of England and Wales, where Andrea had a long-held wish to go “pony trekking.” We visited lots of castles, museums, scenic overlooks, etc. We also traveled on “The Continent” through France, Italy and Germany, where I very much enjoyed tasting the wine. The high point in these travels was attending a live evening performance of Verdi’s *Aida* in the Coliseum in Rome that included real elephants in the grand march.

Andrea participated in a very interesting student/teacher exchange in which each student in her class in England went to a school in Alsace and lived with the family of a French student participant for a week; then later the French student of each family that hosted an English student went to the English school and lived with the family of the corresponding English student. The French and English teachers also exchanged places, and the French teacher, a very friendly man, stayed with our family. On the evening of the second day of Andrea’s stay in Alsace, she called home and whispered to me through deep sobs that she wanted to come home.

When I asked why, she said she was afraid of the father of the family, who was very authoritarian, and that “they eat disgusting things here.” I asked her what was disgusting, and she explained, “The mother asked me if I liked *ragnon* and I thought she said *champignon*, and they were disgusting but I felt I had to eat them.” At that time Andrea was a vegetarian, and that made her experience doubly traumatic. I encouraged her to be more careful answering questions about her likes and dislikes, and she would be all right. After all, she was in the gastronomic capital of the world.

With respect to school, Sarah regarded our trip as a year that “didn’t count,” and blew off her schoolwork. Andrea did all right in school and made some friends, but when we returned to Bellport, she apparently had dug herself into a social hole from which she couldn’t escape. We took both daughters to (different) child psychologists, but our children were not cooperative. Sarah was ultimately expelled from Bellport HS for alcohol consumption and skipping classes, so we sent her to a private boarding school in upstate New York. Andrea refused to go back to Bellport HS, and threatened to commit suicide by slashing her wrists with a white plastic picnic knife if we tried to make her do so. Carolyn was freaked out and dysfunctional, so against my better judgment, we sent Andrea to live with Carolyn’s younger sister and family in rural Minnesota for the remainder of the school year. The next year Andrea was persuaded to return to Bellport HS, from which she graduated after making up a number of gym classes she had skipped, and Sarah graduated from the Hoosak School two years later with no special



distinction.

Sarah pulled off a scam on us that I am embarrassed to relate. She was not accepted by Howard Univ., a highly reputed traditionally black university in Washington, D.C., so she opted to pursue a degree at Morris Brown College in Atlanta, GA. She registered for classes, and we paid all her fees and sent her off. During the first semester, she called us once a week to report on how she was doing (courses, grades, etc.) Things seemed to be going smoothly until we discovered that shortly after arriving there she had withdrawn from the college because of a “family emergency” and obtained a full refund of her tuition, and room and board for the semester. She spent her time enjoying her freedom and hanging out with her new friends in Atlanta. She married a deadbeat guy (Vaughn Boyd) whom she divorced after having a baby girl (Paris), a second baby girl (Chloe) and then twins (a boy, Maximillian and a girl, Zaria) by him. Although he was ordered by the court to pay child support, he didn’t. He lived below the radar at menial jobs (e.g., stocking grocery store shelves) which he quit and went underground again whenever the police came looking for him.

I needn’t go into the details, but I was pleased that Sarah and her children qualified for and moved into a “Habitat for Humanity” house in Atlanta. She held a series of entry-level jobs, and received welfare support, but she didn’t make budgets or manage her finances well. When, as a last resort, she asked me for financial help, I generally gave it to her, but I insisted on her supplying me with a record of ALL her expenses (groceries for the five of them, transportation, clothes, fuel, fast food, etc.) for a couple of months. She sent them to me, and I followed up with a phone conversation to analyze her data.

She was buying far too much fast food, was not cooking wholesome meals, was trying to keep an old car running, etc. I went over the budget with her, item by item, and convinced her (I think) that she had to consider all her sources of income, fixed expenses, non-essentials, etc., and still leave resources for dealing with unexpected events. When we agreed on a stringent budget, I committed for a specified period of time (and no more) to deposit a substantial amount of money into her bank account that was to be used only to cover her family’s necessities.

Foremost among these was the mortgage payment on her house. Paris has a college degree and a job, I don’t know what Chloe is doing, Sarah doesn’t know the whereabouts of Zaria, and Max is in his second year of college with an all-expenses-paid football scholarship. Andrea is living in Santa Fe, NM with her partner, Christian Gustafson, and teaching art, and her daughter, Isadora, is expecting to graduate from a Minnesota state college this coming spring. Carolyn and I were divorced while Andrea and Sarah were going through high school, and Carolyn died of cancer a few years after Andrea graduated *cum laude* from Hofstra Univ. in a special program for classic underachievers.



Despite The Tears, He Was Indeed a Man

Rachelle Psaris

He was a Police Officer in his 40’s, tall, muscular, good looking and friendly. I performed the usual pre operative nursing assessment-checking his vital signs, asking about the last time he had something to eat or drink, who would take him home, etc. After gathering the supplies to start Jim’s IV, I approached him and put the tourniquet on his arm. At that same time I looked up and noticed that he was crying. I quickly took off the tourniquet while asking him what was wrong. He responded that as a child he was given a shot without any advance warning, and had been fearful of needles ever since. Though he had not had any more experiences with needles since childhood, the memory was still vivid. I closed the curtains around his stretcher, gave him a box of tissues, and encouraged him to “let it out”. My heart ached for him, this seemingly strong police officer, who at that moment was a little boy again, hurt and frightened. I could see he was embarrassed, and as I touched his arm gently, I suggested his crying made him no less a man. He calmed down and when he felt better urged me to go ahead and start the IV. Thankfully I was successful on the first try! When his wife came in to sit with him until he went to surgery, he told her the story, and her first response was, “what a baby!” I wanted to reach out and punch her! Instead I replied in a professional voice that he wasn’t a baby, but frightened from a childhood experience and that so many people are afraid of needles for various reasons. What I most appreciated about Jim was that he was strong enough to let himself cry-strong enough to allow his vulnerability to show through. He was more of a man than others I had known.

The 18-Wheeler Truck Driver

Rachelle Psaris

Derrick came in for a minor Urological procedure. When I introduced myself he reminded me that I had taken care of him in the past, to which I replied jokingly, “Is that a good thing or a bad thing?” He reminded me that I had gotten his IV in on the first try-whew!

Derrick is an African American, and you may ask, “So what?” I’ve taken care of African Americans in the past, but this day was different. I was reminded of a recent NPR program that discussed the latest research on being Color Blind, as in not noticing that someone is of another race. The speaker did not like the term Color Blind because, according to her, that meant that people would not acknowledge the degrading and horrific treatment African Americans received centuries ago as slaves and may be ‘blind’ to racist behavior that still exists today. Well, I thought about my relationships with other African American people, and this did not resonate with me. However, on the day I took care of Derrick, I gave it some thought.

We talked about child rearing, work ethic, family life, our jobs, etc. His wife joined in on the conversations as well. He drives an 18-wheeler, she has two jobs. Derrick and I talked about how things have changed with respect to the rules of the road and how even some 18-wheel truck drivers do not adhere to the rules of the road. We talked about our children and he shared some unhappiness about his two sons when they were living home. He called them lazy. “I work 14 hours and when I come home, I don’t want to come home to things that don’t work”-the “things” he referred to were his sons. I laughed because I thought the statement quite clever. He and his wife laughed too, but I knew deep down he wasn’t laughing. I told him how one of our sons had left home after graduating from college when we asked him to pay rent, but moved on to share an apartment with someone else and pay rent. I liked that story! Derrick got his point across-his sons had to leave home because they did not go out and work. As we chatted, I thought to myself, “How much more different do I need to be with this African American man? Do I ingratiate myself to prove that I am not a racist and that I do not and never will forget about my country’s crimes against humanity?” He shared with me the fact that he was HIV positive. I commented that he looked well and he quoted the lab results illustrating how well he is doing. I asked him if he found out after donating blood. He just said that it was from a history of “bad behavior” many years ago. You know, my heart went out to him. I felt no judgment, as I would not have if he were white. Bad things happen and when we were young and felt invincible sometimes really bad things happened and we eventually had to pay the price years down the road. I felt a great deal of admiration for him- seemingly comfortable sharing his stories with me-a white woman. I am not color blind to race-I see the color of people’s skin. I am no more or less blind to them as I am to patients, who are morbidly obese, or dirty, or smell, or who are angry and lash out at me because of their own emotional problems compounded by their needing surgery. They are living breathing beings as I am. They are just different from me in other ways, ways that make us human and original.

I love my job. I get to meet so many interesting people-some I don’t mind forgetting, and some like Derrick, I do not want to forget. Thank you Derrick for sharing your humanness with me.

A Window to the Future

Naomi Schlesinger

Looking out the living room window on the fourth story of the Lower East Side tenement building provided an expansive view for a six-year old girl. The high window had a large pane providing a clear view to the bustling street below. Sitting on a cushioned chair, elbows perched on the sash, I watched the world go by while my grandmother prepared my favorite dish for lunch: chicken soup with noodles. Assorted cars, yellow taxis, and small trucks rolled by, each one heading to an unknown place; each one capturing my attention as the parade changed. It was the moving landscape of people, though, that interested me most. I saw mothers holding hands with toddlers, guiding them, I thought, toward the park farther up the street. Other young women were pushing prams, occasionally peeking in to make sure the baby was okay. Sometimes I would see a little child holding a Mello-Roll that probably came from Joe’s Luncheonette on the corner, and I would wonder if it was my favorite, chocolate. Occasionally, it looked as though two people were having an argument, their heads shaking at one another as they paused every now and then to speak.

It was fun to see people looking so small, so small they made me feel big. There were so many people to wonder about. Were they going to happy places? Was that little boy down there---the one with the red jacket---going to Jerry’s Toy Store? I loved going there with Grandpa. Was that man wearing a dark hat going to work or was he going home? What kind of work did he do? Was the woman walking with a limp in pain? What happened to her? Why did so many people look like they were rushing? Did these people live nearby? What was in that big box the man in a uniform was carrying?

Another child might have looked out that same window and seen the world with different eyes and been curious in varying ways. A girl especially interested in numbers might have wondered how many vehicles went by and counted them, sorting them into categories. Someone else might have focused on what make of cars were passing and asked different questions: were they Fords, Buicks, Cadillacs or Oldsmobiles? Were they convertibles or sedans? How do engines work? How can you tell how old a car is? A child who likes to draw might see different shapes and colors and wonder if he could draw a Buick Roadmaster. A different youngster might check out the buildings across the street and ask questions about the shape of the roofs and doors. Perhaps another would pay attention to the changing hues depending on the amount of sunlight or note how different everything appeared through the mist of raindrops.

There is much we can all understand about ourselves by being attentive to our early puzzlements and curiosities. Thinking back to my childhood interest in people, I realize that this was the dawning of a life-long passion: observing people, wondering about them, and wanting to know their stories. Where did they come from? Who are the important people in their lives? What are their dreams and hopes? What kind of work do they do? What secrets do they hold? What are their fears? What do they enjoy doing most in their leisure time?

The way children perceive their experiences and hold inner memories of them often presage their adult musings and lifetime work since there is a young child who still lives within each of us. Who knows where window-gazing hours might take us?



Covid 19

Mary Ann Sommerstad

“I think I have it,” my husband says as he sits down heavy into the red chair. Coronavirus. My hand stops in mid grocery wipe. How did this happen? We’ve been so careful. His brother probably, but that’s another story. He has all the classic symptoms - low fever, body aches, a slight cough. And so begins our covid odyssey.

We are both calm and rational. We will not touch each other. I will sleep in the spare room. Otherwise everything as normal. The doctor said it was probably too late for him to quarantine. But deep inside my bones I can feel the genes wake up, the anxiety genes. I can see their little faces in the back of my mind, their eyes open wide. I do not acknowledge them.

The first night will not be good. For me. The genes are silently knitting danger messages, like Madame Defarge, and floating them up to my mind on currents of adrenaline. My mind spits out thoughts. Which hospital will I take him to? Stony Brook or Mather? Will my face be pressed up against the outside window as they wheel him away forever? What if he dies? I don’t remember the computer passwords. I forgot the name of our insurance agent. What if I die? Who will take care of our cats? I run through a mental rolodex of names and nobody is right. The cats regard me soberly, their green eyes lit by the flickering TV.

I wake up every two hours and check on him. I’m scared to go into the room. The genes are very agitated, their faces like tiny “Scream” emojis. Their message: Get out, get out of the house. Like in the babysitter book where the phone calls are coming from the murderer hiding in the cellar. I am not supposed to touch him but I do anyway. Forehead not very hot, breathing normal. I pull out the holy cards I got at St. Patricks. What are my religious beliefs? I have no idea. I prop the cards up on the bureau, my favorite saints, two popes and all the Mary’s.

Friends of my youth and now my comforts on this night. The genes rest their knitting needles and sit back down. Light comes slowly to the windows.

The second day is no worse than the first. We drive to the Stony brook campus for a coronavirus test. New hospital tent cities are rising in the cold drizzle of early April. An eerie sight. The test will be positive.

Last month, seemingly eons ago, I finally addressed the 23 and Me genealogy kit that had been a Christmas present two years ago. I dutifully spit in the rather large tube, packed it up carefully and sent it off to be analyzed. I sit at the computer more often these days and find it a welcome diversion. I notice that 23 and Me is a rather avid correspondent. “Your genes have arrived.” “Your genes are getting sorted.” “Your genes are headed down the assembly line where they will soon be processed.” I picture the genes with tiny DNA name tags jumping into a pool with all the other genes where they will meet and greet and find their relatives.

Day three is still the same. No worse. Maybe a bit better. The kids and grandkids do our food shopping and leave the groceries on the back deck. We smile and wave like lepers at the



mouth of the cave. It is a strange dichotomy that our home, always a haven, a refuge, is now the locus of danger. It looks the same as always, warm and welcoming.

Day 4 and the fever is almost gone. I mostly sleep through the night. Another email arrives from 23 and Me. My ancestry report is ready and there are some surprises. I am only 70% Sicilian/Southern Italian, not 100% as I had expected. 30% of me is from virtually all the countries on the Mediterranean. I am Greek, Turkish, Anatolian, North African. I have hit the genetic lottery. On my genealogical map, the entire circumference of the Mediterranean is lit up like a slot machine. I am pleased with my new exotic identity. A bit late. Exotic 70 year old woman. Sounds like a senior dating profile.

Day 5 and the fever is totally gone. We share the good news with the doctors office which has been calling every day, a calming and reassuring presence. My husband must remain inside for 7 days from his first day with no fever. I, however, have to stay in for 14 more days. By the time I have a chance to think about getting the virus myself, it appears that I'm not going to.

A new message from 23 and Me. The genes have gone adventuring. Are they still my genes since we parted corporeal company a century or two ago? “You have two DNA cousins, likely 3rd or 4th,” George from northwestern Pennsylvania and Concetta from France. Cousin George’s dime sized picture looks a bit like my father. Concetta’s is too dark to see. Cousin George has done a lot of geological research on Delia, his family’s hometown in Sicily, my grandfather’s town, and is happy to share information. Both our grandfathers went from Delia to Atlantic City, NJ, from one very small town across an ocean to another. What was that connection? His grandfather opened a barber shop in Atlantic City’s Italian neighborhood, only about 6 square blocks. Cousin George’s grandfather died of the flu in 1918 I did not know that the flu had touched the Italian neighborhood. Did my grandfather get it? Did he have some kind of immunity that he bequeathed me in the genes? The skeletal hand of the past reaches toward me from the computer screen.

The next week or so, my husband has no more fever, no more aches and pains, but the cough persists and he has no energy. Not much change now from day to day. At the end of the week, he gets official notification from NY State that he may return to normal life. I still have a few more days. But I don’t mind because I am on the computer with my new relatives. Cousin George says he is pursuing a family relationship with Anne Bancroft. I don’t think much of the word “pursuing”, but Concetta, the French cousin, sends me the names of my paternal great grandparents. My great- grandmother’s last name is the same as Anne Bancroft’s. Now my enhanced dating profile can read “exotic 70 year old woman related to Anne Bancroft.” Except that I am happily married. Cousin George is also “pursuing” a relationship with the film making Coppola family. It occurs to me that when you go back to 4th cousins, everyone in Sicily is likely related to everyone else.

More 23 and Me messages. “You have 27 DNA cousins.” I read through the list, noting the name and looking for resemblances in the occasional picture. Another message. “You have 1,397 DNA cousins.” Well that’s too many for my human mind to process. I guess this will be the end of my DNA journey.

Three weeks go by. My husband’s energy returns. I too am cleared to go out into the world. I



can go into the supermarket for as long as I want and have no fear. We are both invulnerable - like Superman. It's the end of April. Spring is blooming everywhere. Hundreds of daffodils wave in the backyard, forsythia in the front. It's the perfect time to feel joy and gratitude for simply being alive, for having the wonderful gift of health, for doing ordinary things. I leave the holy cards propped up on the bureau.

I go down to the basement to look for pots for spring plantings, my two dear cats following me noiselessly, little ghostly shadows. Disembodied green eyes peer from behind the stacks of paper towels, towers of water cartons, rows of boxes of cat litter. The grandkids used to say I was getting ready for the zombie apocalypse. And now here it is - minus the zombies. Why have I always piled up all this stuff? Because there was famine in Sicily at the turn of the last century? Because Spanish flu came to Atlantic City in 1918? Because my mother stood in the bread line in the great depression? The genes know. They remember.



Revolutions Per Minute

Bruce Stasiuk

We anchored it between our feet while my sister would turn the crank. The beige Victrola played until the coiled energy was spent, and the song would groan to a funhouse-mirror halt. We’d try to imitate it.

I’m my own grandpa

I’m my own grandpa

It sounds funny I know

But it reallyyy iiisss ssooooooo.....

The brittle record was turned with care.

One slip and it would shatter like porcelain.

We knew about that.

Our hearth was a thick wooden radio. It filled our apartment with crackling songs, and tobacco-colored light.

It became furniture after the TV moved in with Davey Crockett and his theme song.

Each week, the ‘Hit Parade’ sorted out the top tunes.

“Shrimp boats is a’commin.....”

Music was always there spicing moments, branding sensations, and backlighting moods.

It was a random soundtrack.

I never pressed fast-forward.

It was simply there, shadowing the main event...my life.

Dad was strong. Maybe the strongest man in the world.

His scar was from the battle of the Philippines.

He’d toss the ball underhanded to me.

Doctor Green walked up the two landings holding his black leather bag which smelled of assurance.

He would make me better.

Always.

Sister Rose Perpetual knew everything. She’d take the long wooden pole and open the classroom window just a bit.

She drilled us on the Catechism and charted our wrongs and rights.

During the Series, she’d chalk the inning and score on the blackboard.

The Dodgers would be heroes if we could only wait.

Maybe just one more year.

Our president made the world wonderful, happy and safe. We were the land of the free and the brave. Everybody knew that.

Stars and stripes were forever!

I marched out of the Lowes along Willis Avenue with John Phillip Sousa in my head.



Our home cooked meals were eaten to woes about Chinese starvation.
But they weren’t starving alone.
I started starving for some explanations.

My body was changing and so was the music.
Bird Dog
Chain Gang
Spanish Harlem

I was seeing the world differently too.
The promise was looking more like a compromise.
Blue Moon was becoming *Bad Moon Rising*.
I started pitching softer to my father.
During an argument, my mother screamed the truth about his scar.
Doctor Green died.
The nuns were found to have said things that were untrue and... worse.
The Dodgers stayed in two hotels.
One was for blacks.
The White House was the return address for 58,000 caskets filled with Democracy.



He appeared on the Les Crane show...February, 1965.
His hair spoke. He howled in dark clothing, scarf orbiting his neck.
The words came out of a rusty voice full of splintered edges.
“It’s Alright Ma, I’m Only Bleeding”.
“Even the President of the United States must sometime hafta’ stand naked.”

‘California Girls’ and all the rest instantly became *‘Muzak’*.

He barked and wailed songs about injustice.
About barons, and blood on linoleum, and skin torn open by ropes.
All the neat answers became questionable.
He sang, *“The Times, They Are A’Changin’*’.

For me they were.



My Spiritual Son

Susan Steinmann

You are new with all the gangly sprawl
of six feet and seventeen years.

Seventeen years and three months, your
learning rate so fast at this stage the months
need to be tallied.

In your heart there is youth’s impatience
with injustice and hypocrisy challenging
all to explain why the world is this way.

You explode with creativity: downloading,
listening, making critical comments sharing
if adult ears will hear what you do.

Your keyboarding is fast like your growth.
You instant message, switch to a slender
cell to transmit your picture or receive and
wear earphones which send you the music
that your heart chooses.

Bands from Buffalo, the Pogues, Mischief Brew,
You inform me that the Pogues are making their
first visit in fifteen years on December 21st and
maybe we could go. Short of money we try to
think how we could arrange it.

Hidden in your cultural bombardment and multiplicity
of modalities shattering my moribund quiet, you
patiently explain what you think “Wake Me When
September Ends” means. Ideas are important to you.
You engage with school when it engages with your
heart and spirit. When you make sweeping global
comments about what you see, I try to discuss
the need for compromise and trading off daily life
with principle all who mature are taught to make.

Sometimes I don’t even grasp what you are describing
but by looking at the world through your eyes I stay
involved, relevant to the generation walking a road I will
not reach. My spiritual children, seeds of a hopeful future



I hold your hand in mine sixty something
spotted and weathered.
Your generation’s spirit and the memory of mine,
Similar souls seeding our terrain with tomorrow’s sprouts
Keeping just a step or two ahead of despair.



Flowers at Calverton National Cemetery

Susan Steinmann

I have watched the seasons change around your grave,
 husband of memory.
I have kneeled on the cold ground in November
 hugging the white marble with your name,
 putting my arms around the chilly stone
 as though you were there,
 planting a kiss on the top edge,
 warm lips fitting over frigid stone.
The plastic flowers have rolled away into the woody edges
 like tumbleweed, orange ribbons for fall,
 their passing marked by faded fake leaves,
 caught in the roughage between numbered
 sections of the cemetery.
 You are 1495 in section 42.

I remember your curly silver hair that used to be light brown,
 Your mischievous blue eyes, your twinkling laugh,
 And my memory is almost a caricature of itself.
 You are hovering like a wraith just outside my
 conscious mind.

In spring plastic flowers are replaced with live daffodils,
 and lilies,
In summer roses appear, along with other rectangular
 spots moving the section forward in front of you
 by many rows.

On Memorial Day the cub scouts plant flags at every grave.
 I never come on that day telling myself it is because
 it is too crowded, but knowing there are other reasons.
 And back again to fall, year by year.
The deer that stop on the edges of Calverton across from
 the old Grumman property stand poised as though
 waiting for some answer to a question that has not been
 asked.
The four wild turkeys who ran in between the rows
 like a platoon gobbling on little quick feet,
 the only sound except for mourning sobs.

The western Pines stand stark cut against a
crisp blue sky, and the graves seem to grow



like flowers, year by year, season by season.

What a sad place a military cemetery is
even though nature breaks through here
and there, its final say holding out hope.



Memorial

Bob Stone

Only shadows remain
burnt into the sidewalk
after the new dawn.
Whisps of acrid bamboo
smolder over wash basins.
Jagged shards of concrete
tumble across vacant lanes
where crushed vegetables
rot in their baskets.

There is no solemn ceremony for
the woman hanging wash
the man behind his ox
the child carrying her basket.
No flames burn in their memory.
No bugles mourn their passing.
Their names are not carved
into eternal granite.

My Closet

Bob Stone

Lined up shoulder to shoulder
shirts clean, collars pressed
pants, creases sharp enough to draw blood
belts and ties hang in orderly ranks
shoes gleam on their racks
all stand ready to salute the world.

A colonel in motley
I inspect my troops
in my ragged cut offs
a baggy t-shirt from another time
worn edged flip flops
wondering when the parade will march again.



The Greatest Poem Ever Written

Brian Wade

I want to write
The Greatest Poem Ever Written,

I want it to be a profound poem
That touches you deeply.
But I also want it
To make you smile
And laugh so hard
That your face hurts.

I also want it to be short
And perfectly concise
With no wasted words,
Your time well spent reading
The Greatest Poem Ever Written

I want it to be so lovely
And sweet
That it blows your mind
And touches your soul
Like the most beautiful song
You've ever heard.

And when you read it
You should see things
You've never seen,
Like
Angels in the architecture
Spinning in infinity
Singing Hallelujah!

Also
I want it to smell really good
Like the greatest smell
You've ever smelled,
You close your eyes
And there it is -
Baking bread, coffee beans,
Honeysuckle, puppy dogs,
Powdered babies.



And I want to be certain
That reading it makes you
Faster than a speeding bullet
More powerful than a locomotive
And when you look up in the sky
It's a bird
It's a plane
No it's me!
Up there writing
The Greatest Poem Ever Written

But most importantly
I want it to make you feel the Love
And the Power and the Glory
And to know for certain
That no matter what happens,
I mean
NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS,
That everything
Is going to be all right.

I really want
The Greatest Poem Ever Written
To do all this
And so much more.
But instead,
All you get is this...
Another attempt of mine
To write for you
The Greatest Poem Ever Written.

Well, I gave it a shot.

* 4th stanza - Paul Simon "You Can Call Me Al"



Don't Read This Poem

Brian Wade

You'll be wasting precious time.

There's nothing I can tell you.

Figure it out yourself

Like I did.

Don't be so lazy.

Write your own damn poem.

Now what are you doing.

I told you not to read this poem

But here you are again

Reading this poem,

Wasting your time

I'm only going to say this

One more time -

WRITE YOUR OWN

DAMN POEM!