



陳楚良



HASP Review
2025

Volume XXXIV

*The HASP Review is a compilation
of original written works,
original performance art,
and original artistic compositions
by HASP members*



Your HASP Review Team

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The front cover is original art by HASP member Sandra Wennhold. Additional examples of original art created by HASP members is displayed toward the end of this *Review*.

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Discussion of Cover Art by the Artist



Sandra Wennhold

"Peony"

Sumi-e is a form of Asian painting that seeks to capture the essence or spirit of a subject with elegant, well-formed brush strokes. The brush is purposefully loaded to create multiple tones of ink or color within a single stroke. Sumi-e requires only ink (pine soot and glue) or color, rice paper, natural bristle brush, and water. Sumi-e, or ink painting, is particularly associated with Japan. The painting technique often focuses on nature and universal Zen principles such as focus, being in the moment, quieting the mind and letting go of outcome.

I was first introduced to Asian paintings as a child while living in Hawaii. Then again when my father (who was in the Navy) returned from Japan, bringing home several paintings on silk, which hung in our home for many years. I was fascinated by the simplicity of the subjects in the paintings compared to classic oil paintings by the Masters. I have always been interested in many forms of art, and chose art as a minor in college; at that time ceramics, textile art, and jewelry making and design were my focus. It wasn't until the mid 2000s that I picked up a brush.

It is a custom in Japanese Sumi-e brush painting for the teacher, or Sensei, to test their students after 10 years of study. If the student passes the test he or she is certified as a Shihan, or 10-year student, and can teach first level Sumi-e to others. The student also receives a Japanese painting name which contains an element of the teacher's name, and is often referred to as their 'artist name'. In this way, the traditions of Sumi-e are passed from teachers to students, through generations. In 2017 I was certified by my Sensei (Master Teacher) as a Shihan. I signed my artist name in kanji (Ryusan) on the painting.

Sandra

Thoughts from Our HASP Director



As Director of HASP, I am immensely proud of the incredible array of creativity showcased in this year's Review. The sheer quality and passion evident in every photograph, painting, story, and poem submitted are a true testament to the diverse talents within our community. Each piece offers a unique window into the experiences and perspectives of our members, and I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed their work, enriching these pages for all of us to enjoy.

While every contribution is valued and celebrated, I must admit a particular thrill this year as we expand our spotlight to the dynamic world of performing arts. For the first time, we are able to share short video highlights, allowing us to experience the performance gifts of our fellow HASP members. It's a wonderful new dimension to the Review, and I am excited for you to see the energy and skill that these individuals bring to their craft.

As always, I would like to extend a special thanks to the amazing HASP Communications Committee who works tirelessly to put the HAPS Review together. In particular I would like to give a special thanks to Dave Schmitt. Dave constructs and formats the entire Review, and his knowledge and skills are truly appreciated by us all. Thank you Dave and the HASP Communication Committee!

In Gratitude,

Amy

Thoughts from your Review team Chairperson



Ralph Fairbanks

Once again, we have a wonderful array of creative and thoughtful submissions for the 2025 HASP Review. Looking through the stories, poems, artwork, and photographs, it never ceases to amaze me what brilliant people we have in HASP. By reading through each page, you will get a glimpse into the minds of these artists, photographers, writers, and poets. What they have to say, or show will harken back your own memories or hit a nerve that hasn't been touched in years. I think you'll find that we are not that different from each other and perhaps that's why we decided to join HASP. We all have so much to share and what better way than to serve on a committee or even teach a class. As a peer-led life-long learning organization, I encourage you to volunteer where needed, share your ideas and suggestions, and even contribute to next year's Review.

Very Respectfully,

Ralph W. Fairbanks

Original Written Works

By

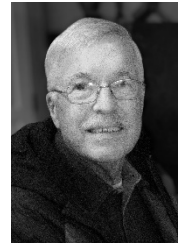
Contributing Authors/Poets

Out of respect for our authors' literary intentions,
proofreading of this publication has been limited.



Boats Talking

Winter in the boat yard;
The sailboats
In their cradles
Shrouds and stays
Slapping the masts
As the boats
Talk to each other
Of past glory days
On the water
And dream of future adventures



Bump in the Night

Lying in my sleeping bag, I heard footsteps right outside my tent. It was the middle of the night, and no one should have been around. Immediately, I was alerted that I was not alone. What was it or who was it? The steps were slow and methodical. Whatever it was, it was curious, for it was moving about inquisitively. It was checking me out as it walked around. I guessed they weren't human footsteps. My teammates were camping close by, tucked away in their sleeping bags. It was dead silence except for the footsteps. These steps were more like a four-footed animal. I had seen several guanacos during the day, but if they were coming in at night, they would have made a heavier sound. They were bigger than the familiar deer I had seen many times while hunting back in Michigan. Guanacos tramped the

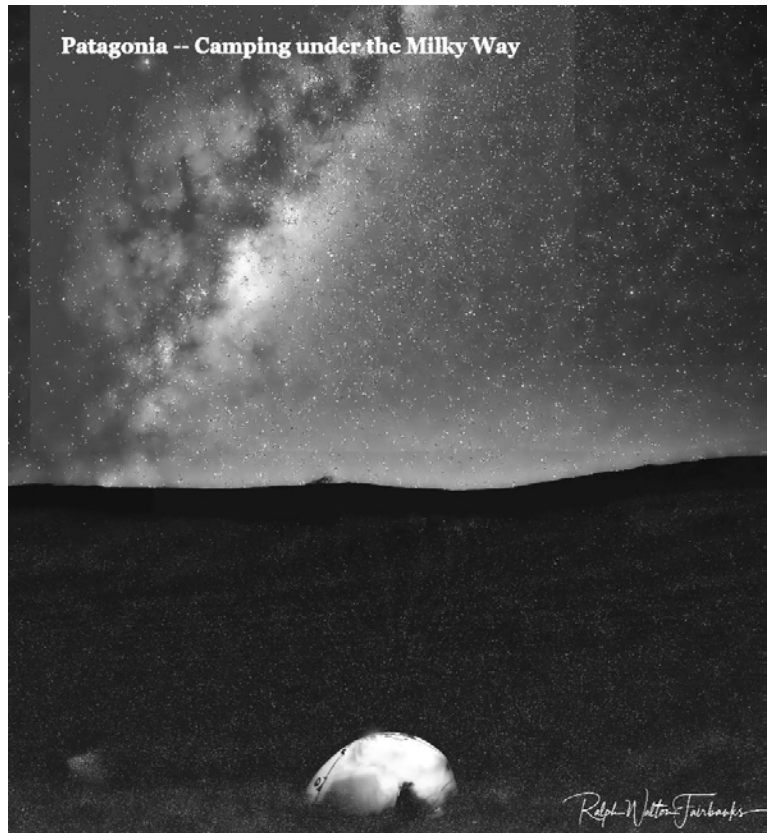
mountains



Guanacos

here in Argentina with sure-footedness and had the same alertness as the deer. The footsteps I heard were not from one of those.

Earlier in the day, we had set out from El Chaltén hiking on a photo expedition in



Patagonia. Our goal was to hike up into the Andes mountains to a plateau only the locals knew of and set up camp. From there, we would photograph the mountains, capturing the Milky Way in the clear mountain nighttime skies and the valleys below at sunrise. Sleep was sporadic as we waited for the best shooting times. There was a sighting of a puma by two of the team members the day before when they were traveling by bus to El Chaltén. Could that be what was crawling around my tent? Whatever it was, I felt very isolated and vulnerable in my one-man tent snuggled up in a sleeping bag. The only self-protection I had was a Leatherman knife which I couldn't find in the darkness. Whatever it was, the animal

slowly walked away and somehow, I was able to get back to sleep.

The next day, I asked the other team members if they heard what I had. Some did and conjectured that it may have been a small piglike animal that lived in the mountains. I wasn't so sure of that as I was still feeling the fear from the night before. I didn't make much more of it than that, but I was going to be more prepared the next evening.

After a long day of hiking in the mountains, I looked forward to the evening and checking out the stars and anticipated waking to beautifully clear night-time skies. This time I crawled into my sleeping bag with my Leatherman and flashlight readily available. I was awakened once again by the footsteps just outside my tent. Clutching my Leatherman, I

remained still and waited to see what was going to happen next. I could hear the animal moving closer to the tent and then it leaned up against it and pushed right against my arm. I have to admit that fear filled my mind, but I waited without moving for what might happen next. I was on high alert. A small knife would be no match for a huge wild cat predator. Would it suddenly attack when it realized I might be prey. But it didn't. As quickly as it came, it left. It took several minutes for me to calm down and I'm sure I didn't sleep after that.

The next day there were no tracks to identify the animal. Was it a pig, was it a puma? I'll never know. The fear of the unknown had taken over me and the fight or flight reflex kicked in with full force. One thing for sure, I'll always remember the bump in the night in Patagonia.



Car Talk

Driving experience began with Drivers Education as a school course at the age of fifteen for my classmates and me. My first time alone behind the wheel was in the high school parking lot on a blustery, wintry day with snow-covered windows that were freezing under the windshield wipers in one of the automatic shift drivers ed cars. I passed the class course despite turning one corner with the instructor and three others in the car at fifty miles an hour. I passed my father's OK when, as I was driving the entire family one Sunday afternoon putting in the required driving hours, a car came at us driving the wrong way on the bridge. When I made the necessary maneuvers to avoid the highly possible collision, my mother was screaming, but my father said I approached the situation correctly, doing exactly what he would have done. I passed my driver's license test when I turned sixteen, managing the left turn with the traffic light at a downtown corner correctly, driving our 1956 aqua and white automatic shift Chevrolet station wagon.

Dad had the opportunity to buy an old, klunker, stick shift car for me. Mom and I worked all day cleaning the old vehicle. It looked so good Dad sold it for considerably more than he paid for it a few days later. Did he decide an automatic shift might be more appropriate for me after those first driving attempts?

While my to-be husband and I were dating in the spring of 1964, his black Volkswagen, which he bought trading in his bicycle, gave up as we traveled to a wedding. A brand-new, blue VW became

its replacement, the vehicle that took us on our week-end honeymoon to the Mammoth Caves.

We were still newlyweds of just over three months when "hubbie" left for work in that "Little Blue Volkswagen" one early February morning. I had dressed warmly in my fur-lined coat with matching scarf, black leather gloves and black boots for my walk to school for teaching, timed so I would not be late despite the snow-filled streets, when the phone hanging on the kitchen wall rang.

I quickly took off the gloves to answer, thinking it strange for the phone to be ringing at that hour. The call came from a hospital in a large nearby city. I listened as the nurse informed me my husband had been taken there by ambulance after an accident, and I should come. Of course, I planned to get there as soon as possible. I called the principal to tell him I would need a sub for the day, followed by a call to my mother about a way to use their only car, which my father had already driven to his place of employment.

A good arrangement was made to have Dad drive me, because I was understandably concerned about what I might be facing, and had little experience driving in the big city, especially on very slippery roads. Dad and I spent the day at the hospital and went home that evening. My husband was released from the hospital a week later.

The insurance company loaned us a rental car, a stick shift, for use until we were able

to buy a new car. With the winter months, the auto became embarrassingly dirty. Al was not yet allowed to drive, so I took the car for a cleansing at a car wash a few miles from home. I lined up the vehicle behind the other dirty ones. Suddenly the car stopped, apparently deciding not to obey any further commands from this unknown female. The cars ahead completed their mission to cleanliness and proceeded to their destinations. But this obstinate rental car refused to head through that dark tunnel. Workers called loudly from the other end, expressing their impatience when no more cars wound their way through. "What's holding things up over there?" The shouted answer they got was from the young worker standing next to me. "The darn lady

can't drive the thing!" He took my place in the driver's seat and moved it through to the exit. There it sat for me to take back my place as driver. How could I get this stubborn automobile back home? Shaking, I got in the car, pulled and pushed clutches, brakes, and any other possible maneuvers to promote the necessary actions. What a surprise! The car performed beautifully all the way back to the house.

As soon as my husband's health returned sufficiently, Al and Dad found a new car for us to purchase, a red Chevy Impala four door hardtop with automatic shift. The "darn lady" now had a car she could drive without expletives. Let it be known, she never drove a stick shift again.



A Charming but Quirky Odyssey in Mexico

It was fifty years ago this past summer. The summer of '74, and Carla and I continued to be young and reckless. So, we decided for a second time to drive from West Michigan to Mexico to spend most of our summer vacation there. We did it the first time in '71, traveling in our '68 Ford Falcon, with its racy bronze body paint, black vinyl roof and a racing stripe down each side. We didn't mind standing out a little.

That first trip was to exotic places like San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato (with its momias under the cemetery), Zacatecas, Mexico City, Teotihuacan, Puebla, Guadalajara, and Oaxaca. This time would be different. We'd travel less broadly around the country, we wouldn't drive 1300 miles south of the border, we would target a few places, and travel more luxuriously in our metallic blue '72 Volvo 164, with black leather seats, air conditioning and a six-cylinder fuel-injected engine.

We also had a stronger impetus to hit the road in '74. I had spent the few months before trying to finish up my grad work from the University of Wisconsin by completing a fairly arduous project involving the writing of a secondary school interpersonal communication curriculum. The night before we headed out to Mexico was spent finishing up that opus, and, in the morning, after throwing the document into the mailbox, we drove south.

This time we'd catch Taxco, Cuernavaca, Patzcuaro, Chapala and Barra de Navidad, but we would spend most of our time in

and around Guadalajara. Most of our memories would be made at the Rose Motel.

The word "motel" didn't do this place justice. A long time before the internet showed up, there was a trusty guidebook, *Mexico on \$5-10 a Day*, and it listed this place. When we drove up to it, a few miles out from El Centro, we knew it was a magical place.

There was a motel—twelve typical units attached to a brick two-story mansion. Those were on one side. On the other side—also attached—was a three-room apartment that was called The Conservatory. This was the space we were shown. The fully-equipped kitchen and living room had a wall-sized, half-moon shaped window that looked out at an exotic tropical paradise of pool, palms, fruit trees, and a pagoda. Then there was the bedroom and bath, a step up and adjacent to the living space. This little bit of heaven dropped into our laps at the Rose, all for \$7.20 per day.

Before the trip, Carla had dreamed that we'd stay in a space that had a piano. She had chalked that thought up to too much planning for a road trip. But our conservatory did have a piano, and with it came a black-and-white-spotted kitten named Bandido. We knew we'd have to stay at the Rose.

The Rose turned out to be more than plants, pool, pagoda, hot pink walls, loud green and yellow wallpaper, a piano, and an adorable kitten. We also found

ourselves among a community of travelers.

Claudia—in her sixties, a cigarette dangling from her lip, with a wrinkly ultra tan and a silvery ponytail, down from LA annually on the train—brought all of us at the Rose together. I don't think it mattered that this time we were part of her program. I believe she made a community out of whoever happened to people the place when she was down there. Claudia was easy to like and she knew everything about what the Guadalajara region offered. She also needed a ride to go places.

Jack and Anne and their two kids, who came all the way from Australia, became part of our little entourage. So did the three guys who had just graduated from the University of Indiana. Also part of our group was a couple from the Chicago area who were with us for a short time until a call between them and their children

persuaded them that the kids were having too much fun at home without them. But the rest of us took excursions to Lake Chapala and to check out the ceramic-making in Tlaquepaque. We spent enjoyable nights in the conservatory playing dominoes and entertaining Bandido, but most of all, we had great times in the evenings sitting by the pagoda all together, sharing stories, eating tortillas with guacamole, and sipping tequila.

None of us wanted our little odyssey to end, but Jack and Anne had to return to Australia, the Indiana guys had to start thinking about getting back for jobs or grad school, and we had a drive of over 600 miles to just get back to Laredo, let alone to Holland, Michigan.

For all we know, Claudia may still be hosting travelers at the Rose and looking to bum a ride or a cigarette.



The Coat, a Christmas Story

I stared into the mirror in the dressing room. What I saw was a young woman wearing the most beautiful, soft brown coat with brass buttons. Home for Thanksgiving break from college, my mother and I had gone to this shop to pick up a dress on layaway for a friend. It was not a shop we would have normally patronized. It was a place where stylish, expensive clothes resided, clothes that when you looked at the price tag your eyes widened a little and a slight gasp escaped the lips.

I had spotted the coat as I looked around the shop and couldn't resist trying it on. It was a wool coat, the color of a fawn. I knew full well that anything here would be out of my reach, but I just wanted to see it on me and wear it for a moment. As I stared at my reflection in the mirror, Mom came in and stood next to me, also looking into the glass. "That coat looks lovely on you," she said. She saw my face as I slightly bit my lip and tried to hold back a tear. I wouldn't ask her for something that I knew she couldn't afford, and I saw in her face that she longed to be able to buy it for me. Slipping the coat off, I turned to her smiling. "Well, I can dream," I said. "It is a beautiful coat." As we left the dressing room, I hung it back on the rack. Mom went to the counter to pick up the lay away, and we left.

I had started college just a couple months earlier. Mom knew that I had moved into the dorm with three outfits, a much used coat, one pair of boots, and one sensible pair of shoes. All the money I had made in the year between high school and college

had been used for room and board and a little reserved for book fees. She and Dad had helped move me into my room, and she had seen the collection of sweaters and other nice clothes my roommates had placed in their closets.

Back at college after Thanksgiving, I would occasionally daydream about the coat. I resumed my classes and work as a secretary in the International Relations office. I also tried out for a theatrical production, drama being my current major. Surprisingly, I was offered a role on my first try out. Talking with the director later about the time that was needed for rehearsals and performances, I realized that I just couldn't do it. I was already strapped for time to study, and it was more important to keep up my grades. It broke my heart but I refused the role.

Days passed and before long I was on the train again returning home for Christmas break. I looked forward to spending time with my family and Mom's coffee. I never knew why her coffee was simply the best. It would be perking on the counter in the morning in the stainless steel pot. The coffee itself was enough for me to look forward to a visit. Years later, I learned her secret. She placed eggshells with the coffee grounds before brewing.

Christmas back then didn't start before Thanksgiving. It really started when the tree went up, which in our house was usually two weeks before the big day. I loved the bubble lights, the tinsel, the pine smell and all the ornaments made by the six of us kids throughout the years. It lit up

the far end of our family room that my Dad had built onto the back of our small Cape Cod house and we virtually lived there after it was completed. It included a dining room with a huge table, able to accommodate our ample family, and a sitting room. It also made it possible, for the first time, to hang out together with everyone during holidays and Sunday visits.

The house was buzzing with excitement as always at Christmas. The anticipation of this wonderful time of year was palpable. Secret gifts were wrapped and placed under the tree to be opened Christmas Eve. My mother would again delight in the things my three younger brothers would find, like small bottles of "Evening in Paris" perfume purchased at the local 5&Dime, or a jewelry box made from a hand-painted cigar box. That Christmas I had been able to buy a Hummel figurine. It was a schoolboy walking with his books over his shoulder. I knew she would love it.

Work was doubled for Mom, of course, at Christmas, with so much to prepare and a lot to do for her children and for her grandchildren. That Christmas only three of my siblings were at home. My sister was already married and had a family of her own. My oldest brother was in Germany serving in the army, so it was me and my younger brothers and our Irish grandmother who lived with the family.

As always, Christmas Eve arrived and all the packages were ripped apart and there were tears of joy and crying from young boys who didn't get a corvette or a bazooka and certainly not a puppy, having several animals in residence already. They got the useful gifts, like socks or shirts, that were far from favorites, but also some of the things they wanted within reason. Mom was delighted with the

Hummel and kept it on display for years to come. I was happy with the useful gifts, warm hat and gloves, and a not-so-practical album of the Kingston trio.

Christmas morning arrived and getting out of the door for Christmas mass was daunting. The jockeying for the bathroom time embarked. One bathroom for the seven of us was a lesson in diplomacy. A lot of yelling and arguing and we were ready to go to Mass. In our tradition, baby Jesus was not placed in the manger until the day of Christmas. In the rush, we almost forgot baby Jesus, but at the last moment He was lovingly placed in the manger by Mom. We would come home seeing He had arrived and would scream, "Happy Birthday, Jesus."

That Christmas was, as always, an extended family day, including my sister with her kids, and my aunts and uncles and their kids. A festive Christmas meal was served with one aunt's famous sweet potatoes, my other aunt's out-of-this-world carrot cake, and, of course, Mom's wonderful banana-pineapple jello salad. It was a day of closeness, warmth, and photos taken by Dad with everyone's heads chopped off—his speciality.

The Christmas break ended sooner than I wished. Dad and Mom would drive me to the train station, but not before they both privately slipped me a few dollars saying to me in turn, "Don't tell your Mom" and "Don't tell your Dad."

As I, already feeling homesick, picked up my suitcase, Mom said, "Oh one last thing. Wait here for a minute." She reappeared holding a big box. "Go ahead; open it," she smiled. And there it was, the beautiful soft brown coat with the brass buttons that I had coveted at Thanksgiving. "I went back to the store after you left and put it on layaway," Mom said. "You deserve something beautiful. Put it on so I can

see." I was transfixed. The coat that I had only dreamed of was mine. I was unable to speak for a few moments before I threw my arms around her, crying and thanking her. She had tears in her eyes too.

Of all the presents I have ever received, none has been more precious. That coat made me feel like a princess every time I put it on and, even more, it embodied a

mother's love. I'm sure Mom went without in order to buy it, but I also know that being able to give it to me meant more than any sacrifice. Like the "Gift of the Magi" by O'Henry, this was true giving. Mom remains in my heart not only as my hero, which she mightily deserves, but as someone who knew the true spirit of Christmas.



Conditioned Numbness

Since Columbine in '99,
The toll has risen, time after time,
Four hundred thirty and still counting,
How do our minds keep discounting?

On and on, the stale debate goes,
Until we're stupefied as stones.
We'd be the safest under the sun,
IF safety actually meant more guns.

Still, we accept, we normalize,
And chastise those who question why.
Banning guns?, a fear they voice,
Infringing on their freedom, their choice.

But what of freedom's truest arm,
To learn in peace away from harm?
To be alive and home at three,
We scratch our heads at their anxiety.

More classrooms become a darkened show,
Where joy should reign and minds should grow.
Galleries of crimson Pollocks,
Of innocents lost and silence embolic.

Words fail me, my disgust is clear,
When greed and power interfere.
When thoughts and prayer ring robotically,
And inaction feels like complicity.

So take your thoughts, your prayers, your lies,
And shove them where the truth denies.
While you retreat to cushioned chairs,
As others' worlds shatter in despair.

This 'great' nation that tolerates,
it's children dead, and exonerates
The powers be, that fail our young,
Whose trust in us has come undone.



A Discovered Eulogy

A Son's Memories of his dad – Bill Holden

Beginning the difficult process of sorting the belongings and very personal items of a loved one, whether family or friend, who has passed away can evoke overwhelming sadness or the discovery of unknown feelings.

While sorting through my husband's desk (Bill, who passed away last year) I discovered a handwritten ten-page eulogy I had never seen and had never been read at a funeral service. My husband's father did not have a funeral service, just a small gathering of friends in the neighborhood. Knowing my husband, who always liked to be prepared, he had it "ready" just in case!

My flowers were wired and delivered on Wednesday, June 7th. The card read for Dad's birthday and Father's Day. They made it for his birthday. He was 87. They did not for Father's Day, but there are many living memories of my father that I will cherish.

Sunday afternoon drives in the 1950 Dodge. If Norman Rockwell had seen us, we could have been on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*! Picture a five-year-old and a three-year-old in the back seat. They did not make back seats wide enough. We were really quite disruptive! The ice cream cone was the destination, or occasionally Sunday dinner at Valley's Restaurant for \$10.66!

Learning to sail a 14-foot plywood sailboat. The accidental jibe. The ignored admonition that it was too windy, and then the capsizing. The loving, understanding as his son learns the hard way.

He never could back up a boat trailer. I was backing a trailer down launching ramps before I was driving cars forward on the highway with a driver's license. Dad would get out of the car and say, "Son, you do it!"

A seven-year-old and a five-year-old helped to immortalize our new house by carving our family address in a granite boulder, the size of a VW, on the side of our driveway. Dad held the chisels and we pounded!

A ten-year-old, an eight-year-old, and now a three-year-old getting lessons on pine paneling a recreation room in the basement for a new (first) TV. TV did not come to our house until 1955. Mother resisted! Memories of sitting in the pine-paneled basement anticipating the Bird to drop on the *Groucho Marx Show*. Dad's hearty laugh. Before that, we listened via radio to *Our Miss Brooks*—a fellow teacher—a lot of laughs.

Christmas tree harvesting behind our house. The tradition started in the old house (pre-1775). We moved saplings to the new house we built in the early 1950's and within four to five years were doing the same yuletide hike down the hill behind the house toward the brook to find a Christmas tree.

Memories of encouragement to "be all you can be." We were not denied any educational opportunities we were able to pursue. My younger brother, David, pursued a major in government and got a master's degree. He became a planner for the city of Portsmouth, NH. Peter, the middle brother, became an attorney, establishing his own practice firm. Dad's one disappointment, I

almost went into Medicine, completing two years of medical school. The business/research world opened quickly and with my educational credentials in Biology Honors at Oberlin, that career appealed to me more.

When I was 13, Peter 11, and David six, we rented an island in Great Bay. We rebuilt the primitive cottage (complete with an outhouse) existing from earlier generations. Peter and I studied mornings to get marks on the PSATs so we could get into Mt. Hermon Prep School. Dad had worked his way through Mt. Hermon many years ago, eventually earning a Ph.D. from Harvard in government. We sailed and boated in the afternoons. Dad was teaching a summer semester at the University of New Hampshire. He came to the point at Great Bay by car and flashed his car lights. We boys rowed the dinghy over to meet him. Mother had supper waiting.

After the island experience, I went to work during the summer at a local marina pumping gas. The next year I was shelving books and working with the janitorial service at the university. Peter did job-related horticulture. David worked at Disneyland during his first year of college in Florida. Dad had instilled a good work ethic in all of us.

We kids and Mom were only around for sixty percent of your life, Dad. You were 38 when I was born and I began remembering you five years later. Dad grew up on a farm outside Mt. Holyoke, MA after his family immigrated from England. Elizabeth Agnes, age 7; John Thomas, age 6; and Ellen Horrocks, age 4, left England with their mother, Emma Parkington Holden, on the White Star Liner, Laconia, for America. Many years later, Dad

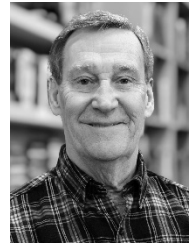
returned to England and was able to locate his family home that he left at age seven. As mother recounted, "following general directions given by a neighbor in Blackburn, Dad walked unerringly to Lord St. and there was Number 60 and the garden that Dad and his sisters played in!"

Dad was a loving husband to mother, Doris. Our mother passed away at an early age. Peter and I do not remember her. Dad remarried. Doris was a professor at the university. Our kid brother, David, joined us in 1953. We babysat David so Dad could take Mother out and do things that husbands and wives do when they step out on the town, just the two of them. I suppose there were concerts at UNH, faculty parties, etc.

Dad was a friend to many who are listed in his yearbook at Mt. Hermon. At the university, he had many friends and colleagues when he was chair of the Government Department; some were his former students who kept in touch. To many colleagues who were invited to our house once or twice a year for cocktails, Stan (oh yes, I was Stanley, family name, until my first year in college, then I switched) and Peter passed the hors d'oeuvres.

Dad was a professor. I did not know him as a professor. He just left for work every day. We three boys left for our boarding schools at 14-15 years old. If we had stayed home, we probably would have gotten to know him better as an intellect and scholar as well as a dad. David, among the three of us, knew him better that way because of his school's proximity to New Hampshire.

We will miss you, Dad. Indeed, you were a loving Father, Husband, Friend, Scholar, and mortal human being, as we are all.



Donald's Four Days

My parents, Aloysius O'Connor and Edna May Jones, were married May 5, 1931 at Holy Cross Catholic Church in Indianapolis. Exactly one year to the day from that date their first child was born, a son, Francis Richard in 1932. Eleven months later a daughter, Lois Marie, arrived on April 23, 1933. Then he was born. Donald Joseph O'Connor, March 4, 1934. The third child.

Mom and Dad were playing a nervous game of Vatican Roulette and the jackpot was another baby. This all happened long before I was born but I have to believe that they were over-the-moon happy, especially Mom. She was 22 with three babies, each a year apart, and a loving husband with a job. Dad too. He was 27 and had an almost instant family. The Great Depression had been dragging on awhile, well into its fifth year, but he was working and one of the few men on their street who could make the mortgage payments. He always had the money to pay the iceman when he delivered the blocks for the icebox, cold and hard to the touch. He could pay the coal truck driver cash, right on the spot, when he backed his truck up to the chute on the side of the house to feed the beast in the basement. They owned a radio and could listen to FDR's words of encouragement and solidarity during his "fireside chats," a series of 28 evening radio addresses the President gave between 1933 and 1944.

Dad and other men on the block fortunate enough to have an income in those dark, difficult times would canvas the neighborhood for those families with

young children who were too proud to ask for help. The men would pool their precious extra coins and order additional bottles from the milkman on his early morning rounds. After dark my Dad and his buddies would quietly deposit those bottles on the doorsteps of his proud neighbors, without a word spoken. That's the way it was in a poor working class neighborhood in Indianapolis in 1934. You used what you needed and gave what you could. Survivors in a lifeboat sharing rations.

It is difficult to imagine this now, but this was before credit cards, before unemployment benefits, and before Social Security. When a person had no money, I mean they had No Money: not two nickels to rub together. I'm quite sure my mother did as much, if not more, for the neighbors, but she shared few of her own stories about those days. Times were hard and most people were good. It all made sense. At least it did until March 5th of that year.

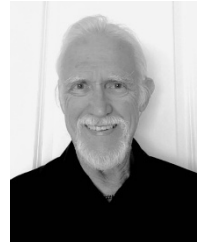
There was a problem with the baby. He couldn't keep his milk down. He was able to nurse but no nourishment was getting through. Day two of Donald's short life produced doctors with furrowed brows and worried glances. They told my parents nothing definitive. It was 1934 and the physicians probably didn't know exactly what was wrong or what to do about it. Day three brought chaos and anguish. The boy was wasting away. The relentless crying was breaking my mother's heart. His small sunken eyes were cavernous against the gray pallor of his face like two small

whirlpools drawing him downward into their vortex. Eyes that gave only a brief glimpse into a soul quickly disappearing. Mom was still in the hospital with the baby. I can picture her pressing her lips to Donald's forehead and smelling that intoxicating "baby smell" known to every parent. Sweet and bittersweet for her.

I wasn't there so I don't know, but I can imagine Dad escaping to Holy Cross Church, kneeling in the front pew, and talking out loud to God, his plaintive voice echoing through the massive, empty Catholic cathedral like a cannon boom. Day four delivered a diagnosis. No food or water was getting through his intestines. Donald had a congenital blockage in his tiny bowels called "atresia of the colon", confirmed by the abdominal swelling, vomiting and a lack of interest in feeding. There was no known treatment at that time. This grim news was accompanied by the brutal reality that he wasn't going to

thrive. He died on day four, March 7, 1934. What that was like for my parents I can't begin to imagine.

In later years, as the other eight of us came long and we became a family of ten living children, my parents seldom mentioned Donald. And when they did, it was a quiet, reverent reference to a sad chapter they did not want to explain. They didn't talk to us about their personal feelings. You didn't do that with your children back then. At least we didn't. I do remember imagining, as a very young boy, that maybe baby Donald hadn't really died at all but grew to be a man and that man was actually the famous Donald O'Connor, the celebrated song and dance man of stage and screen in 1950s Hollywood who danced in movies with Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds. Surely someday we'd all be reunited with him and then Mom and Dad would not be so sad anymore.



Easter Faith

"It'll go with anything," Mom always said.
Teenaged me mumbled some curt thnx,
Being glad that the receiving ritual was over until the next feast day

when I'd prickle again over another bloody sartorial aberration:
(the snap-on ear muffs were soon lost)

Maybe another imprisoning vest,
Or socks with "plug-in" hues that were always visible—
raging spats beneath my high-water pants,
But most likely another mockery-of-the-crowd sucking noose.

I could have shown—while wearing that plaited plaid—a puss
attempting a tartaned look of pride in my laughable species.

But it was green next to pink abutting orange challenging blue to a duel.
Outdoor colors, maybe.

It made me sick, as with a Yeaster infection.

It was every 14-ish boy's way of volunteering to hold the target for a game of Lawn Jarts
A trial.

Or worse. No, worse was not possible.
I was a scourge.

But I would slowly, after a few days, cross over to being comfortable again
when "You didn't wear that tie I bought you" would die away.

God, I miss her so every Springtide.

I'm sorry, dearest Parent of Faith.

Her Faith?
It went with everything, but I never took it anywhere.



Ebb and Flow

I don't know why this is happening now, but I have been thinking a lot about the rhythm of life. One of my favorite biblical passages has always been Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. You know the verses: "A time to be born and a time to die, a time to sow and a time to reap, a time to weep and a time to laugh...." These teachings were brought to the secular world by songwriter Pete Seeger and made popular in 1965 by the Byrds song "Turn, Turn Turn." All these words contained in both Biblical and musical verse are true juxtapositions of what we can observe or experience in our lives.

However, through my experiences in the last ten to fifteen years, I find the analogy for my life best described as an ebb and flow—a rhythm, a cadence of thoughts, feelings and events, many not of my choosing. At this moment, I sit on our patio feeling the wind tussle my hair and brush my skin. I hear the rustling of the leaves and hear the buzz of bees on the lilium blossoms. My writing pauses to take it all in. Yet a few days ago it was hot, humid, and so difficult to breathe—conditions I tried to avoid. I look at our vegetable garden and all has been harvested. Just three months ago, I recall being excited about the pea and bean shoots emerging from the ground and yellow tomato blossoms promising what was to come.

My thoughts take me to my days walking the beach. I recall how each day, the sands changed slowly or dramatically based on the ebb and flow of the tides. I wonder: Is there not a rhythm to all life—an ebbing—a

time of quiet, a time of retreat, and sometimes a time of darkness; a time given us to contemplate, to heal, to seek God in the darkness? Or the alternative—being in the flow of life—moving along, engaged, aware of those around us and of God's creation?

I am aware of this concept of life's rhythm on a deeply personal level. During my second cancer diagnosis, surgeries, and months' long healing, I found my life was not "in the flow." It was a time of fear, feeling out of control, and having one thing, cancer, consume my life. My life slowed, ebbed as a result. But in the slowing, some significant things happened: my faith grew stronger (I sure talked to God more!); I experienced in a profound way the love, support and caring from my friends and my church family; and I had time to think deeply on what I valued most in life. I learned the importance of "the ebbing"—chosen or not chosen. Because I relinquished control and accepted (not always with grace) this retreat, this pulling back in my life, I can now embrace more fully the "flow" I find myself experiencing. My life raft is now floating with the river! I am more immersed in the flow knowing there will be "ebbing" ahead. It is inevitable. I am to be like the sea, going with the ebb and flow of my life, experiencing both as they occur.

Is it not true:

You cannot know joy without sorrow?

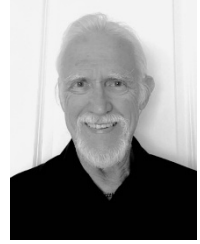
Spring would not be so sweet without winter?

Success cannot be fully appreciated without failure?

A sip of water is more delicious on a parched tongue?

This is true for me: I believe God is with me in both the ebb and flow of my life. I simply need to trust that I will always find Him in both.

"Like the seasons of the year, life changes frequently and drastically. You enjoy it or endure it as it comes and goes, as it ebbs and flows." —Burgess Meredith



End of August, 90 Degrees, Dirt Road

Edie pushes her Schwinn one-handed, slowly along, and Pants.
flat tire for the corner garage, where Daddy sent her,
album of trading cards pressed against her chest.

Many firsts awaited: Skirts a-poodling, gossip,
womanhood warnings, formerly nasty boys.

Before those: yes, soon school. Grade 7:
Thought: "Frankly, my dear, I don't give..."
Naughty. Or not.

Malcolm Studebaker-ed past, lost in no thought at all. and Rusty.
camel filtered, vent window opened only a crack,
no breeze on the dash; hanging dice still and yellowed.

No firsts waiting for him, none Imagined.
Two wives, then all photos in the caskets.

He once knew about sevens, gone.
Sang: "But I deadly-sinned them all away—"
Funny. Or not.

If they could know one another



Evening Playground

Just at dusk
Darkness slips in
And around
The slides, swings and seesaws
Taking them in for the night.

The last child has gone
Leaving the games
To another day;

A faint echo of that child's voice
Lingering in the darkness.



Father Time

My father taught me many practical things, including how to build a proper fire, what poison ivy looked like, where to find morel mushrooms, and a family favorite—how to create the perfect Christmas tree. This involved going to the tree lot on Christmas Eve afternoon and finding two cheap trees (preferably, each five dollars or less). And before we all crammed into the family station wagon, we reminded our mother to spread a king-size sheet on the living room floor. This was necessary as my father's method dictated sawing branches from one tree and drilling holes in the other tree. This ingenuity, of course, produced one handsome looking Christmas tree suitable for decorating – all for ten dollars.

I have very clear memories of another skill he taught me. Telling time. I believe I was around five years old. The house we lived in, at that time, is an important part of the story.

It all started in the basement, where my father had found an old broken clock. Well beyond repair, one could still move the hands around the faded white background to any time you wanted to illustrate. This was the first part of the lesson. Wanting to please him, I remember faking that I was catching on faster than I really was. He would move the hands around and ask me what time it was. I did pretty well in answering three o'clock, four fifteen, ten twenty, noon, etc. Then he started on the "quarters-to" and the "halves-past." We never actually got to the "quarters-to" or the "quarters-after" because "half-past" was not going well at all.

With tears threatening to make an appearance, my father had an idea. We headed upstairs and

outside. He instructed me to stand at the open back door. He told me not to move as he walked around the house to the front door. He opened the front door (fortunately, the front and back doors were aligned) and started calling me. He explained that I was at twelve o'clock and he was at six o'clock.

"Debby. You see, I am at the front door which is half-past the hour from where you are standing."

"You are at twelve o'clock and I am at six o'clock or half-past the hour," he added so hopefully.

Clearly going through his mind was the fact he had spent his Saturday morning trying to teach me to tell time. And clearly, he was not getting the results he wanted. Especially with this "half-past" problem.

So, the next thing I knew, he was running around from the front door to the back door and instructing me to run from the back door to the front. He tried the "half-past" explanation again. He ran around several more times and finally stopped as he tried to catch his breath. I kept running around the house, smiling and pausing each time at the back or front door, as he commanded me to get serious about this whole thing! It was now afternoon, and the teaching session mercifully ended.

At the dinner table that evening I announced with a spirited "Taa-Daa!" that "I know how this 'half-past' thing works."

And I did!



Forever

Cheeks rubbed red by an autumn wind,
We dance through burning leaves until sweet smoke fills our clothes and
We carry the scent home in our hair, a token of the day.

Home when our mothers call.

Home for supper.

Home when darkness reaches down to light the street lamps.

A nightly pause in our eternal now.

The days slide by like beads on a string, but we will never change,

Never fade like leaf smoke.

Never disappear at daylight like graveyard ghosts.

Never grow old.

And the dance will never end.

Our mothers call, and one by one we vanish,

Spirits in the falling darkness.

Deliciously heavy with fatigue.

The hot shower breathes out steam,

And suddenly I see a slow red trickle run down to find the drain.

I watch it circle, becoming a faded watercolor pink.

I watch it circle, and something elemental shifts.

And just like that, the circle of our days is broken,

And nothing will be the same again.



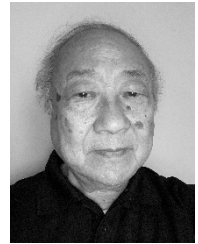
Frenemies?

The April sun is calling us
As winter-dormant fields turn green.
We feel a primal urge to surge
And smiling golden flowers are seen.

Little children love to pick
Bouquets for mom with yellowed hands.
We're glad to share our mad abundance
Because we are a friendly clan.

There used to be a vernal welcome
Shown in generations past
they picked for salad, wine or tonics and
added us to their repast.

Sadly, we are now pariahs
No one wants us anymore.
Reviled, dug up and mostly poisoned
It's monoculture they adore.



Fun With Dad

When I was old enough to remember things I started to enjoy being with my dad. He seemed to be a patient person, never losing his temper. When I was between three and four I got into his desk drawer. He stored his 78 RPM vinyl records in this tall drawer. I took one out of the craft paper sleeve and rolled it on the hardwood floor. When it stopped rolling, it naturally fell on its side, smashing it into several pieces. I was mortified by my criminal act and was anticipating some sort of physical punishment. My mother reinforced my dreaded thought. She not only instructed me to pile up the big pieces for dad to examine but also made me pick up the microscopic fragments off the floor and place them in a separate box.

When dad came home that evening, he did not punish me. All he did was to play an undamaged record on his gramophone for me to hear. I watched as he cranked the handle. The record began to spin at an incredible speed. I was kneeling on the couch next to the gramophone as I watched up close. My eyes were moving dizzily in a circular fashion at a rate of close to 78 revolutions per minute. The stylus made contact with the black vinyl record. I heard crackling sounds and then a male voice singing, "Oh my darling, Clementine". I was mesmerized by the deep voice of the singer, Bing Crosby. My dad said to me, the record I broke could not be played again. He impressed on me that records were delicate and they could break easily if mishandled.

In 1954 I was in middle school. My dad began to listen to instrumental music. The

recording technology had improved. The old, heavy, clunky and brittle vinyl records were replaced by 45 RPM (mostly for rock-n-roll singles) and 33 1/3 RPM long playing vinyl records, both unbreakable. I was the only child who followed his passion in music appreciation. As he transitioned from Strauss' waltzes to program music I followed with great eagerness. I fell in love with whatever vinyl records he could bring home. Be it Schubert's Trout Quintet, Brahms' Academic Festival Overture or Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition, we went from program music to concerti and symphonies within a short time. Then I found my true hero: Ludwig van Beethoven. His compositions stirred my soul. I often dreamed of playing Beethoven's piano music in Carnegie Hall.

My dad and I played guessing games. One of us would play a few measures of a masterpiece on the phonograph and the other had to identify the piece. When he was at work I would play some of the most enjoyable pieces for my own benefit. I began to read the synopsis on the back of the record jackets. It helped me improve my English and taught me the history of these masterpieces.

In 1960 Hong Kong built a concert hall and invited the London Philharmonic Orchestra. I managed to buy several concert tickets. I invited my dad to join me for one concert conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent. My dad and I were totally blown away when the orchestra played the haunting Ralph Vaughan Williams' Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis. The second half we heard the LPO perform

Sibelius' Second Symphony, a piece both of us had heard before. The ambience of attending a live concert was much more enjoyable than hearing the same music on tape or on vinyl.

When I left Hong Kong for college in Minnesota I was thrust into a monastic existence. There, I discovered Gregorian chants. Every weekend the Benedictines would do a mass using ancient music. I told my dad about the experience. He began to collect recordings of Gregorian period music. We exchanged our discoveries of Hildegard von Bingen's ethereal chants and music by early masters like Guillaume Dufay and Giovanni Palestrina.

I enrolled in Fr. Dominic's music appreciation class. On the first day Fr. Dominic proclaimed on stage that A is for God, B for himself and C, D and F for the rest of the class. Most of my classmates listened to Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley, or Andy Williams. I was totally comfortable with Fr. Dominic's guessing game on classical music. I ended with an A in class.

My dad and I bonded and I admired his caring attitude toward his children, his neighbors and his co-workers. He was slow to anger but quick to lend support. I want to be like dad.



A vinyl record in a craft paper sleeve



A stage prop made by Henry Fu, The author's grandson.



Gone Fishing – Fishing Gone



When my father died in 1991, one of the best tributes I could give was, "He took me fishing."

It began with what I now think of as a rite of passage—from father to son. I was six and it might have been as simple as that. Or, perhaps he was using me to gain the "OK" to partake of the opening day of trout season on New Jersey's first April Saturday, 1950.

He liked to prance around as if he were the cat's meow of whatever he was into. His self-image of fishing was displayed by ads for Abercrombie and Fitch or any number of classical fly-fishing publications. The closest I ever came to that was established on my very first day on the banks of that nondescript body of inland water—a bait casting rod with a worm on the hook, dressed in a flannel shirt with a sleeve shiny from nose wipings. One cannot beat a flannel shirt for that.

During a brief time when he was not trying to unsnare my reel from its rat's nest of tangles or freeing my line from overhead branches, I actually caught a fish—a rainbow trout of the massive size of six-inches in length. In spite of his fancy

waders, fly rod, creel, and assortment of tantalizing flies, he caught none.

At home, the celebration was like a Presbyterian Bar Mitzvah. In a manner of speaking, I was declared a MAN! The entire family dined on this tiny morsel of nature's bounty. Not to be outdone, little brother, Tom, cut his first tooth that very same day. "Ouch!" said mom.

Now, many decades later, my attitude has evolved. Three years ago, while fishing at our annual retreat in Wisconsin, the fish I caught were cleaned and saved for friends. Then I got more sentimental. Last year, I landed a few nice fish and looked at them gasping for air in my net and thought, "Sorry little one, I think I'm going to release you back to your life in this beautiful lake. This life is all you have and all you are going to get. It shouldn't be up to me to put a limit on that."

Now at age 80+, Lovie gets increasingly concerned when I wobble out to the boat and struggle to get into or out of it. After a swamping a few years earlier, she did not accompany me anymore. So this year I'll remain ashore, read a book, sip a beverage and imagine the happy fish out there enjoying their lives without my interference. The memories will sustain me.



Good Color

Grandma always reported
on others' health
in terms of color.

Pale or sallow was bad,
A sure sign of a dire diagnosis.
A tinge of pink in the cheeks was good.

"Judy had hip replacement, but her color's good."
"I ran into Bob yesterday; his color was not one bit good."
"Donna's color is so bad. I wonder what's wrong?"

Lately, I've been sleeping on my back
with my hands crossed peacefully on my chest,
Like a body placed in final repose.

Now that I'm assuming this tidy posture,
I can appreciate that it's a convenient way
to fit a body in a narrow box.

I do hope my color is okay.



Hanging On

Deep in the throes of winter's grasp,
ice cloaking our timeworn path.
Looking and searching for other routes,
Regretfully, no turning back.

Ice freezing out all warmth and life,
encasing all it touched.
Stagnant from the seasons past,
clogged with decaying detritus.

It grew throughout the dark season,
hardening over time.
Building cold upon unyielding layer,
creating obstacles to climb.

To avoid the burn of rigid ice,
I cannot falter, I cannot fall.
Through these harsh and treacherous nights,
I must stand firm, I must stand tall.

Spreading numbness every day,
the frozen landscape isolates.
And when vigilance is squandered,
Can we avoid catastro-fate?

I grip, I glide, I slip, I slide,
on frozen paths, I twist and twine.
To keep my balance, to hold my heart,
I fight to stay upright, defined.

As winds shift softly from the south,
as winds are wont to do.
Ice crusted clear, yet cracks appear,
Still, the ice endures.



Hope

Searching for renewal
For our earth and our soul
Bowing a head, bending a knee.
Invocation

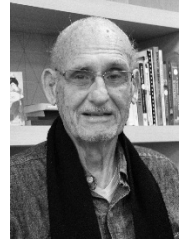
Striving for fairness
A life where skin color is no concern
Being treated as equal.
Righteousness

Fleeing from violence
People leave their homeland
Pleading for asylum.
Acceptance

Struggling for a small corner
Animals flee and scramble
Longing for a space, a home.
Sanctuary

Beholding this ravished planet
Our earth calling out to be saved
Knowing time is running short.
Stewardship

Looking for the sacred
In this profane world
Seeking for healing and justice.
Communion



I Missed the Boat - A True Story - Part 1

A RUDE AWAKENING

I'll never forget the day I missed the boat. This statement can mean many things. It might mean you've missed out on an opportunity to try something new or you've realized it's too late to make it to an appointment. You've then "missed the boat" in a sense. However, I have a little bit of a different story to share. In my case, this is not an abstract statement; it is a literal one.

On Thursday, March 6, 2008, I was left stranded on the island of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands.

My wife, Barbara, and our friends were in the midst of a wonderful trip aboard The Westerdam, a cruise ship based out of the Netherlands. We boarded in Fort Lauderdale, Florida for our voyage in the Caribbean. Our days were filled with luxurious naps in the sun, dinners out with our friends, and shell-hunting walks along the beaches on each stop.

One particular morning, we docked on St. Thomas. As we entered the harbor, I saw a beautiful beach and decided that it would make a peaceful place to read the local newspaper. I put on a swimming suit, flip flops, and a muscle shirt and departed upon landing. I assumed, as I exited the ship, that the boat would leave at ten in the evening as it had done the night before.

I made it to the beach, and after reading the paper for half an hour, I fell asleep. Under the umbrella with a gentle breeze,

life was good. Little did I know I was about to embark on an unexpected and exciting adventure.

The next thing I remember hearing was the Westerdam's loud horn. I awoke frantically. I realized the ship might be leaving—without me! I quickly put on my flip flops and started walking in the direction of the ship. I heard the horn again and began to realize more clearly what was happening. I started to run. I was on the island of St. Thomas with no billfold, no credit cards, no cellphone, no passport, and no identification. However, I did have a muscle shirt, flip flops, and a swimming suit with two quarters in the pocket.

As I approached the Holland-America offices near the port, I could see the ship about four or five hundred yards from the dock and aimed towards open water. As I came down the hill, a red pick-up truck from the Holland-America offices blew its horn at me.

The man inside the truck shouted, "Are you the one they're looking for?" I was a little confused but assumed it must be me. "Yes, I'm about to miss my boat!" I exclaimed. He ordered me to get in the truck quickly. He hit the gas and explained the plan as we raced towards the dock. He would radio the captain and propose a way to get me on the cruise ship. If I missed it, I would not be able to continue the cruise.

The plan was simple and complicated at the same time. The man had a boat that could drive along the side of the cruise

ship. There was a hole on the boat, close to the water line, that had a rope ladder. If we timed it right, I could use the ladder to enter the boat. We got to the end of the dock and waited for a response from the captain. The longer we waited, the more hopeful I became that this would work! However, I overheard the captain's deep barróg accent come across the line. The tone of his voice said it all. I knew it wasn't going to happen. He told us I would have to stay behind. The captain promised to contact my wife and get my credit card and passport forwarded to the resort on the island. After that, I was on my own.

Little did I know, earlier that day, a crew member on the Westerdam had fallen off the side of the ship while performing routine maintenance. According to a newspaper article from Friday, March 7, 2008, which I still have today, the man had fallen about forty feet into the water and "was pulled out in time to avoid drowning." My wife, who was already notified about me missing the boat, heard rumors going around the ship that the person who fell off the ship was a guest. And the ship left him behind! People were getting the stories mixed up and thought I was the one who fell off. Barbara didn't like hearing this story over and over again. She marched straight to the cruise line staff and asked them to make an announcement. She wanted them to announce that her husband was safe on the island, and he did not fall off the ship. The staff refused to make the announcement, due to ship policies, so Barbara had to navigate interesting conversations the rest of her vacation.

THE TRICK THAT HAD BEEN TRIED

When I realized I would not be getting back on the boat, the first thought that occurred to me was oddly hopeful. I thought, "Well, maybe I can head over to

the island of St. John, where I've stayed before, and turn this unfortunate situation into my own little vacation." I could wait out the rest of the week until my wife returned to Florida. You see, this is not the first time something like this has happened to me. I don't get stressed out about travel and logistics, so I don't always think things through. Maybe it's a blessing or a curse, but I don't think there are many scenarios I can't get out of. I kind of like the challenge of a difficult adventure.

When I asked my wife later how she felt when she found out I was stranded, she said, "To be honest, I wasn't worried." Can you believe it? Well, I can. She knew I'd find my way.

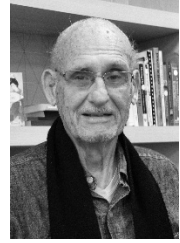
So the Westerdam continued its journey without me. The ship was due to return to Fort Lauderdale on Sunday, March 9th. That gave me three days to figure out how to get back to Florida to meet up with my wife and friends. I wasn't worried about it. I knew the following morning that I would have a copy of my credit card and passport. I didn't yet realize the critical difference between paper and plastic. Using a copy of a credit card was a trick that had been tried many times before. And I would learn the hard way.

In the meantime, I needed a place to stay for the night. I began to problem-solve. Years before, my wife and I had visited our niece who was living on St. Thomas. During that visit, we attended a small, local Reformed church and got to shake hands with the minister. He told us stories about the history of their church building and how it was furnished by a disbanded church in New York City. That memory stood out to me and resurfaced as I was thinking about where to get help. I had half a mind to walk to his parish and ask if I could sleep there for the night or borrow cash to catch the ferry home.

Eventually, I decided it would be easiest to go back to my resort and wait for my passport and card. I would purchase a ferry ride in the morning to get back home. I wasn't worried.

But this was all wishful thinking. I still didn't realize the limitation of no cash, no credit card, no ID, and two quarters.

As it turned out, the Holland-America agent understood the situation I was in and made reservations for me at the same resort where I had fallen asleep. The next morning, the resort gave me breakfast, a sheet of paper with a copy of my credit card and passport on it, and said they bought me an airline ticket to Fort Lauderdale. But I had to find my own way to the airport.



I Missed the Boat - A True Story - Part 2

A FRIEND ALONG THE JOURNEY

The next morning after breakfast, I started on foot to the airport. I walked two miles in flip flops, reading my newspaper. For some reason, carrying a newspaper made me feel like a normal human, rather than a penniless, lost traveler.

After a short flight to San Juan, Puerto Rico, it was late afternoon, and I was hungry. I would spend my layover in the airport, and I needed to find something to eat. Now was the time to test my paper credit card.

I was immediately refused by the first restaurant clerk. I asked if I could speak to the manager, knowing that when they heard my story, I would surely be offered some grace. Turns out, the manager wasn't feeling as gracious as I had hoped. I shared the woes of my journey, but he just looked at me with doubt. All he said in response was, "I have to have plastic."

I was so hungry, so I tried a new approach. I hauled out the two quarters in my pocket and asked if I could get a half bowl of soup and a few crackers. The answer was, "no." A young woman sitting within earshot had overheard the whole debacle. She marched up to the manager and said, "Put that soup on my bill!"

Once I had my food, I sat down with her and shared a lovely conversation. She told me that she knew what it was like to not have any money and be in a sticky situation. I learned that she was a diamond dealer from New York city, and she had had her

purse stolen once. I was so grateful for her kindness. It really helped turn things around for me. I thanked her for the soup and went to catch my flight.

BACK ON HOME SOIL

I got on the airplane in the afternoon and within an hour, landed in Fort Lauderdale. Although I didn't appear like a typical traveler in my swimsuit, flip flops, and muscle shirt, I fit right in in Florida. I felt relieved that I had finally made it back on home soil.

I picked up a free newspaper and confidently marched out to the transportation line. My trials were not over. I saw a half dozen taxis lined up outside and as soon as I handed my printed Visa numbers to the first driver, I was met with a familiar reply: "I have to have plastic."

I went to the next two taxis, both of which gave me the same answer. My car was parked in Pompano Beach, about a fifty dollar ride away. But I only had fifty cents. As I stood outside the airport, humid air warming my skin and taxi cabs zipping in and out of line, I tried to think of the next best step I could take. At once, a wonderful thought occurred to me!

I remembered that my brother-in-law, Dennis, had been vacationing in the Florida Keys and would be at the airport today, returning to Michigan. I had no idea which airline or what time he was leaving. But I knew I had to find out.

I ran back into the airport and headed straight to the check-in counter for Northwest Air. For what was the third or fourth time that day, I retold the story of my failed cruise journey. To my surprise – the woman at the counter believed me! I asked her if there was a plane heading for Detroit today and if a man named Dennis was on the itinerary. She expertly typed away on her keyboard. With each click, I wondered what my fate would be. She paused and exclaimed, “There’s one leaving in ten minutes! Follow me!” She led me straight through security, and within just a few minutes, I saw Dennis standing in line to get on his plane.

Knowing I was supposed to be on a cruise, he looked at me with utter bewilderment. “Lyle? What are you doing here? Where is my sister?” I told the story quickly once again, mentioned that his sister was somewhere on a cruise ship in the Caribbean, and asked if he had any cash. As he was about to board his plane, he handed me \$150 and wished me luck. I had enough to get home.

I hailed a taxi to Pompano, where my car was parked. Finally, things were going smoothly. I took a deep breath once I was sitting in the driver’s seat of my car. I looked out at the ocean and hoped Barbara was having a good time at sea. I started the car, swung through Wendy’s on the way home, and drove to Hutchinson Island where we lived.

THE MISTAKE THAT SAVED MY LIFE

Just as I was settling back at home, getting into comfier, cleaner clothes, and enjoying some time of peace and quiet, I started to notice discoloration in my right forefinger. I figured it was just a scratch or a bruise I had acquired on my travels. I was exhausted, so I stuck my finger in a glass of salt water and fell asleep.

Upon waking in the early morning, I noticed the discoloration had moved up my arm. It didn’t hurt, but I didn’t like the look of it. Something wasn’t quite right. At seven thirty in the morning that next day, I brought myself to the Martin County Hospital Emergency Room. The doctors took some tests, told me I had an infection, and sent me right back home with a strong antibiotic.

The next morning, I woke up to the phone ringing. It was the doctor on the other end of the line. They said, “You need to come back to the hospital right away. The tests came back. You have a flesh-eating bacterial infection and need immediate treatment.”

I spent the next four and a half days in Martin County Hospital. The doctors daily monitored the infection and its effect on the organs in my body. They were worried about the infection spreading. That would be a very dangerous situation. I notified a couple of friends in the area that I was in the hospital. I didn’t have a phone, so I needed a way for someone to contact Barbara when she reached the Fort Lauderdale port in a few days.

You can imagine I was quite surprised by this turn of events. Thankfully, I wasn’t in any pain. I had a view of the ocean, and the nurses were very kind. Doctors came in every day to ask me how I may have gotten this flesh-eating bacterial infection. It occurred to me that I had been cleaning my boat a couple of days before the cruise. I told them that I dropped a steel drill-bit under my boat lift and had gone in the water under the deck digging in the mud to retrieve it. The lack of sun under a deck favors this kind of bacteria. I’ll never really know. What I do know is that all it took was one tiny scratch.

Based on the infection's progression, the doctors suspected this was where I picked it up. In fact, they informed me that had I still been on the cruise ship, it was very possible that I would not have received the medical attention I needed.

After the infection healed, I was discharged from the hospital and able to return home. Barbara and I sat down to a nice, long meal to catch up on all we had missed. As you now know, there was a whole lot to share.

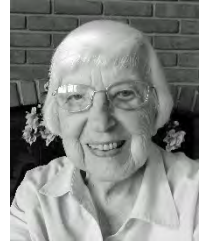
PROVIDENCE

When I look back on this experience, I'm a little disappointed that I missed out on some quality time with my wife and friends on the cruise. But something I've learned over the years is that the challenging parts of our lives are actually often the ones to be most grateful for. Sometimes things happen to us that make us feel bad or lonely, but then we find out later that it actually benefited us a great deal. And in my case, sometimes the bad situation is what saves your life.

My mishap adventure turned out to teach me a lot about God and providence. I've always been the kind of person who's pretty comfortable sitting in the mystery of God. I don't try to tell anyone what to believe, and I think there's actually a lot we don't know or understand about the divine.

But I can't help but see how in each part of my journey, I was met with provision and care. In each trial, hour by hour, I ended up in the right place at the right time. I experienced this as a very tangible example of God's care for me. When I missed the cruise ship and had to navigate each stressful encounter to follow, it never would have occurred to me to think that God might be saving my life.

I hope this story is comforting and encouraging to others. My story is a bit humorous at times, full of adventure and twists and turns, but it's also a serious one. I never thought I'd say it, but I'm so grateful I missed the boat.



I Wonder

I Wonder—

—What happened to modesty.

—What happened to self-control.

—If wars would ever occur, what would happen if mothers of teenage sons ran the country.

—If there could not be a better way to use the time people waste stuck in construction tie-ups. Could traffic controllers announce there would be a ten- to fifteen-minute wait and tell everyone to turn off their cars, thus saving gas and avoiding pollution? People could get out of their cars and stretch, read a book, let the dog out, give the children a break, or have a snack. Then a sixty-second alert could be issued and traffic could flow again with happier people.

—If we had statesmen instead of politicians, if we would ever have “earmarks.”

—Why high school and college swim teams practice twice a day almost year round while other teams practice once a day.

—Why one hour isn’t long enough for the Hope College pull.

—Why local mail needs to go to Grand Rapids for canceling and sorting. If it stayed in Holland it would save transportation costs and speed up delivery.

—If schools shouldn’t form basketball teams for students who are under five feet eight inches tall. They must like to play basketball too.

—Why, when we spend so much time, effort and money selecting our presidential candidates, we allow the candidate to pick his/her running mate. Some have made good choices, some abysmal: Sarah Palin, who cost McCain a close race; Cheney; and Quail—the list could go on. The exception was Truman, who appeared to be a so-so choice, and turned out to be a good president.

—Why people leave home looking as if they never looked in the mirror.

—Why Christmas cards, which have any real Christmas theme, are so hard to find. A friend of mine always sends cards featuring Christmas trees. I have chosen to have cards with nativity scenes, angels, or wise men on them. Recently I looked on four sides of a kiosk and found nothing expressing the real meaning of Christmas.

- How much modern art will be considered art five hundred years from now.
- Why we discuss changing or eliminating the Electoral College after every presidential election, but never do anything about it.
- Why we discuss living on Daylight Saving Time year-round every Spring and Fall, but never make any change.
- What ever happened to the words “please” and “thank you.”
- Why presidents and governors should be allowed to pardon people.
- If it is fair that California, with a population of 39 million, has two senators and Wyoming, with a population of 563,626, also has two senators.
- If the United States could adopt a less war-like national anthem than “The Star Spangled Banner.” Wouldn’t “America the Beautiful” or some other song be a better reflection of our country than an anthem with “bombs bursting in air”?



In Search of Summerland

My child once said when he was only five. .
He remembered being in Summerland and gazing down to earth.

He was looking for the mother he wanted.
And when he saw me, he knew I was the one he was searching for. .

I was on earth being told I would never bear another child.
Complications from my first birth had left me unable. .

But my child had seen his mother and had picked her out.
He would find a way to me. .

And so he came.
The doctors were mystified. .

And now I dream of Summerland and hope I find it one day.
The place where my soul will wait to be reborn.



Intimacy

Barbasol, rich with soothing Aloe. One regular and two travel size. Next to appear, the Gillett razor.

Two sinks, two mirrors, and our own drawers containing tools which work daily to prop us up.

Fred Rogers said,

"I think the greatest thing about things is they remind you of people."

I watch you as if you are a carpenter making a fine and workable cabinet last longer than it should.

Tooth brushes, electric and handheld travel across aging, yet worthy teeth.
Nail files and clippers, ear and nose trimmer used to intercept unsightly sprouts.

Sinus relief packets, spray and pills will they be effective today? Don't forget tissues.

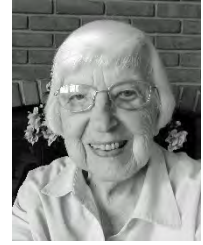
Then, there are the special sauces that make the body just a bit less rebellious,

Anti Itch, Anti Rash, Anti Callous, Anti Dryness. Neutrogena, Blistex, Burt's Bees and Lubriderm which we always jokingly named Loopyderm.

We acquired magical ingredients for erasing spots, lumps and creases. In spite of all these lineaments packed in tubes, jars or bottles, age kept gaining ground.

Your lush hair. All grey and thick, some still clinging in small strands to the bent bristles of your hair brushes.

Yes, Mr. Rogers, things do remind you of people, even the little things.



The Invitation

Living near Lake Michigan and Lake Macatawa and enjoying boating and the fun of being on and in the water, even though we acknowledge the dangers of the Big Lake and Lake Mac, it is hard to believe that there are those who never have or ever want to be on a boat.

Jerry, a tall, lanky farm boy lived near the lake. Thirty, he was prodded by his parents to find a mate. He was so shy that he could scarcely say "hi" to a female. Besides, where could he ever meet a possible wife? So he earned his keep and kept to himself. Years passed. He was thirty-one, thirty-two, and decided to indulge his fancy and buy a boat. Going on jaunts on the big lake gave him great joy. Thirty-three, thirty-four, well maybe this idea of dating could be accomplished by asking a girl to go on a

boat ride. He screwed up his courage, which took great doing, and decided to ask a girl who worked for a neighboring family. It took several weeks of seeing her at church before the appropriate moment came up. He approached her and hesitantly asked her, "Would you like to go on a boat ride with me on Wednesday at seven?"

To which she put both hands on her cheeks and with horror replied, "Oh, I couldn't possibly do that!"

She never explained that she was deathly afraid of the water. Shouldn't she? Did he ever invite anyone else to go on a boat ride? I don't know. I do know that years later, neither one was married.



Lie to Me

Lie to me! This is not a simple, foolish suggestion. Please, this is an earnest, heartfelt request.

When I am very old and unsure of the year, the date, the time of the day, and I tell you my daughter is picking me up and taking me to a bridal shower for my cousin Elenore, listen to my story, even though you know my cousin is 91 years old and her husband died 20 years ago. Be kind. Live with me for this moment in my reality—my year, my day. Lie to me.

When you come to see me in the hospital, I may tell you I did not sleep well last night because a group of children ran up and down the corridor all night. Tell me how sorry you are. Tell me you will have a stern talk with the nurse about this. Don't correct me. Don't tell me the nurse's station is just outside my door and I must have heard the nurses talk and run down the corridors to help other patients. Join me in my memory. Be with me. Simply lie to me.

If you visit me, tell me who you are, and how happy you are to see me. I may even tell you about the choir that sang two songs to me last night: "By the Sea of Crystal Saints in Glory Strand, Myriads in number, Drawn from every land."; and another hymn—my favorite—but I cannot remember the name of the second song. It was beautiful, the entire wall moved, regressed, and the large choir sang in flawless four-part harmony. Strange though, they were singing to me, but they had their backs to me. If I tell you the story, believe me. It happened to me. I

remember the beauty and the wonder of the experience. Join me in the wonder. If you don't believe me, please, simply lie to me. It will make me happy, content with you in my reality.

Please don't ask me if I know who you are, if I know the year, the date, or the time of day. Please don't test my memory and make me feel my aloneness, my forgetfulness, my isolation, my stupidity. Tell me who you are, even if you are my favorite grandchild. Please, be kind. Lie to me.

If I ask "Whose children are those?" and you see no children, say you don't know. Lie to me.

If I ask about the people sitting on the sofa, and you don't see people, you may tell the truth, say "I don't see anyone, but you see them, so they must be angels." It may not be a lie, but if it is, thank you.

When I can finally go home and you carry me from my easy-chair to my bed, and I grin and say, "I walked, even though my feet hardly hit the floor!" Smile and say, "Good job." Lie to me. It may be the last time I walk. Just for our times together, live with me in my reality.

Lie to me.

Mother was 92 when it became necessary for her to move into an assisted living facility. We searched and found the best alternative to her own home—two rooms in a well-cared-for building with adequate caring staff and beautiful grounds with red, yellow, orange, and blue flower

baskets hanging on the post and at the doors. Ducks and geese landed on the pond and were visible from the dining room.

Mother could take her own furniture with her, including her beloved organ, the bedroom furniture she and Dad purchased when they married, and the lazy-boy that matched the one Dad had used for years. We found that the residents loved to overhear Mother play the organ, the old favorites and hymns of their youth. Residents and nurses suggested she play louder and leave her door ajar or open, so they could enjoy the joyful music. She loved the attention and playing impromptu organ recitals.

At 95, Mother was in a wheelchair and finding the distance from her rooms to the dining room growing longer. We realized it had become challenging to find things that brought her pure joy or were amusing enough to make her chuckle or laugh.

The facility director called a meeting. Brother Harvey, Sister Hazel, Mother, and I attended. Brother Al, who lives in California, and Sister Gladys, a Florida resident, would not be able to attend. The staff explained that Mother needed more care than they were able to give. We should consider a full care facility, although the director suggested a short-term alternative. If we could come twice each day to take her to lunch and dinner, help her eat, and bring her back to her room, the staff could continue to help her in the morning, get ready for the day, and assist her eat breakfast. We agreed we would do this - of course we would. We told the staff we would set up a schedule. One of us would be with her during the meal time. Mother had something to say. She reached over, touched Brother Harvey's arm, and said, "My son has a shirt

just like this". We looked at each other and smiled. Later, we decided to laugh, not cry.

Twice a day, one of us visited Mother, brought her to the dining room, helped her with her meal, and visited for an hour or more. She was happy to see us each day. We tried to remember to update each other on our visits. This was working! Mother could stay in her comfortable surroundings with her helpful, cheerful friend, her cherished possessions, and familiar furniture.

My most memorable visit was on a sunny, spring, early afternoon. Mother was happy, animated, downright joyful, so happy to see me! I had lunch with her, a tasteful chicken salad with sherbet for dessert. Back in her room, we talked of work and play on the farm and memories of busy times of the year, the rows of red, ripening strawberries, the smell of the newly cut hay field, the taste of almost overripe watermelons split open with the fist and eaten in the field. She was completely aware of time and memory. What a great visit.

I called Sister Hazel as soon as I returned home, and told her what to expect as it was her turn to spend the evening meal with Mother. I happily told her how Mother had improved.

Hazel called me as soon as she returned home that evening. Mother had been happy and joyful. Mother told Hazel what a wonderful surprise she had experienced in the afternoon. Gladys, my sister, had come all the way from Florida to spend the noon meal and the afternoon with her. They had experienced a delightful time. Perhaps my sister and I do look a bit alike and mother's eyes are failing.



Loss

It creeps in,
Small at first.
The indignity of a fall after a toddler's first steps.
The sadness of a beloved pet lost.
The unspoken and unrecognized loss of country, thrust upon you with no say.
The loss of beloved grandparents to whom no last goodbye can be uttered.
The pain of first love betrayed, which feels like you've been stabbed with a knife.
Children flying the nest, have you prepared them to take flight?
The loss of parents, an unfilled gap with unexpressed words of love.
The indignity of falls taunting that fragile person you are becoming, despite your best efforts.

Loss leading to

Tears that stick in your eyes that your body just can't seem to let flow.



The Lottery Ticket Part 1

The lottery ticket I bought one winter afternoon before my weekly poker game changed my life. But not the way you may be thinking. It is ironic in hindsight that before I went to gamble, I bought a lottery ticket with no intent to gamble.

The game of poker is defined as any of several card games in which a player bets that the value of his or her hand is greater than that of the hands held by others, in which each subsequent player must either equal or raise the bet or drop out, and in which the player holding the highest hand at the end of the betting wins the pot. On the other hand, a lottery is variously defined as a drawing of lots in which prizes are distributed to the winners among persons buying a chance or a drawing of lots used to decide something or an event or affair whose outcome is or seems to be determined by chance. Poker involves luck, skill, and decision-making. There is luck but no skill in the lottery. The only decision-making is whether to buy a ticket. The old joke is that it's very hard to win a lottery if you don't buy a ticket. But I digress. Back to the story.

I live in the Southwest suburbs of Chicago. I'm a working guy. Kind of like the Chicago working guy stereotypes you see on TV or at the movies. I'm "Joe" of course. And my five best friends are working guys like me. Charlie, Jimmy, Al, Rod and Denny. We have worked together, played together, raised families together, won and lost in life together, and played poker together for over 40 years.

We play poker every Friday night and rotate hosting. Which means you buy "guy" snacks when you host, and everyone brings what they want to drink. No one is required to attend ever. No attendance is taken. But it is bad form not to show up without telling anyone and especially to show up late. Don't do that. What's the matter with you?

But we all try to show up as often as possible. The game isn't the same with just five or four and we're not playing with three. We do not like fill-ins. They almost never work and those poor guys just can't keep up with our banter or the game we play. We just know each other and our styles and predilections too well. We bet dollars but no bet more than five bucks ever. We do have one real rule. You can't leave the game after a big score. You have to give your friends a few hands to try to win back their money. You'll know when it is OK to leave

The day I bought the lottery ticket was Friday and Charlie was hosting the poker game. It was also Charlie's 65th birthday so it would be a celebration as well. Charlie is the nicest guy you could ever meet. He is honest and fair and would give you the shirt off his back. And... he was a prankster, a practical jokester. He had pranked every one of us over the years. Nothing really mean. No long-lasting consequences. But funny. Very, very funny. Like hiring a stripper to come to your house on your birthday. Like getting the local high school boys to toilet paper your house and yard on

your anniversary. Stuff like that. I figured it was my turn to get him back.

THE PRANK

The game was at 6:30 pm. I stopped at the liquor store on the way to Charlie's to get some vodka and mixer for my drinks. It was 5:45 pm. As you might know, many liquor stores also sell lottery tickets. The weekly drawing is at 6 pm. This was all part of my master practical joke plan. I bought my liquor and five quick pick Powerball Lottery tickets at 5:50 pm. Quick pick means the computer randomly picks the seven lottery numbers for you. Powerball was up to \$100 million that week. A lot of money! After taxes, that would likely be around \$60 million. It would change your life.

THE PRANK EXECUTED

Then I waited. At 6:05 pm I checked my phone for the Lottery drawing announcement. I wrote the winning numbers on a piece of scratch paper on the liquor store counter. Then I bought another lottery ticket for the next week's drawing with those winning numbers from the drawing that had just taken place. I mixed that ticket with the five quick pick tickets I bought 10 minutes before that drawing, and put them in a birthday card for Charlie. I shoved the scratch paper in my pocket.

I got to Charlie's a few minutes early. The party had already started. Lots of food and drink. Jokes. Good-natured ribbing. Typical poker night. And balloons, signs, confetti, cards, and some gifts. I put my card in the pile and put my drink together, got some food and took my usual seat. I did not draw attention to my birthday card and its lurking practical joke. I figured we would get to that soon enough.

Jimmy and Al showed up a few minutes late, so we had to give them some crap and review the unwritten rules of our game protocol. We started playing. And eating and drinking. The play was unremarkable.

No one was winning or losing big. After an hour, we took a break for Charlie to open his cards and gifts. We were all a little tipsy and happy. It was a good time.

The cards were bawdy. Fortunately for me, no one else got lottery tickets. There were some sex toys (that none of us would ever actually use) and some liquor and Slim Jims and stuff like that. What else do you give a 65-year-old? I gave him something else: a very slight chance to be instantly rich. When it comes to the lottery, no matter which game you play, your odds of winning are vanishingly small. For example, the odds of claiming the jackpot in a Powerball drawing are one in 292.2 million. To put this in perspective, you have a one in 186,978 chance of death or injury from a lightning strike in a given year, a one in 46,744 chance of dying from a hornet, wasp, or bee sting during your lifetime and a one in 27,925 lifetime chance of dying in a cataclysmic storm.

Charlie opened my card and said he hoped it was a million dollars. Ha Ha. He liked the card and the bad joke in it. He rifled through the six lottery tickets and remarked how impressed he was with the great thought I put into his gift while at the liquor store. He exclaimed quite loudly that if he won, he would give each of his five best buddies \$1 million and would call his a-hole boss immediately to tell him to take his lousy job and shove it, he was quitting, right now. Then he yelled upstairs to his wife Nancy to come down for a sec. She did. He asked her to check the lottery tickets I had just given him with the announced drawing numbers from that evening. I had set the hook. Nice and hard.

THINGS GET OUT OF HAND

Nancy came down again a few minutes later, white as a ghost. She carried all the lottery tickets except one in one hand. She

carried the last one in her other hand, along with a slip of paper with seven numbers written on it. The winning numbers. Charlie looked at her, missed her obvious distress, and asked "How'd we do?" "Did we win?" She said "Yes." He laughed. "Right. Don't bullshit me." She said again they had won. Here was the winning ticket and here were the winning numbers she wrote down from the Lottery website.

Charlie would not believe it. He asked her which one of us put her up to this. He looked at each of us as he asked this. We all looked back at him blankly. Nancy assured him it was no joke. But Charlie knew he had a prank coming and wouldn't let it go. When no one confessed, he took the bull by the proverbial horns and took the ticket and Nancy's handwritten note upstairs to their computer to check for himself.

We waited. A few minutes later we heard loud yelling. We heard triumph. We heard a common working man become instantly wealthy beyond his wildest dreams. We heard "Holy Shit! It's true. It's true. Holy shit! We won! I won! I'm filthy rich!" Things were getting out of hand. I didn't know how to stop it. My prank was becoming cruel. Unfair. Almost evil.

He bolted down the stairs and came straight to me and bear-hugged me. He said my gift had made him rich. Thank you. I love you. I love you all. I'm going to make good on my promise. You each get your million dollars. Nancy was crying and everyone was hugging everyone. Charlie told her she could have anything she wanted. He would take her around the world. They would go to all the places she had always wanted to see. She sobbed. He said he would pay their kids' mortgages off and give them money in the bank for rainy day funds. And more just because he now could. He would give money to the church. Nancy started moaning and sobbing. It was

almost too much. Too good to be true. And it was. I knew that. Charlie couldn't believe his good luck. He couldn't believe it. He was so happy.

He took a seat and asked Nancy to make him his drink. She did. He took a long swig and then made a toast to all of us.

THE PRANK REVEALED

Then Charlie said he was going to go upstairs and call his boss, as he had promised he would do, to tell him to F himself, Charlie was quitting immediately. He didn't need that job anymore. As he got up, I knew I had to stop this right then. I told him he shouldn't do that. He was quizzical and asked why not. He was rich. He didn't need that job anymore. He had too much to do now anyway.

I said he was not rich. He had not won. Now Charlie was mad. He wanted to know how I knew that. He and Nancy had checked the numbers three times. I said the numbers were right but the ticket was wrong. Charlie was still angry (as he should have been) and now asked what was wrong with the ticket. Was it a fake ticket or a forgery or something like that? I said "No, just look at the ticket." He did. He looked and looked, and it finally dawned on him. He saw the correct date but the time the ticket was issued was 10 minutes after the announced drawing. He knew what I had done.

Charlie is one of my best friends. Perhaps my best friend. But the look he gave me was not that of a friend. It was not really a look of anger. It was a look of hurt and disappointment. It was a look I will never forget. My prank had truly injured my friend. It had taken away his new dreams. Shattered them on the rocks of my dishonesty, however well-intentioned.

I told him I was so sorry. I didn't mean to hurt him or Nancy. I told everyone I was sorry. Over and over again. I cried. I asked

for forgiveness. I held my head in my hands. I was pathetic. The room was silent. No one moved or said a word. I had ruined my friend's party. His 65th birthday. I may have ruined all my friendships in the room. I was afraid. More afraid than I had ever been in my entire life. I just wished I had never bought the damn lottery ticket. What a mess.

LOVE

After a few minutes (and it seemed like forever to me), Charlie sat down beside me. He put his arm around me. He said it was OK. That it was actually a very clever prank. It just got out of hand. But no one was hurt. Nothing had really changed. He said he loved me. I was his best friend. Of course he forgave me. Let's just forget it and go back to our fun. And, most importantly, Charlie said I had given him a special gift. That he now knew what it was like, if only for ten minutes, to be a multi-millionaire. To be able to be generous to others and to give your family all they ever wanted. And he now knew he was still happy in his life without that.

Nancy said through tears that it might take her a little longer to forgive me because she really wanted to go on all those trips, but eventually she would. Everyone laughed. It was going to be OK. Only I didn't know then how true that was. What I did know was that I had the kind of friends you could always count on. My prank had proven that. That was the real gift.

We played some more poker and had small talk, but the air had gone out of the room. The fun was gone for that night at least. We all left about an hour later. Charlie and Nancy were talking closely in their kitchen as we left, and I saw my card and lottery tickets in their garbage can. That seemed appropriate. It was a long drive home and long night for me.

WHAT DOES REDEMPTION LOOK LIKE?

It was a long week after that night. I did not hear from any of the guys. While I had been forgiven, I was sure Charlie and Nancy were hurting, and I thought the other guys were unhappy with me as well. So I laid low. They would call when things had simmered down. I was going to take my licks like a man. I deserved them.

There was no poker game the next Friday. That I knew of. We usually talked about the game during the week. No one called. No one discussed it with me. I assumed it did not happen, and it did not. It was a long Friday night. My wife was out with some girlfriends. She was pretty unimpressed with my prank and felt I had treated my friend very badly. She didn't have much to do with me that week. On Friday night, I watched bad TV alone, drank too much, and ate lousy frozen pizza. I felt very sorry for myself.

On Saturday morning, Charlie called and asked me to come over in an hour because he needed to talk with me. I said I would be there.



The Lottery Ticket Part 2

WHAT DOES REDEMPTION LOOK LIKE?(CONTINUED)

The jig was up. I thought he was going to read me the riot act. That he was going to tell me he was in fact not forgiving me and that we were no longer friends. I thought the worst. I was afraid again. I did not tell my wife where I was going. I didn't know what I was going to say or do when I got there.

On the way to Charlie's house, I decided I would fall on my sword, tell him how wrong I was, beg forgiveness again, tell him it will never happen again, and ask him to please, please still be my friend. I was in prank purgatory.

I parked in their driveway and went to the front door and rang the bell. Charlie immediately answered the door with a ready smile and invited me in. I did what I had decided on the way over. Gave him the whole speech. I was very sincere and contrite. He laughed. Hard. He slapped me on the back and laughed some more. He told me to come in and continued laughing all the way into his kitchen where Nancy was sitting and waiting for us. She gave me coffee and a cinnamon roll.

Charlie told her what I had said. She started laughing too. Also hard. Tears came into her eyes because she was laughing so hard. I was flummoxed. Why was my apology a joke to them? Why was my sorrow for hurting them funny? I asked them that. Charlie asked Nancy to show him what she had made. She went into the bedroom and brought out a poster board and put it on the kitchen table between all of us. Taped in the center was the

"winning" lottery ticket. She had decorated around it and written "The Winning Lottery Ticket That Wasn't" in red marker and then added in blue "and then Was."

Written on the edges of the board were all the things they had said they were going to do with the money when they thought they had won. There were flowers decorated around their wish list and angels and exclamation points and so on. They had taken that darn ticket and made lemonade out of lemons. They had taken the situation and made it fun for them. I am not sure I could have done that. But it was impressive, and I admired them for it.

I thanked them for showing me the posterboard and told them of my admiration for how they had handled all this. They laughed again. Nancy said to Charlie that I didn't understand. That I didn't know. That they needed to tell me.

I interjected. What didn't I understand? What didn't I know? And why had they kept the lottery ticket? Nancy answered me. And my life changed.

They had thrown away the lottery ticket with all the others before I had even left that night. But in the middle of the night, Nancy bolted upright from her sleep and went and got that ticket out of the garbage. She just had a feeling that there was something special about that ticket. At the very least, she thought they should wait for that week's drawing to check it

against the drawing numbers. I told her that was nice but that the odds of the same numbers being drawn twice in a row were in the realm of the ridiculous. If the odds were 1 in 292,000,000 to win the Lottery. To win it twice in a row on the same numbers was 1 in 292 million times 292 million, i.e., 1 in 85 billion. I would later learn this math was fundamentally wrong. But it was still a massive number and an infinitesimal chance.

Nancy then showed me the winning numbers for that week's Friday drawing. Friends, they were exactly the same as the prior week. Nancy had checked them. She had called the Lottery office and was told that indeed they were the same, and this had never happened in this Lottery before. But it had happened a few dozen times around the Country. They told her the winning ticket was bought at 6:10 pm on the Friday before at the very liquor store where I had bought that ticket. I had bought the winning ticket for my friend. They also told her there was no winner the week before so the \$100 million had rolled over. That prompted more buying and now it was worth \$120 million. After state and federal taxes, the winner would net \$70 million.

I was dumbfounded. I was stunned. My head was spinning.

Charlie and Nancy understood. They had felt the same way when they figured this out. Thank goodness Nancy had pulled the ticket from the trash. She would never let any of us forget that either and she shouldn't.

I told them how happy I was for them. Charlie said he was still honoring his promise and each of his poker buddies was getting \$1 million and Nancy was getting all her trips. And the family would

be taken care of. Wow! My prank was becoming reality. Or so I thought.

TWICE IN A ROW DRAWS SCRUTINY

A lottery winner has to take in a winning ticket this large to the Lottery Office, sign a bunch of forms and pose for photos for lottery advertisement. Your name will be disclosed to the general public. It is the law. Then the scavengers come out of the woodwork. Many people have said that winning the lottery actually ruined their lives.

Charlie and Nancy went through all that. Charlie, being naturally affable and outgoing, told the whole story to the press about the lottery tickets I gave him and about the extra one I bought with the same numbers as the prior week's drawing. That was a mistake.

While the story is true and makes great press, it also drew the interest and scrutiny of the Lottery office and the state Attorney General. They felt there was something fishy about the story and how I bought the ticket. They suspected the drawing was somehow rigged. They held up the payout on the ticket and started an investigation.

Charlie and Nancy got legal counsel. They searched and found a lawyer who specialized in representing lottery winners on the when and how of claiming and taking lottery proceeds. It can be quite difficult to navigate on the tax side and when multiple people buy tickets together.

After about a month, the lawyer called me and wanted me to submit to a sworn deposition before the Attorney General's office about the circumstances around my purchase of the winning ticket. The lawyer told me the state would not release the winnings unless I gave the statement.

Charlie and Nancy also, of course, wanted me to give the statement.

I was out of my league on this one. I had done nothing wrong, but felt uneasy about giving the statement, and I did not want to be prosecuted for anything. So I hired my own lawyer. Charlie and Nancy's lawyer gave me some good recommendations. My lawyer did his own investigation and interviewed me over and over about what happened. He challenged me and mock cross-examined me. He felt there was no basis for any criminal or civil case against me. We agreed to the statement. My lawyer would be there to represent me.

Friends, I bought what I thought was a losing lottery ticket as a prank on my friend. I had no idea it would balloon into a national public interest story, much less a heavily-investigated matter by the state Attorney General. But now my friends were all counting on me to bring home the riches from that very ticket. I felt a lot of pressure and responsibility. I had a good lawyer. I had done nothing wrong. The lottery numbers repeated themselves two weeks in a row. It was a massive coincidence, nothing more. It had happened around the Country a number of times. No one ever found any wrongdoing in those instances. It is virtually impossible to rig a lottery drawing. There are too many checks and balances. And I had no contacts with anyone remotely affiliated with the Lottery. I would simply tell the truth in my statement. And I did.

The Assistant Attorney General who questioned me was assertive and aggressive, but not accusatory or mean. She got straight to the points in question and interrogated me thoroughly. But she made no headway about any malfeasance by me or Charlie. There was no headway to make. I was honest and straightforward and answered her questions as directly

and completely as I could. There was no guile in me. That was apparent. She seemed particularly taken with the fact I had kept the scrap of paper from the liquor store on which I had written the winning numbers when I bought the sixth ticket after the prior week's drawing. She could not figure out why I would have done that if I was trying to scam the Lottery or commit a crime. I actually don't know why I saved that scrap of paper and I told her that too. She thanked me for my testimony and cooperation. She said the state would conclude its investigation in due course and advise us through counsel of their findings and recommendations.

True to its word, about four months later, the Attorney General's Office did issue its findings and recommendations. It had done an extensive investigation of the software used to generate random winning numbers in the Lottery Charlie and Nancy won. It consulted gaming experts and mathematicians.

It found that America's popular and lucrative lottery drawings, in which computers randomly select numbers that turn a lucky few into instant millionaires, may not be as random as they seem. In dozens of the games across the United States, identical winning numbers have been generated within weeks or months of each other—sometimes in consecutive drawings. Lottery officials, even some who have previously acknowledged concern with the national lottery system, contend the repeated numbers are nothing more than chance. One Lottery spokesperson stated that "While such repeats are rare and uncommon, there is no reason to suspect these numbers were not drawn reasonably."

Math experts who have researched lottery drawings concluded it is difficult to truly know whether the identical draws

indicate a serious problem without an in-depth inspection of the lottery software. They concluded only that the data here "suggests that there are outliers, and it suggests it's worthy of investigation." Collected data of winning drawings in 37 states identified more than 100 drawings over the past 25 years where the same game generated identical winning numbers within 365 days of each other. In eight instances, the same winning numbers were generated in consecutive drawings in the same games in multiple states.

Experts reviewed the data on these and ran more than 10,000 simulations and determined that although many of the duplicate drawings seemed consistent with statistical odds, several examples in other states appeared to be outliers "worthy of investigation." They also concluded that in some instances "it is highly unlikely that the chosen numbers in either of these lotteries are truly random."

In one state, 10 sets of numbers were identified that were called twice within five years of each other. That state's lottery director stated that "While such repeats are rare and uncommon, there is no reason to suspect these numbers were not drawn reasonably." Another lottery director stated that "As with any technology, including ball machines, the opportunity exists for hardware to fail."

The Attorney General concluded that there was no factual basis to prove or even suspect any wrongdoing by Charlie, Nancy, me, or anyone involved with the Lottery draw in question regarding the

ticket I bought. They advised the state Lottery to honor the ticket and to make the appropriate payout as soon as possible. They did not, however, pay interest on that money during the term of the delay, nor did they pay our attorney's fees.

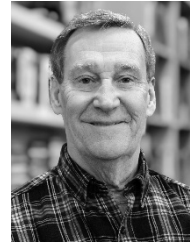
EPILOGUE

Charlie and Nancy collected their Lottery winnings, paid their taxes on them and are living, as best they can, happily ever after.

Charlie gave each of his five poker buddies \$1 million, including me. I did not get more or less than the others and that seemed right to me, as my prank had initially caused some hurt. The five of us did not have to pay any taxes for receiving our gifts. The gift tax only applies to the giver. And it does not kick in until the giver has made over \$13 million in other gifts. [As an aside, how did Congress come up with that?]

That extra \$1 million in my pocket has kind of changed my life. I worry less about money. I have a nice back-up fund. It makes Medicare co-pays and deductibles and monthly premiums for Part B coverage easier to take. But it did not fundamentally change my life. I didn't buy a new sports car or fancy home. I like where I live. I like who I am. I like my friends and family. Why change any of that?

But. That winning Lottery Ticket did change my life. It taught me what is important in life and what is not. And it taught me not to pull pranks anymore!



Maid in Indiana

My dad's mom was a maid in the home of Eli Lilly in Indianapolis from the late 1890s to 1901. That was the year that she married my grandfather, Patrick O'Connor. Her name was Pearl Golay and she grew up in the small farming community of Wirt, Indiana, close to the shore of the Ohio River that forms the border between Kentucky and southern Indiana. She was descended (on her mother's side) from Abraham Rycken, a Dutch settler who arrived in New Amsterdam (modern-day New York City) in 1638 from Holland and was given a land grant of an 87 acre island in the East River, near the entrance to Bowery Bay.

The Rycken family subsequently shortened their surname to Ryker and later on some family lines used Riker, while others used Ryker. The family owned Rikers Island until 1884, when it was sold to the City of New York for \$180,000. It is currently the site of a large penitentiary.

My great grandmother Catherine Golay's mother was a Ryker, as was her mother before her. From there it's a straight line back to the 1630s. This heritage had trickled down from her Dutch ancestors like a stream in a forest of immigrants and then rippled further downstream to her daughter Pearl (my grandmother) by way of New York and then Kentucky, with the stream eventually pooling in southern Indiana with Pearl's birth on October 31, 1878.

So it was against this historical backdrop that Pearl came into her own, as a young woman, desperately wanting to escape rural Indiana. As soon as she was able, probably around 17 or 18, she packed her meager belongings, said goodbye to her parents, William (Curt) and

Catherine Golay, and caught the train out of Louisville, heading north to Indianapolis. The big city beckoned with its loud, clanging street cars, exciting fancy restaurants, and indoor plumbing almost everywhere. Pearl needed to make her own way in this new world and not remain mired in the old one. The year was 1896 and the Republican William McKinley was in the White House, having recently defeated the Democratic candidate, William Jennings Bryan. The Gay Nineties had been in full swing for six years, as the Gilded Age was coming to an end. Indianapolis was the state capital and Butler University was over twenty years old by then. It held the distinction of being only the third university in the United States to admit women on an equal basis with men. Many of the captains of industry and lumber barons lived in this thriving, glittering Hoosier metropolis. This is where Pearl needed to be, not stuck in Jefferson County watching the grass grow.

Restricted by her rural upbringing, her job skills were limited. Her plan was to find employment as a domestic in the home of a wealthy family in the big city. She had read in the Indianapolis News, the "Great Hoosier Daily" as it was known, that a maid could make between \$20 and \$30 a month, plus lodging. Through a series of events we will never know, Pearl was hired by the Eli Lilly family as a live-in maid. In addition to the domestic duties of cooking and cleaning the estate, this person was trusted with access to personal belongings and likely some personal secrets hidden in those rooms.

The 1898 Indianapolis City Directory lists Mr. Eli Lilly, President of Eli Lilly & Co., living at 1426 N. Meridian St. During her tenure in that

home, tragedy struck. Eli Lilly died in his bed, succumbing to cancer, on June 6, 1898, just a month shy of his sixtieth birthday. Their employee, Pearl, was 20 that year. I can picture my grandmother draping the mirrors with black shrouds and preparing the household for the funeral reception planned for later that week. As her maid, she could have assisted the widow, Maria Sloan Lilly (Eli's second wife of twenty nine years), in preparing for the funeral service. Fixing Mrs. Lilly's hair just so, helping her put on her large-brimmed black hat, adjusting the veil face covering so it shrouded her entire face and buttoning up the back of her long, black widow's church dress cinched tightly at the waist like a tourniquet.

My grandfather, Patrick O'Connor, recounted many times over the years his memories of the many visits to the Lilly home to pick up Pearl for dates during their courtship. On one of those visits, Pearl had probably been wearing her maid uniform all that day. It was a long, black dress with a full-length, white, cotton apron trimmed at the bodice with an eyelet ruffle and a matching bonnet perched on her head like a bird's nest. She couldn't wait to get into something more comfortable. Preparing for Patrick's arrival and happy to be rid of that ridiculous outfit, she now wore a plain, blue dress with lace trim around the neckline and a simple necklace with a gold locket on the end of a silver chain. This, and her smile, is what greeted him when she opened the door.

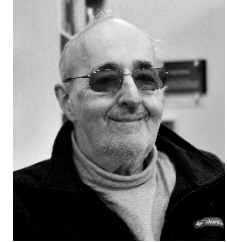
Returning home that evening after whatever constituted a date at the turn of the century, I can imagine Pearl sneaking her Irish beau in the back door of the mansion and tip-toeing upstairs on the servants rear entrance staircase to the family rooms, being careful to avoid that one loose, squeaky step. I can picture them walking slowly, shoes-in-hand,

down the carpeted hallway to Mrs. Lilly's empty room, careful not to alert any of the children or the other servants. Opening the door to madam's boudoir with a quiet twist on the knob with her left hand she'd pull Patrick through the doorway with the other hand and close the door quietly, in one fluid maneuver.

Sitting at Mrs. Lilly's dressing table, smiling at her own reflection in the mirror, she'd drape one of the lace veils over her head and wrap it around her face, leaving only her eyes visible to toss Patrick a coquettish glance, while dotting a small drop of Mrs. Lilly's French perfume behind her right ear with a casual move. Patrick would have worn the cleanest shirt he owned tucked onto a pair of well-worn corduroy pants and his best tweed Irish cap that he saved for special occasions. Wearing an impish grin, he smelled of the Ivory bar soap he'd used in his weekly bath earlier that day.

Extending his hand to her, he would say with a gallant demeanor, "May I have this dance, Mrs. Lilly?" Pearl would rise to meet him, curtsy and respond, "Well, yes you may Mr. Lilly", the touch of her soft hand exciting him more than a little. They'd spin around the room to an imaginary waltz while Patrick hummed an Irish tune he'd remembered from his boyhood in County Antrim. Then, hearing loud voices in the front parlor as the Widow Lilly arrived back home, Pearl would quickly shoo him down the back stairway and onto the rear lawn where he could quickly scurry behind the carriage house and make his way to the street for his long walk home, having only had a short moment to say goodnight with a hurried kiss.

They were eventually married in Chicago on July 3, 1901 at Holy Family Catholic Church at 1080 W. Roosevelt Road and began their own life-long waltz together, no longer needing to pretend.



Manolito's Journey

Manolito was a wide-eyed and curious child—a 12-year-old, Mayan boy living with his family high in the mountains of northern Guatemala. He bore all the visible signs of poverty: pants held up by a makeshift rope; floppy shoes far too large for his small, Mayan feet; and a tattered, hand-me-down T-shirt advertising a diner in New York City.

His village, nestled in the remote mountains of northern Guatemala, was home to some of the poorest families in Central America. Manolito's family slept on a dirt floor in their small home and survived through subsistence farming, supplemented by whatever odd jobs his father could find in the city.

Despite his hardships, there was something striking about Manolito. His deep-set eyes reflected far too much life experience for a child his age. His olive-colored skin, round face, short stature, and jet-black hair were characteristic of the Mayan children in the region—many of whom were said to be beautiful. Manolito only reinforced that belief. His wry smile and sparkling eyes could charm anyone who met him.

Healthcare in the region was scarce and rudimentary. Medicine was hard to come by, and only two poorly-trained government health workers visited the village two or three times a month.

Manolito had developed a painful condition that no child should have to endure. He suffered from phimosis, a condition in which an uncircumcised boy's foreskin does not grow and expand

properly, leading to chronic infections and, worse, restricted blood flow that could cause tissue damage. The local health workers had no real solution other than offering occasional antibiotics and suggesting a trip to Guatemala City, where he could try to get seen at an overcrowded clinic. But such a journey was impossible for his family.

One day, two American missionaries passed through Manolito's village with unexpected news—an American medical team was coming to the nearby town of San Cristóbal for a week to help the local people. The announcement sparked hope, but the journey to San Cristóbal was daunting. The village had no direct road, only a rugged mountain path that would take six hours on foot.

Yet, the distance did not deter Manolito's mother. She firmly believed that God had answered her prayers and that help awaited them in San Cristóbal. Determined, she prepared for the journey, packing tortillas, cooked beans, and bottles of water. The missionaries urged her to arrive two days early, warning that more than 2,000 people would likely be waiting to see the doctors.

When they arrived at the hospital compound, they were among the first in line. But they had to wait outside the fence for two nights, sleeping on the ground. Local church members brought food in the mornings and held places in line for those who needed to step away for water or the bath. At last, the gates opened. Manolito's mother clutched his hand as they stepped forward, her heart pounding

with anticipation. The triage nurse took one look at Manolito's condition and immediately sent him to the surgeon. He was scheduled for surgery the next day. The surgeon, a general practitioner from Minnesota, understood that this would likely be Manolito's only chance to receive the operation he desperately needed. He wasted no time in preparing for the procedure.

On the day of his surgery, Manolito was understandably frightened. But the kindness of the American medical staff soothed his fears. The warmth and compassion they showed made him feel safe—perhaps safer than he had felt in a long time. When he woke up, his mother received the news she had prayed for—the surgery was a success. In just a few days, Manolito would be heading home, never again having to suffer the pain, infections, or complications that would have worsened as he grew older.

It was at this point that I met Manolito and his mother. I was working in the post-operative area, helping to discharge patients and ensure they had everything needed—bandages, pain medicine, and instructions—for at-home care. Since Manolito spoke only the local Mayan dialect, I needed two translators—one to translate from English to Spanish and another to translate from Spanish to *Pok'omchi'*, his native language. Given the sensitive nature of his condition, both translators had to be male so that the boy wouldn't feel embarrassed discussing his post-surgical care.

As we spoke, I asked his mother how they planned to get home. She answered casually, as if it were the simplest thing in the world, "We are walking back up to our village," gesturing toward the steep mountainside.

"How long will it take?" I asked.

"About six or seven hours," she replied.

Concerned, I asked if they had places to rest along the way. She nodded. "We have family partway up—we can stay there if needed."

I couldn't shake the thought of what that long hike would feel like for a boy who had just undergone surgery. The idea of him trekking up that mountain, every step jostling his fresh wound, made me wince. I sought out Ken, our team pharmacist, and asked if we could send Manolito home with some pain relief—codeine and plain Tylenol to help him endure the grueling climb. Ken agreed without hesitation, and as we prepared the medication, we exchanged a knowing glance, both of us cringing at the thought of what the boy was about to endure.

As I handed the medicine to his mother and explained the dosages, Manolito suddenly looked up at me with worried eyes. Through the translators, he asked, in all sincerity, "With the bandages on, what do I do if I have to pee while walking home? His face was full of genuine concern, and I could tell he had been thinking about this for a while.

I reassured him, explaining that he simply needed to keep the area clean and change the bandages if they got wet. I handed his mother lots of extra gauze and tape for the journey.

Finally, knowing how much village boys loved playing soccer, I had to deliver one last piece of news. "No football for one week," I said.

He groaned. "One week?"

"Yes, one week." I made him repeat it. He reluctantly agreed, and we shook hands on it.

As I watched them prepare for their long journey home, I couldn't stop thinking about what they had endured just to get medical care. A six-hour trek down the mountain. Two nights sleeping on the ground. The unwavering faith of a mother who refused to give up on her son. And the overwhelming gratitude she expressed over and over, despite everything they had been through.

I thought about what would have happened if Manolito hadn't received this surgery—the relentless infections, the pain, the irreversible damage. A procedure so simple in the U.S. had been life-changing for him.

Before they left, Manolito and I shared a firm handshake. "I feel lucky and blessed to have met you," I told him.

He gave me a big, beaming smile and waved as he hurried to catch up with his mother, who was already making her way up the path. She turned back one last time, waving goodbye until she disappeared into the distance.

For them, the journey home was just beginning.

As for me, I closed my eyes and said a quiet prayer for their safe return.



The Matter of Sin

When I hear "Begin The Beguine", I smile and weep at the same time because the song is and will forever be linked to my parents. Certain 1940's recordings bring vibrancy to my remembrance of them. At moments when the mood struck her, my mom would slink past my dad, her shoulder up, her seductive eyes engaged in all the vampish lustiness she could muster, and she sang "It had to be you, I wandered around and finally found somebody who, could make me be true, could make me feel blue." My dad for his part may have continued reading the newspaper, but not before giving up a half smile of recognition for mom's efforts. My mother thought she was Rita Hayworth or Ava Gardner. Like many first generation Americans, women and men alike used Hollywood as a social guide for dress and behaviors, so they wouldn't look like they were "just off the boat."

My mom and dad weren't even semi heathens, but they were fallen away Catholics. When the catholic newsletter was delivered to our house, it was regarded as just another plea to use Ivory Soap or imploring shoppers to try out our new Rogers Super Market. Mom and dad hardly gave a glance to the section of movies condemned by the Catholic Church. The Legion of Decency listed films Catholics were forbidden to see under penalty of mortal sin and thus the fury of hell. Sister Mary Edna taught us that being in hell would be like having a body-sized hot iron pressed into our flesh while flames licked over us without mercy for all eternity. Yikes! That's enough to inspire walking a straight line. Although certain movies could transport us down

the road to perdition, I willingly went to our neighborhood Indiana Theater to see "The Bad Seed" starring Patty McCormack. I never did become a child murderer, but I was racked with guilt that was somewhat lessened by my mother who would double up with laughter when I imitated Patty's menacing movie line to a tee. "Leroy, give me those shoes."

Mortal sin was serious business, yet so easy to come by. Things piled up. One day you eat meat on Friday, the next day a movie could kill any prospect of entering the pearly gates. The confessional was the only way to redemption. Forgiveness in a huddle with a priest who had the power to wipe out transgressions seemed easy enough, but it wasn't. It was a long, narrow journey to that secluded booth in order to empty out one's misdeeds, clearing a blackened soul for more misdeeds.

I was tortured because my parents were not dutifully participating in the church faith of their roots. I worried about them and prayed for them every day. An understanding of how life has a way of weighing a person down began to percolate in my religious blood. My dad was a gunner in B 17's during World War 2 when he was just 19. My mom scrubbed, cleaned, and factory worked since she had been 15 when my grandmother forced her to quit high school. No wonder they just slept in on Sunday mornings. No wonder they didn't want to kneel in a dark little cave of a confessional and lay bare the secrets of their hearts. No wonder trips to the movies were more fun and life enhancing.

My neighborhood could have used a branch facility of social services right on the corner of Brown and Bevel. We were a blue-collar bunch crowded together. Our houses were only ten or twelve feet from the public sidewalk. People up and down Brown Street never heard of Dr. Spock and some parents were junkyard dog mean, crazy or both. Skipper Eagan's stepdad swore loudly and took liberties to whack Skipper often. Donna Followell's mom also took swipes at Donna, I witnessed, once with a dog chain. But, mostly Mrs. Followell sat on her stoop smoking a Lucky Strike while she allowed us children to feel the metal plate in her head. Margie Gleaner's spiritualist parents and relatives gathered regularly in their tiny bungalow for seances. Barbara Wright's mom and grandma would crack open some spirits just before the Liberace show. During his dramatic opening of piano keys tingling, Liberace would look straight into the camera and wink. When summer screen doors were open, the women could be heard giggling to each other, "No, he winked at me, not you!" My parents seemed saintly by neighborhood contrast. The worst parents of all were Bill and Vera Farady. They lived next door at 2110 Brown St. and we lived at 2108. Bill and Vera put away a case of beer every night. Vera never missed Sunday mass wearing her little hats and white gloves. She stood on the inside of her house, leaning against the door frame while we kids would sit on the front stoop listening to Vera's drunken Irish ghost stories. Bill was mean, drunk, and unfriendly. He punished Cheri, their daughter, my friend without mercy. Vera never interfered with Bill's business of cruelty inflicted on Cheri.

One evening, Cheri and I both had errands to run to Frantz's, our neighborhood grocery store. It was dark and we were taking the shortcut through the alley. Even I was surprised at what popped out of my mouth. "Cheri, do you think your parents will burn in hell?" So, near the dark alley, underneath the Buckeye tree, on a mission for bread and milk, Cheri replied, "No."

That night, I no longer believed that my parent's trifling sins would condemn them and it was also the night I stopped believing that there even was a hell. I ceased being bent on soul saving prayer trickery for my parent's salvation. I concluded, I'm not going to bother the lord with this anymore.

After our Sunday dinner of roasted chicken, prepared by both my mom and dad, my sister and I went downtown to see "Singing in the Rain" or "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" or some other wonderful spectacle that would make us giddy with delight. I then failed to give the wages of sin another thought.



Carolyn and Cheri



May Sadness Be the Measure of Your Wisdom **In tribute to Lynda W. Schmidt – Part I**

I heard of a father who never hugged his daughter goodbye without saying this blessing over her: "May every place you go make it hard for you to leave... May every person you love make it hard for you to say goodbye."

No doubt about it. Loss comes in many forms.

–from *Between the Dark and the Daylight* by Joan Chittister

The memory of how it began is the trip of the day I met and had my initial interview with Jungian Analyst Lynda Schmidt and the start of a more than 30-year adventure. That's my honest description of what Mark Nepo refers to as "The Exquisite Risk – Daring to Live an Authentic Life" and it all began in February of 1993, as I drove my Miata on a circuitous route between Bangor and Brooklin, Maine.

That day held crucial components with which she and I had experience, but until looking back I didn't see. Now I can name some key elements present at the very start. These included: nature in all her guises; trust in its purest form as humanity filled with curiosity; and sound. (In particular, my newly-installed cell phone allowed for directional updates for this hilly route.)

But the configuration of sound, so essential to deepening our relationship throughout the 30 years of Jungian work, was music. This tribute to Lynda Wheelwright Schmidt is prepared with three, specific selections representing and encapsulating three multi-year-periods. One might say together we were "Sounding the Depths!"

It is also essential to identify a component to our sessions often left without being named specifically. However, as Lynda lived in the middle of nature and we both grew up in its care, nature provided a sense of security and eventually Lynda named it "The Big Something" as the numinous; nature as essential to spirituality was my sensibility. This component deepened and became more conscious in and to our Depth oriented process.

Editor's Note: It is unfortunate that there is no way to embed music in a print publication. Shortened Youtube or Spotify links are provided for readers to type into their devices to experience the music as close as it can be for this tribute.

1993-2000 "Getting to Know You" & Circumambulation

Homecoming Denny Zeitlin – "Hymn"

<http://bit.ly/4ieeXKS> OR <https://spoti.fi/4kxtEdx>

Weekly sessions for me were so unlike heady interviews and “pop quizzes” of academia that my expectation to be the “best student I could be” was the labyrinth I navigated for a good while. Considering those early sessions, I can say it was a lot like exploring the dunes and shoreline on horseback as I did in my youth and quite like Lynda’s description of her life as a youngster on the ranch. Sharing stories and occasional, essential familial observations, Lynda blazed the start of the trail. By 1996, the circling of themes shifted to a more spiral form. Like Zeitlin’s “Hymn,” a simple theme of several seconds repeats for over five minutes only changing keys. My dreams, important to analysis, deepened but my consciously driven “student” attitude was still firmly entrenched.

The specialness of exploring unknown terrain by horseback is that one doesn’t, or at least shouldn’t, move too fast. We didn’t, but certainly covered ground – fertile or otherwise! The next several years spiraled upward, downward as well as in and out. The trails were somewhat worn but each change of season re-fashioned the trails in look and feel. Much like a key change reorients the ear, so does rain, snow, and wind shift the path.

Denny Zeitlin, Jazz Pianist and Composer, is also Psychiatrist Dennis Zeitlin, MD. Zeitlin was a new name to me but much to my liking. Like the work of artists such as Oscar Peterson and Dave Brubeck, his albums were a great find for me. Interestingly in Lynda’s office was an old, framed 8x10 of a tall, young man playing acoustic Bass. It was Klaus, her spouse. I mentioned Denny Zeitlin’s name to Lynda and told her of my new interest in his music and that he was also a Psychiatrist.

I later learned that Klaus had played a few times with Zeitlin. He summed up the experience in a note (1999-2001?) to me via Lynda:

“Dear Susan

Many thanks for the Zeitlin discs. He is the hardest guy I ever tried to play with.

He skips progressions – goes from major to minor at will – adds chords – Invents – Brubeck was easy. But Denny is fun to listen to. Even if his bass player gets lost from time to time. Thank you – Klaus”

2001-2010 - Symbols of Transformation & Creativity and Madness

Piano Concerto No. 2 – Rachmaninoff (excerpt from movement 2 Adagio)
<https://bit.ly/42fc86s> OR the entire Piano Concerto No. 2 – Rachmaninoff
<https://spoti.fi/43R9dSQ>

The transition into the new millennium was, without a doubt, ominous. In 1996 my mother died. Lynda’s father passed in 1999. Late July of 2000 was “Creativity and Madness – Santa Fe,” a professional conference both Lynda and I attended. September 11, 2000, even today defies adequate description. I had no idea of the depth of despair Rachmaninoff experienced before one last approach to composing his “self” in symbols for sound – not words. All three movements of this concerto bring the listener a risk of allowing an authentic experience in and among SELF.

While growing up, Lynda's piano instructor was the accomplished English Concert Pianist Margaret Tilly. After the Santa Fe conference we talked a bit about Rachmaninoff and Piano Concerto No. 2. It was one Lynda dearly loved.

I never heard Lynda play Rachmaninoff or any other selection. But the affect and resonance of the dialogue we had of this piece said so much. The presentation in Santa Fe was clear and opened the door more widely to the role of music and transformation without a word needing to be said. The suggested excerpt link is only a sample. For those not faint-of-heart, please take the time to experience the entire concerto in "alone time."

Analytically, 2001-2010 included deeper, darker dreams for me, weekly sessions sometimes by phone now and increased written correspondence often from Lynda to me relating to articles, book titles, movie suggestions as well as sights and thoughts from wherever in the world my conference presentations were taking me. There was also more loss in my life and Lynda was unwavering in her support, particularly when it wasn't session time. There was also an occasion early on when she told me: "You march to a different drummer" and reminded me of Jung's comment "Thank God I'm Jung and not a Jungian."

This was the honesty I didn't want to see but Lynda's sincerity provided a tone of care and compassion softening my heart to open more to truth and trust. I felt heard with her words and not judged. You see, in my eyes I had failed to gain candidate status or admission to any one of the four or five training programs I believed were my professional destiny when I began working with her in the early 90s. But Lynda knew well my "head stuff" meant I was not embodied. I was learning to slow down – loss can do that as can Rachmaninoff.



May Sadness Be the Measure of Your Wisdom **In tribute to Lynda W. Schmidt – Part II**

2011-2023 – “Death Makes Life Possible” & Divine Presence
Song Like a Seed – Sara Thomsen – “Canticle of the Feathered Ones”
<https://bit.ly/4hA9RYI> OR <https://bit.ly/4iTnrH6>

Moving out of the previous era was also a move “away”. Which shifted our regular session schedule to mostly alternate weeks, always by phone. The re-location to Buffalo, NY from Bangor, ME did include a transition – synchronistic of course!

Not only was I in a job for which I hoped and longed but in a city with an arts scene far beyond my many other-city-life experiences. Buffalo also had APSWNY – the Analytical Psychology Society of Western New York. Not an institute, but a wonderful, vibrant, established group of adults curious and dedicated to experiencing “depth studies” at their own address with a board and programming and – I was thrilled and encouraged at my first inquiry to “get involved”.

Lynda was thrilled for me and I wondered about the integration of my new job as a Hospice Buffalo Music Therapist, Depth-Oriented Psychotherapist, and investigator of the relationship between the Bonny Method of GIM and Margaret Tilly as Music Therapist at Langley-Porter (her analyst was Jo Wheelwright). Might this be a place, a time – an opening?

The following are excerpts from a note sent by Lynda related to the manifestation of my integrations (SOUNDING THE DEPTHS: JUNG, JUNGIAN ORIENTATION AND MUSIC – fall 2012):

“Dear Susan, Sat. 9/8/12

Thank you most heartily for sending me all the articles plus your talk and Tilly’s so romantic photo and program. I am enjoying all of it so very much...

I told Klaus about your project and so we reminisced some about her...

He (Klaus) also remembered going over to have dinner with her – she rather scared him (we were 18 and 20 to her 50+)...

I can see how much more there was about her than I realized!”

I offer the following sidebar to “platform” much of what continues in this segment:

It could be said this was the beginning of the end. The original themes of nature, trust, and music continued to shape-shift/morph into the realm of Kairos remaining so to the present. There was, however, the emergence of an essential component – spirituality. The word was felt but not directly discussed throughout our time together. It was first referenced as “nature” or described as experiences we all have with our senses in the

world at large including with all sentient beings. But it began to become noticeable that the word nature was not inclusive at this time in our relationship and process to verbally acknowledge the deepening of sensory encounters. Such an awareness appeared to evolve through deaths of various types and the “wondering” at the life that emerged – naturally.

No more visits in person, but many reports of Klaus’s gardening endeavors in the nature-scape of the homestead; the sights and sounds of the gulls who visited for daily or weekly scraps. The daily walks along the shore with one Juno (dog) after another at least a few more years and the many phone sessions with increased dream intensity and more metaphors related to life-span relationships with “consciousness” and beyond. Our experiences flowed in and out of chronology. Depth through music was my experience at work with patients; readings from world traditions and meetings of heart and soul with Lynda. Recognizing the reality of diagnoses is the variance in human time on the one hand but timelessness on the other. Such was the trail for about the next five years.

Music was “sacred” time shared by Lynda and Klaus. I witnessed this through her notes to me between sessions when the moment prompted. These were times of containment of sorts. I was humbled to hold space, energy, consciousness – whatever, however, if/whenever needed as the time approached for Klaus’ passing 2/3/17.

Lynda’s hearing declined more and listening to radio, TV, recorded music – so much of anything other than in-person conversation or amplified, gently-paced phone conversations became difficult. But reading was the “go to” and worked well for the both of us beyond the alternate week or sometimes monthly sessions. There were life-span experiences we both knew, some experienced and most were being shared. We also had, years earlier, found a quote by Hans Christian Anderson mutually acceptable: “When Words Fail, Music Speaks.”

Our shared author and inspiration for our last chronological years together was Joan Chittister (JC) OSB. What follows are excerpts from a postcard with the image of *The Lotus Eaters*, 1895 by Thomas Moran. Lynda wrote:

“This painting seems to echo JC’s awareness of Divine Presence. That’s a term I can resonate to. Like ‘The Big Something.’ I liked her story of the 3 year old consulting with his baby brother about what God looks like because ‘I’m beginning to forget.’ Living in nature as I do here, I am forever getting into feelings of awe. And, however did I luck out so well?! Thank ‘goodness’ for Divine Presence. I do like Chittister!!”
5/20/22

Lynda never heard the music selection for this segment due to reasons obvious to the reader at this point. However, given the relationship please take time to go to the audio links and allow yourself and other sentient beings around you a few minutes of "the Big Something."



May "wonder" emerge in your heart as you experience - listen - feel -
"Canticle of the Feathered Ones"
resonant with Divine presence - a measure of your wisdom!

My love is with you Lynda. - Susan



The Meaning of Christmas

Our family was all together
To celebrate the season.
I gathered the children around me
And asked, "What is the reason?"

"What is the meaning of Christmas?
Why do we celebrate?
Why is the day so important?
What is special about this date?"

And they all started jumping and laughing
And this is what they said,
"It's all about the presents
That come from that guy dressed in red."

"Presents, presents, presents"
Was all they would say.
As I asked, "Is this was the reason
We celebrate Christmas Day?"

So, they started to tell me their memories
Of all the Christmases past
And of all the wonderful presents
That they had received at last.

Katie once got a big wheel
So big that it filled the whole room.
When she asked for a car at age sixteen
She got one that really went zoom.
A Ferrari. A Ferrari?
Well, a matchbox Ferrari in her stocking...

Betsy got dolls, little ponies and such
But compared with her brother, that did not seem like much.
Mike's gifts always looked so much bigger and better.
After all, who really wants a pink, unicorn sweater?

Anne recalled Barbies, stuffed animals and more
Gifts that could even fit on the floor.
She once piled her gifts on her lap instead
And the tower of gifts went up over her head!

Sherry loved all the music, the CDs with new songs.
She would rock her new dolly and they would both sing along.
Tommy liked trucks, cars, building tools, and Look--
There is Jenna with legos and new fantasy books.

"But the real meaning of Christmas?"
I asked. Then I sighed
Because "Presents, presents, presents"
Was all that they replied.

Then Betsy said,
"It is important to think about others
During this time of year,
Especially to think of Santa
And those flying reindeer."

And Mike said,
"We could leave him hot chocolate and cookies
(Healthy carrots and celery too)
Then maybe he'll keep bringing presents
For us during the whole year through."

So, then I looked at other adults in the room
And I said "What does Christmas really mean?"
The adults all looked back at me and then they started to scream
"Presents, presents, presents, presents."

Uncle Steve recalled train sets, toy soldiers and such
Blocks that built bridges that could be blown up.
He used a real mousetrap to make things go kaboom
And sent his toys flying all over the room.

Aunt Jean got a new doll, Betsy Wetsy by name.
She could drink from a bottle and wet just the same
As any real baby. And it was such fun.
Jean changed the diaper when Betsy was done.
(Luckily Betsy did not know how to poop!)

The most magical Christmas said Jean, Kathy and Sue,
(You could only wish this would happen to you.)
Was when they ran to their stockings on that Christmas day
And saw three beautiful walking dolls there on display.

"So," I thought,
"Those are the memories.
That must be the meaning.
Gifts are the reason

For the whole Christmas season”.

Then the family got quiet
And someone said,
“Is there another reason
for Christmas instead?”

“Instead of the presents and gifts and all that,
Maybe just presence is where it’s all at.”
And I thought, “Oh, that’s presence.
That’s spelled with a C.
Maybe that is what the meaning of Christmas should be.
Maybe we spelled the word the wrong way.
Maybe it’s the presence on this special day.”

The presence of family
And people who love us.
The presence of Jesus and
God up above us.
The presence of peace, love and joy all year through.
That is the meaning of Christmas for you.



The Meaning of My Name (s)

My Maiden name was Royal.
I really liked that name.
It spoke of kings and queens.
Maybe I was just the same?

It spoke of things magnificent.
Majestic, grand and great.
It meant I wasn't ordinary,
But would have a special fate.

I hoped I could always keep that name.

But then I went to college.
There I dated Mike Devine.
Kathy Devine would be a good name.
That would be just fine.

Sadly, Mike went on his way and I knew that someday I might have to change to a different name.

Then I met David Walton.
What an ordinary name.
But he was awful cute.
And I loved him just the same.

I thought
 This name means nothing special.
 I can't feel like a queen.
 Royal was so much grander.
 Now what can Walton mean?

So, I looked it up—
 I learned that Walton has a meaning.
 It means a walled city or city of wood.
 At least it has a meaning.
 Now that was pretty good.

 It also means prestigious.
 Walled cities were considered grand.
 A safe, good place for families
 Away from the vast, empty land.

So, I will keep the name of Walton.
It is good enough for me.
And besides that David Walton
Was as cute as he could be.



Morning Glory

As this perfect extension of summer continues, I have been daily mesmerized by my immediate surroundings, by which I mean the flowerpots on my deck. One pot holds a morning glory vine. It's my favorite.

The deep blue flowers mesmerize me—maybe because they seem so rare in a world of pinks and reds, yellows and purples. Blooms like lobelia (which I can kill in a matter of days) or blue hydrangeas (which can be cut and put in a vase) are delightful eye catchers for certain. But the morning glories are elusive and only bloom for a day, which for me, adds a layer of magic.

Near the end of June, the little temporary garden shop next to our local hardware store had a big clearance sale. Many plants looked a little droopy, but I figured I could coax a couple back to health with some TLC, and I was up to the challenge. A pot that promised blue morning glories sat on my deck devoid of flowers all of July and all of August; not even a hint of the promised deep blue glories I imagined.

I thought many times of just chucking the unproductive thing. But it wasn't completely dead—just barren as the hundreds of thin heart-shaped green leaves and whimsical tendrils kept growing up the trellis lovingly put into place just for them.

The green, of course, was a gift of nature, but I was thoroughly disappointed by the lack of flowers. Regardless, I watered the pot and removed yellow leaves as I tended my other happy pots nearly every day.

In my heart, I hoped to see at least one promised glory bloom.

Have you ever investigated the simplicity of one of these flowers? So uncomplicated are they: Just one thin membrane, really, shaped in a circle, but with five segments. Probably three inches across. All the same unique deep blue color except for the very center—which is soft white with an inviting bright yellow center. The back side of the flower delineates the five segments with five soft white dividers “markers” that meet at the base. The center of the flower holds the five segments like a little trumpet affair—or (if you're a child at heart) a fairy dress.

It's that simple. A circle gathered together at the base. Before it blooms, the flower presents itself as a pointed, bulbous swirl of blue and white. It is tight and comes to a point—the base being fat and the tip being pointy. This entire affair is only two to three inches. It blooms so quickly that one can almost watch it unfold—which I sometimes do. A miracle taking place over a cup of coffee.

BUT, and I do mean BUT, the open flower itself is a magnificent shade of blue. A shade unlike any other. In the early morning, right after blooming, the flower is deep, deep, pure and mesmerizing blue. I can look into the center and travel the world.

Blue like the Blue Grotto on the Isle of Capri in Italy.

Blue like the pristine waters of the Caribbean, or the Mediterranean on certain sunlit days.

Blue like the deepest, most pure blue summer sky.

Blue like a beautiful, shimmering dream.

A blue morning glory is not to be imitated, plus it is not a sought after flower. Because, guess what? In many places the morning glory is considered a weed. And here I was coaxing my unproductive weed to thrive! Yes, all summer long I was doting on this little pot sending up tendrils and more tendrils with not even the hint of hope.

Then, one day in early September no less, I noticed (maybe) one of those little, tight, spirally things forming in the depths of the greenery. It got bigger. It bloomed. I took pictures and recorded the bloom in my journal—such was the wonder of it all.

Thereafter, more blooms began to form—and bloom! When I get up in the morning, the first thing I do is check on the glories

right outside my kitchen window. Yes!!! There they are. Ones in bloom. Ones faded and other ones emerging.

They bloom in the morning, but not if it's too chilly. They bloom all day unless the sun cooks them. They close up and fall off the vine at night as new blooms push their way forward.

Those morning flowers delight me in myriad ways. For one, because my tenacity has brought forth beauty. For another, because that deep blue, fragile flower works a miracle on me. Did I mention fragile? That circle of blue is thin as tissue paper. So vulnerable to all sorts of destructive agents like too much wind or a big bug for starters. Maybe that is why they can only grace the world for one day.

The fact that those little suckers actually bloomed when for two summer months they refused to even present me with a clue of forthcoming flowers has warmed my heart. There may be a lesson here if you (the reader) look for one. For me, the glory of the fleeting flower is enough.

MORNING GLORY POWER

How far can you travel into the deep clear center of a deep blue morning glory?

Might it take you to exotic destinations far away?

Or would you rather linger in the perfection of this day right here at home?

Whatever you imagine is possible because the flower itself holds no expectations from the viewer.

In fact, the viewer is the agenda.

YOU are the agenda.

What do you need?

Quiet?

Beauty?

Stories?

Prayers?

Hope?

They can all be called forth in its depths of perfection.

Let yourself be comforted by the simple beauty.

Know that it exists.

Release your troubling thoughts into its alluring invitation.

Cherish it.

Thank God for it.

Believe that good surrounds you.

It does.

We have to believe in it.

We have to find it.

We have to embrace it.



Mornings with Vivaldi

Sugar in my coffee

Vivaldi on Blue Lake Radio

Bacon and eggs

In the skillet;

A perfect morning



The Mother Road

Most people remember 1968 for the many tumultuous things that occurred that year: The assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy; the riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago against the VietNam War; the Tet Offensive, the bloodiest period of that war; student protests on college campuses across the country; the signing of the Civil Rights Act; Apollo 8; the first manned spacecraft to orbit the moon; and the election of Richard Nixon as President. I lived through all of those national events, but what I remember most from 1968 was a road trip to California.

I was living in Jackson, Michigan and had just completed my freshman year in college. Looking forward to the summer of '68, with no plans and little money, I was keen to have an adventure and to get out of Hicksville for once in my life. My friend Tommy Burns and I cooked up a plan to drive my 1962 Dodge Dart 3,000 miles to Los Angeles along Route 66, as depicted in the popular TV show of the early 60s by that name. Of course, I would be Tod Stiles, played by actor Martin Milner, because of my similar blonde hair and winning smile. Tommy was cast in the role of Buz Murdock, the ruggedly handsome, dark-haired sidekick played by George Maharis, who incidentally bore absolutely no resemblance to my friend Tommy. These two vagabonds and their 1961 Corvette had weekly adventures on Route 66 in that series which ran from 1960 to 1964. So we scraped together all the money we could, which was not nearly enough, of course, gassed up the Dodge, and headed to downtown Chicago, where the "Mother Road" begins at the Art Institute on Michigan Avenue. As the winding route stretched before us like a snake, my Dodge

became that Corvette, sleek and powerful, and we were off. Two 19-year-old knuckleheads with more guts than brains.

Our trip money was earmarked for food and gas, and not much else. We certainly weren't going to waste our precious dollars on motel rooms, so we camped along the route. We bedded down in our sleeping bags in corn fields in Missouri, in parks and campgrounds in Oklahoma and the Texas panhandle, and often in the car if the weather was bad. My Dodge Dart was performing flawlessly as we cruised through New Mexico and Arizona like a couple of escaped prisoners: prisoners of adolescence. Finally arriving in Los Angeles, excited and wonderstruck, we took stock. We had budgeted very poorly for this spontaneous trek and after settling in and taking inventory of our dwindling cash it became painfully clear that we needed to get jobs to earn enough money to get back home. We'd become quite fond of eating. So I quickly got a job at the local McDonald's and started working in earnest on my first paycheck.

On my first day I reported for duty wearing my newly-issued uniform which consisted of a short-sleeved white shirt with the Golden Arches emblem stitched on the shoulder, a black bow tie, and a paper hat shaped like a boat that covered my entire head. I looked like Halloween had come early. After being introduced to my equally young California coworkers, I happily explained to them that I was from Michigan and held up my left hand, palm out, as a mitten depicting the topography of my home state and pointing with my right index finger to the location on this map where my hometown was located. What a rube! This

silly demonstration was met with smirks, as these guys cast conspiratorial glances at each other and the plan was hatched. This interchange lasted only a few minutes before the Assistant Manager bounded into the room and shouted, "Let's get to work. If you've got time to lean, you've got time to clean."

In those days McDonald's french fries were made from scratch, on the spot. The potatoes were put into an electric peeling machine. This was a cylinder-shaped device with razor sharp blades that spun clockwise inside of a metal casing like the blades of a garbage disposal, only bigger. After being peeled, they were cut into long strips with a hand press that forced the individual spuds vertically down through a web of sharp, crisscrossing blades with a hard downward thrust on the long handle. One by one these naked white potatoes became french fries as they dropped into a waiting metal basket under the slicer. This was a three-person procedure. One kid to operate the peeler, one to cut them into long strips, and a third to rinse them thoroughly to remove the starch. Peel, slice, rinse. The final step was to submerge the taters into the scalding deep-fryer cooking oil that smelled like WD-40 but produced that golden brown, crunchy potato delicacy: the french fry.

Being the new employee who knew no one and appearing somewhat confused and gullible, it was now time for my initiation. Being careful not to screw up on my first day, I was working hard and fast doing exactly what I was told. At one point in this frantic kitchen chaos, one of the older boys yelled to me, "O'Connor, call down to the basement to get more potatoes." "How do I do that?" I pleaded. "Grab the microphone on the counter there, press down on the handle

and speak directly into the mic, holding it close to your face so the boys in the basement can hear you good," the boy directed. A stainless steel sink counter ran the length of one wall and at the very end was a shiny rounded device sticking up from a hole in the counter where it was mounted on a handle with a spring-loaded lever on the side. I had never seen anything like this before but assumed it must be a California thing. As I approached the "microphone" the other boys stopped what they were doing and circled around me to see what was going to happen, not saying a word.

"Hurry up O'Connor, we're almost out of potatoes," he bellowed. I lunged at the shiny thing, grabbed the handle firmly, yanked it from its perch, and positioned it squarely in front of my kisser. Squeezing the handle, I opened my mouth to speak but before I could yell down to the basement for more potatoes the strong spray of hot water hit me directly in the face like a firehose. The uproar of laughter from my cretin coworkers went on for several minutes. Standing there drenched and mortified in my new soggy uniform and saturated paper hat, I must have looked like a drowned rat. It would be some time before I learned that there are no basements in McDonald's restaurants

I worked there for a while to make enough money to get home, which we did, taking Highway 80 out of San Francisco on a beeline to Chicago like we were shot out of a gun, forty-eight hours straight, arriving in Michigan just as our last dollar went into the gas tank. I'll never forget my short employment at McDonald's or my introduction to California microphones.



My Pilgrimage to Hell and Back

The Trek of a Lifetime

In mid-December 1997 I was a little over 3 months into my backpack trip around the world. I had only made it through three plus countries on a list of forty or more. To date, everything had gone splendidly and according to plan. Well, what little plan I had. Except for the timing. My laissez faire itinerary was about to catch up with me.

Two weeks earlier, in Chengdu, PRC, when I booked my flight to Lhasa, Tibet, I attempted to book the next flight from Lhasa to Kathmandu, Nepal. The airline rep politely chuckled, then informed me flights cease over the Himalayas from December through March. They assured me I could travel overland in a private car or by public bus. I reserved a car to depart Lhasa on December 10th to arrive at the Nepalese border on December 13th.

After breakfast on the 9th, I found the hired car driver at my hotel. He informed me the other passengers needed to leave today—and soon. Within the hour, I was squashed into a Toyota 4WD Land Cruiser with four rather large eastern Tibetan men—one of them in saffron robes. The trip started smoothly enough, and despite the language barrier, we were able to communicate much through kindness, hand gestures, and laughter.

On day one, we encountered a flat tire, which speaks much to the road conditions in Tibet. The scenery wasn't much at first; it was stark, arid, and devoid of life. The majority of our route traversed elevated plateaus, ranging between 12,000 to 15,000 feet above sea level. Our route would take us from Lhasa to Zhagmu, via Gyantse and Shigatse, and over the La

Lunghi pass; the highest pass at over 17,000 feet where trees ceased to exist.

On day two, due to an early snowfall farther along the route, we were forced to stop in a town called Tingri. Multiple other vehicles, including lorries and a public bus, also stopped there. Considering we were in the middle of nowhere, my accommodation was better than expected. My room, in a concrete block building, had a dirt floor, no electricity, no heat, and no running water. The bathroom was across the parking lot in an open-air building. Twice daily, communal meals were in the 'lobby' and consisted of potatoes, noodles, or rice. The staff told me to help myself to the drying yak carcass hanging from the ceiling. My pocket knife came in handy when I needed a protein jerky snack.

On day six of the journey, we continued in a caravan toward the border. Things went quickly from bad to worse, or so I thought. The little snow in Tingri became piles along our drive. The desolate landscape was now a blinding white canvas. Vehicles frequently got stuck in the snow. We would all get out, shovel the tires out with our hands, push the vehicles clear, reload, and repeat what seemed like every twenty to thirty minutes. This went on for about six hours before we stopped at nightfall in a small, nameless village.

The villagers' expressions indicated their lack of enthusiasm at the arrival of around a hundred people. Unfortunately, it appeared we would need to spend multiple nights, straining the few resources the villagers had. As the only Western woman in the caravan of

interlopers, I was housed in a storage shed for the next three nights. Good news, bad news; the shed was used to store yak dung. Since we were above the tree line, yak dung was the fuel source for cooking and heating. While it wasn't pleasant to bunk with, I had access to fuel, even though it was a mother to light. The entire time I had been stranded, I didn't remove a stitch of clothing. I wore five layers on top, three on the bottom, two pairs of socks, two pairs of gloves, and one warm, animal skin hat, yet I had never been so cold. Food was rationed to a single serving of boiled potatoes a day. Unfortunately, my copy of War and Peace had been reduced to THE toilet paper. It was difficult to stay ahead of my reading due to the overwhelming need of the ever-growing group of stranded passengers.

I spent my days reading in the sunshine and wondering how I got in this situation. I usually phoned a family member when I got to a new country to let them know I was safe. I was now four days overdue and counting. Luckily, several Chinese businessmen had joined our group and appeared to be influential with the locals. They were able to access a CB radio to contact authorities in the next town of Nyalam. The highlight of each day was the call to check if the roads were clear. After three days, we were given the green light, but the vehicle drivers informed us they would take us to Nyalam and then we were on our own.

The ride was grueling and felt far longer than the six hours it was. I don't think I ever thanked my driver, but he possessed nerves of steel. The bulldozers created a path barely wide enough for the vehicles. We slammed into and bounced off towering piles of snow at every turn. At one point, we found ourselves driving through a tunnel hollowed out of the snow! My monk companions chanted and prayed throughout the ride. I couldn't help but

wonder if they knew something I didn't and thought it wise to follow suit.

When our caravan finally dragged into Nyalam, we gathered to discuss our next steps. The drivers were adamant—they could go no farther. Our options were to wait out the weather or finish the 40 kilometer journey on foot in small groups. Our group, which included a young Tibetan man who had studied in the West and spoke fluent English, decided to leave before dawn to avoid the sun's warmth, which could trigger the deadly risk of avalanches. My new friend informed me the road we would be taking was known by the locals as 'Horse Neck' or more ominously as 'Hell's Road.' The first name puzzled me. The second struck terror in me. I was cold, hungry, and exhausted. I cried myself to sleep that night.

As we set out in the predawn darkness I had found a strange calmness. Despite the terror of my dreams, I reminded myself I had run several marathons, which convinced me I could do this. What I had not done previously was encounter such unforgiving conditions and terrain. As I started out walking with my Tibetan companions, other groups lashed themselves together with rope to avoid losing one another. Every step was calculated and one wrong move could send you sliding down a mountainside. My eyes darted between the awe-inspiring Himalayas stretched above me and the rugged, gnarly terrain beneath me.

For twelve long hours, my gaze was fixated on the ground. Now I understood the terror behind the names of this road. It demanded unwavering focus. The physical and mental battle of every single step was grueling. The unrelenting cold and hunger were a constant distraction. We had started our trek without a meal, and I had only a package of eight cookies and a chocolate bar to sustain me through the two days of walking. Somehow, I needed to make it across Hell's Road.

By mid-afternoon, I had to leave my Tibetan monks behind. The older one's pace had greatly slowed, and he kept needing to rest. Every time we stopped, I felt the cold reach deeper and deeper into my bones. I knew if I stopped I might not find the strength to get back up. They decided to rest for the night at an abandoned and shuttered motel. With a heavy heart, I handed my contact information to the young monk and asked him to send word—any word—that they finished their journey as I had made the difficult decision to press forward with my English-speaking friend.

Each step was more difficult than the last. We came to a place where an avalanche had taken out the landscape leaving rocks and snow strewn about. The destruction looked small, perhaps only thirty or forty feet long, but the steep, icy crossing looked like a death sentence to me. I froze up—I couldn't do it. Fear and exhaustion paralyzed me. I honestly didn't think I was going to make it. I half considered throwing myself off the side. Better to make my own mortal decision than to let the mountain do it for me. For more than thirty minutes, I pushed myself to keep going, sometimes on all fours. Every cell in my body was telling me to survive.

After twelve hours, we staggered up to what appeared to be a small farm on the outskirts of a village. It was dusk and I was drained and needed to rest. My friend seemed to be arguing with the owner. Their words seemed harsh and their faces cold. They didn't want me there. *I wasn't one of them.* Something inside me finally snapped. I couldn't hold it in. I lost it and started to yell and scream. "Tell them," I said to my friend, "if they slit my wrists, I

will bleed, just like them. If they leave me outside, I will freeze to death, just like them." At that moment, I felt like the ugly American, but I hadn't come this far not to survive.

They hesitated, but finally relented. I was shown a barn filled with animals where I could sleep. At this point, it didn't matter. In the morning, they generously shared soup with us and informed us it was only ten to fifteen more kilometers to the border.

As I made my way along the road through sometimes waist deep snow, I followed the faint path of the groups ahead. The blinding, white terrain seemed to stretch endlessly all around me. When I caught up with other survivors, they grimly recounted stories of others who lost their footing and were swallowed up by the mountain. One of the Chinese businessmen had frozen to death in the night. Whether from exhaustion or sleep, no one knew. Yet, despite these horrors, I made it to the border.

Like a surreal dream, there were cabs, ordinary, beat-up cabs, waiting to take me on the five-hour drive to Kathmandu. Like a chariot of salvation, I climbed in, slumped back onto the seat, and let myself be delivered from my nightmare.

As we drove, the snow began to recede, giving way to lush green valleys, warmth, and sunshine. The promised land was within reach. But my body was battered. My fingernails were gone from gripping snow and ice. My stomach ached from hunger and my face was dirty with yak soot. And yet, deep in my bones, I knew I was lucky. Lucky to be alive. Lucky to have survived. Lucky to have this tale to tell.



Names, Forgotten

Images etched on a timeline
Faces, conversations, encounters
Logged in memory's vast file.

Memory's fragments, hurts pushed aside
With grief's grip, imprinted on new experiences
Making them no longer new
Repeated over and over and over.

Colleagues, classmates, friends, neighbors
Their names lost in a jumble of memories
Sometimes repeated in dreams.

What is your name? The alphabet helps
A name that starts with B, Bob, "No" Bill
Revelations,
Sometimes in the middle of the night.

"What's in a name?"
A label given each of us
Comprised of relationships, experiences, emotions.
Only God knows all the names, even mine.



Nurtured in the Children's Garden

I'm four fingers old as I enter the long room to the right of the playground door. The lady standing before the door introduces herself as Mrs. Adams, my teacher. The big event? My first day of kindergarten, translated from the German, the Children's Garden, where seeds are planted for the Garden of Life. Despite some crying children, I am excited with anticipation. What is about to happen next? I love Sunday School with its stories and songs and coloring. Will kindergarten days be a similar experience? I am assigned to attend school in the mornings, assuming as a younger student, I will still be needing occasional afternoon naps.

The nine months of morning school experiences now begin. The corner room in our school is rectangular, lined by windows along the north and east sides to brighten the classroom. Straight back from the entry door is a smaller windowed room to maintain teacher supplies and craft materials, and to the left a door that opens to a child-sized toilet.

We sit on the floor in front of the little room for stories, singing and frequent group activities. I love singing songs around the piano such as "We sit in a circle and sing together, that's what I like about school," Another "I know my name and address and telephone number too" and perhaps most important, the song about safety. "Let the ball roll, let the ball roll, no matter where it will go. Let the ball roll, let the ball roll, it has to stop sometime you know." Forgetting its lesson meant slamming brakes as I tried to retrieve my new ball from disaster. Despite the fright

experienced by the poor man braking and my mother screaming, the ball and I are safe.

Here also our class enjoys following directions such as "Pretend you are an elephant with a long swaying trunk, hop like a bunny, or crawl like an alligator. I especially enjoy the circle activity "Here We Go Looby Loo", cleverly used as a teaching activity for learning body parts, balancing, and lively movements. "I put my right foot in, I put my right foot out, I give my right foot a shake, shake, shake and turn myself about.

Our group gathers to hear a special visitor to the room within the first weeks of school. The older man who brings with him a man's white hanky uniquely tied to look like a mouse was, unknown to us little folks, the speech therapist. The talking mouse asks each of us our names, and questions to answer. We are very excited to share our lively thoughts with the talking hanky. As a result, a few of us are assigned to speech classes for the rest of the year. I apparently need help with pronouncing "th", "wh", "f" and "s" among others, as I make such amusing sentences as "Da sire tuck goes so sast." I also struggle with multisyllable words such as "dabinadort" (for davenport) and that awful mispronounced word with too many syllables known to me today as "aluminum." How happy I was when I discovered I could just say "sofa" in place of davenport.

To the west of the gathering space for floor sitting stories and activities are long

tables and kindergarten-sized chairs for art projects and recess snack time. It is here starting the second semester that we are introduced to reading and arithmetic by Dick and Jane and Sally, and their dog Spot in our readiness workbooks, our literary friends for several years. Report cards come out at the end of the year to announce I successfully completed my kindergarten year and will now advance to first grade.

I am in sixth grade when I again have a chance to be in the same kindergarten room, where Mrs. Adams is still the teacher. For three successive weeks she has to leave an hour early for dental appointments. By someone, somewhere, it is requested that I come to the room to read to the children for the last hour so she can leave safely. I sit in front of the class thoroughly enjoying reading to the children, the door left open so the

principal in her office way down the hall can hear if there is any problem. All goes well with the children all three times, but several sixth-grade girls complain that they, too, should have a turn to do the same.

A decade later as a senior high school student, I sign up to help distribute donated clothes to the summer migrant families picking pickles or blueberries. Volunteers from the area meet at a local downtown church to ride together to the project. A woman approaches me, asking if I recognize her. I answer "No, but your voice sounds so familiar." She answers, "That's not surprising." There she is, my kindergarten teacher, now with a new married name, who planted the beginning seeds for five-year-old me in the garden of life.



"Out beyond ideas"

*"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing,
There is a field. I'll meet you there"*

Rumi

I claim no tribe,
no dogma, no firm certainty
but I am American
raised on democracy.

We once loved independence,
but now it is deplored.
trapped between true believers
mutually abhorred.

One tribe with few credentials
feels patronized and wary
of being condescended to
by their "betters" who are very

appalled by their resentments
and antiquated creeds
so susceptible to conmen's
manipulative screed.

Goaded by the demagogues
who feed on their frustration
and manage to collect their
votes
to the peril of our nation.

The other tribe
may know the score,
at least they're sure they do.
That they know more

Is obvious, they're with
Science and Education.
Deciding who should qualify
for help and approbation.

Aggrieved by the ignorance
of those they disdain.
Only those who've been
identified
are entitled to have pain.

This recipe is working out
about as you'd expect.
Each side reviles the other
doing nothing but reject.

What happened to the common sense that leads to common ground?
Please, let's meet out in the field and turn this thing around.



Poetry - Haiku

Cotton candy clouds
Spun over the far skyline
Melt into purple

A half-moon rises
Spilling sequins on the lake
A sparkling pathway

The arms of the pine
Try to hold up the snow puffs
For us to admire



The Portal

At the very heart of life, I think
There is a door,
And it is closed, or nearly so.
Beyond it is the dwelling place of God.

Many paths approach this interface.
Some are wide, well-lit, with signs along the way,
Others, merely solitary tracks,
But all end here,
In stillness, timeless mystery, common place.

The door, itself, substantial,
Firmly fits
Into the framework of eternity.

Scholars seeking answers come
To sound its depth,
Reporting on such insights as are found.
Ardent pilgrims, also venture here
To trace with reverent touch its weathered grain,
To breach its bounds in prayer.

And notice this.
The stone worn down,
The wood worn smooth and polished with fresh tears.
Suffering souls have come here, seeking grace,
Disappointed lives played out and deeply frayed.
The thoughtful
And the heedless,
All have come.

And all will come. There is no otherwise.
So how are we to ponder this?
It is as far as human thought can go.
Adventuring, we cross into unknowns,
Where things of earth must surely lose their shine,
Where elemental things of God prevail.



Quietus

Gloria woke to find the morning light sliding beneath the shade in her bedroom. She had plans for the day, she thought, several in fact. Gloria mentally wrote her to-do list, then decided to knock off a few items. She was tired this morning, her sleep had been restless, and lately it seemed she had so little energy. She whittled her plans down to one or two items. Yes, she could handle that.

Then, the Monster appeared at the door to her bedroom.

The Monster smiled at Gloria in a way she supposed was meant to be comforting, but it wasn't, not at all. In fact, it was terribly irritating. He hadn't even knocked, the idiot, but then, what would she have done if he had? Tell him to go away? She'd tried that before. How many times can you repeat a thing like that?

Gloria had expected to be more afraid of him - it had been many years since he appeared to her, and she was terrified then - but today she found herself much more angry than frightened.

The Monster lumbered over to Gloria and sat down on the edge of her bed. He was much larger than she remembered and the old bedsprings howled in protest. He smelled a bit, too.

"Get off!" She said to him. Age has its prerogatives, she thought, and not hiding your feelings is one of them.

"Aren't we grumpy this morning," he said, and waddled over to sit on the old rocking

chair, where Gloria once soothed her children into sleep or out of a nightmare.

Gloria scowled. "Go away, you're too early."

"I think that's for me to decide." The Monster's voice was deep, the pounding of a wave against rocks. He looked different than she remembered, though. Different, in fact, than Gloria knew most people thought of this particular Monster, for he was not hers alone. He resembled an enormous fuzzy balloon, covered in thick, black fur. Skeletal arms and legs. Only his eyes were as she remembered; cavernous, so large a wind could howl through them. But then, Gloria thought, it would be wrong for Death to be cuddly.

"Where's your black cape?" She asked, still cross, "And I thought you always carried a scythe."

Death shrugged. "Different strokes for different folks."

"But I told you, you're too early!"

Death hummed tunelessly to himself for a moment, then asked, "Just how old are you, Gloria?"

"98, and you know that as well as I do. My mother lived past 100, you know!"

"Yes, I remember."

To her surprise, Gloria's eyes filled with tears. "I still miss her, you know. Think of her everyday."

Death's cavernous eyes softened a bit, "Yes, I know."

"She's been gone for decades, but I still reach for the phone sometimes, thinking I'll call her."

"Wouldn't it be nice to hear her voice again?"

No! Gloria said in fierce silence, *I want to hug her. Breathe in her familiar scent of Emeraude perfume.*

Death sighed, a sound of bone-dry leaves. "Her last years weren't good, were they?" *Struggling to breathe, so weak she couldn't cross a room without stopping to rest.*

Tears headed down next to Gloria's ears. "No."

"And your father? Don't you want to be with him?"

Gloria shrugged, "Not especially." Their relationship had been a tumultuous one.

Death said with the air of someone bringing home a point, "What about John? What if you could be with your husband again?"

Suddenly, Gloria could see him! Clear as day. Clear as if he stood across the room. She thought for a moment there was someone standing just behind him, but a pierce of light obscured whoever it was. And then Gloria felt as if a freight train rumbled across her chest. The pressure was so intense, she couldn't breathe.

Death whispered, "This is the best I can do, Gloria, this is as easy as it gets."

"I know...I know that now."

It was if she were reaching deep inside herself, her hand pushing through the layers of her life... looking...finding. A different voice whispered, "Only take what glows, Gloria."

"Yes." *I have it all, she thought, I have all of **them**.*

"Ready now?" Asked the Monster.

"Yes," she whispered with something close to joy, "Oh yes, please!"



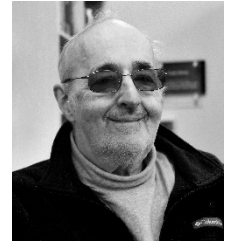
Recipes

I admit it—I LOVE recipes! I can't help myself and I must confess that I do question the extent of my passion. I mean: "How many recipes can one person have before being deemed to have an obsessive disorder? How many cookbooks?" I ponder what motivates me to tear out pages from magazines of potential dishes to make; not just perusing cookbooks, but after having done so, feeling the need to buy them. I know with absolute certainty I will NEVER be able to try all those recipes in my lifetime. But (of course there is a "but") I never know when an occasion might present itself for which THAT recipe is the perfect one; what if I had thrown it away? Perish the thought!

I have spent many yesterdays and more of tomorrows organizing the loose, torn out magazine recipes into my files and making an inventory of each files' content. I am telling you truly, I must do that! If I were to just put them into files without writing down what is within, I would spend hours trying to find a recipe I think I might have saved. I have also spent even more hours adding to my own "Tried and True" bound recipe notebooks of which I now have three 2" binders! You see from these examples that I am smart enough to know that organization is key. I am so proud of myself! I mean think of the alternative; it would be craziness, chaos!

Okay, here I go again, the same question again...Are these behaviors indicative of a compulsion? I don't think so. Here is my

simple, four-point explanation for what I consider to be my sane behavior. First of all, I love to cook. As I read a recipe, I can taste the goodness, the "yumminess" of it. I often envision the occasion and the people around the table enjoying the flavors. Secondly, by extension, I want to share with the author of the recipe the skill and technique of cooking the dish. By trying so many varied recipes my skills in the kitchen have grown. I have learned a great deal about ingredients and techniques. Thirdly, cookbooks take me to other places and sometimes other times – from church compilations of its members favorite recipes, to Italy, to a restaurant in California (French Laundry, TOAST), New Orleans (Delmonico's), Tyler Florence and Ina Garten in Paris. One of my fondest memories is when I met Tyler Florence in Mill Valley, California. He autographed his two new cookbooks (of which mine were the first two sold in the world, I might add!), put his arms around me and my husband, David, and THE picture was taken. Forget Sean Connery, Brad Pitt! A picture with my favorite chef is the best—a forever memory! Without fail, cookbooks refresh where I've been or where I might wish to be. Fourthly, why not? It's fun and I enjoy the entire process—reading the recipe, tasting it in my head, shopping for the ingredients, being in the kitchen, cooking, cooking, cooking, and at the table eating, eating, eating, and lastly cleaning up. I love it all! So, I have come to a conclusion my dear friends: I'm not compulsive, just happy!



Reflection on a Winter Storm

A winter storm carries a certain beauty—a quiet power that blankets the world in silence. As I stepped outside, I marveled at the transformed landscape. Trees bowed under the weight of freshly fallen snow, and the wind whistled through the stillness, wrapping the world in a hushed embrace. Despite the storm's severity, I felt drawn to the elements, eager to experience the moment firsthand.

Bundled against the cold, I had unplugged my heated gloves from the wall and slipped them on, grateful for the investment. The wind bit at my face as I trudged forward, my footsteps muffled by the thick snow. I couldn't help but smile, knowing my wife would have reminded me of the lunacy of my decision to go for a walk in such weather. But sometimes, the call of the outdoors is too strong to ignore.

The neighborhood was quiet, the usual sounds of life muted by the snowfall. A couple of neighbors were out shoveling driveways, nodding in acknowledgment as I passed. Their expressions ranged from bemused curiosity to mild concern as they watched me disappear down the snow-covered street.

As I entered the hiking trail behind the Catholic church, the storm embraced me fully. The evergreens stood as silent sentinels, their branches laden with snow. The world felt timeless, as if nature had pressed pause. I inhaled deeply, savoring the crisp scent of winter, the swirling flurries, the sheer vastness of it all.

There is something humbling about a storm. It reminds us of our smallness, of nature's unyielding power. Yet, within that vastness, there is also peace. The wind may howl, and the snow may fall relentlessly, but in that moment, surrounded by winter's embrace, I felt nothing but stillness.

My journey took me past familiar sights, now transformed by winter's touch. I imagined a squirrel high in its nest, chattering in amusement at my decision to trek through the storm. The untouched snow beneath my boots gave a sense of serenity and solitude. There, amidst the evergreens, I felt both awe and vulnerability. Nature had stripped away all distractions, leaving me with the stark beauty of the moment.

But I was not training for Mount Everest, nor did I have a Sherpa guide to lead me. After about an hour outside, I decided it was time to come to my senses and head back. It had been a scaled-down adventure, yet it left me feeling invigorated. This 75-year-old felt grounded, at peace, and comforted by the solitude. In the isolation, I sensed the presence of something greater than myself—an eternal guide whispering that it was time to go home.

The return journey was a battle against the wind, which seemed unwilling to let me go. Yet, even without a Sherpa, I made it back to my condo, warmed by the satisfaction of my adventure.

John Steinbeck once wrote, "*What good is the warmth of summer, without winter to give it its sweetness?*" Standing at my window, watching the world outside

draped in its pristine white stillness, I understood his words. Winter's storm had tested me, humbled me, and, in its quiet way, welcomed me into its majesty.



Regarding the Bible Book

"He's got the Bible Book, again!"

You must imagine this news being delivered in the excited voice of a three-year-old as I rush to inform our mother of this situation, for I know the Bible Book will surely suffer at the hands of my younger brother. I don't remember who fared worse in this incident; my brother for his transgression, or me, for my tattling. I do not think we were encouraged along either of those lines, but in later years, in my mother's humorous storytelling, we both came off as the children who tried her patience; witless, adorable beings that we were.

I begin with this story for it places the Bible Book somewhere at the center of our family life, where despite possible maltreatment from the youngest, it remained in plain view, on the coffee table in our living room. We were taught to honor it. We were read bedtime stories from its pages and we went to Sunday School to learn how to find such treasures as the Twenty-Third Psalm and John 3:16, and where, for our edification, the life drama of the man Jesus was enacted in living color in its yearly cycle.

What child could resist the stories of his birth, with its costumed characters, a star, a baby, angel messengers, and shepherds, not merely afraid but 'sore' afraid in the dark of night? It held our attention and fueled our imaginations, nearly as much as the shivery Easter mysteries of cross and tomb, abandoned grave clothes, and a lily scented resurrection morn. So vivid are the details

in this story, (a purse of money, a crown of thorns, a rooster crowing at daybreak) that a child simply can not turn away.

But for me, the story to top all stories was the first one, the one that took place there in the garden, where the man and woman in very casual dress meet up with the snake whose bold winking leads to such terrible disobedience that the Lord God, Himself has to step in and sort it out, installing a flaming sword to prevent a reoccurrence. Wow !!! We never get to the bottom of that story, nor should we. It will resonate within us as deep truth for the rest of our lives.

Then there are the numerous, slightly off-color stories, that have to be morally rescued. For who wants the children to see too clearly David, for example, the much beloved and greatest king of Israel in his blood chilling rampage of murder and adultery? Or Jacob, that old testament patriarchal hero, pulling a fast one on his father to gain the blessing, then double crossing his uncle to gain the wealth—character flaws that seem to be passed along to his sons, who are found in subsequent chapters jealously scheming the destruction of a brother?

And though good can be found to come of some of it, there are plenty of tales one hopes the children will not find until they have come to understand, somewhat, the potential darkness of the human heart. The Bible (though sometimes it does) does not always set a good moral example. What it does always do is point the reader

to the need of redemption, and the provision for it.

Beside the stories, which in their repetition become old friends, short statements of great practical wisdom also come to find their home in our hearts:

"Let he who is without sin, cast the first stone."

"Let the day's own troubles be sufficient for the day."

"Teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom."

"For everything there is a season."

"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

Which reminds me to make mention of the Bible's rich store of poetry. I do not underestimate a child's ability to be caught up in poetry, for I well remember my early enchantment with this verse from the book of Psalms which begins:

"If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea..."

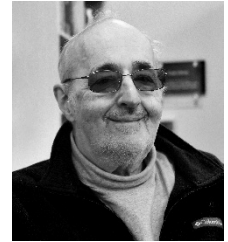
This was wondrous to me because, though I knew the meaning of each word, strung together like that, they became something gloriously more than the sum of the parts.

I love such word pictures as the salt of the earth, the Bread of Heaven, the pearl of great price, the little foxes that spoil the grapes, the lilies of the fields, (toiling not), the nations beating their swords into plowshares, the people walking in darkness who suddenly see a great light.

I love the Genesis description of the Lord God "walking in the garden in the cool of the day" and Isaiah's vision of the Lord "sitting upon His throne, high and lifted up, his train filling the temple." These are images I have tucked away for safekeeping.

The Bible is such a big book and we need never outgrow it. It is overarching in scope, contradictory in its detail, dense in its complexity, boring in its minutia, surprising in its humor, instructive in its teachings, and archaic in its language. Its study can last us a lifetime and I think we should be allowed to get our hands on it, early.

In it we can find inspiration for the living of all our days and, if we do become frequent readers, its better parts will lodge within us like favorite, old pieces of furniture and its poetry will roll easily from our lips even as we walk through that eventual valley of shadows that returns us to the source.



The Siren Call of the Lowly Hot Dog

Recently, I was watching a PBS show that follows two antique pickers as they travel the nation looking for great deals and interesting pieces. On a recent episode, as they drove through Southern Michigan on their way to meet an antique car collector, the host turned to his partner and said, "Hey, we're near Jackson, Michigan. We need to stop for one of their famous Coney Island hot dogs." Host number two quickly agreed: "Yes, we do. Let's turn the truck around and make a beeline for Jackson." Their destination? A little corner hot dog joint named the Jackson Coney Island.

Jackson, Michigan, has historically been known as a working-class, rough-around-the-edges factory town. Workers with tired eyes and calloused hands were a common sight. Besides the factories that continued to appear on the landscape in the early 1900s, the nearby sprawling railroad yard provided another major source of employment—gritty, labor-intensive work that paid a decent wage. Proud immigrants from all over Europe—Ireland, Greece, and beyond—poured into town in the early 20th century, ready to help build cars, process steel, load up railroad boxcars, and build better lives for their families.

Then there was the Macedonian family, the Todoroffs, who immigrated to the United States in 1910. Their goal: to move to Michigan by way of New York and start a restaurant. With them came a secret recipe, ready to share with the town's populace. They called it the "Jackson Coney Island" hot dog.

The hot dog was simple and humble—but all goodness. They dressed it with mustard, chopped onion, and their secret Coney sauce. That's it. No more was needed. The sauce, made from ground beef hearts and a carefully chosen mix of spices, had an almost mystical ability to make a person momentarily forget their life's purpose. At the moment of consumption, it was just you, the hot dog, and the universe.

The Todoroffs opened their first restaurant in 1910. That building still exists and still serves the original Coney Island hot dog. I speak the truth when I say that on warm days and summer nights, the line to order the now-famous sandwich stretches out the door and down the sidewalk. Frazzled waitresses barely keep up with the continuous ringing of the phone for takeout orders, but they do—with a smile. The short-order cooks steel themselves as they rush to complete the never-ending stream of orders. Despite the chaos, the atmosphere is surprisingly relaxed and friendly. Everyone is there for one reason—to order what Jackson simply calls "the Coney."

I have often speculated that there is some addictive, clandestine ingredient in the Coney sauce. There's no other way to explain the gravitational pull of that little hot dog shop on the corner.

As a child, Sunday nights were filled with anticipation as we waited for our father's announcement that we were going to have dinner at the Coney Island restaurant. We would pile into the family car, my

excitement barely contained. The restaurant, located in a sketchier part of town, attracted a variety of devoted fans. My father, a police officer, would spend time greeting people—fellow officers, business owners from downtown, and even criminals and drunks he had previously arrested. They would stand at our table and chat with us while waiting for their orders. As a young boy, I found it all very eclectic and exciting.

Today, the restaurant has not lost its ability to entice customers into its fold. It remains in the original building—old, cramped, noisy, and filled with all manner of people. It retains the look, the odor, and the vibe of its 130-year history.

The Jackson Coney Island has a sibling rivalry with similar hot dog joints in other Michigan cities. Detroit, Flint, and Kalamazoo all claim to have the tastiest and oldest Coney Island dog in Michigan. But they have no explanation for why the Jackson-based Coney Dog has won the annual statewide Coney Island contest multiple times.

I recall a night at the diabetes clinic where I was teaching a group of newly diagnosed patients about blood glucose management. Someone asked me, in all sincerity, if it would be “OK” to indulge in his favorite food occasionally. Of course, he was referring to the Coney Island hot dog. That question sparked a lively debate. Several others in the class suddenly had the same question on their minds. Sensing the growing restlessness, I broke down the nutritional components of a Coney Island hot dog. We discussed the carbohydrate, fat, and protein content, as well as the cholesterol implications. I assured them that the hot dog itself would have little impact on their blood sugar, but the bun needed to be accounted for in their daily carbohydrate

count. However, frequent indulgence could raise lipid and cholesterol levels, increasing the risk of heart disease. As the class ended, I noticed a few disappointed faces processing the mixed news.

After class, the very discussion of the Coney Island hot dog triggered my own craving. “Okay,” I told myself, “I can stop and have just one.” As I entered the busy little shop, I was amused to see three members of my diabetes class seated at a booth, enjoying their respective hot dogs. We exchanged knowing glances and shared a laugh. They jokingly blamed their presence at the restaurant on my class presentation.

As a side note, our team of dietitians at the clinic had no choice but to address the reality of Coney Island hot dog consumption in Jackson. The fact that the main ingredient of the sauce was ground beef heart sparked mixed feelings among our staff, as many of our clients asked for guidance on how to fit a “Coney” into their meal plans. One of our dietitians—a committed vegan—lovingly created an entire PowerPoint presentation on the Coney Island hot dog, including how to incorporate one into a diabetes-friendly diet.

These days, I indulge in a Jackson Coney Island hot dog only two or three times a year, when I return to town to visit friends. In my younger years, the universe rewarded me with ample opportunities for Coney Island dogs. But now, as time moves forward, I’ve come to accept that it’s simply time to step back.

I conclude with an unexpected quote from a favorite poet of mine, Maya Angelou. Even she seemed to have hot dogs on her mind at times. She once shared:

"At the end of the day, I love a Hebrew National hot dog with an ice-cold bottle of Corona beer. If the phone rings, I won't answer it until I'm done."

Somehow, I always knew that Ms. Angelou and I were connected on more levels than just poetry.



Snake Stories

I served as a Peace Corps volunteer from 1974-76. It was one of the greatest adventures of my life. It opened my eyes to a whole different world. These stories are in honor of the Year of the Snake.

Story 1

We had just entered the dry season in Kabala, Sierra Leone, in West Africa where I was stationed as a 20-year old Peace Corps volunteer and school was in full swing. My roommate, Kathy, and I had arrived home from teaching school feeling hot and dusty. Our habit was to take a bucket bath to freshen up. We did not have running water in our house. We just had a bathhouse out back with a latrine and bathing room and paid a student to collect buckets of water for us from the community tap everyday. The structure was mud brick with a corrugated metal roof and mud floor. Our yard was surrounded with a six-foot metal fence for privacy.

This particular day, I went first, stripping down and wrapping a towel around me. I quickly nipped out to the bathing room, grabbing a bucket of water to take with me. There is an art to taking a bucket bath. You wet yourself down, soap up, and then rinse off, being careful not to get soap in the bucket. Your hair is washed in the same way. One bucket of water had to go a long way.

After finishing, I headed back to my room wrapped in my towel and Kathy slipped out for her bucket bath.

As I was drying off, I suddenly heard men's voices yelling outside our fence. Then I heard them banging the fence with sticks. Neither Kathy nor I were in any fit state of dress to go out into the yard to see what was going on.

I quickly dried off and threw on a loose, African robe. Heading to the back door I heard someone break in our gate. By the time I reached the door, two men were beating the ground with sticks. "Wetin de apin?" ("What's going on?") I yelled in Krio. One of the men scooped up something off the ground—a Black-necked Spitting Cobra! "Tanki ya, Tanki ya!" Thank goodness for the care of our neighbors.

Story 2

Kabala was the largest town in our northern district of Sierra Leone. There were several volunteers from the United States (Peace Corps), England (VSO) and Canada (CVSO) in Kabala and the small surrounding villages working in education, agriculture, and health. On weekends, the house Kathy and I shared would become the gathering place and guest house for the volunteers in the area. I have fond memories of those weekend gatherings.

One such weekend, we were all sharing a meal, chatting, and solving the world's problems well into the night greased with a bit of palm wine. As people do, at some point in the evening, I headed out to the latrine. It was dark outside but I knew my way having done this many times. I headed

in and used the latrine. On my way back to the house, I passed Kathy, who was using her flashlight to make her way to the latrine.

I had just reached our back door to our house when she let out a terrible scream. I and a couple of others rushed to the

latrine. In the dim light of her flashlight we could see a snake curled around the toilet just below the seat. A shiver ran through my body as I realized that I had just used that toilet oblivious to the fact that a snake was curled around it. Needless to say, I never ventured to the latrine without a flashlight after that.



The Snake

It lies out there. I can see where it lives on my patio when I look out my windows. Sometimes it is coiled up and other times it is stretched, just lingering on the sidewalk after having done its job of sustaining my geraniums, petunias and snapdragons with lifesaving water. My garden hose annoys me to no end. It ambushes me and eats up time like a barking dog that needs a long walk.

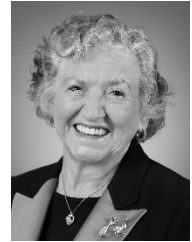
Spring was the time of the snake's rebirth from garage to outdoor faucet. My kind neighbor helped me turn on the water which had been silenced during the winter months. It was also the time I began to scour the garden shops for the summer beauty that would soon surround me after the cold Michigan weather. All went well for several weeks before hose doom struck. Since the hose's prime characteristic was that all water should be drained out after use and it would shrink down to a wrinkled handful of a manageable reptilian clone. Mr. hose didn't like it one bit when I neglected to turn the water off so its bloated body could drain.

Discovery of a biblical, full-blooded, flood on my patio produced by hose rebellion, set my mind to liquid control. After turning off the faucet, I got myself comfortable in a lawn chair with a roll of duct tape in order to repair the burst body of my trusty water delivery apparatus. I circled and circled the tape for at least an hour, while congratulating myself regarding my resourcefulness. When I turned on the water again, sprays, leaks and squirts pummeled me without mercy. All that effort was the lame work of an engineering novice.

It was time for serious hose shopping. First, Bill's Garden Shop: none there. Menards: no dice. Meijer: again nothing. Then I hit the jackpot at Lowe's. But, what did I know about footage? They carried 50 ft, 100 ft. and 150 ft. Middle of the road seemed safe to me. One hundred feet was the winning ticket. Turns out that much hose was as hard to handle as Princess Diana's wedding dress. My new (now unreturnable) hose could stretch to water four condos in my complex.

Okay, so how to store the new snake in a compact, tidy manner. I set out to find a large hose storage pot. The first one I bought was, unbelievably, way too big. Took it back. Went to all the same big box stores for a container. Found the perfect size, but was not able to use it because the mouth of the hose needed to be at the bottom of the pot to function. I cannot detach the hose from the faucet since it is on too tightly. And, oh did I mention that the hose is made of some kind of material that snags on concrete. It cannot be pulled like a smooth hose. It must be detached by hand from its concrete-trapped position.

I look out the window and see my nemesis waiting for me. It knows my little attempt at gardening cannot survive without making peace and accepting the rigors of yanking, winding, and storing. Being grateful for the options of showering, jet spray, flat stream, soaker, angle, and mist are a gift to my arsenal of needed garden equipment to grow the pretty geraniums, petunias, and snapdragons. Maybe next year I will look into succulents.



Solitude

Solitude:

Aloneness without clutter
Debris and distraction
Assessing the present
Reviewing the past.

Solitude:

Without the existence of time
Reflection with contentment
A time to be patient
No sense of urgency
No need to calm down
Too late to be scared.

Solitude:

Thinking words that need not be spoken
Only silence – the ultimate voice
Finding confidence in the unknowing
Contemplating the logic
Of the chaos of my life.

Solitude:

Continuing to live in my life space
Between here and much, much later
Astonished by the present moment
Comprehending the miracle of destiny.

'Tis the quiet solitude of prayer.



Summer Shuffling

A call to play was just what I needed. As my younger siblings played cowboys and Indians with their little plastic characters, I was glad to hear Jane calling loudly "Judy, Judy" over and over outside the front door. That was the only way my neighborhood friends and I were allowed to contact each other. Phoning or ringing doorbells were absolute no-nos.

As I let Jane in, the question of "what shall we do?" led us straight to the drawer containing the canasta cards, our favorite summer pastime that season. Although many of our friends and relatives, for religious reasons, were not allowed to play cards pictured with royalty, our families did not object. Jane and I played until one of us was declared the winner. Mom decided it was time for us to get some fresh air and exercise and sent us outdoors to play. It was hot outdoors, so we went to Jane's house. Assuming we had already had our outdoor play, we were allowed to play with her canasta cards on their enclosed porch overlooking the funeral home, as long as no services were being held.

When the game was done it was back to my home, where we were allowed inside to enjoy another exciting hand of cards, assuming that we had enjoyed a reasonable time outdoors during the stifling afternoon.

This was working so well we added a couple more neighboring girls to our card games. We were now standing outside two other homes loudly calling "Beverly, Beverly" and "Lois, Lois". This gave us two more homes to hide inside for our lively games. When Beverly's mother decided we had been inside long enough, out we went. This time to Lois' house to continue our competition. Once the suppers the mothers were preparing were ready to be eaten and the fathers came home after a long day's work, we finally went to our own homes for the evening.

The summer days continued to be exceptionally successful for us, following the same routine, indoor canasta to avoid the outdoors. Until the day the mothers compared notes and caught on to our deceptions. Is that why we found ourselves in the blueberry patches for the rest of the summer?



Sunday Dinner in the Bronx

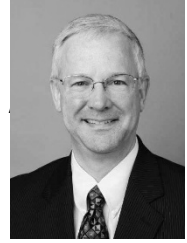
One of my fondest memories of family is connected with food. My maternal grandparents were Italian, and immigrated to the U.S. around 1920 from the south of Rome, Italy. They settled in New York City, in the Bronx. They lived in a 3rd floor flat that had 3 bedrooms, a front parlor, bath, kitchen, and dining room. The kitchen had an ice box for which an ice man delivered blocks of ice for refrigeration. There was a gas stove that was used most often for storage because my grandmother did not trust the new stove. A wood burning stove was used to cook incredible food. And on Sundays that went on all day long.

Let me tell you what happened on Sundays. The family gathered around a huge, round dining room table for meals. And there was a flow of people. It was not static. As your time and life permitted you came to the table, talked, laughed, ate or drank, and left. Extended family came, neighbors, whomever.

The food was incredible; delicious, hot, plentiful, and all from the wood burning

stove. She cooked all day and presented us with platters of delicious chicken, pasta, bread, vegetables, and salad. All the while, the folks around the table were talking, telling stories, laughing, joking and having intense debates, some in Italian and others in English. And always the encouraging words, “manga” meaning eat. Of course, wine was served, even to us children; good for our blood. My grandfather made the red wine in the basement. And a jug of it would be by his chair at meal time and passed as needed around the table. I felt the warmth and affection of this community and just was entranced as I ate.

The culmination of the beautiful experience was of my grandfather singing his own prayer of grace at the end of the meal that will remain with me forever. When enough wine, food, and stories had been enjoyed, everyone pushed back and relaxed in their chairs. Grandpa would begin singing, while raising his glass of wine, “God Bless America” with tears rolling down his cheeks.



Two Poems

Staring into the Ethos

The big water
Michigan
The
Lake
The Place
Where my heart
Returns
For peace
Home
Where I
Find
Myself
Where
I love myself
Where
I am
Myself
And
When I'm away
I find myself
Wanting to return
To go there
Climb a dune
And sit amongst
The grasses
Looking out
At the
Great
Lake
And staring
Into
The ethos forever
Moved by its
Mythic force

Thrilled by
Its massive movements
Buoyed by its
Rhythms
Blanketed in soft waves
Of resound
I stare
And feel
The powerful ethos
Of its past
And the hopeful
Future it
Will bring
By its steadfast
Journey across
The landscape
Of our lives
It ever
Advances
Recedes
And
Advances
Again
As we all do
In the ethos
Of our own lives
And staring out
I become a part
Of it
And it of me
And
We are one

Poems No More

You told me
Today
That I don't write
You
Poems
Anymore
Sorry darling
But that is
Not true
I write you poems
Every day
In every way
I can envision
I write them
I recite them
I conjure them
In my mind
And you can hear them
If you only look
And see
How I look at you
How I smile at what you say
How I touch you
As I walk by
How I kiss you
And linger
In your embrace
My poems are there
They are there
In our daily nothings
In the routines
Of our lives
They are there
In our meals
In our cleaning
And our washing
Our laughter
And our tears

They are there
And I dare say
That the only day
My poems
Will be no more
Is the day after
I am no more
For as long as
I have breath
My lips will utter poems
For you
For who we were
And are
And will someday be
And those poems
Are ours
Are we
For evermore!



Two Poets as Lovers

"Do we have one more pork chop?"

*"Tuesday I ate it. Way spicy, son chef
and the part of the pig that you roasted was dryer than chalk"*

He corrected her "son" after finding an in.

"Do we live in a love nest, Wordsworthian Bonnie?"

"Burns it was wrote about Bonnie Doon, Mister Mistaken."

"Did you hear, flow'ring thorn, what I asked, what I dared?"

*Thrusting a parry, she went for soft tissue:
"Please don't distract, clove' hoof, when I'm redactyling."*

(and a pest she was, 'sorbed in her laureate dreams.)

"I am to thee so sick a rose?"

"You are Just an autre Okie! One whose poised Epics rot before ink dries!"

"Montana artsy cowgirl fartsy!"

*"Journals knocking at YOUR lyric Wasteland portal, Prince Obscuro?
When we leave this earthy sty, all syllabi will ode á MOI!"*

"My nightmare features drivél-ridden verse: the words (your best);

"The Sapient adverse to what you drool; My Craft the ever-worshipped sort."

*Gnashed she then: "pray get the classed,
Garde you en with tone, your diction, rhyme!"*

(He is cursing the day that bore said "You should meet her.")

Then asked Dieu for some guts, and cried tortured respondee

"Doomed Love, Up Thine!"

After a bask, well-admiring their craft, she toned:

"I love your artful retorts, Ross, especially 'tortured respondee' "

"My dear Kate, you've won Big with 'when I am redactyling' "

"Next a light lunch, then we'll sharpen our tusks for round two."

"We'll trade sides."

"We have French toast and bacon, dear."

[The names of the poetic meters are buried in the appropriate lines. L.C.]



Weeds Among the Stones - Part I

The weeds poked through the soil in early spring,
A bleak forecast they bring,
More work to keep the garden clean.

Seeking light, they wound their way,
Searching for life, picking their path,
Winding thin, strong roots around the stones,
Placed to blunt their advance,
Giving them little chance?

Wreaking havoc on our ordered landscape,
Thriving amid awesome odds,
Flaunting the "Gifts of the Spirit" with
Endless patience, persistence and perseverance.

Despite their bother, I admire their valor,
Growing in sidewalk cracks, sprouting from
Concrete walls and stone fences, saying,
"See! I'm here, conquering your edicts,
laws, condo rules, and borders!
Why? "Because I want to live too!"



Weeds Among the Stones - Part II

Barbed wire, fences, walls, forging the Rio Grande,
Avoiding the "Gulf of America,"
Striving for the "promised Land".
Called by God to seek a better life,
For self and offspring, they come,
Like the weeds among the stones.

Traveling miles through mountains, jungles, forests,
Foraging for food and water remembering Isaiah's
Promises from God,
"When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
And when you pass through the rivers,
They will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
You will not be burned;
The flames will not set you ablaze.
For I am the Lord your God,
Your Savior."

Reaching the Border, slipping through cracks,
Seeking a life, condemned for being.
Hounded and hunted
Hiding in the last churches where
God still exists and Christ is still Lord.
Like weeds among the stones,
Why? "Because we want to live too!"



weeping alone

she came for afternoon tea
holding her doll in her arms
as if it's a cherished possession -
astonishingly beautifully moving -
but she has seen decades of birthdays
now her memory holds only the long ago
as if the wind robbed her reality
leaving her with broken harmony.

is the new-born baby doll
the child of years gone by -
the baby who died at birth -
never cradled in her arms
the stolen opportunity to love
the lamented story rarely repeated
but so long held in her heart.

and i
with abiding ignorance
of her present reality
restlessness of her weary soul
the loss she could barely bear
like wildflowers flaunting
impossible fragrances
with no one to inhale the scent

and i
how often have I squandered friendship,
discussed frivolous somber reality,
flaunting improbable expectations,
subduing beauty of the present moment,
rather than share opulent grace pouring out
remained silent about things that move us
not sharing life's astonishing despair,
nor recognizing the face of blessings.
Now our lifelong friendship evaporates,
there're not enough tears to fill the still void.
there's no one to share sadness
i weep alone.



Windows of Humanity

I have a confession to make. I am a window peeper. Not an up-to-the-actual-window kind of peeper, but a peeper from the passenger-side-of-the-car kind. As a passenger traveling through Hudsonville, Jenison, Grand Rapids or to and from my home to a condo in Florida, or on a tour bus in a foreign land, I find myself gazing at yards, cars, and houses as I pass. I speculate about who might live there and what their life might be like. Why they might have chosen to live there or even if they had a choice. I project myself into what I see.

My gazes are not based on locality or type of property. I am equally fascinated by: the trailers in poor condition in the hollows of West Virginia with yards littered with trash and old machinery and abandoned cars; the beautiful homes along the Kanawha River after going over the bridge in Charleston, West Virginia; the horse farms in Kentucky; the Amish farms in Indiana; the thatched roof homes in Wales; the small and large old homes anywhere and everywhere; the dilapidated and the new. In the early morning hours, I delight seeing the twinkle of lights from within as I picture people preparing for work and children for school. In the evening, I wonder about the lighted rooms and imagine children playing, doing homework, or who might be watching the TV screen I can glimpse as we ride by. Who are these people? What are their joys, sorrows, or problems? What are their stories? I do know that over all the miles I have traveled here and abroad, I feel connected to the lights in the windows and to all those people I cannot see. I am

drawn into the "oneness" of our shared humanity.

Our humanity knows no politics, no economic or racial separation. As my mom used to say: "We all put our pants on one leg at a time." So true. I know all the people I see in my imagination within those varied homes are all in need of shelter, food, safety, and a sense of belonging. Just as I am. At least that's what I learned from Maslow in Psychology 101. Maslow's fifth need, defined as our human need for self-actualization, is more difficult to imagine for others. But those first four are absolute needs for each of us. There is no disagreement (at least I hope not!) that whether you live in poor or wealthy conditions, people should feel assured there is shelter over their heads, food in their stomachs, they are safe from harm, and they know that others care about them.

Tomorrow morning or this evening, if you can, gaze into the windows of those homes you pass. Within, there are people just like yourself, just like me. My hope is that you, too, will feel a connectedness to them, a connectedness to our shared human condition. In this time of societal fragmentation and "otherness," perhaps we need to look more closely, maybe seek to understand those existing in the light of the windows we pass. Perhaps we do, indeed, need to breathe deeply, smile and know that "yes, we all do put on our pants one leg at a time."



Winter Fun

I look out the window now. The snow is falling. The world is white. Everything seems peaceful and quiet. The snow brings me wonderful memories of my childhood.

My two sisters and I grew up on a fruit farm in rural Michigan. Because we were on a farm, we had lots of good outdoor places to play. We played outdoors all year round and having snow in wintertime was especially wonderful.

One of the things we loved best was sledding. There was a small hill behind our barn that was perfect for sledding. We each had our own sled with steel runners and special steering handles. We could steer the sleds simply by moving our hands. A pull with our right hand meant that the sled would go right. A pull with the left hand meant that our sled would go left. Sometimes we would ride lying down on the sleds and at other times we would sit up. And sometimes we would ride together on the sleds. I could lie on my sled grasping the steering handles and my younger sister, Sue, would climb on top of me. Then she would hang on tightly as we went racing down the hill.

The steel runners worked great when the snow was hard and icy. However, they did not work as well in deep, fluffy snow. They would sink too low and the sled could not go very fast. One day my father saw us struggling to get our sleds moving. He knew how we loved to go fast down that hill.

The next day my older sister, Jean, and I happened to look out the kitchen window. We were very surprised to see our father working on the hill. He had taken his hose out and was spraying water all over the hill.

"What is he doing?" I asked Jean. "Why is he putting water on our sledding hill?" Jean just shrugged. She did not know either.

Later that day my father came inside. "I think you girls should come out and try your sleds today. I think they might work a little better" So we bundled up in our winter coats and took our sleds to the hill. I looked down at the hill. The snow had turned to ice. Thick, slippery ice that sparkled in the winter sun.

"Okay," my father said with a big smile. "Now you girls try it."

We tried it. Jean went first. She took her sled and ran a few steps. She flopped down on the sled and took off. As the sled runners hit the ice, her sled started going really, really fast. She flew! I heard her screaming and laughing. I knew I had to do it too. I took my sled, ran a few steps, flopped down on the sled and raced to the bottom. What a wonderful day that was.

Then one year we got a toboggan for Christmas. What a wonderful gift for us to share. It was much longer than our little sleds and because it had a flat wooden bottom, it would go much faster over the snow. But the best thing was that we

could all ride on it together. Jean, Sue, and I were so excited.

We tried out the toboggan on the hill behind our barn. My father showed us how to sit together. "Jean," he said, "You sit with your legs crossed in the front and put your hands on the front of the toboggan."

He watched her do that and nodded his approval. Then he said, "Now, Kathy, you sit behind her and put your feet around onto her lap. There are ropes on the side for you to hold onto or you can just hold Jean around the waist." After I was seated, he helped Sue climb on behind me. Then he gave us a push to start us off down the hill.

It was a wonderful fast ride. The wind blew our hair and the snow flew in our faces. But the best part was that we all were able to ride together. Since the hill was straight, we did not have to worry about steering the toboggan. It had no steering bar, but my father told us to not worry about that. All we needed to do to steer the toboggan was to lean. If we wanted to go right, we would all just lean together to the right. If we wanted to go left, we would all just lean together to the left. It all sounded very simple.

A few weeks later, my father came in from his farm work and told us he had a big surprise for us on the weekend. He had a big smile on his face and a twinkle in his eyes. He seemed very happy about something.

"What is it? What is it?" I asked as I jumped up and down. Sue and Jean wanted to know too.

"You have to wait", he said. "You will find out on Saturday".

We couldn't wait for Saturday to arrive. The week had never seemed so long. When the day finally came, my father told us it was time for our surprise. He told us to put on our coats, boots, and mittens. We were to dress very warmly and to follow him. As we scurried around to get ready, Jean said, "I wonder what is going to happen now?"

When we got outside, we saw that our parents had the toboggan out. "Are you all ready?" my father asked. "Then follow me." We followed our parents down the driveway and across the road. Then they started walking through our neighbor's orchard pulling the toboggan behind them.

I wondered where we were going. My father had never led us off on a walk like this before. We walked through the orchard and up a very steep hill. The snow was deep and our breath made little clouds in the cold. We turned east, walked through a few more apple trees, and came out into a clearing. And there in the clearing was the biggest hill I had ever seen. It was huge. It was steep, long, and covered with fluffy, white snow. There were no trees on the hill except for a large tree at the bottom. The hill was much bigger than the hill behind our barn.

"Wow, What a wonderful hill." Jean said. I looked ahead. The snow was deep on the ground and clustered on the apple trees on the edges of the hill. The sun sparkled on the snow. It looked like the perfect hill for sledding and tobogganing.

"Well", said my father looking at us. "What do you think?"

Sue was quiet. She was looking seriously down the hill.

Jean had a big smile on her face. "I want to try it," she said. "Let's go"

"Who wants to go in the front?" I said. I really did not want to be in the front myself. The hill looked really big and a little scary .

"I will", Jean said. She quickly sat down at the front of the huge toboggan. Sue sat down in the middle and then I got on the back. We hooked our legs around each other and grabbed the side ropes.

"Are you ready?" my father asked.

"Yes!" we all shouted with big smiles on our faces.

My father got behind us and then ran a few steps while pushing us. Then he gave one last big shove and we were going down the hill. We were zooming down the hill. We were going very fast. We could hear the snow crunching as we flew over it. Our skin tingled as we felt the snow blowing in our faces. I snuggled my face up to Sue to

keep warm. This was really fun. Then suddenly I looked up. I realized we were going straight down the hill. Straight down towards the lone apple tree at the bottom. We were going to crash into it.

"Lean!" I screamed. "Lean away from the tree!" Sue and Jean started to scream too. Then Jean made a big lean to the left. Sue followed her. The tree was getting closer.

"Lean!" Jean shouted and we all three leaned together. We leaned hard to the left. The wooden toboggan began to turn. We were still going fast, but we kept leaning the toboggan slowly veered to the left. It went to the left just enough to glide past the apple tree and into the snowbank at the bottom of the hill. What a ride. We quickly got up together and began the long walk up to the top of the hill.

"What do you think?" Jean said. "Shall we try it again?"

"Yes!" Sue and I shouted. And so began many years of winter fun.

Original Works of Performance Art

By

Contributing Artists

Performance Art Access Instructions

And now for something completely different!

Ever wondered what creative talents lie within our HASP community? Now's your chance to find out! On the next page, you'll find special QR codes. Think of them as instant gateways to short videos showcasing the wonderful performing arts contributions of your fellow HASP members.

New to QR Codes? It's Easy! Here's How to Watch:

- **Grab Your Smartphone or Tablet:** You'll need a device with a camera. Most modern phones and tablets have a QR code reader built right into their camera app.
- **Open Your Camera App:** Simply open your device's camera as if you were about to take a picture.
- **Point and Scan:** Hold your device so the QR code on the next page is clearly visible within your camera's screen. You don't usually need to press any buttons!
- **Tap the Link:** Your device should automatically recognize the QR code. A notification or link will pop up on your screen. Tap on this notification – it will take you directly to the video.
- **Enjoy the Show!** Sit back and enjoy the fantastic performances from our talented HASP members.

Troubleshooting Tips:

- **Good Lighting:** Make sure the QR code is well-lit so your camera can see it clearly.
- **Steady Hands:** Try to hold your device steady while it scans the code.
- **Get Closer (But Not Too Close!):** If it's not scanning, try moving your device a little closer to or further from the QR code until it comes into focus.
- **No Built-in Scanner?** If your camera app doesn't automatically scan, you might need to download a free QR code reader app from your device's app store. Simply search for "QR code reader."

We're thrilled to share these moments of creativity and passion with you. Scan away and celebrate the vibrant performing arts spirit within HASP!

NOTE: If you don't have a smart phone or tablet, don't worry. Links to the videos will be posted in the HASP Happenings during the month of July.

Malcolm and Sheila Hallam

Dance (Jive)



Chris Campbell

Cursive Calligraphy (Wu Xing)



Rob Colten

Trombone



Original Works of Art

By

Contributing Artists

Our Artists



Lynn Bekins



Kathy Benedict



Peter Burkey



Nancy Carlson



Dorothy Chamness



Alan Denko



Dean DeRidder



Mimi Elzinga-Keller



Linda Fairbanks



Ralph Fairbanks



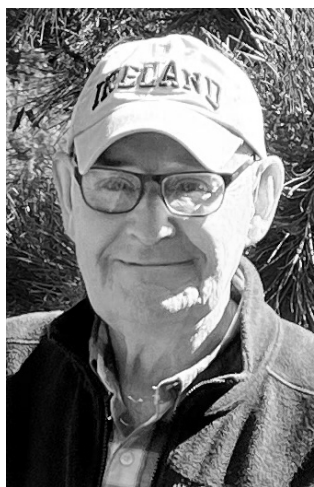
Deb Genzink



Jan Gebben



Judy Johns



Fred McConkey



Susan Miller



Nancy Carlson



Jean Norden



Mary Jo O'Connor



Randall Phillipps



Lynn Rutan



Gloria Schurman



Sandra Wennhold



Big Red

Oil Painting by Lynn Bekins



Peace in the Valley
Watercolor painting by Lynn Bekins



Poking Around
Oil painting by Lynn Bekins



Gentle Gaze

Watercolor on paper by Kathy Benedict



Penguin for Josiah
Watercolor on paper by Kathy Benedict



Simple Beauty

Ink and watercolor by Kathy Benedict



Denali
by Peter Burkey



Icelandic Church
by Peter Burkey



Maine Lighthouse
by Peter Burkey



Beautiful Blue Fungi
by Nancy Carlson



Peekaboo

By Nancy Carlson



Junco

by Nancy Carlson



Relics

by Dorothy Chamness



Bronze Copper
by Alan Denko



Brown Elfin
by Alan Denko



Common Ringlet
by Alan Denko



Sunrise
by Dean DeRidder



Being Green

by Mimi Elzinga-Keller



Migration

by Mimi Elzinga-Keller



Reflection
by Mimi Elzinga-Keller



The Eyes Have It - Emotion Passed
by Linda Fairbanks



Big Blue
by Ralph W. Fairbanks



Ralph Walton Fairbanks

Fitz Roy at Night
by Ralph W. Fairbanks



Undulations

by Deb Genzink



Wild Flowers
by Judy Johns



Morning Glory
by Jane Lindemuth



Black Sand Beach, Vik, Iceland, June 2024
by Fred McConkey



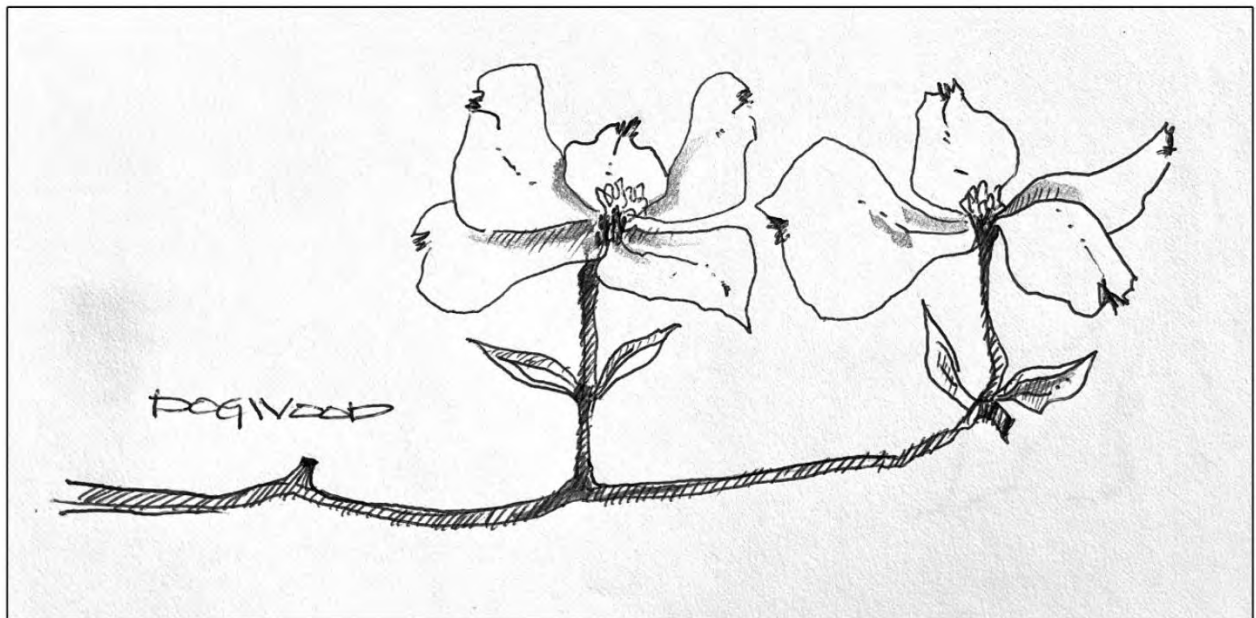
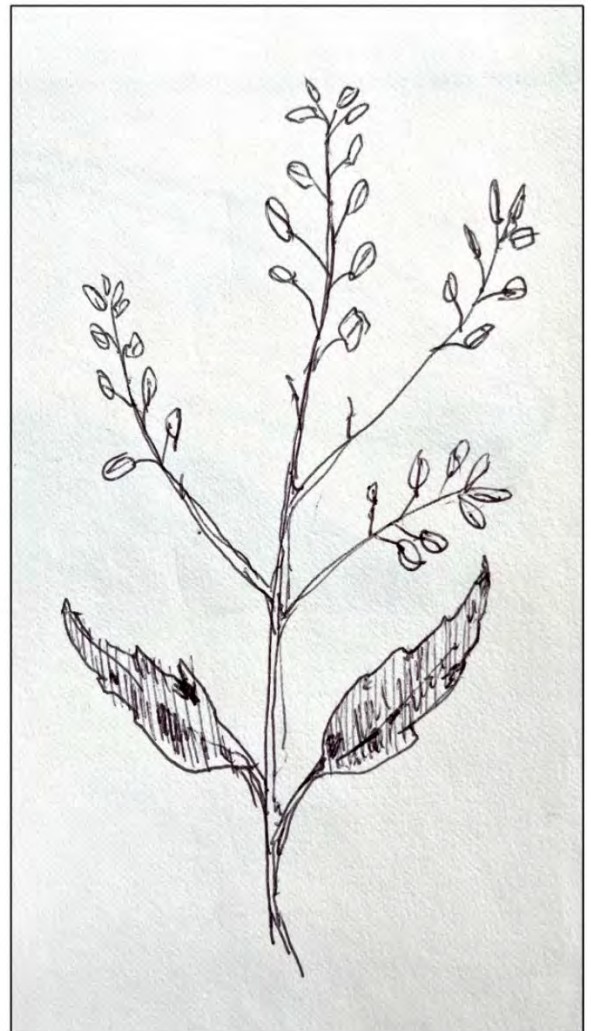
Sketches



Sketches 1
by Fred McConkey



McConkey, Fred



Sketches 2
by Fred McConkey



Mont Saint-Victoire
by Susan Miller



Moroccan Oasis
by Susan Miller

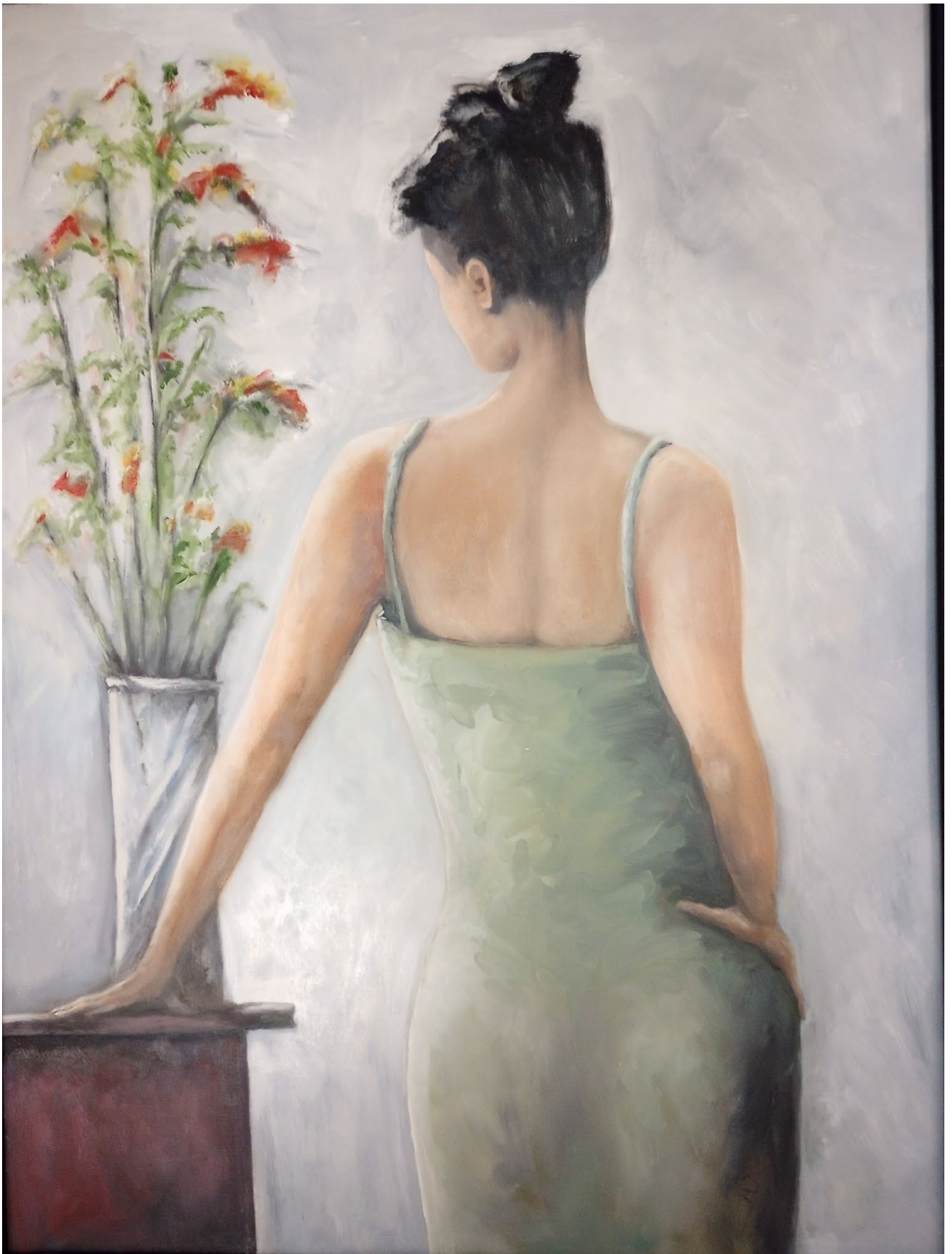


Poppies
by Susan Miller



Zinnia Bedazzlement

by Jean Norden



Untitled
by Mary Jo O'Connor



Catch the Wind
by Randall Phillips



Shrimp and Grits
by Randall Phillips



Free
by Randall Phillips



Baltimore Oriole

by Lynn Rutan – Taken at Black River board walk Holland in 2023



Close up of a Gold Dust Day Gecko

By Lynn Rutan – Taken on the island of Hawaii in 2023



Grand Canyon Lookout

By Lynn Rutan – Taken in late afternoon light at Grand Canyon National Park



Moon Over Water

Acrylic on canvas by Gloria Schuman



My Maple Tree

Collage on canvas with acrylic by Gloria Shurman

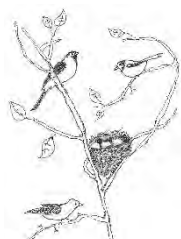
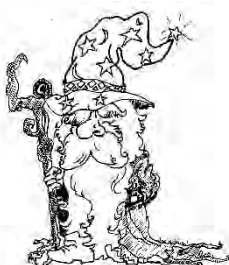


Having Fun

Alcohol inks on yupo paper by Gloria Schurman



Sumi-e Painting
by Sandra Wennhold



In Memory of Jan Gebben
Artist, Storyteller, Illustrator and Friend of the HASP Review

HASP HOPE ACADEMY
OF SENIOR
PROFESSIONALS
at Hope College

