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Three Sixty Two

Bruce Stasiuk

Josephine was born an orphan. It was 1918; the year of the Great Pandemic. Within hours of her birth, the flu killed her mother. The burden of an infant was too much for Pete. He disappeared.

Marie buried her daughter and took the baby in. She raised Josephine along with Claire and Charlie, her own teenage children.

Marie owned 362 Willis Avenue in the South Bronx. The four-level building housed her grocery and dry goods’ store. Burlap sacks, filled with grains, beans, and spices, lined the wooden floor beside barrels of pickles and sauerkraut. Above was a storage area, with apartments on the third and fourth floors.

Years later, while Marie was bringing soup to Josephine... who was now married and a mother herself... she stumbled on the stone steps leading up to *Beech Terrace*, and by protecting the soup, failed to protect herself. She became what was called, an ‘invalid.’

The store closed down.

After being idle for several years, Charlie reopened it as the Willis Radio Store.

He sold appliances along with the radios.

Josephine moved into the third-floor apartment with her husband, daughter, and me, her son.

Although I wasn’t born there, my memories were.

It was where I first saw my father’s face after his discharge from the army.

During my first few years, it was the place where my mother would bathe me in the kitchen sink because our bathroom was off the hallway.

The door to the building, which opened onto the sidewalk, was never locked, nor was the door to our apartment.

We had a living room, a kitchen, and two bedrooms. The smaller bedroom occasionally housed Marie when Claire was exhausted from tending to her. My grandmother needed lots of care. She was hard to understand because her words were caught between her Alsatian accent and the injury.

My mother would distribute linens stamped with ‘*Consolidated Laundries*’ to the mystery people who lived upstairs. They were there. Then, they’d be gone, replaced by others. My mother called them tenants.

Olga was one. She was a heavy woman who only wore black. I’d always try to beat her to the front door. Walking up the two flights behind her slow waddle took forever for a kid who usually did three steps at a time. It was worse if she stopped at the ledge where all the mail was left unsorted. I couldn’t fit around her.



Those stairs brought the seltzer man.
I could hear him outside our door with the brittle clinking of his blue bottles.
I knew it wasn't the milkman. My father was the milkman. He delivered for *Chesterfield Farms*.

With his white uniform, the crowd, thinking that he was a doctor, pushed him to the front after two cars collided near the corner.
The real doctor was Doctor Green. When I was sick I went to him. When I was very sick, he came to 362 toting his black leather bag of cures. I always got better.

Mr. Picininni would pull up in his square truck, flip a burlap rag over his shoulder, and claw his tongs into a massive block of ice. Crystal splinters would fly off. He'd swing it onto his shoulder and lug it up to the tenant's iceboxes. He never stopped at our door. We had a refrigerator.

The war was over and Uncle Charlie was doing very well.
He started selling more televisions and fewer radios. In a few years, we'd have our own TV. It was a heavy piece of wooden furniture with a screen the size of a piece of toast. The three channels lit up for a few hours each day.

Part of growing up was suddenly noticing things that were always there. The dainty pipe stumps coming out of the walls were like that. One evening my father took a match from the tin container by the stove, and while turning the valve, lit one of the pipes. The gaslights still worked.

In the evenings we'd compete for the big leather chair which was stationed at our front window, overlooking the straight avenue. Willis was a true Avenue. A wide thoroughfare with a cobblestone street as old as the Dutch. A pair of unused trolley tracks were set in the stone. I loved the sound of the car tires as they riveted their way past our stage. I studied each bus as it stopped on the corner.
The doors would hiss open and I'd hope that this would be the one my mother would step from after selling candy at *Barton's Bonbonire* to the wealthy folks on the Grand Concourse.

Coal trucks backed up onto the sidewalk. The quickly assembled chutes used gravity and a man's shovel to deliver rumbling coal to the open bulkhead doors. Pedestrians stood there, waiting, fumbling with cigarettes, rather than walking around the trucks and onto the busy avenue. A heavy wagon pulled by a horse would slow the traffic. The hooves clopped against the polished stones while the horses dropped 'street apples' for the tough kids to throw. During cold days, the manure would give off wisps of steam.

The cardboard man came with his pushcart to collect the boxes from the appliances Uncle Charlie sold.
One cold afternoon, he came with a woman. She laid down in the wagon and he covered her with piles of bent and folded cardboard to keep her warm as she slept.
I watched it all from the big chair. It was sad and beautiful.



We had taverns on each corner which provided scary theater on some evenings. During the day, a door might open; leaking dark belches of cool staleness.

Across the way, next to the army and navy store, was the smoke shop with the big red *Optimo Cigar* sign.

My father would send me there to buy two Optimos whenever Aunt Bertha and Uncle Joe were coming from New Jersey in their black 1920 Buick. It had flower vases and portable screens to keep bugs out when they went to the outdoor movies. People slowed their pace when it was parked on Willis.

My father sent me on missions to the ‘Chinese.’ It was an apartment two blocks away. I’d walk up four flights, knock on the door, and hand the man my father’s envelope. I’d sit on the wobbly chair in the hallway and wait. The door would eventually open and the man would hand me a warm bag. I’d scurry home with our dinner.

Sometimes I was sent to the grocery store with a note for two quarts of Ballentine Beer. The grocer would complain, but sell me the beer. The brown paper bag had the price written in black crayon on the side. I was embarrassed every time I went on this errand.

The barber pole at Tiptop’s would spin when the shop was open. From the booster seat, I wondered why the barbers had so little hair. The funnel-like spittoons were placed right under the infinity of mirrors which amazed me. I’d try to move swiftly enough to look deeper into the reflections...always failing. After every haircut, the barber would show me a piece of my ear that he accidentally cut off. It never hurt and I never bled.

But mostly I remember the magical place with its big, empty windows.

In the evenings when I had the heavy leather chair to myself, I’d look out at the night and across the street to the colorless room.

It too, was on the third floor. It had plain windows and was always...almost always, empty and quiet. No one was ever there.

But sometimes, just sometimes, on the school-less weekends, I’d stay up late and it would glisten and glow. Music came from its opened windows. I could hear shouts and laughter and cheers mixed in with dishes and glasses clattering.

One loud voice would boom into the silence, followed by clapping and more laughter. The crowd would move to the speed of the music. Some of the people would spill out onto the sidewalk. The men wore ties and the women were in crayon colors. They would touch and yell. They’d cry and punch and kiss. I could see the pumpkin glow from their cigarettes. I’d leave the viewing stand and go to bed, resting on the sounds which would carry me into sleep.

In the morning it was all gone. The music, the people, the sounds. It was silent once again, and the closed windows were dull and empty.



My Calling as a Nurse

Rachelle Psaris

As a young girl growing up, I had the goal of becoming a nurse primarily to take care of babies. I loved babies and was an excellent babysitter. My choices of a profession as I saw them were nurse or teacher. I viewed the role of teacher as one of being a disciplinarian and didn't welcome this as an option, thus nursing was what I chose.

Early on in nursing school I knew I did not want to specialize in Pediatrics or Newborn Nursery, realizing I connected with adults more easily. I realized that I didn't see my role as just carrying out the doctor's orders in caring for patients, but also to make a difference in their lives emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically. I was taught this in school and after learning it decided to own it. I could not just be a robot and do everything physically right for them. I had to connect in a human way too.

In nursing school, I became emotionally involved with a patient, who was suffering with End Stage Renal Disease, from which he eventually died. I had also become very attached to his family and after his death, the family stayed in contact with me for a while. I felt great pride in this relationship.

Later on, as a professional nurse I found that the qualities I possessed stood me in good stead with my patients. On returning a patient to his room post operatively, I found the man in the next bed gripping the side rail, white knuckled in pain from his surgery. He wasn't my patient, but my heart went out to him and I very quickly gave him a crash course in Lamaze breathing. He had been medicated recently for his pain, but I knew he needed to focus on his breathing and to relax to help the medication take effect. He followed my instructions and slowly his hands released their grip on the side rail and his face relaxed.

A robot doesn't cry with a patient. I did though, when a patient broke down crying over the recent death of her daughter from cancer. I took her hand and without reservation allowed my tears to flow.

My sense of humor stands me in good stead also. Some patients, who I prepared for surgery, came to the hospital rigid with fear. After about an hour with them I often found ways to get them to smile-not necessarily laugh, but smile enough to know that they relaxed just a little bit. Again, a robot would not have accomplished this.

Many years ago, the hospital I worked in began a program entitled Patient Redesign for Excellence Program. Roles had been redesigned to assure optimum care for patients. At the same time cut backs in Medicaid funding and the heavy weight of HMO caps on payments, resulted in layoffs and freezing of jobs. What resulted was more work by fewer people and a noticeable drop in morale. The union became involved at the same time because our contract was up and hell literally broke loose. I found myself caught in the middle, believing some of what administration was saying as well as what the union had to say. That year the manager of my department retired and she was not replaced. We became a self-managed unit. Months later the director of our Peri operative services resigned and her position had not been filled.



Sometimes I felt as if I was on a rudderless ship and there were times when it was difficult to stay focused on why I was at the hospital and who I was there for.

But, when things appeared helpless, I resorted to thinking thoughts like “my patients are what’s important and the rest can go to hell.” Those were harsh words, but sometimes that’s what it took to get through a day. “If the rudderless ship goes aground, I won’t worry because I know there are people in higher positions than I who will take control, and I will know that my patients got what they needed from me-the best care I could humanly give them”.



The Child of the 60’s: My Odyssey Part 1

Lucy Gluck

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

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

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

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

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

Here I was in the mid-west in the world of big-ten football, dances, curfews and many, many blond people. I was seen as exotic because of my dark hair and I was even asked once if Jews had horns! I still remember how I felt like I had just landed as an alien on a new planet and I had no idea how to navigate this new world. I remember feeling incredibly lost and didn’t know how to behave and what to do. I was terrified and extremely lonely. And once again, music saved me.



This time it was jazz and rhythm and blues. There were a bunch of musicians there some of whom later became famous and once I found that group, once again I was home. I sat on the Terrace of the Student Union and listened to music and talked about music and went to concerts whenever I could.

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

After graduating college and I was faced with difficult career and relationship choices my journey continued against the backdrop of these unique times. I ended up in San Francisco where I continued my journey in the place where these years unfolded in dramatic and exciting ways. When these times are discussed, they are characterized as turbulent, full of terrible dissension and violent. But all I remember is that feeling of freedom, of making over the world for the first time and feeling part of a totally unique time full of hope and a feeling of incredible promise, limitless possibilities and freedom. At what point did our individual experiences feel different and become a movement? How did it become something bigger? Is this how everyone feels about their time or was this time special?

Settling into France

David Bouchier

From: *Journal of the Eightieth Year: The Five Seasons*

Our annual journey to France has the feeling of a familiar routine, but it is still stressful because we must put ourselves at the mercy of huge, indifferent organizations like airlines, as well as individual drivers and pilots whom we know nothing about, and who may quite possibly be insane or incompetent. This year the insanity and incompetence are fairly well-concealed. Our heavily-tattooed driver gets us to the airport on time, and we relax in the Air France lounge for an hour or two, eating and drinking. This luxury is made possible by an upgrade that we purchase at the last minute, and which is well worth the heavily discounted price.

This is a night flight, and business class on Air France now boasts new seats that adjust into an almost-flat almost-comfortable bed. So we arrive at Charles de Gaulle airport early in the morning in a tolerably good state of mind and body. As always we stay at the Sheraton Hotel within the airport, once again arranging a last-minute upgrade to what is humorously called “Club Class.” This hotel is extraordinarily quiet and comfortable, considering its location. I would like to retire here permanently. The rooms are all the same, with a 1960s modernist décor and wonderfully soft pillows. We sleep all afternoon and eat at the unexciting hotel restaurant, where we practically know the menu by heart.

The rest of the journey also follows a well-tested routine, which works perfectly as long as the French rail workers are not on strike, as they often are. At about noon we catch a TGV (high speed train) at the station conveniently located right inside the airport and alongside the hotel. The TGV whisks us quietly and comfortably to Avignon by mid-afternoon. This is my favorite part of the trip, especially when cypresses and mountains tell us that we are arriving in the south, or the midi as the French perversely like to call it. The rental agency has the car we reserved – a Fiat 500 – and by early evening we are standing in the middle of the street in Saint Quentin la Poterie, with our suitcases, having a long, largely incomprehensible conversation with our nearest neighbor Raymond before we have even managed to get into our house.

The little house at 68 Grand Rue has been left immaculately tidy and clean by Hildegard, our Swiss caretaker. After so many visits we feel completely chez nous as soon as we have clambered up the two steep flights of stairs to the sunny living room at the top. The late days of May, which are alternately bright and extremely breezy, pass in a pleasant blur of settling in and visiting our old haunts. Most of the time we stay peaceably at home. In fact this will be the pattern of our whole visit. We have no need to go sightseeing because we have already seen everything in the region that could possibly be called a “sight.”

Friends have sometimes asked, rather rudely: “What on earth do you do all summer in that little village?” It’s true that the beach is far away, which is fine with me. I am far too old for beaches. There are no regular entertainments, although plenty of irregular ones. The fact is that we do very little. In the morning we walk up into the vineyards if the weather is fine, saluting the statue of the Madonna at the top of the hill. In the evening we walk around the village, greeting people we know and admiring the numerous village cats. After this modest exercise we sit in the shade on our small terrace and wait for the church clock to strike seven, followed by the slow tolling of the Angelus. Religion is very soothing at second hand. The bells announce the opening of aperitif hour, after which the restaurant is only a few steps away. We like to avoid too much excitement.



Covid-19

Martin H. Levinson

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



Meditations in an Emergency

Martin H. Levinson

Chanting *om* takes too long when the coronavirus is expanding faster than a spaceship full of monkeys on a trip to see the magic kingdom, which is New York City baby, filled with hustle and muscle to jump on the E train at rush hour, visit the Met, go to the theater, have a brandy at Bemelmans Bar then dinner at Le Bernardin where the tasting menu will set you back a pretty penny and the exotic fruit Pavlova will move you to never want to leave this epicurean nirvana and go outside where people are wearing masks, walking six feet apart, watching each other with panicked expressions and hoping the ride home on the subway will not be their last one as they wash their hands for twenty seconds singing happy birthday twice as long as a sneeze takes to spew the virus into the air where it does not drop to the ground right away but lingers lasciviously in flight looking for a host to land on and multiply like a bat out of the hell Wuhan has become even though the Chinese say they have things under control except that’s what they always say and if stuff was made here we’d have masks for health care workers who are intubating old people on ventilators of which there are not enough even with GM ramping up production of press conferences that Trump gives on TV every night telling the viewers not to worry because he and his administration are on top of the situation and what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.

DeathList

Mike LoMonico

Old people just grow lonesome / Waiting for someone to say, "Hello in there, hello." John Prine

Music has always been an important part of my life. My early taste was rock and roll on 45s, and they included Dion and the Belmonts, Bobby Darin, and the Everly Brothers. My listening included listening to Murray the K and Cousin Brucie on AM radio and later FM with the British Invasion and Folk Rock. And I fondly recall listening to my father’s collection of LPs: Judy Garland Live at Carnegie Hall, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Connie Frances, Mario Lanza, “West Side Story,” “My Fair Lady,” and others too obscure for me to remember. Sundays were when the mammoth stereo cabinet was opened and the stack of scratchy 33 RPMs was piled on. We listened, talked, and even though I was underage, drank daiquiris and whiskey sours as mom prepared Sunday dinner. Wasn’t it a time!

My brother Larry loved music and taught me all about classical music, though I never got it about opera. He also introduced me to jazz, especially Dave Brubeck, Miles Davis, Count Basie, and the Modern Jazz Quartet.

Not a day goes by when I’m not listening to music. Mostly it’s on Amazon music on which I’ve uploaded most of my CDs or on stations such as “Deep Tracks” or “60s on 6” or “Real Jazz” on SiriusXM. We still go to concerts to see shows by The Moody Blues, The Fifth Dimension, Peter Noone, and Randy Newman.

So, now to my Death List. (When I mentioned it to a friend, she assumed that I was in my final days. **I am not**; this is just an exercise.)

I’m not sure when I began working on this playlist for my memorial. Maybe it was when I attended a memorial for a college friend and heard the collection of music his three children had selected for his service. It might have been a few years ago when my brother died. Or, maybe it was when I turned 70. Or, when I heard a particular song that needed to be included.

And recently I heard an old favorite that made me think about that list again. Singer-songwriter, John Prine died in early April, and I was listening to a bunch of his songs. I loved them all, but the one that made me stop and replay it was a live performance of “Hello In There.” Here are the words:

We had an apartment in the city
Me and Loretta liked living there
Well, it'd been years since the kids had grown
A life of their own left us alone

John and Linda live in Omaha



And Joe is somewhere on the road
We lost Davy in the Korean war
And I still don't know what for, don't matter anymore

Ya' know that old trees just grow stronger
And old rivers grow wilder ev'ry day
Old people just grow lonesome
Waiting for someone to say, "Hello in there, hello"

Me and Loretta, we don't talk much more
She sits and stares through the back door screen
And all the news just repeats itself
Like some forgotten dream that we've both seen

Someday I'll go and call up Rudy
We worked together at the factory
But what could I say if he asks "What's new?"
"Nothing, what's with you? Nothing much to do"

So if you're walking down the street sometime
And spot some hollow ancient eyes
Please don't just pass 'em by and stare
As if you didn't care, say, "Hello in there, hello"

When John Prine died of COVID-19 on April 7, he had already battled with two bouts of cancer. The live performance I heard is from 2018, yet he wrote it in 1971 when he was in his early 20s. He was my age when he died. Besides these beautiful, sad thoughts about aging and loneliness, what struck me was [the voice on this particular version](#). *Take a few minutes and listen. I'll wait...*

Get it?

Like so many of us these days, sadness and loneliness have become parts of our daily life. Seeing old friends and family on Zoom helps to an extent, but I miss being with other adults. I especially miss hugging 5-year old Ella and squeezing her beautiful cheeks.

And now, as “the news keeps repeating itself,” I’ve added this song to my list.

My list (a work in progress)

1. In My Life—The Beatles
2. Knockin’ on Heaven's Door—Warren Zevon



3. Forever Young—Bob Dylan
4. Strangers in the Night—Frank Sinatra
5. River—Joni Mitchell
6. Hallelujah—Leonard Cohen
7. Harvest Moon—Neil Young
8. God Only Knows—The Beach Boys
9. Symphony of Sorrowful Songs—Henryk Górecki
10. Hello in There—John Prine



Duro Blanco Amour

Gracie Panousis

The counters were installed today
white granite with rivulets
of black shadows and
caramel cloud patches
they are sleek and smooth as ice
hard and cold

I run my finger along the
pathways – connecting
veins with clots,
then sail along unobstructed
through blankness
I search for you in the dense stone

I see your disease
how bloods feeds tumors
I trace your demise
and then reverse the route
ending at the start
with you twenty and robust

How can I ache so for
a love that was often
withheld?

That was cold and
infected?
that hurt to touch?

Why do I yearn for a mouth
that often cursed me?
dream about hands
that encircled my neck?
fantasize about a back
that was mostly turned?

The counters were installed today
they are white with
black and beige
and they are so very
painfully
Beautiful.



Hibernation

Gracie Panousis

*“Oh, tell me how to cure myself of irony,
the gaze that sees but doesn’t penetrate:
tell me how to cure myself of silence.”*

Adam Zagajewski

Outside my bedroom window the day is gray
The backyard full of deep holes where the dog has been
burying and digging up her stick
my heart too is gray and holey

It seems I’ve lost all my writing
Some sort of computer glitch
On an ancient desktop Dell
The flash drive no longer works either

My children’s childhoods?
Feelings about life’s momentous events?
What I wanted ten years ago?
Who I desired when I was twenty?

Maybe we’re meant to reset and reinvent
Instead of revise and rework
I will awaken in the den, emerge from the chrysalis
And rise out of the ashes

I will stay pure and childlike, open to joy and heartache
I will see beyond and understand all
I will not remain mute but will
Deliver the truth to the world

Yeah, right.



Long Branch, New Jersey

Al Jordan

In 1958 my father was appointed to a new church and our family moved from Rahway, New Jersey, a suburban white middle class community, to Long Branch, a seaside resort town 35 miles southeast, but planets away in culture, population, geography, and attitude. Long Branch boasted of being visited by seven U.S. presidents. But it was a step-child to Atlantic City, Wildwood, and Asbury Park. Its best days were both behind and in front.

Every resort town has a soft under belly not listed in the slick brochures, where sightseeing busses do not visit, tourists are warned not to go, and the myths are foreboding. It is the part of town where the invisible workers live--the maids, porters, and kitchen workers who, like lemmings, march to the sea each day to low paying menial jobs, and their smiling faces mask the reality of being permanently stuck at the bottom. In Long Branch the area was known as “The Block”.

The Block was less than two square miles, minutes from the ocean. We lived on Liberty Street, the main thoroughfare and the hub for gathering, gossip, and socializing. If you blinked twice, you missed it all-- Uncle Sowell's candy shop, a small grocery store, Sinky's pool hall, three bars, three churches, a liquor store, and Mrs. Hemphill's brothel, all anchored by three segregated two-story low-income housing projects--Grant Court, Garfield Court, and Seaview Manor.

Long Branch, was a challenge for me. I soon realized that the 3 years living in Rahway had stuck to me, despite my frequent trips to visit relatives in my old Queens neighborhood. The cuffed tan khakis with razor sharp creases and button-down collar shirts could not compete with the cool look of narrow leg shark skin pants and colorful paisley shirts with the wide collars. My slang was dated and lacked rhythm, inflection, and sting. I had become too comfortable with the Everly Brothers, Brenda Lee, and American Bandstand.

On the Block you were either “cool” or a punk. But two lucky opportunities bought time for me to develop my cultural competence--girls and basketball. The guys respected “game” especially when applied to girls. As a preacher's kid (a P.K.) I had access to girls whose unsuspecting parents transferred their trust of my father to me. I was left alone with their daughters. The guys believed it was because of my “game.” I never told them any different. Basketball was my equalizer long before I updated my wardrobe. My reputation was for “shooting the rock,” and “patting the pea”--two of the highest compliments on the basketball court.

Friday nights meant a dance at the Potter Avenue Community Center, an old wooden mildew smelling, poorly-lit fire trap. Inside, were sweaty young bodies in intense competition swaying, bumping and grinding to the music of James Brown, Etta James, the Chantels, and an emerging sound called Motown. As my cultural transition progressed, the “Slop,” “Crossfire” and “Boogaloo” replaced the “Hop”, “stroll” and “Lindy.” Predictably, at about 10:30 pm a distant rumble in a far corner of the room, signaled a fight over girls, money, or town rivalries—it did not matter. Miraculously, everyone squeezed through the one exit, the police arrived, and the dance was over until the next Friday.



My parents, barely 30 years old with 5 kids, struggled on a minister’s salary. I always had a job. One summer I worked as a pool porter at a prestigious surf club, where both famous and wannabees paid thousands of dollars to roast in the sun, be catered to, and specialize in being rude and obnoxious. The white cabana boys ran errands, pampered, and flirted for large tips. Their daily tips surpassed my weekly salary! My job was simple, keep my area clean, mouth shut, respond promptly when summoned over the loud speaker “one porter and one broom report to the front office” and stay out of the pool even after closing. Ironically, I knew many of the girls who accompanied their parents. Our eyes locked in recognition, but not a word was spoken. It was a cat and mouse summer.

Long Branch High School, with its cathedral-like front entrance, was an imposing structure that belied the safe comfortable feeling inside. Students also came from other towns—Eatontown, Oceanport, West Long Branch—and presented a visibly heartwarming yet deceptive type of diversity. Most interactions beyond athletics, extracurricular activities, or occasional parties were superficial. We did not visit each other’s homes or neighborhoods. Our relationships across racial, economic and cultural divides were almost contractual. We were strangers who renewed our friendship each day.

The two-mile walk from the Block to the high school rivaled athletics as the best part of the day. As many as fifteen of us walked downtown where the savvy shop owners guarded their fresh fruit until we passed by and we thundered into neighborhoods where frightened shadowy figures peeked nervously through blinds. The gifted talkers engaged in the “dozens”—a game of verbal insults fueled by our boisterous encouragement. Once inside the school we all scattered to the wind—a subtle wind of low expectations that sorted and sifted too many us to the bottom rung of the academic ladder.

I returned to Long Branch for my 50th high school reunion. Brochures promoted majestic hotels and casinos, excellent restaurants, and pristine beaches--no mention of the place I was yearning to see—the Block. Gentrification, the code word for removing people deemed disposable, had taken its toll. Only two churches remained, the projects had become townhouses with deceptive fancy names, the community center was a bright brick building, and my beloved basketball court was gone. Liberty Street was no more. My restless inner teenage spirit urged me to approach passersby and shout “I used to live here and it was more beautiful then.” But my older voice reminded me that you can go home again in your heart and memories. I heeded that wisdom and, for a few glorious moments, I was back on the Block.



Things I Have Learned

Lily Klima

In the past few weeks I have learned some things.

I miss my hugs.

My heart aches. I am grieving for my family and friends, for New York, for The United States, for all nations in our world. The novel COVID-19 is infecting our bodies, psyches and souls. To protect myself and others during these dangerous times, I am self-isolating and practicing social distancing.

I have learned that although I am by myself I am not alone. My normally socially active days are now being spent sheltering in place with my iPad, iPhone, and TV. In order to not despair over this seemingly non-stop, no end in sight, global crisis being discussed and transmitted over the airwaves, I have learned to limit my time watching the news and instead turn to nature shows and of course anything musical and theatrical.

Albeit living solo, I have learned to dance in place. I can keep rhythm and although not in sync with others, I remain in sync with myself. I can wave my arms in anywhich way; I can stomp my feet. I can wiggle my tusch and swivel my hips. I can sing out of tune and shout hallelujah. I can move; I can breathe!!! Yes, I am still very much alive.

Though new to me, through amazing technology, I have learned how to Zoom. So comforting to see and hear friends and to “visit” with family in far away places. As most of us do, I definitely depend upon the phone and the Internet for communication.

Except for my daily thirty minute walk, around the block there is no place to go. I have learned to sit quietly. A great deal of my time is spent in my second floor atrium reading, writing or looking out at my garden.

Last week, I saw a pair of mallard ducks paddling about in my pond; their heads bobbing up and down signaled mating gestures. A pair of cardinals pecking at my bird feeder flew off together perhaps she to build their nest and he to chase other male cardinals away from their chosen site. A pair of squirrels scampering over rocks, in my yet to be planted flower beds, were being typically adolescent in their antics. These scenes are so refreshingly good to see. Viewing nature is far more calming than images of anxiety ridden shoppers hoarding toilet paper and Purell!

I am considered to be an elderly non-essential person who should stay at home. Frankly, after more than three weeks without a run to the supermarket, I was short of some pantry essentials. My daughter, living in Colorado, suggested that if I didn’t order goods to be delivered, she would gladly do so for me. I hate to lose my independence but her worried face on my FaceTime screen told me to give in to her wishes. I promised to send her a shopping list.

About an hour later, I heard a knock on my door. There, six feet down my walkway, stood a neighbor with whom I had chatted earlier in the day.



After coaxing my resistance into acquiescence, I graciously accepted her offer to go grocery shopping for me. The following day, six bags of groceries were put by my front door. Overwhelmed with emotion, I am grateful to Elaine, who optimizes selfless goodness. She is truly a healthcare heroine who brought me nourishment for both my body and spirit. Also, my daughter’s fears, of her Mom venturing out into public, have been assuaged.

A sense of urgency has forced change. I have learned to surrender and suspend my need to control of how I used to live my, get up and get out of the house, high energy life. I have learned to curb my impulsive and spontaneous take charge personality. I am cognizant of risks and learned that I can only control what is within my limited sphere. I need to take care of myself so others won’t have to.

I have also learned that to reflect and ruminate upon these extraordinarily difficult times is too heart wrenching. Yes, I am by myself but not alone and have asked Alexa is blast Tommy Dorsey’s Boogie Woogie. C’mon everybody let’s dance!

Until I see you all on the other side of this ordeal, I send cheers with virtual “sanitized” hugs.



How Did I Get Here?

Peter Lee

From my memoir, “Leave’ em Laughing: a brief history of the Pickle Brothers Comedy Team.”

The “here” in this case is the green room of the CBS Studio 50 Theater in New York. It was September 25, 1966 and I’m there along with my partners Ron and Mike, known as “The Pickle Brothers Comedy Team,” as well as some other very nervous performers all waiting to go on a very popular television variety show called “The Ed Sullivan Show”. To understand the “how,” we must go back, far back- to September, 1958

“Chantilly Lace” or “Primrose Lane” was playing on my car radio as I pulled into a parking lot at Hofstra to register for my courses. Then I headed for the student union, grabbed a copy of the Hofstra Chronicle, and inside was a notice stating that auditions were being held now for roles in a new student written and directed play. I ran to the Hofstra Playhouse and auditioned. I must have given a good reading as I left with the lead role. BTW, the writer and director’s name was Francis Coppola, and rehearsals started next week.

It was there where I met Ron and Mike, and soon we were putting on our own comedy revues, using fellow Drama students Madeleine Kahn and Lanie Levine. After graduating we formed a comedy team and played every club we could for over a year and were finally hired as opening act at the Bitter End, owned by Fred Weintraub who became our manager. From then on our goal was to get a funny & clean 7-minute piece we could do on TV. Two years later, after constant writing, performing, and honing our material, we were finally ready!

A talent scout from the show must have seen us perform and wanted us on the show. Now we were at the theatre and waiting to perform our act at the dress rehearsal, and after that we were told we had to cut two minutes from our piece, which we quickly did as there was so much at stake. We went over our changes and then I heard a booming voice announce “Pickle Brothers, 15 minutes.” I just had time to check my teeth for any residue of spinach salad when I heard “Pickle Brothers, Ten minutes.” The five-minute call came right on top of last one and before I knew it, I was in the wings waiting to go on. At this point my flop sweat had soaked through my shirt and was practically seeping through my jacket, and I was afraid it would drip on some electrical box and cause a blackout. Then I heard Ed say “And now, here they are from Hofstra College, the Pickle Brothers,” and we were on! Our performance consisted on a few short and fast spoofs of TV commercials and sight gags, including the one where I get bitten on my hand by a snake, and Ron grabs it and sucks out the venom. Relieved, I sit on a stool with a rubber snake, go “ouch,” and look at Ron who says “nope – no way...” and exits.

It’s very difficult for me to remember what it was like to be on that show as I was having one of those near- death experiences, complete with the blinding white light with glimpses of dead relatives. There were lots of laughs and applause at the end and Ed called us over briefly, said something which I can’t remember, and it was over. Now when I hear Billy Joel sing about how I “can’t handle pressure,” I yell “**Yes I can!**”



It’s Time to Rise Up, America!

Bob Hayes

It’s time we stop shouting into each others’ faces
And rise up to act like the noblest of this planet’s races.

We must all join together,

or I fear this crisis we may NOT weather.

If you are safe in your home feeling blessed,
remember the afflicted, *they’re beyond stressed.*

Remember all types of **first responders.**

will they be secure without the basic items, *we ponder.*

They’re trying to save each and everyone possible,

while toiling in places that are impossible.

Remember those out there still doing their jobs,

at the risk of having their lives robbed.

Remember to keep doing your part,

Social distancing is just the start.

If thankfully this terror hasn’t struck you or yours,

Pray that it will not reach many others’ doors.

The land we love is named the *UNITED* States,

Now it’s time to bravely step up to the plate

And help protect each other’s’ fate!



Almost

Bob Hayes

Food shopping I went
with the list my wife sent.
Got the chicken and the steak,
picked up the mix for cake.

Snapped up the peas and potatoes.
Chose succulent hot-house tomatoes.
I was all ready to please my honey,
Oops! I forgot the money.

Rapture

Bob Hayes

The sapphire blue sky of afternoon
shimmers on the lake's water
The verdant woods across its shore
beckon to the weary hikers
They stride ever forward
through fields of yellow Goldenrod
in season's best bloom
Nearing heaven



Momentum

(a true story by Ed Metzendorf)

It just stopped running. The car, that is. My wife and I had returned from a skiing trip around dinner time one Sunday evening. I went out for Italian food while she unpacked the suitcases. The food was now in the car and I was driving down a main road toward home when I realized the motor wasn't running. I steered the car to the side of the road. It wouldn't start.

I got out of the car and walked to an adjacent neighborhood to see if someone would let me use their phone. This was the pre-cellphone era. I went up to the first house and knocked on the door. “Who's there?” came a voice through the closed door. “I was wondering if I could use your phone to call my wife. My car broke down on the main road.” The door remained closed. “I'm sorry but we are all being careful because there was a murder in the neighborhood last week.” I felt like I was a suspect. I then asked if the person could just call my wife and tell her that I broke down and needed to be picked up. There was a pause. “What's your phone number?” I recited it. I heard two voices now discussing the number. The door opened. “It's okay for you to use our phone since we see by the number you live nearby.” I thanked them.

I called my wife. She came to get me with her car. We left my car at the side of the road, went home, and had a delicious dinner.

We both went to work the next day with my wife getting a ride from a friend. When I came home I called my neighbor, told him what happened, and asked if he could help me tow the car back home. I had a good strong rope. We climbed into his pickup truck and drove to the place where I left my car. It was still there. I tried starting it again with no luck.

I tied the rope from the truck to the car and off we went. My neighbor drove his truck, and I was in my car. We went slowly and it was hard driving the car without the power steering. Everything was going fine though, and we finally turned down our street. We approached the railroad crossing which was perched on a small hill above the grade of the road. My neighbor took extra caution here and went very slowly up and over the tracks. As he started down the other side, I was still going up and almost on the tracks. All of a sudden, the rope snapped, the railroad crossing lights and bells went on, and I heard the train whistle. I was on the tracks and barely moving.

I now concentrated on the physics of the situation. Did the car have enough momentum to cross the summit of the hilltop and then let gravity pull me down the other side? Did it? I was still moving, but barely. The gates were coming down. Time was passing slowly for me, but quickly for the gates and train. Another whistle blew, and then another. There was no time for a backup plan. I wasn't even thinking about one. I relied on the physics of the situation and an equation I learned in high school.

The car still had a bit of momentum as it reached the top of the crossing and continued to crawl. I felt a slight pull, an increase in momentum. It was gravity taking over. I heard another whistle. I was going faster, although only by a little bit. The car went down the other side just in



time as the gates fell to their final destination to block the road. I made it! My neighbor was already out of his truck as I coasted toward him. The train roared by behind me. I thought, now that’s momentum!

It was then that I considered the full measure of the experience. What if I stopped on the crossing? Would I have gotten out of the car in time, or become frozen on the tracks as a college buddy once did when he was crossing some tracks and saw a train coming at him? I’ll never know for sure.

In case you’re interested, the problem with the car was a 75 cent fuse for the fuel pump. That’s all it was. But that 75 cents has provided the momentum for a good story to tell through the years.



A Reporter Remembers

Memoir 3

Ron Hollander

Many, many stories later, when I became a professor of journalism (which I always thought a pompous title, and a bit of an oxymoron), I would explain to my students that *when* a story happened could affect how prominently it was played in the paper. Other big news might push it farther back to—as columnist Jimmy Breslin so delicately put it—the brassiere ads.

The Kennedys were famous for their skill at manipulating the news. So there were cynics who said that only a Kennedy could arrange to commit possible manslaughter on the same day that men landed on the moon.

Yet of course no story could significantly eclipse Chappaquidick.

I sat in the Camaro, waiting for the Kopechnes. Waiting was a big part of being a reporter. I didn’t mind. I was on the hottest national story of the day. And after all, I had that radio.

There was live coverage of the moon landing. In that flat, emotionless, astronaut voice, Neil Armstrong (was that the perfect name?) counted off the feet to landing.

“Twenty feet down. Kicking up some dust. Okay, engine stopped. Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed.”

“Roger, Tranquility. We copy you on the ground. You got a bunch of guys about to turn blue. We’re breathing again. Thanks a lot.”

It was 3:17 and 40 seconds, Eastern Daylight Time, on July 20, 1969, and the Kopechnes were on their way.

It couldn’t have been more than half-an-hour before they pulled into the driveway. It was show time, and I was ready for my big number. I didn’t want them to get into the house and close the door on me, so I was a little fast across the street.

But I was soft. Later, when I did TV, there was that obtrusive microphone you were always sticking in people’s faces. But print was different. There was just me, my notebook, and a number two pencil with no eraser.

They let me in. They were too polite not to. It was always the little people, the poor, who you could interview. Their houses were right by the street with no 2 long drives or gates. Or their names were on the apartment buzzers. They didn’t know about lawyers or PR flacks. And they were well mannered

Joseph and Gwendolyn were just a father and mother who had lost their only child, a 28-year-old sparkly girl with short, blond hair from a Catholic college who as a kid used to traipse around the neighborhood with her bat on her shoulder and a Dodgers cap. Kennedy didn’t matter.

Gwendolyn twisted a blue handkerchief. Her eyes were teary, but her voice was clear: “I looked my daughter over. I picked the sleeves up on her little dress.” I wrote it down, but I was embarrassed to be taking notes. “There was not a mark on her body.”

Joseph held her left hand—the one with the wedding band—beside the two, framed pictures of Mary Jo on the credenza. There were fresh pansies in water.

He talked to me, but it wasn’t me he saw. “When she came home from college, she said she was going to thank us for putting her through school by giving a year to God. She taught on an Oklahoma Indian reservation. She always did have the love for the poor child.”



Sometimes in reporting you just want to reach out and hug somebody. Maybe I actually did on some of the Vietnam casualty stories. But here it seemed intrusive. So I just listened, which is what they wanted.

Mostly it was Gwendolyn. “Oh, she was a whizzer-dizzer. She’d just pull that kitchen apart, wash and wax it.” How she always made her bed when she came home to visit. Was on the rescue squad. How well she could handle herself. “No matter what she did, she was always very good at it.”

Joseph: “It was just that she was so thankful for everything.” How they never held her back, but instilled the difference between right and wrong. And, inevitably, how much she admired the Kennedys.

They were mourning, but showed no anger. “People tell us we should sue for a million dollars,” Joseph said. “What for? Why hate? Nothing can help us with our daughter now. No one can bring her back or console us.”

They continued, and I wrote it all down. It was my job, and I was good at it. I said many times how sorry I was, but it didn’t seem enough.

The story was a big deal, and ran on the whole front page of the Post. My editors were happy. Friends in the city room congratulated me.

But I was thinking of Gwendolyn and Joseph sitting in that whizzer-dizzer of a kitchen.



A Little Bit of Heaven Off of Route 17

Barbara Golub

The unbearable hot weather, the mosquitoes that showed no mercy and no air-conditioning in our apartment were some of the reasons why my mother and I left Brooklyn for the summer on an annual vacation to “a little bit of heaven” which lay north of the city.

Fortunate to be the first passengers picked up by the “Hackie”, we got the comfortable seats in the back of the big black passenger car. The other mothers and children had to sit in the two rows of jump seats in front of us for the 100 mile, four hour journey to the “mountains”. We were on our way to the Sun House a working farm owned by the Pendris family. It was located in Woodridge, a small village in Sullivan County in the Catskill Mountains of upstate New York. We were going to stay in one of the small bungalows that Mr. and Mrs. Pendris rented to a few guest families for the summer. Coming from Brooklyn where there wasn’t even a tree on my block, I looked forward to seeing the zinnias, petunias, black eyed susans, marigolds and roses that would greet us when we arrived.

Route 17 in those days was a very rough ride. The roads were not like the super highways of today. It was so hot inside of the car that we had to keep the windows open. The gas fumes invaded the interior and many of the children got car sick. We looked forward to stopping at “The Red Apple Rest” for some fresh country air, refreshments and to stretch our legs. My thoughts at that time were of the blueberries and blackberries that I’d soon be picking at the farm.

When we got to the infamous Wurtsboro hill, everyone but the driver had to get out of the car get behind it and push it with our overloaded trunks piled on the roof, up and over the very steep hill. Some of the “heavier” women had trouble keeping their balance while managing to keep their screaming children from falling under the wheels. I remember someone yelling, “OK, altogether now, 1-2-3 push” After quite a few attempts and with an all-out effort, we victoriously sent the car to the other side and happily with no casualties.

I was most fortunate as my father worked for the New York City Post Office in the Registry Department and made \$45 a week which was a lot of money in those depression days. He was able to send my mother and me to the farm for the entire summer. He came up by bus on weekends to enjoy swimming with us in the Neversink River which was less than a mile away. I loved the swimming but hated to put my feet down on the bottom of the river because it was so gooey from the leaves and grasses that had decayed there over time.

On some nights after dinner, we took the mile or so walk to town to have a black and white ice cream soda or a hot fudge sundae with real whipped cream and a cherry on top at the local ice cream parlor. When I was allowed to stay up late my mother, father and I got dressed up and with some of the other guests at the farm walked over to the “Casino” on the grounds of the Avon Lodge, a nearby hotel. We’d enjoy watching a young Sid Caesar perform. He’d married the daughter of the hotel owner and the “Casino” with its small stage and rows of folding chairs was the perfect place for him to hone his comedic skills. Many famous comedians got their start in hotels like these. This area was known as “The Borscht Belt” because of the many Jewish people who frequented either the hotels, farms or “Kuchaleins”(rooming houses with one large kitchen to share) and ate the traditional Jewish fare—pickled herring, bagels and lox, challah bread and borscht, a delicious cold beet soup with a dollop of sour cream. A real treat before bedtime was being able to go to the icebox in the kitchen of the main house and help myself to a glass of the



most delicious chocolate milk I’ve ever had and with it have one of Mrs. Pendris’s home baked butter cookies that melted in your mouth.

At the end of one summer when the Polio epidemic was at its worst, my mother and father decided to keep me in the country until things got better at home. A short distance up the road was a one room wooden school house which I walked to every day. There was a row assigned to each grade and I being eight years old was put in the third row with the other eight year olds. Books were handed out and school was in session. When I think of it now, the teacher must have had a very difficult time teaching all of the different grades at the same time. As much as I can remember, all went smoothly in this wonderful atmosphere.

Some years later when I was eleven years old, I had the most wonderful thrill of seeing “The Wizard of OZ” at 2 o’clock in the afternoon in the local movie house in Woodridge. In my mind’s eye, I can still picture the theater with the house lights on before the picture began and how excited I was to be grown up enough to be sitting by myself!

These cherished memories of all those wonderful summers so long ago at the Pendris farm are worth every bump suffered on the road up to “a little bit of heaven off of Route 17”.



You know the isolation is getting to you when:

Kathee Shaff Kelson

Trying to remember what made me laugh....Jeff Foxworthy with his “You might Be a Redneck” jokes came to mind. So here is my riff on his humor.

You know the isolation is getting to you when:

When you try to find the news channel on your microwave
watch the screen
and realize it might be your best bet...

When you name all the squirrels in your bird feeder
and the big gray one with the crazy eye named Ralph
starts giving you tips on the stock market
and you believe him...

When you get dressed up for your Zoom cocktail party
and think of your flannel pajamas with polar bears
as “formal wear.”
and someone compliments you on them...

When you watch cat u tubes for hours
and you wonder if your cat might also have talent
and you realize your cat is a dog...

When you throw your cash into the washing machine
out of fear that it's carrying the germs of thousands of hands
and add Downey
and iron it...

When you stop wearing deodorant
in hopes that it will remind you of Zumba class you're missing
and it feels oddly comforting...

When you finally have time to organize your closets
and you color code your clothes
and then try to alphabetize them...

When you look in the mirror
and think it is “face time”
with a some old stranger
and you introduce yourself...



When you decide that cutting your own hair can't be all that difficult
and your grandkids think you have
a new “silly filter app” on “face time”
and you write them out of your will.....again.

When you run out of hair dye
and think that red and green food color might make brown dye in a pinch
and it does
in a way
and you once again write your grandkids out of your will...

When you finally clean up your bedroom and hang up your clothes
and discover your treadmill
and in a fit of energy
take the clothes off the hangers and cover the damned thing up again...

When your house is so clean
that you pray that the dust bunnies are fornicating
so that you'll have a new generation to chase...

When you pray to the gods of Costco and Stop and Shop
for manna
and learn the meaning of eternity...

When you do research on what people did before toilet paper
and wish you had not...

When the most moving news of the day
is your partner's bathroom report
and you wish you could find a “block” button for them...

When you watch the laundry bouncing in the clothes dryer
and think it is cable news
and write a compliment to the station...

When you carefully dress and groom for that office meet-up
and even remember to press “enhance face” on Zoom
and you see that your smile is nearly as bright
as your Christmas tree blinking over your left shoulder...

When you think that a candlelight dinner might boost your spirits
and you try really hard to “plate”
oatmeal...

When think you'll try meditation



and you need a peaceful place away from your family
so you build an igloo out of toilet paper
and you want to live there forever.

When you leave at dawn to score that coveted handicap parking spot outside of SBS
and you smugly sit in your car drinking your latte
and wait three hours for your Zoom class to start
and watch it on your phone in your freezing car.



Ninety Cuts No Ice Here

Bob Stone

Stooped and leaning I look you in the eye.
I am still here to bus the dishes
and make the pots shine.
I'm in the conversation
when the fate of the world is decided.
We remember our cabin in the country
where I split wood and stacked it
next to the cellar door.

I tell about when we were crowded
into tiny rooms above dirty snow.
We talk about when I climbed
an impossibly heavy ladder
to change old storm windows.

You will still make pie crust
from my recipe.

I'm here when the babies I raised
go gray and lame and their children
walk a distant path.

Some days I'm tired
and fall into bed early
practicing for that time.

My husk may be put away
but I'm here when you laugh or cry
and tell my stories.

Soon the echoes will become faint
time will dim thoughts
and I'll be a cracked image
tucked into one of the albums
stacked in the bottom of a closet
an entry in a census form
or maybe someday
I'll be back as a hologram
sitting at the dining room table.



My Babies

Jothi L. Curcio

Our current house in Lake Grove, was built in 1998, and we moved into it, in January 1999. I was busy the next couple of years developing the gardens in the front and back yards, with the help of landscapers. I decided to have a water feature at the corner of our backyard. The landscaper built a pond that could hold around 600 gallons of water, and constructed a waterfall. It looked beautiful. Then I decided to have some baby goldfish in the pond. They added beauty to the pond.

Around that time, my cousin who lives in London came to visit me. We decided to fly to Fort Lauderdale, Florida and take a cruise to the Bahamas. As my husband Carl could not accompany us due to his work, I entrusted him with the task of feeding the fish daily. He was not too happy about that. However, he agreed to do it.

When we came back from the Florida trip, I found not even a single fish in the pond. Carl could not explain what happened. One morning, he said, he went to feed them as usual, and found all of them had disappeared except one dead fish in the skimmer box, which he threw away over the fence in the wooded area behind our house. The mystery was solved in a few days when we saw an egret descending in our back yard and walking toward our pond and peering into the water.

I was dejected and gave up the idea of raising goldfish in our pond, for the next 5 years. Then I found out, I could cover the whole pond with a net and the egret would not be able to get to the fish. My enthusiasm was renewed.

I got the pond well covered with a net and got nine small goldfish and one koi. I started to care for them as my babies. I got the water checked every few months for its pH, Ammonia content, Nitrite and Phosphate levels. Often I added Pond Stress Coat to condition the water, Aqua Clear, if the water was cloudy. Fed them with high quality Tetra Pond Koi Vibrance fish food during the summer, and Tetra Pond Spring & Fall transitional fish food, for cooler months.

All ten fish were happy, swimming along and grew fast into 8” to 10” long adult goldfish, and the koi, in a few years.

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During the winter, when the temperature started to dip below 40F, they would stop eating. They would go into hibernation for the next 4 months. I had to use an aeration kit to oxygenate the water, and a de-icer to maintain a small opening in the ice to allow gas exchange and prevent build-up of toxic gases.

I always marveled at Nature or God’s hand in keeping my babies alive during the winter season, under the sheet of ice and 30” to 67” (2009-2010) snow most of the years, in the past 15 years. It was a joy to see them emerge when all the ice melted.

During these years, they multiplied and by 2017, there were 18 fish.

We never worried about them when we were away during winter months. They always survived all the winters.



Before we left for India in December 2017, I checked the oxygen. It was working. I checked the de-icer. It didn't immerse into the water fully. I couldn't adjust the cord, as the cord and the rocks around it were frozen, as we were having single digit temperatures. I felt a little uneasy. However I assumed, as 90% of the equipment was in the water, it should work.

After spending more than a month in India, we returned on February 5th at night. The next morning, I went to check the pond. It was covered by a thick sheet of ice. I couldn't see anything below. I had to wait until it thawed. I couldn't see any opening where the de-icer was. I had a stabbing pain in my heart. I should have taken time to loosen up the de-icer cord, before we left.

When the ice started to melt partially, 4 days later, I found some of the adult fish were floating, dead. I checked for the oxygen bubbles in the water, there were none. The de-icer was not the problem. There was no oxygen. I removed a bucket that had covered a wooden pole, to protect it from the elements that had the electric outlets. The plug for the oxygen pump seemed not totally inserted into the outlet. How did it happen?

I pushed the plug in and the oxygen pump started working. The cord must have been pulled back by the weight of the snow and ice, due to the snowstorm that happened in January, when we were in India. All 18 fish must have died, without oxygen.

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We had snowstorms like this in previous years. Nothing like this ever happened. Why did Nature or God give up on them this year?

This is the end. I'll never have any fish in the pond again anymore. It became a tomb for them.

When the temperature got warmer, we started to remove the dead ones near the fringe of the pond. Then I noticed movement in the younger ones in the middle of the pond. What a miracle! The younger ones survived without enough oxygen, for a while.

The dead ones were the 7 mature adult goldfish and the koi. All the younger ones and the babies survived.

Is it the way of Nature to remove the older ones completely, to make room for the younger ones? I don't know.

Then in these two years, they all grew up and multiplied. Now I have

21 gold fish.



Dad and Timothy

Dan Sherry

It was a dreary November day, one year into the Great Depression. My father was looking to find his younger brother, Timothy. He wanted to go outside in the weak November light and play Cowboys and Indians. Timothy was almost one year younger than my father, George who would be five in a few weeks. George as usual would be the cowboy and Timothy would gladly be the Indian. With his older brothers, Johnny and Terence, it would be a different story. They would dictate who would be the Indian and it would always be George.

Their five-story brick apartment building was surrounded by woods. The building was one of those that looked old even when it was new. It seemed to be built worn-down. Built in 1912, it was neither old nor new - just had that worn-down look. It sat on the edge of what would eventually become Inwood Park, an interesting city park that is well used to this day.

Their apartment was neither small nor large but certainly seemed small with six children and two adults. While many Americans suffered mightily during the depression, the Sherry's of the Inwood Park neighborhood of Manhattan were able to eat three meals a day. Modest meals but three a day. They had no luxuries to speak of but the children were raised to appreciate what they had. They were a Catholic family as their father, Sylvester, and their mother, Mary Ann, immigrated from Ireland in 1915. Mary Ann left for a better life and Sylvester left to avoid arrest by the British soldiers who had been searching for him back in County Monaghan. Freedom was their reward for leaving and fleeing Ireland.

George knew something was different that grey November day as his mother had him dress up in his Sunday best. It was not Sunday and he never enjoyed wearing his Sunday best - hand me downs from his two older brothers that never fit properly. The shoes would be too large until they became too small. Then the shoes and the clothes would be handed down to Timothy. But why was he wearing his Sunday best today, he wondered?

The apartment was filled with many adults. Most of them were also in their Sunday best. George was confused. The ashtrays were being emptied by his two older sisters. Cigarette smoke filled the air throughout the apartment. His mother and father were busy talking to their guests. Whiskey was being poured and shots were being downed. He noticed Johnny and Terence sneaking away with some whiskey glasses. A sense of sadness seemed to linger in the air along with the cigarette smoke. Something was wrong but what?

George checked the three bedrooms looking for Timothy. Then the kitchen. Then the bathroom. Then the largest room in the apartment, the dining room. Staring at the dining room table, strange, was all George could think. There was Timothy. Why was his bother lying on their large dining room table? He was sleeping! George went to the table and gave Timothy's leg a gentle push. Timothy did not respond so George went up to Timothy and spoke to him, "Timmy wake up. Let's go outside and play". Still no response so George shook Timothy's shoulder. Timothy's eyes remained closed. George did not understand what was happening.



My grandfather walked into the dining room and sat his son on his lap. Sylvester was suffering the death of his youngest child and had not yet spoken to his now youngest living child. He did his best to explain that Timothy was now in heaven singing with the angels. George’s young mind did not comprehend heaven and angels. George did understand that he and Timmy would never again play Cowboys and Indians.

My father’s first Irish wake was the saddest day of his young life.