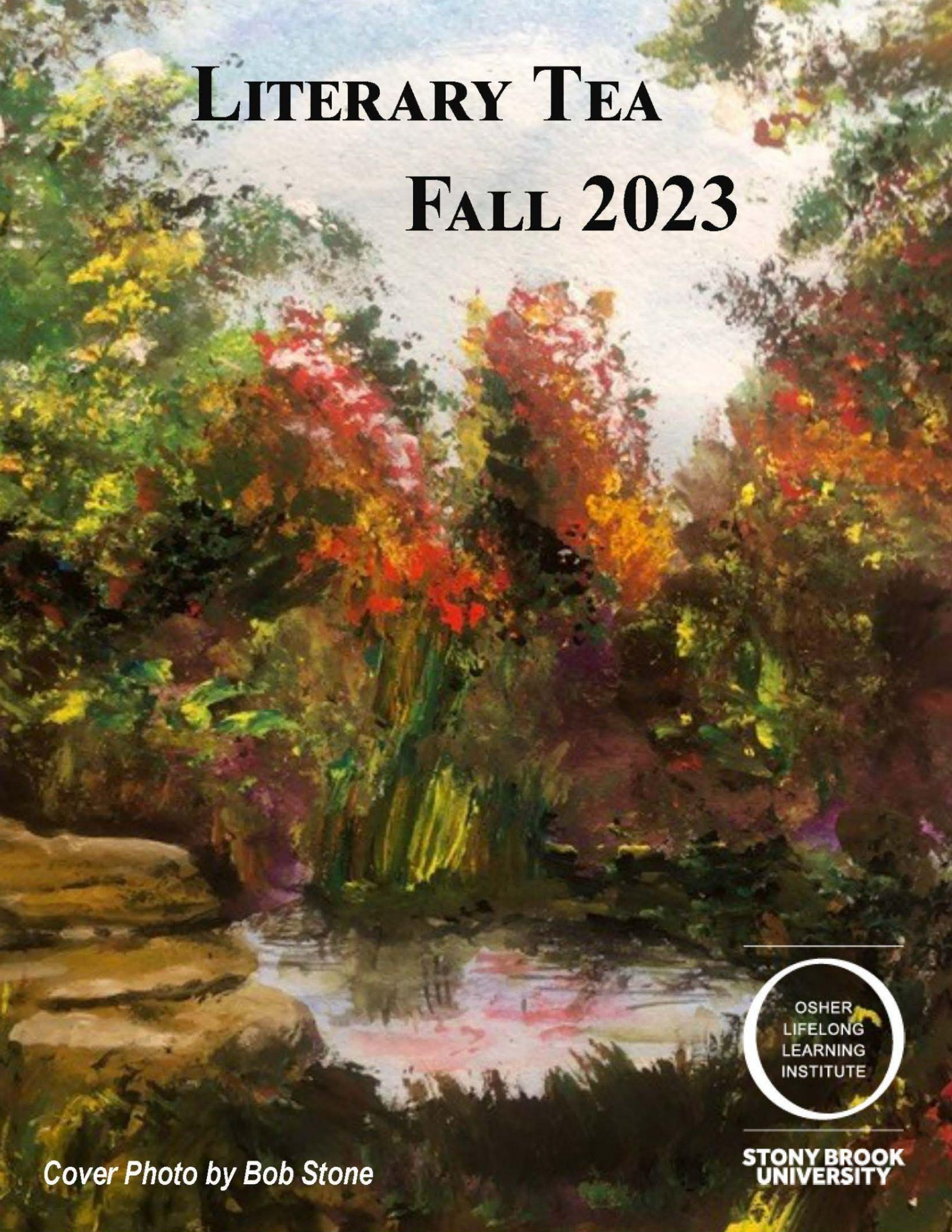


LITERARY TEA

FALL 2023



OSHER
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UNIVERSITY**

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The Beauties Around Me

Patricia Ballan

Although the roses of summer are fading, there are many buds on the Montauk daisies, telling me that I can expect a riot of white flowers next week.

I've recently bought a river birch tree and had it professionally planted on my front lawn. It has small leaves, several stems instead of one trunk, and it waves to me in the wind. I speak to my plants, inside and out of the house. I've heard that the exhalation of carbon dioxide is healthful for plants to absorb, but that really doesn't concern me; I just simply enjoy my one-sided conversation with them.

The river birch doesn't have a name yet, but inspiration will come to me as it did for the Princesa weed which flourishes in my backyard. I stopped the Hispanic gardeners who came to cut her down by telling them, "No, no, esta bonita!" and the name stuck. The gardeners may have murmured "La vieja loco", (The old lady is crazy!), but they smiled indulgently and let her be. She, my Bonita, is six feet tall and has huge green leaves. It seems that she's in the foxglove family and is native to East Asia. She's visible through the picture window in my living room, and each day I call out, "Good morning, Bonita". I can swear she ruffles her giant leaves in answer as the wind rustles through them.

In the square garden in the front we once had a tall, beautifully-formed blue spruce. Sitting by the door during one windstorm, I heard a loud crack and the sound pierced my heart. I knew instinctively what it was; our lovely pine had gone down.

For years, I waited for something to take the place of privilege in the center of the square, and finally ordered a crape myrtle for the spot.

He, with his fiery red plumes shooting upwards like fireworks, is now the focal point of the square. Only now are his colours fading in time with the fall. He has no name, though, and I can't say why...he's clearly masculine, strong and assertive...usually my kind of guy! My husband was such a one.

Fifty-two years ago when we bought this house, we found a somewhat scraggly rosebush hanging its head by the patio alcove. Don uprooted it and replanted the bush where I could see it.



I had friends in the Sayville Garden Club, one of whom was Eloise Nye, a rose expert. She analyzed the pink floribunda and determined that, far from being nondescript, the roses it displayed were a fine Queen Elizabeth variety. Not only did this bush thrive and grow to a height of almost seven feet, but each June it favored us with a mass of wonderful and fragrant pink roses.

I'm happy that I took a photo of it one June, because after Superstorm Sandy flooded this area, the brackish water woefully harmed the bush's roots and stunted its blooming for eleven years. It's just now reviving and is two feet tall. I can wait a number of years more for it to return to its former glory...but not too many more years, I guess! Come on, Rose!

Dotted around the property are several knockout rose plants; so hardy and self-sustaining. The drought did not dismay them; they just kept on keeping on.

That's pretty much what I'm doing myself.



Lessons

Richard Bronstein

I don't think a day goes by that I don't learn something. It could be something new or something old that has faded; it could be new facts or new insights into human nature and codes of conduct. In March of 1970 I was inducted into Army service and commenced my basic training where I received many new lessons. BCT, or Basic Combat Training, has been around since 1917, but in the '60s after a Congressional review found many deficiencies in the training, an overhaul occurred that led to many reforms of which I was both a beneficiary and, probably, a victim...but either way, many lessons were to be learned. A lot of the screaming and yelling at us persisted but the screaming and yelling seemed to have a bit more humanity and understanding.

A year earlier I was admitted to the Bar of New York and 4 days later I was married. I was telling people then that I was admitted and committed in the same week. Little did I know that 11 months later I would be admitted into, and committed to, a different type of institution.

When I reported for duty at Fort Dix, New Jersey, I was aged 24, overweight, out of shape, and over-educated. The Army didn't have a problem with any of those qualities. The first two were handled within the first two to three weeks...I lost about 15 pounds and was lean and strong. The third quality was mine to deal with. I remember a training sergeant asking me if it was true that I was a lawyer (I had a feeling where this was headed). When I acknowledged it was true, he asked me how many years of education I had. I counted 12 for elementary through high school, 4 for undergraduate college and 3 for law school and, somewhat nervously, told him 19. He was duly impressed and then told me to pick up the cigarette butts lying on the ground..."yes sergeant" was the only correct reply.

Drill sergeants are responsible for "coaching, counseling and mentoring" trainees in transforming them from civilians to combat-ready soldiers. My drill sergeant Hicks easily fulfilled those responsibilities. During our training, we were told not to miss Marksmanship testing, because if you did, you would be recycled into a different company and put back a week...nobody wanted that. On the morning of the testing, I woke up sick with a fever...but, not wanting to miss marksmanship, said nothing. On the chow line, my drill sergeant must have seen that I was sick and said, "hey lawyer, you OK?" (Sgt. Hicks often called me "lawyer" and once asked me for some legal advice). When I told him I felt sick, but didn't want to miss marksmanship, he told me he would have me be among the first to shoot and then he would have me driven back to the infirmary. He called our platoon together for a pep talk and explained that he would have the best marksmen shoot first as a model for the rest and then called out the names with the first being BRONSTEIN...Bronstein? Dead silence. Bronstein definitely did not have a reputation as



a marksman. If I hadn't been so sick, I probably would have laughed. After I did my shooting and somehow hit the targets through the fog of my fever, I could hear Sgt. Hicks arguing with the lieutenant that he needs the ambulance to take Bronstein back to the infirmary and the lieutenant saying that the ambulance is there in case somebody gets shot. Great, I'm thinking now I have to figure out a way to get myself shot so I can get a ride to treat my fever. My Sergeant won the argument and on the ride to the infirmary I was so sick that I kept thinking I'd probably be better off if I had been shot. At the infirmary a medic stuck a thermometer in my mouth while I was burning up. When the medic withdrew it, I heard him say, "holy shit...uh, don't die on us, trainee, we're gonna get you right to the hospital"...I had a temp of 104 and was suffering from Rubella that was rampant at the base...the hospital was so full, there was no hospital room for me...I was put in a waiting room that was converted into a hospital room for four of us and recovered in about 72 hours.

But empathy only goes so far as I was soon to learn.

We were all told that there were no passes for getting off the base during the 8 weeks of basic training, so don't bother asking...we were stuck in Ft. Dix for the duration. But I decided to risk being a smart-ass and use my legal training to try to bluff my way off the base for Passover. I told my platoon Sergeant that Passover was an important Jewish holiday and he had to let us go home for the seder...he bumped me up to the First Sergeant who then passed me on to the captain...a Vietnam vet who probably wanted to be anywhere else than training us to be soldiers. He asked if I thought I could make up the missed day of training.... we were in the middle of bayonet training where we were learning how to gut the enemy. I told him I felt confident I could catch up. To my shock, he gave me and the other Jews a 24-hour pass. I went home, spent the night, went to a seder, and returned within 24 hours. The next morning my company reported for continuing bayonet training. The class was being given by none other than our Captain...he had never done this before...I felt a sense of foreboding. About a hundred of us were gathered on the ground and he called for a volunteer...before anyone could respond he called out BRONSTEIN, get up here...not a good sign. I was told to stand about 10 yards away from him and face him. He then fixed his bayonet on the end of his M-16...raised it over his right shoulder and told us "Men, this is the correct way to attack your enemy soldier with a bayonet" and then ran full tilt at me as if he was going to make shish kebab out of me. I stood there...frozen to the spot. He stopped two feet in front of me and brought the rifle and bayonet down at my chest, stopping the blade an inch from my fatigue jacket and then drawing a diagonal crease across my jacket...while I just barely managed to keep last night's matzoh ball soup and brisket from coming up all over him. I often wondered if he expected me to thank him for the wonderful lesson he taught me...but I never did.



Down St. Lucia Way

Joel G. Cohen

In 1982 my wife and I along with friends we met on our Aruba honeymoon in October 1980 decided to attempt to repeat the great time we had in Aruba with a trip to St. Lucia. Needless to say we were disappointed we couldn't go to Couples Jamaica, rather than St. Lucia.

The accompanying song was written chiefly by me at the request of hotel management as part of a show put on by the guests. St. Lucia was 180 degrees from Aruba, perhaps not literally, but in real terms

frain:

Down St. Lucia way we eat bananas everyday
Down St. Lucia way, we eat them every way.

Welcome to St. Lucia- A paradise take a look
We tried to get Jamaica but we heard that it was booked.
We wake up every morning and listen to a lot of rain
Why did we come to St. Lucia, We must have been insane
The food they serves deliciouse and those native fruits
of St. Lucia
But once you let it settle, You have to POOSHA-POOSHA
Have you tried to go swimming - In the beautiful ocean here.
If you get over all the rocks then I'll buy you a beer.
Down in old St. Lucia, they take you to the volcano
The natives try to sell you rocks that you can pick up
by your toes.
We had a very nice day, on the Buccaneer we did cruise
But when we got to Soufriere, they tried to steal our shoes.
The currency here is E.C. and very very hard to change
It may be E.C. for you but it's not E2 for me.
I wanted a Pinia Colada, but they told " The Blender"s Broke "
I got so tired of waiting that I wound up with a Coke --
ALL - NO COKE - PEPSI
Oh it's 4 o'clock now, Everybody run to exercize
We don't want to be late now or else we'll be another size.
Tomorrow we go to the airport and we're awfully sad for that
But there's no need to worry cause we'll probably have a flat.
Despite this little song, We really did have a ball
We hope you had some fun and we want to thank you all.



The Pool

Mike Dolber

It’s 1961. A new decade, a time of change. A new president, a “New Frontier”, the Space Race, a new National League team next year in New York. It’s the year I will turn eleven; the year we will have a new home. We have moved from our apartment in a Brooklyn neighborhood sandwiched between East Flatbush and Brownsville to a three-bedroom apartment on the second floor of a new two-family house in Canarsie. There’s a small lawn in front of the house, and more green around us than we are used to. It’s still Brooklyn, and the distance from our old apartment to our new one is only a few miles along the route of the Remsen Avenue bus, but it feels like we’re in a different world.

Our kitchen has a large window over the sink which overlooks a courtyard and faces the kitchen window of our new neighbors, Irene and Jerry. They have two sons – Barry, a year older than my sister Ellen, and Warren, two years older than me. When the windows are open, our families can converse across the courtyard, and we often do. “Yoo -hoo, Mrs. Goldberg”, my mother calls, referencing a line from an ancient TV show. And despite her initial protest (“Please, he’s just not my type”) Ellen agrees to go out with Barry, and four years later they will be married. Yes, she literally married the “boy next door”.

I will live in this apartment for the next decade, until my wedding in December 1971. I will go to PS 115, to John Wilson JHS, and then to the brand-new Bildersee JHS. I will be a member of the first graduating class of Canarsie High School – the Class of ’67 – and then move on to Brooklyn College, still living at home and now commuting to campus on the J Bus. New home, new neighborhood, new schools.

The three or four attached houses on our block are identical. Our rear windows look out on a “community drive”, a stretch of concrete between our garages on one side, and a three-foot wall with a small plot of grass above it on the other. My parents, along with Irene and Jerry, decide that this driveway is wide enough to be a suitable space for, of all things, a swimming pool. It’s an above ground, 3-foot pool. A ladder straddles the side wall, though most adults could easily step over the side to get in. The pool looks quite out of place, almost ridiculous, in the middle of the concrete driveway, but we are more than happy to have it. It becomes a magnet for guests–friends, my aunt and uncle, my cousins, and assorted others. We have a small barbecue grill, some beach chairs, and a few inflatable floats and rafts. We leave the garage doors open, so that those who want to avoid the summer sun can sit inside for a while. Our pool and backyard are not luxurious, not upscale by any means, not really even a backyard. But for a couple of years,



they help to create our pseudo-suburban summer lifestyle.

We have good times. We swim, if you want to call it that. We throw a ball around, and we enjoy trying to knock unsuspecting victims off their rafts. Occasionally though, we need to get into the pool with buckets to “bail out” the water, clean the liner, and refill the pool with fresh water from the garden hose. One night, I am out with my parents at the Valley Stream Drive-In seeing the first James Bond film, Dr. No (which by the way causes a good deal of embarrassment to a twelve-year-old watching it with his parents). When we get home, we see Ellen and Barry out by the pool. “You left the damned hose running! The whole thing overflowed!” Their annoyance at being left to deal with this mess is evident and justified.

The ever-present transistor radio placed near the pool brings me the voices of Mel Allen, Red Barber, and Phil Rizzuto describing the 1961 pennant race between the Yankees and the Tigers; as well as the historic excitement of Mantle and Maris chasing Babe Ruth’s record. On a hot August day in 1962, it brings us news of the shocking death of Marilyn Monroe. And of course, there is the ever-present music – the Shirelles, Chubby Checker, Ray Charles, the Beach Boys, the Four Seasons, Peter Paul, and Mary, delivered to us by the WMCA Good Guys or by Cousin Brucie. We are on the verge of the Beatles and the British Invasion—more change around the corner. That pool, that driveway, became the backdrop for the soundtrack of my eleventh and twelfth summers.

Today, I refuse to be an aging Baby Boomer glorifying some imaginary “good old days”. The early sixties were rife with sexism, racism, homophobia, and the Cold War mentality. We were on the precipice of Vietnam, assassinations, and social convulsions. As Billy Joel sang, “the good old days weren’t always good, and tomorrow ain’t as bad as it seems.” But as I remember those summers of the early sixties, I think about how many of our fellow Brooklynites would have loved to have had that pool and that yard. At least for a time, we accepted what we had and what we could do, rather than bemoaning what we lacked or what we might aspire to. We did the best we could, and that wasn’t bad.



Nix the Prefix

Len Farano

What happened to those hidden words that take a dark rear seat
And never are the juicy ones we’d like a chance to meet?
They’re always seen with prefixes like “dis” and “non” and “un”.
Don’t they deserve a decent shot at being number one?

Are writings ever “delible”? Do folks act just “chalant”?
Can’t penmanship be “peccable”? Are “gruntled” souls in want?
Should I appear just “sheveled”? Would that make me less “pareil”?
Would I be labelled “plussed” if concern I can’t conceal?

Let’s pull ourselves together and once more appear quite “raveled”.
Dump alternate notations and choose the road less travelled.
You can sense my strong intention to restore these words that rate.
So come and join me in this quest and we’ll “combobulate”.

By now you’re kind of wondering if this silly goal is reachable,
And clearly you’ve concluded that its author is so “peachable”.



Resort Summer Busboy

Aldustus Jordan

“Every time I get to thinking about me being black and they being white, me being here and they being there, I feel like something awful’s going to happen to me.”

From *Native Son* by Richard Wright

In the summer of 1960, I was promoted from pot washer to busboy at a 5 Star restaurant on the Jersey shore. It was a promotion that I did not seek or want. My last day as a pot washer was without ceremony or tearful goodbyes. My co-workers, “Joe Snow,” “Tookie,” and “Crowbait” were men accustomed to just moving on. When I told “Crow Bait,” about the promotion, he said to me, “Son, jump on any good shit the white man give you cuz he gonna’ send you a heap of bad shit.” He was right. By late August, they were gone.

My parents’ reaction to my promotion was a mix of pride, joy, and anxiety. They knew that I was venturing into uncharted waters. They also sensed my own apprehension about dealing with the restaurant guests, new co-workers, and no one at work to help me “lay my burdens down.” In a desperate attempt to feel comfortable in my new role, I tried on my uniform several times and looked in the mirror: a pair of black pants, white shirt, vest, bowtie, cummerbund and, yes, my “Sunday go to meeting shoes.” I looked like, Rastus, the smiling butler, on the Cream of Wheat cereal box!

Prior to my promotion, I only caught quick glimpses of the grand dining room, but enough to know that I preferred my slop sink hidden deep within the bowels of the kitchen. Happily, I was far from the guests arriving in Cadillacs accompanied by uniformed drivers with on-demand rehearsed toothy smiles, white-gloves, and distinctive black caps that kept them in their place. We were worlds apart but somehow had an intimate relationship at the dinner table—my pots cooked their expensive gourmet meals.

The large dining room was daunting, fascinating, and unwelcoming. It was a luxuriously boring display of folded linen napkins and stiffly starched tablecloths with razor-sharp edges. The numerous pieces of polished silverware and bell perfect crystal glassware rested comfortably at each place setting. I looked up and observed the huge fancy ornate chandeliers casting white reflections on both the ceiling and the dark colored tapestry walls depicting Centaurs and half naked women. A highly polished dance floor yearned for dancing feet but it was only an ornament and conversation piece. The thought of my dancing the “Boogaloo” the “Crossfire,” or “Mashed Potato” on that floor brought a smile to my face.



Jim, the restaurant manager, who promoted me, was not big on ceremony. My introduction to co-workers was quick and his orders spoken to no one in particular,
“This is, Al, and he will be working with you”
“I expect you to show him what to do.”

My co-workers were not impressed. Waitresses, waiters, and busboys went to assigned work stations and left me standing there. I did not anticipate hugs, but certainly not this reception. I knew, day one, that this job was going to be a real challenge for me and I did not look forward to it at all.

A distinct caste system existed among the staff. The waitresses and waiters were older and many of them were “lifers.” This job was their livelihood and supported their families. Their professional business-like approach allowed them to easily mingle with the guests. They always appeared to be too busy, aloof, and unapproachable to help me. Time was money.

The busboys were younger seasonal workers, a mix of teens and college students. Some of them were rich kids whose parents insisted they work for the “experience.” They were easy to spot. Several made attempts to befriend me only to learn their motive: “the black dude” might be able to “score some weed” for them or provide safe passage in the black neighborhood. I stayed away from them. I was certainly not looking to become a “lifer,” but my parents needed the money.

I never told or discussed with my parents about what was going on at work. I am sure they knew something was wrong. After my promotion, I stopped telling stories about my job and grew sullen and moody. I tried to bury my fear and frustration. Besides, I wanted to handle my own business. The one time I went to Jim, he referred me to one of the older waiters who was an active participant in my discomfort. Jim refused to consider sending me back to pot washing.

Several weeks into the job, I knew my days were numbered. Absolutely none of the staff would help me. On occasion I would be “ordered” by the older members to clean up a mess or spend hours on disgusting bathroom duty. I spent days trying to look busy, but I was clearly not in sync or respected. I was invisible. Somehow the word circulated that I was a former pot washer and I was then viewed by co-workers as less than a busboy. Waitresses and waiters began to complain to Jim that I “was in the way, too slow, or too threatening to approach.” Even the pot smoking rich boys said the job may be “too complicated for me.” I never saw one cent from the tip pool as Jim had promised. I held up as best I could, but I could feel my 15-year-old mindset begin to overpower my need for a job. I began to strike back.



Then, one day in slow motion, I watched as the white porcelain bowl of creamy half-eaten tomato basil soup “slip” from my nervous neophyte hands and Soak the black toupee, Splash freshly shaven face, bowtie, bulging neck. Spatter the ruffle-front shirt, designer tuxedo, Stain the gold Rolex, silk socks, Gucci shoes and fall innocently to the floor. “Sorry, sir.” My apology was automatic, weak, and without remorse. The guest was neither accepting nor impressed.

The dining room grew silent as the man screamed, cursed, and hailed racial epithets at me. I heard none of it. I had shut down. I was foolishly celebrating “payback.” The other cheek had been turned for the last time. Pragmatic Jim, the same man who elevated my status, took it all back. He fired me on the spot. I had a momentary sense of relief. But I could not go home unemployed. My search for another job began immediately.



Catch

Tony Parlatore

“Wanna have a catch?” These 4 words evoke some of my fondest memories. I have said them, and they have been said to me countless times over my still unfolding life.

The simple act of throwing a ball to someone and having that person throw it back - and rhythmically repeating that exchange - has significantly improved the quality of my life. The Act just doesn't stand alone - it is the framework of so much more. Not only is the ball being thrown, but thoughts, comments, questions, jokes and whatever else the pitcher and catcher choose to share is being exchanged in this simple game.

My first game of catch was with my dad about 70 years ago. He explained how baseball is played and how important it was to root for any team that played the Yankees. He was a union man and always was on the side of the underdog! I learned many life lessons from him while wearing a leather mitt on my left hand - hating the Yankees was just one of them. My most recent catch was with my granddaughter. While tossing a lacrosse ball we discussed the pressure and gratification of playing Division I collegiate sports and the life of a freshman away from home for the first time. I also learned that she is a far better lacrosse player than I ever was!

Many games can be played while having a catch. Between tosses my brother and I would often challenge each other to some inane exercise like naming all the tight ends in the NFL and if one of us got stumped he would have to do the other's household chore that day. In other games we would pretend we were major league pitchers trying to strike out the side in a simulated big league game. But most of the time we would just be brothers sharing our time and lives with each other.

I've played catch at all times of day, year round, but on at least one occasion it was probably inappropriate. It was the morning of my wedding day. Vinny, my college roommate was in from out of town. Before getting dressed and going to the church, we went out on the lawn to throw the football around. We talked about anything other than what was about to happen. After about 3 minutes our exchange was rudely interrupted when my mother ran outside, intercepted a beautifully thrown spiral, and continued back into the house in full stride. I never realized how nimble my mom was and what a great set of hands she had! We made it to the church in plenty of time and actually could have run a few more pass patterns on my lawn had we known that the bridal party would be fashionably late.



Our morning game of catch was not the last one enjoyed on that beautiful day. The reception dinner ended with the traditional tossing of the bouquet and when Sue let fly a deep pass down the left sideline of waiting single girls, Vinny’s fiancé Anne sprang from the pack, caught the bouquet and raised her arms as if in the end zone!

He and I never discussed the irony of that catch but we exchanged a knowing glance which returned us to our morning pastime.

Of all its attributes, the most basic element of the game of catch is that it must involve the participation of another person.

There is no possible way of having a catch by ZOOM, or SKYPE, or FACETIME. I know of no APP which can be downloaded that would facilitate the game.

Two people have to be physically together to exchange something for the game to be played.

For me what has been exchanged has been some cherished moments with people close to me. And the only “device” that needs to be recharged is this old man’s right arm.



As If We Were One

Rachelle Psaris

One day a patient came back from having a minor procedure, which required minimal sedation. I performed the usual routine tasks, checking her blood pressure and heart rate, and asked if she was having any pain. She began to cry. On further questioning she denied pain, but told me she was crying over the death of her daughter-she had died from cancer. I took one of her hands in mine and began to stroke her shoulder and smooth back her hair with my other hand. As I looked into her tear-filled eyes I felt myself well up with tears, but immediately stopped myself-saying to myself, “I have to be strong for her, I cannot cry”. But then I told myself that times had changed since 1964 when I was studying to be a nurse, when emotions were held at bay, “to be strong”. I allowed the tears to flow down my cheeks and for perhaps only one minute the only two people in the room-in the world- were me and my patient. It was as if we were one. The moment passed. She smiled and thanked me. I silently thanked her for helping me move into a new stage of my profession-one where I felt human!



Musings

Bob Stone

I watched a jackal whining on an EarthCam
monitoring a water hole in Namibia.
The jackal was afraid of some cheetahs
who showed up while she was having a drink.
The jackal has no words, only squeals of simple terror.
We have words.
They name things to remember
and tell us things to plan.
We operate, do things to keep alive
sometimes we find it useful to co-operate,
to temporarily work together
to further our self-interest.
But, in the end, we each die alone.
I watch the first moving pictures
of people strolling or purposefully striding
on the streets of New York or Paris
and I realize that every one of them
from the old folks leaning on canes
to the infants in prams, is dead.
The world will end for me
in five minutes or five years.
Soon the waters will rise, the air will choke.
In a few billion years the seas will boil away
and the earth will be swallowed up by the sun
then eventually the universe will end.
Should I worry about my grandchildren,
my grandchildren's children?
Should I worry about the human species
that will sooner or later die out or be replaced?
Will I worry about them when I am gone?
Does my grandmother lie awake on her cloud worrying
about her great great grandchildren ?
I wonder if she puts her halo on a night table



where she used to keep the glass with her false teeth
Are the souls of the dead subject to be drafted
into a new life, perhaps in a new universe?
Life is not always silk pillows and chocolate.
I might find myself herded behind barbed wire
or buried under the ash of a volcano.
We all can't be one percenters



Woo Woo

Virginia Tanner

“Dad, Gin, I want to get a motorcycle. I have enough saved up.”

“NO! Todd, you know your father’s friend got killed on one going over the George Washington Bridge!”

“I’ll NEVER be going over that bridge!”

“Doesn’t matter. End of discussion!”

I was still navigating my way as a new bride and stepmother to four kids, two at home. My husband, Ernie, was on the downside of worrying about teenagers. Todd was his fourth, my first. I was the newbie zealot.

“Todd, your father and I have decided that you can get your permit and sign up for Driver’s Ed. Driving the car is safer than driving a motorcycle.”

“Gin, would you take me driving?”

“Of course, did you ask your father?”

“Yes. He said you have more patience.”

“OK.”

“Todd, let’s go to the elementary school parking lot so you can learn the car.”

“My driving teacher said that’s a bad idea.”

“We’re doing it anyway. Change places with me.”

“Ok. Start the car. Observe. Go forward about 20 feet. Stop. Observe. Turn right. OBSERVE!! STOP!”

“Can we drive on the streets now?”

“Todd, we usually stay on the inside of the double yellow line.”

“Gin, take your feet off the dashboard. I’ve got this.”

“Son of a ...! You cut off my son!”

“Gin, Dad is going to be mad that I taught you to curse!”

“OK, Todd. You passed your test. This is my car for work. No speeding, be careful! No going down the Port Jeff hill with the windows open, music blaring and going woo woo!”

“Woo woo? Seriously! Well, then you can’t sing or dance in front of my friends.”

Decades pass, Todd is fifty-nine. We lost Ernie in 1994 and circled into a smaller, more tightly knit family. His siblings and he, his wife and kids welcomed Bob as family in 2003. Then the teasing extended to Grandpa Bob.



He still brags that he taught me to curse. From California, he regularly teases about woo woo and singing in front of his friends. In 2010. I joined the church choir. With 3000 miles between us, I baited Todd.

“Every Sunday I sing in front of your friends!”

Heckle, heckle, josh, josh. Even his kids join me in teasing.

2022. My dear Bob passed away. I inherited his 2010 Sebring hardtop convertible. I had to care for it but couldn’t drive it. Probate! The towing company dropped it at my house. I drove it around in circles on the top of my driveway just to keep the battery going and the tires moving. For fifteen months!

September 23, 2023. I registered the car, put my new plates on and took it for a fifty-mile shakedown drive.

“Todd, here’s a picture of me in the convertible. Yes, I did drive it down the PJ hill, the radio was blaring. I was singing!”

I definitely heard someone go “Woo Woo!”