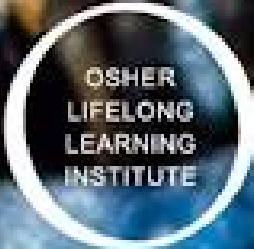


LITERARY TEA FALL 2021



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STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY



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Our First Credit Card

Camile Abelson

I grew up in a modest middle-income household. As a typical one-income family, we were never broke but money was always an issue; I’d often hear my parents late at night talk about how much was in savings, could they pay the most recent medical bill, what about new shoes for my sister, brother and I. We always managed but it was never really easy. Since 1944 my father worked at Pan American Airlines at Idlewild Airport (later renamed JFK) in Fleet Service, which was housed in Pan Am’s Cargo Building. His salary and benefits were reasonably good but couldn’t cover non-essential expenses.

When it came to money, Dad was of his generation, very guarded, very modest, never discussed money with anyone, other than those late night conversations (which I sometimes crept into the upstairs hallway to listen to) with Mom; he believed you simply did not buy something unless you had the cash to pay for it. Therefore, for many years my parents did not own a credit card.

We moved from Brooklyn to our new Bay Shore home in 1957. Suddenly, we moved from a cracker box space in Ridgewood to a big house to furnish. My parents did so very slowly. One of the things they were most grateful for was a new home with modern major appliances which we didn’t have in Brooklyn, like a washer and dryer. Mom loved that. The one disappointment, though, was our refrigerator. It was a small Kelvinator with practically no freezer space. In addition, our fridge suffered occasional minor breakdowns requiring repair visits. Mom was a great cook and looked forward to creating new meals with space to refrigerate and freeze them. Not in this fridge. She just hated it and after a few years would implore my father to buy a new, larger one, arguing correctly the repair visits were costly and mounting. He was always understanding but would firmly reply “Sorry, Fay, but not now.” He’d argue they couldn’t afford it, there were always other, far more essential expenses necessary. He wasn’t wrong. She’d plead,

“Can’t we apply for a credit card and charge it? Sears has great appliances and the monthly payment shouldn’t be that great.”

My father wouldn’t budge but he wasn’t old-school for nothing, but a product of the depression, as was my mother. They’d often talk about their childhood poverty, how their parents were unable to afford meat and vegetables at the dinner table; and dependent on the local Catholic church to provide donated clothes and shoes.

Dad would say,

“Money is a precious gift when all you remember is never having any.” Of course, he was right.

That new refrigerator and credit card would have to wait until one Sunday morning, in June of 1963, when we all rose to enjoy breakfast together. Dad worked almost every day; he usually left for



work by 5am Monday through Saturday but was generally home on Sundays. When he was, we’d all get to sleep late and pile into the kitchen for a real breakfast of omelets, pancakes, french toast, and most

of all, chatter. It was the happiest morning of the week. On this particular morning, we (Mom, Dad, my sister, Rosemary and the youngest, my brother Tony) all entered the kitchen and saw a huge puddle of water covering much of the tile floor. In absolute silence, with jaws dropped, we all turned to the refrigerator which was dripping. My mother, who was a lifelong cleaning fanatic, was gasping at the mess; Dad couldn’t speak, just stared. I sloshed over to the fridge, gently opened the door and saw everything from cold cuts, to a mustard jar, to a couple of half gallons of milk, jams and jellies, all wading on their respective shelves. What little was in the freezer was now fully defrosted. I couldn’t bring myself to state the obvious so my sister Rosemary did:

“I think the fridge died.”

Mom grabbed a mop and my sister and I fetched two bath towels. Dad and my brother Tony helped empty every item from the fridge into the sink as we dried the floor. Most everything was thrown out. My mother in brilliant understatement, stood panting, with mop in hand, and victoriously declared,

“Well, I guess we don’t have a choice. That’s that!”

Dad remained stunned, he just couldn’t believe it; but later that day, they went to Sears, applied for a store credit card and bought a refrigerator - larger and far more modern than the one we had - which was delivered three days later. We all comforted Dad telling him we’d be fine, and wouldn’t ask for any unnecessary expense so as to help out; but here’s the one moment I remember best: After the realization the fridge did indeed die, no way to save it, I saw the tiniest smile creep from the side of my mother’s lips as she panted and sighed and did her best “woe is me” performance, while doggedly mopping the floor. Oh, mommy, without having to do anything, you got a new refrigerator AND your first credit card! Brava!



A Child’s Garden of Verses

Virginia Amaro Tanner

“Time for bed!” my mother said.

Although it was still light outside at 7:30, I didn’t mind. “And I should like so much to play, to have to go to bed by day.” notwithstanding. Bath done and pajama-clad, I took my mother’s hand and we walked upstairs to my little room. As we passed through the hall, she kissed her fingertips, touched the crucifix on the wall and then touched my head. I crawled up and settled in. I loved my room. It overlooked the backyard and all the things that I loved in my little girl world. I could see the dog house, the garden, the chickens, the garage, my reading tree. Mrs. Kane’s white trellis was covered with ripening grapes behind her wire fence. I could almost hear her yelling at Pal. “Stop running and leave those chickens be!” I watched the early evening sunshine leaving and enjoyed the shadows covering over our yard. After “Angel of God my guardian dear” and “Now I lay me down to sleep” along with a few “God blesses...,” my mother would ask me,

“What do you want to read?”

And then the fun began. She took out our copy of Stevenson’s work and we began our nightly adventure.

I would first request “The Swing” because I had one. She opened “A Child’s Garden of Verses” and began. “How do you like to go up in a swing, up in the sky so blue? Oh, I do think it is the pleasantest thing a child can do.” Often, she would start the verse and I would chime in to finish it. If I started, Mom would finish.

Some days I would sit on our swing and yell, “Higher, higher!” to my dad. I thought maybe I could see the “rivers and trees and cattle all over the countryside” if he pushed high enough. I never did but loved to sit there and look about at my own view. The hydrangea bush was fascinating. We always waited to see if the flowers would somehow change from white to blue because we buried some tin cans and nails underneath. That they never morphed before our eyes was not for lack of wanting.

Next, “My Shadow,” Almost every sunny day I would find a spot and see if my shadow really did go in and out with me. On the shady days, I would always ask my mother, “Can you see my shadow following behind me, or did it get too small to see?” I wondered if it really did “stay at home, fast asleep in bed.”

“When I was sick and lay abed, I had two pillows at my head.”

“All my toys beside me lay, to keep my happy all the day.”

And I would dally about in the land of Counterpane. I loved that word. I asked my mother if I could get one asked my mother if I could get one. I pleaded so that I might enter the land of Nod,



“The strangest things are there for me, Try as I like to find the way, I never can get back by day.”

After several more poems and usually one or two rounds of “On the Good Ship Lollipop,” my mother would leave me to fall asleep. “Good night, God bless you.” Rarely did sleep come quickly. I was always thinking, visiting odd places, rhyming words, making up my own poems and often listening to my parents’ voices, downstairs and away, as they listened to the radio. Sometimes I would leave my bed; my lamp and I would go inside my closet, a low one under the eaves that held my dresses and my pinafores. I would take the book and “read” to myself. Over and over again, sometimes even with my eyes closed; I would retell those poems, sometimes to my dolls, mostly to myself. Most nights I fell asleep in my little nook but in the morning, woke up in my bed. My father’s last chore before he and my mother went to bed was to scoop me up and tuck me in again.

To this day, I cannot see “the kites on high ...tossed O wind that sings the loudest song.” without going back to my little room and my mother reading to me. I am sure “A good play upon the stairs” that regaled a trip on a ship inspired the game my sister and I invented, “Train,” on our very own stairs. Our train was headed to Virginia City or California and we were dance hall girls clad in our mom’s high heels and our chenille bathrobes, hers pink, mine blue, folded over and tied at the waist like long aprons. Our train left on Saturday mornings while our parents slept. Our dining car served lovely breakfasts from our kitchen...bread and butter, with some cinnamon sugar sprinkled over our bread...it would have been toast like our grandmother would make for us but we weren’t allowed to use the toaster. On those trips, the train climbed “up the mountainsides of dreams” until our parents got up to start the day. Continued next week!

A few years ago, I started a search for our own copy of Stevenson’s work...my sister had it on her bookshelf in Florida. It was worn and tattered, falling apart and missing pages. We think the one we had might have been our mother’s own copy from her own childhood. I found that the hall crucifix was a common baptismal gift in the 20’s. It is marked “baby” on the back. No one is left who can confirm either of these clues but it pleases us, all four, to believe that they both were Mom’s from childhood. I cannot speak for my sisters but I know, for me, Stevenson’s poetry inspired wanderlust, an appreciation of the beauty of nature. It taught me to cherish moments of solitude. He inspired imagination in me to make the ordinary less ordinary. To this day, I think of his rhymes and stretch my mind to make new and fanciful ones. And curiosity! Having been an ill child, Stevenson wrote to fill his time with joyful images and hope-filled messages for other children. My mother saw great value in sharing his thoughts with us as she recited his tender verse. She had been a child confined with leg splints for two years,

“Mom, did Grandma read to you in the land of Counterpane? Is that how you knew?” I wonder this now.

Decades passed. Alzheimer’s came to my mother as it had to her own. There were days that she did not speak. I discovered that music would open her up and then she would speak. For years, after lunch, we would ride in my car and listen to her 1940’s standards, singing along. She would always rush to finish the lyric ahead of the music; I think it was to prove to me that she remembered. Later, car rides were not possible but walks were. Rainy days found us strolling the corridors of Sunrise Assisted Living arm in arm, fair weather, the parking lots and walkways. Sometimes others joined us and



we had a parade! Our repertoire began with some prayers, followed by some songs, followed by some poems. If I started, she would finish. If she started, I would chime in. A Hail Mary and a Glory Be, Angel of God, Sidewalks of NY and “I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me...And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.”

Then, walks weren’t possible but our songs, prayers and recitations continued until they couldn’t. Always, “Good night, God bless you.” And it started with a book!



My City

Patricia Ballan

I've just finished reading Pete Hamill's book “Downtown”. In it, he delved deeply into the details of New York's history, and expressed his passionate love for our city- his and mine.

Once long ago I aspired to be a Big Apple Tour Guide, and found that one had to be born in New York City to attain that distinction.

My love for New York is well known among my family and friends. So many times I took small groups around to places I'd scouted out beforehand, just beaming at their delight at the wonders I was showing them.

Most often entry was free to miraculous sights: the carved altar at St. Thomas' Church on 53rd and Fifth Avenue, the Dahesh Museum, the IBM Gallery at 57th and Madison, the “Little Church Around the Corner”, Temple Emanuel on Fifth Ave., the Aristotle Onassis Cultural gallery (in memory of his son, Alexander), St. Patrick's Cathedral....

I pretended that the Frick mansion was my home, and would proudly show my “guests” the lovely courtyard fountain, planted with lilies all around. I knew many secrets about the collection; where to find the Limousin enamels, and that there was an organ concert on Sundays at 2pm near the staircase. I could also point out the distorted proportion of the Countess d'Haussonville's arm in the famous painting. Entry to the Frick was free.

Free then, too, was the Metropolitan Museum of Art and its romantic uptown partner, the Cloisters. I found that the gift shop in the Asia Society had the finest assortment of Asian jewelry and souvenirs in the city.

Some of the great ethnic food trucks of today have achieved gourmet status, but such an idea was unheard of back then. The number of restaurants in the city is amazing.

I had learned from a Chinese friend how to order baked pork buns in Chinatown at my favorite bakery on Canal Street, Tai Pan. The buns were 50 cents each and two of them were enough for lunch. (I'd ask for “tassia bow”). One could stop at the City Bakery on 18th Street, and be satisfied there for the price of a muffin. Or perhaps have a knish at Yonah Schimmel's—inexpensive bites were just there to be discovered. If a substantial bowl of soup was required, a visit to Veselka at 9th St. and Second Ave. in the heart of the Ukrainian enclave, solved that problem inexpensively.

Across from the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, is the Hungarian Pastry Shop and its fruit-filled delicacies. That shop is worth a detour.



My last stop would usually be Zabar's, so that I could take home treats for my husband, such as pate', lox and smoked sable, imported cheeses and babka. At the balsamic vinegar counter, there were bottles of very intense aged vinegar selling at \$40.00 for just a few ounces. Zabar's is still a gourmet cook's paradise.

The Little Church Around the Corner has a New York backstory. Originally consecrated as the Episcopal “Church of the Transfiguration”, it was near several theaters. Actors and actresses wishing to be married would apply at other churches and were turned away because theatrical folk were considered disreputable. They were told “Try the little church around the corner”. As a result, it developed a reputation for welcoming all. Plaques inscribed with famous names who were married there can be seen about the church.

Occasionally I visited on my lunch hour and read the prayer of St. Francis, which was lettered in Italic script and it rested on a lectern. A soft light shone on it from a stained glass window. There was an air of peace and comfort in that spot. I would return renewed to my hectic job.

Now in my old age I'm divesting rather than accumulating. However, in my heyday I shopped the stores like Odd Job and Weber's which specialized in selling closeouts. I bought Christmas presents all year round.

My city abounded with such shops and I pounced on many a stellar bargain, dragging huge bags home on the L.I.R.R. Those were the days!

Many of the places I spoke of have disappeared, but live crystal clear in my memory. Recently we almost lost the Strand Bookstore. Carnegie Hall and the Grand Central Terminal were saved, the Apthorp's facade is still a marvel, but so many fine architectural icons have gone away.

Still, don't focus your eye on the shops at street level. Look up at the floors above and you'll see largely unnoticed building decorations of great beauty. The architectural historian, Barry Lewis, once conducted a street-by-street tour on television pointing them out. He loved New York as much as Pete Hamill did and I do. I have voted him into our select fraternity.



Boss of Bullitt

Joel G. Cohen

In his first public interview in years, ninety-one year old Gene Hackman has marked the 50th anniversary of *The French Connection* (October 9 1971) by asserting that the film’s car chases were eclipsed by those of *Bullitt*.

The 1968 film *Bullitt* is a classic for many reasons; Steve McQueen’s supercool performance as Frank Bullitt, Jacqueline Bisset as girlfriend Cathy, the world’s most beautiful civil engineer. There’s the 1968 -Ford Mustang GT Fastback/Dodge Magnum Charger duel yielding cinema’s best car chase ever. Add to this, the San Francisco scenery and you have a great flick with a fifty three year run.

I first saw the movie at the RKO Fordham in the Bronx. I was thirteen and too young for driver’s ed. I have watched the film tens of times since then. I have visited San Francisco several times and arranged to see some of the film locations.

When I turned twenty-three I joined the Federal government , staying for ten years. I left and returned in my mid-fifties for another tour of ten years. Such government service has helped me appreciate a character in *Bullitt* who gets no play from film buffs or reviewers, – Captain Sam Bennet, convincingly portrayed by Simon Oakland.

Interestingly, Oakland’s immediate preceding movie role was also with Steve McQueen in *The Sand Pebbles*. He played Stawski, a machinist mate. Stawski is a degenerate bully who nearly surrenders shipmate McQueen’s character Jake Holman to an angry Chinese mob. Stawski and Bennet couldn’t be more different men.

Captain Bennet is Lieutenant Frank Bullitt’s boss. You can hope for a boss like Bennet, but you’re not likely to get him; especially working for the government. Most civil servant bosses are risk adverse, making a career of covering their ass. They will rarely contradict or challenge their superiors. Most important, they won’t back their team when things get bad or messy. There are some exceptional managers, I was privileged to work for a few. They don’t make it to the top.

The villain in this tale is not the mob boss on the run, Johnny Ross; rather, a politically ambitious prosecutor making his play before a U.S. Senate subcommittee hearing by promising to produce Ross, as his star witness. The prosecutor is Walter Chalmers, portrayed perfectly by Robert Vaughn. Chalmers is technically outside the chain of San Francisco police command, but nevertheless able to control Bennet’s superior Captain Baker played by Norman Fell. Soft spoken, well mannered, charming; Chalmers, is destined to fail. He answers to no one.



On the way there will be others whose reputation he might destroy. He doesn't trust anyone. He must take down Bullitt, who he specially picked to guard and deliver Ross; why, in order to cover his own gross incompetence in losing his star witness. Without Bennet to back him, as good a detective as he is, Bullitt will soon be an ex- San Francisco cop.

A sampling of the dialogue establishing Bennet as the boss you want:

ARRIVAL OF CAPTAIN BENNET TO HOSPITAL MEETING FRANK BULLITT LEARNING ABOUT INJURED CONDITION OF STAR WITNESS:

CB : “I want to talk to you. Play it by the book from now on”

FB: “Does Chalmers run this investigation or do I?”

CB: “All I'm interested in is results. Do whatever you think is best. I'll try to back you up.”

CHALMERS TO BULLITT:

Lieutenant, I shall personally officiate at your public crucifixion...if Ross doesn't recover during the course of the hearing. so I can at least present his deposition.

And, I assure you, I shall not suffer the consequence of your incompetence.

And even if there wasn't any...I'm rather certain I can prove negligence on your part.

WALTER CHALMERS SUNDAY SERVICE OF A WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS ON CAPTAIN BENNET OUTSIDE CHURCH TO HAVE STAR WITNESS PRODUCED

Chalmers is introduced to Bennet's wife and family outside their church. Chalmers imagines how difficult it must be to send the Captain's oldest son Tony to the university on a captain's salary, but notes there's no reason Bennet won't advance if does the right thing.

WC: Nail him (Bullitt) to the cross. I want him written off”.

CB: “ My family's waiting for me.”

Bennet states he will not order Bullitt to produce the star witness in his possession.

CB: “ As his superior officer I have given him complete charge of the case”.

WC: After personally serving CB the writ- “Castrate him”.

Captain Bennet never gives in to the pressure from Chalmers. He responds with few words and never backs down. That's what makes him the Boss of Bullitt.



The Store

Michael Dobler

They sold the candy store when I was around six. I don't really know why they did, but I remember hearing that the brand-new Carvel stand that opened across the street cost them a lot of their summer ice cream business. I somehow think there was more to it than that, but I will never know. It has hit me that I am the last person left in the family who has any memory of the store, as elusive as that memory might be. Everyone else is gone – my grandparents, my parents, my aunts and uncles, my sister. The memories end with me. The stories belong to my kids.

I can't say what I remember, as opposed to what I've been told. It's all combined somewhere in my mind, in a place where fact and fable intermingle to create memories. But this much I know to be fact: My grandfather owned the candy store, or as they called it back in the 1950s, the luncheonette. It was in Brooklyn, on East 52 Street, around the corner from Winthrop JHS 232, somewhere near the border of East Flatbush and Brownsville. His name was Abraham Pincus, so the store was called “Pinky's”. My parents worked long days and nights in that store, especially in the summer when they stayed open late to accommodate the neighborhood people who came in for ice cream or sodas. To this day, I do not know if they actually owned any part of the store, but they worked as hard as anyone. In fact, the whole family worked there in one way or another.

I can see my grandmother, Rose, in her white apron, with beads of sweat making their way down from her forehead, preparing food, or serving lunch to the junior high school kids, and always yelling at them to stop spinning around on the counter stools. I remember my mother and father standing behind the counter, cooking and serving, and I can hear my father calling the ice cream Sundays “frappes”. He used that term for as long as he lived, well after the store was gone.

Even I, at age five or six, had jobs to do. There was a rack filled with comic books in the front of the store, to the left of the door, and I used to arrange them in some way or another, stashing away the ones I especially liked. Those comics would be worth a small fortune today. The cigarettes were also kept in the front of the store, behind the counter. Smokers (and who wasn't a smoker in the early fifties?) would ask for the brand they wanted, and I would hand it to them because I could tell Camels from Chesterfields or Marlboros based on the color or design of the package. The truth is, I have no memory of any of this, but I was told about it so many times over the years that I assume it to be true.

I clearly remember the huge, light green air conditioner unit that stood like a sentinel in the back of the store. I was told that it was a big deal when they got that air conditioner, in the hope that it would



attract more people into the store on hot summer nights at a time when very few had air conditioners in their apartments.

There was a counter on the right side of the store, and a few tables in the back, in front of the air conditioner. I can see my grandmother and her sisters, the old musicians from Minsk, sitting around one of those tables and talking. The story was that they were telling stories, not usually complimentary, about relatives who weren't there and customers who were. I imagine them as some Yiddish version of the witches in Macbeth, but is this true? Maybe this was an exaggeration of their normal conversation; a family story told to elicit a laugh. Or maybe not.

My uncle Paul, the musician, occasionally helped out in the store when he wasn't playing a gig. Supposedly, though he was a master clarinetist, he was incredibly clumsy, and dropped or spilled whatever he was holding – ketchup bottles, eggs, soda. It probably happened once or twice, but it became family lore. The man who distributed toys and novelties to sell in the store would show up every so often and would give me one of his samples. I cannot remember his name or face, but I do remember getting those toys. And at the end of the day my sister, who was six years older than me, used to walk with me to our apartment around the corner, and watch me in the evening while the rest of the family was still in the store. That, I know to be true, and I think of it often.

Ten years ago, my wife and I drove our son to a place he was staying in Brooklyn. I decided that I had to drive over and see the store. It was raining heavily, so we looked at the building through the window of the car and took some pictures. Pinky's was now a grocery, or a bodega. It didn't look much like I remembered it, but it seemed like a nice, welcoming place for the people in the neighborhood. Maybe it gave them an occasional alternative to Starbucks or McDonalds. And as I sat in my car looking through the raindrops, I wondered if perhaps somebody's grandmother was working inside, yelling at the kids for spinning on the counter stools.



November

Len Farano

Grey.

Dark.

Grey and dark.

Dark and grey and white.

White but mostly grey and cold.

No longer autumn, not yet winter.

*Almost barren trees whose leaves linger
preparing to join their lost brethren
already stacked layer upon layer.*

*Each unit of the total devoted
with Proustian adoration to the past.*

To saints and souls and soldiers fallen.

To feasts of founding fathers.

*A time for accounting,
for closing life's annual ledgers.*

*Linked to his sisters April, June and September
by equal duration yet standing apart somehow;
sober, somber, final.*



A Requiem

Barbara Golub

How do you memorialize the home where you lived life for fifty two years? You don't say prayers at the gravesite with family and friends surrounding you. You don't do the traditional sitting Shiva which is customary in a Jewish home after the loss of a loved one. No family or friends pay a Shiva call, bringing food, sharing memories of the departed one, helping the mourner to cope with the loss. No one really cared except me, my daughter Miriam and my son Steven.

There came a time when I had to leave my home and it was almost impossible for me to do. I truly loved this house, from the moment I walked into the model, a backsplit split level house (where the split level was only visible from the side elevation. The front elevations showed only a single story and the two stories were in the back.) There were four bedrooms, living room, kitchen, dining room, den and two baths. I knew that this was the dream home that I had always wished for. Situations arose however that made that dream explode into the harsh reality that I had no choice but to sell.

The new owners of my house at 25 Chenango Drive in Jericho, New York tore it down immediately after the sale was completed. They would never occupy it, put their furniture in it, stock the pantry with their favorite foods and walk through the rooms where fifty two years of my memories were amassed. This house, although being left with only memories, would always be mine and mine alone.

My husband Selwyn, baby daughter Miriam and beagle puppy Hawkins and I traveled from our apartment in New York City the long way to Jericho, Long Island as the Long Island Expressway had not been built yet to watch our new home being built from the ground up. It was thrilling especially for me who had been living in small apartments for thirty three years of my life to have my lifelong dream of having a house of my own come true. We moved in on Selwyn's thirty eighth birthday, March 1, 1961.

Memories abound as I am writing this love letter to the home that I dearly loved. As I drove into the driveway every single time coming home, I always looked up at the house and a warm glow came over me. The blizzard that snowed us in on the night that Steven was born and how we managed to get to the hospital. The kids playing when they were little and then watching them grow up seemingly in such a short time. The birthday parties and when the “Rains Came” on Miriam's New York University graduation party. My father bringing my mother from the hospital to stay with us on week-ends. The almost fire on my fortieth birthday when the 40 “Magic Relighting Birthday Candles” would not blow out and started to burn down the cake. Watching the kids play with our wonderful Siberian Husky,



Nikki. Seeing my father who had the patience of a saint read and play games with Miriam and Steven. The summer parties with my thirty Richard Brown film class friends who after feasting, hopping into my king sized bed to watch a movie. Playing duets on the piano with my pal Flo, recalling the shared laughter with friends and sometimes even tears that filled up those unforgettable years.

I am so fortunate that I shared life’s blessings such as engagements, weddings and new babies in that wonderful place and that every time I want to go back there I just close my eyes and conjure up a sweet nostalgic, heartwarming memory.



Terrified Tillie

Irma Gurman

My mother, Tillie, was terrified of many things, but never was she more terrified than she was of the water. We never went to the beach. She said she hated the sand, but I knew better. Those waves carried all sorts of hidden dangers beneath their surface.

So, when we built a pool on our property, Tillie always sat at least 6 feet from the edge, lest she might miss a step and fall in. She sat on a beach chair and watched my family cavort in the water and simply enjoyed watching us enjoy ourselves.

Our pool was the standard 16 x 32, with a three foot shallow end. This is where the story takes place. Now, I must tell you that Tillie was barely 4 foot ten when standing on her tip toes, but if you do a slight calculation, you will realize that the three feet of water still only reached slightly above her waist.

It was a hot day, and the water would be so refreshing. She dipped her toes into the water and we convinced her to put on a bathing suit. Of course, she didn't own one, so I gave her one of mine. She looked really cute, and everyone complimented her on what a bathing beauty she was. We all decided that she should not waste this rare opportunity, and after a great deal of cajoling, terrified Tillie summoned up her bravura and stepped into the three foot end of the pool. Of course, she immediately lost her footing. She couldn't feel the bottom and she began bobbing up and down and screaming, “ Help! Help! I'm drowning!” We all rushed to her aid, pulled her up by her armpits and lifted her out of the pool. She was not cooperative, flailing and screaming the whole time.

I do not exaggerate. We have a video of the whole incident, so Tillie was unable to deny her unjustified panic. But she didn't want to look at the movies afterwards, since she literally looked like a tiny, trembling, teary, terrified Tillie.



Red Light, Green Light

Bob Hayes

Back in the days of my splendid youth summertime was especially enjoyable. We filled dozens of hours with ball--playing, bike riding and a vast variety of outdoor games.

We didn't need toys or sports uniforms to participate. We just used our imagination.

“Tag” was always good for a healthy workout. It came along with some friendly sniping remarks, like “I Gotcha”, “Naw, you missed me by a mile;”, “Did not”, etc. which were shouted in merriment at each other. Usually, the most sacred of home base was usually a tree, a sturdy, stately oak tree was fine.

An enjoyable twist in “Tag” was “Freeze Tag.” It was much more of a team game. Players who had already been tagged were frozen in place. But, another player who was still free could “un-freeze.” them, helping them to run to home base.

Skelly was another street game of some re-known (it mainly was played in Queens parks.) Brightly filled bottle caps were “pinged” (that is pushed) by hand around the asphalt scoreboard. You could have great fun by “blasting” (striking) another player's bottle cap (and knocking them out of the game). Skelly filled many an hour in urban parks.

Another good game to play was “Red, Light, 1-2-3.” In this game one player led the group. Players would try to advance to home. But, the leader disqualified anyone caught still moving after the words” Red Light, Green Light, 1-2-3.

These and other outdoor games were the lifeblood of our summer. Almost all the kids in the neighborhood joined in. young, old, girls and boys. It was like one big family.

Back then there were no soccer clinics or travel teams, just a bunch of kids running around the neighborhood in sunny, fresh air! Ah, some days I just wish I could go back there, just for one day. “Tag, you're it.”



The Report

Ron Hollander

“What will we do?”

My father was always in charge. He usually did not ask questions. My mother relied on his knowing. But now there was silence.

The report with an official medical heading lay between them on the table in the foyer. It was partially covered by the stained, paper, dinner napkins. A corner was already faintly brown with gravy. It was crumpled where their hands had squeezed it.

“We could get another opinion.”

She sniffled. “You would know.”

“But Hanlon is the best. That’s what everyone told me.”

“If you say so, darling.”

“They are good people.”

He reached for her hand across the dinner plates. Most of the pot roast was still on them. He was careful not to get the cuff of his business shirt in the beans.

They had been married six years. Their first child, a son, crayoned cowboys on the floor in the bedroom. The baby girl slept in her crib in what was originally the dining room off the kitchen. She was not usually so quiet. Down below, traffic hummed on Ocean Parkway. A fire engine’s siren broke the pause between them. She was waiting for him to solve it. He always had.

“I’ll talk to Mackenzie. He knows everyone.”

“Alright. But I never liked him. He’s too loud. And those suits...” She came from a better family than he. They had a corner house just off the parkway. Her father owned Fischer Press. He had a 16-cylinder Cadillac. She was a bit of a snob.

He was quiet. What did it matter about his suits. He wasn’t sure Mackenzie could help, anyway. But it was something to say. He wanted to comfort her. Fill the space. Tell her he knew what he was doing.

“Baby, we will get through it. The report isn’t the last word. This is 1945. You’ll see, it will be alright.”

She wanted to believe. She always had. He was so strong. Handsome. He solved everything. Such a rock after her crazy family. But this was different.



“You aren’t with her all day. You know: She cries and cries. She dribbles. I can’t hold her. She doesn’t look at me. You’re away. You have your job. But, darling, it’s all day long. Ronnie knows something’s the matter.

He got up and came around the table. He put his arm around her. She put her wet cheek on his hand on her shoulder. It didn’t seem enough.

Everything had been so perfect. He was a waiter for the summer at the Catskills hotel. They only met on her last days of vacation with her family. He wrote as soon as she returned to Brooklyn. Her girl friends giggled when she showed them his letter. Their wedding was grand. They were a beautiful couple. Ronnie came a year-and-a-half later. They waited three years. Then came Andrea.

He looked at the report for the tenth time over her shoulder. He knew it by heart. Mackenzie had helped him to understand it.

“In utero, her brain and optic nerves failed to develop, and it is impossible for them to do so in the future. This encephalopathy will be associated with severe mental retardation and blindness.

“It is highly unlikely that she will learn to speak or to have any ability to care for herself independently. It is unlikely that she will have the life span of a healthy child.”

He mouthed the words to himself. What had he done? How could he have let this happen? He had followed all the rules, done everything right. Even the first Jew to work in GE’s medical division. They had it all. And now this.

He turned helplessly to her. “Everyone says we should put her in an institution, put her away. Go on with our lives.”

The words sounded harsh. Yet what was the alternative? To keep this albatross with them forever? He prided himself on being a man of science. He had majored in chemistry at City College. He had thought he would be a doctor, but the Depression intervened, or perhaps he had let it. Instead he sold x-ray machines. He sought logical, rational solutions to problems. But this was their daughter. More, it was his wife.

He looked at her. He couldn’t believe his luck when he met her at the hotel with her family. You heard stories of waiters striking it rich with the beautiful daughters of wealthy guests, but he didn’t know about the money until later. He saw her dark, brown Romanian eyes, the toss of her black hair, the cheekbones that rose with her smile, and her lush body under the white blouse with a gold brooch of a musical note.

He thought, how could he take her baby from her and put her in some grey stone building, if she even survived? How could he betray the woman he loved so, who had given him such a wonderful son? Who counted on him?

“I will make it alright, darling, you will see.”



“But, Sey, you can’t promise something you can’t do.”

“There must be a way. Maybe some treatment Hanlon doesn’t know about. He’s not the last word.”

“But neither are you.”

I always was, he thought. Until this. He felt he was betraying her. She got up and started clearing the table.

“Let me help you.”

“No, that’s okay, you stay there and read the paper. You had a hard day. I can do it myself.”

And so she could, she thought.



Chemo and Therapeutic Conversation: A Tribute to Ernest T. Jordan

Aldustus Jordan

For a brief moment we are hypnotized, fixated on the persistent slow drip of toxic hope entering his body. The pause is welcomed and our conversation moves from superficial to deeper thoughts, feelings and recollections that bring both laughter and tears. It is ironic, but not at all sad, that until his return to Long Island from Texas over fifteen years ago, illness was our main conversation. After so many years, we finally have opportunities to communicate as men.

My brother, Ernie, and I are four years apart, a mere speck in time on life’s wrinkly linen canvas, but large in sibling relationships. He is the third of five children born to my parents then in their early twenties. My mother, Ernestine, often described him as an easy baby with a sweet personality, not cranky, or demanding. He was also independent and amused himself for long periods of time while playing in his crib. So, even then he was comfortable in his own skin.

He inherited all of the football and artistic genes in the entire family. He found beauty in both a punishing tackle and the brilliant colors of a sunrise. His birth posed no threat to me. I had already enjoyed four years of attentive spoiling as the first-born son, grandson, and nephew within a loving female dominated extended family. But here we are two retired gray-haired septuagenarians seeking a deeper meaning of life and reaching to recall the smallest of details and feelings, with strong faith and no fear of the road ahead.

I never viewed myself as his big brother, but I have learned that he did. He looked up to me—the big-time basketball star with all the girls who stayed out until 11:30 p.m. on weekends. One of my weekly chores was to hold his hand and walk to his speech therapy appointment for what my grandmother called a “slow tongue,” a description far better than that of his speech therapist. I waited patiently and, on the way home, we practiced his “slow tongue” exercises. I also recall his joy when I came home from college to watch him play football. I was proud of him and bragged about his football exploits and artistic talent to anyone who would listen. Several of his sketches adorned the crackly plaster walls of my Philadelphia apartment. He never knew any of that because I never told him. He knows now.

As preacher’s kids we moved a lot. Somehow Ernie’s feet never seemed to touch the ground and take root. He was born in Queens NY, but has few memories since our family moved to Rahway, NJ years of high school. Much to the chagrin of his football coach, who was when he was three. We moved again to Long Branch, NJ where he attended junior high and two losing his star quarterback and dreams of a county championship, my parents moved to Huntington, Long Island where he graduated from high school. Ernie retired and, after 30 years, moved back to Long Island from Texas, a place he never considered home. He did plant deep and permanent roots when he and his wife purchased our family home in Huntington— on a promise he had made to my father.



We shared a tiny bedroom for many years, but never seemed to occupy the same place and experiences at the same time. When he graduated high school, I was living in Philadelphia and attending college. When I graduated, he was attending college in Missouri, later married his high school sweetheart and moved to Texas. Ernie left home for college at 18 years old and that is how I remembered him. My memories and recollections seemed to begin and end with saying good-bye on that hot August day in 1967. We knew that time moved on, but failed to record, account for, or comprehend the changes time brings. For years the two of us were emotionally connected but frozen in time. We seemed to be familiar strangers sharing a common yet disconnected history.

There were frequent “touching base” phone conversations over the years, but our deepest thoughts were not communicated. When he visited New York, it was usually a family event and our conversation was limited, light and casual. A diagnosis of prostate cancer for us both, opened the door to deeper conversation. We had surgery on the same day, he in Texas and I in New York. But more than that, our phone conversations had a different texture and tone; we began to talk about our faith, fears, and our own mortality.

Life altering moments often occur without warning, fanfare, or drama. Ernie’s moment occurred in 2019 during a routine physical examination in a small, spartan-like, examination room with a choking smell of disinfectant. It was a predictable medical history--vital signs, heart and lung exams, head, neck, abdominal, neurological, skin exam and laboratory work--with his doctor who knew the drill all too well and a bored patient who could not wait to leave. There was a casual mention of belly pain, nothing more. A scan revealed a mass believed to be benign then later altered. Our eyes connected and, in an instant, we were jarringly released from the agonizing time warp between examination and diagnosis. His life and mine would change forever. It was just that sudden, just that simple.

The slow drip continues as we observe the almost ritualistic changing of the IV bag—his name, date of birth, purpose for the next medication, and length of time.

“So, Ernie, how did you stay in racist Texas for so long?”

In his best impersonation of a Texas drawl, he replied,

“Buddy, they hated the Chicanos more than they hated me. I was second on the list.” We shared a good laugh.

Ernie’s more recent cancer diagnosis opened a new chapter in both our lives. I still hold his hand as we walk to weekly treatments, but now it is a privilege and not an “older brother” chore.

I am proud of him as a brother, husband, father, and grandfather. But now I tell him. After all, I am his big brother. We are often asked what do we find to talk about each week for 4 to 5 hours? Our response is always the same-- “everything.” We share a belief that despite the present reality, time is on our side. We are not simply filling time in the present or closing gaps in our past lives. We are writing a very personal history of our own and strengthening a brotherly bond that is everlasting—a true blessing.



Postscript:

On May 18, 2020, with peace and dignity, Ernie died at home in his bed. He had fully prepared himself for his new life. We gathered and celebrated a life both well lived and examined. My broken heart is buoyed by fond and loving memories. His booming baritone voice, often irreverent. The mischievous smile that captured, broke and mended the hearts of many mother’s daughters. The calls to his big brother to say “I love you.” And, I smile

Christmas Then and Now

Lily Klima

It was a hot, south of the equator, December 25th summer morning. Amidst clapping and cheers from the children, sitting around a tinsel decorated tree, Father Christmas, carrying a large sack slung over his shoulder greeted us with shouts of “Merry Christmas.” He was a jolly rolly polly fat bellied, white bearded man dressed in a red fur-lined coat and knee-high boots.

At five years old, I puzzled about his clothing and was told that he had come from faraway Norway where it was winter and cold. I wondered how and why he was coming to Tabora, my small town in Tanzania.

We were hushed and quietly watched as he slowly unpacked from his sack, colorful and carefully wrapped packages tied with bright ribbons. One by one he called out names and children stepped up to receive presents.

My name was not called and my mother gasped, “Oh, please wait.” She hurried to the lady in charge, whispered something, pointed in my direction and handed her a package. She in turn handed it to Father Christmas who called my name. I could hear some snickering but I stood, bravely smiled and shyly curtsied as I received my present that was wrapped in ordinary brown paper.

Children tore at wrappings and ran to show their parents what Father Christmas had brought. It became noisy with exclamations of glee. Happily, no one paid any attention to me as my mother explained that we were a displaced Polish Jewish family who did not celebrate Christmas and that she had forgotten to deliver a gift for me. I was to keep being Jewish a secret, that “Father Christmas” was made up and not to tell that parents had supplied the presents.

At thirteen, I immigrated to America and learned about Santa Claus. At twenty-two I married an Austrian, and learned about Das Christkind (the Christ Child) and the Weihnach’s Engel (Christmas angel). As a non-practicing Jewess, I adopted my renegade Catholic husband’s Christmas practices except I went overboard with decorations and overabundant with gifts. At our annual Open House on Christmas Day we hosted as many as eighty guests. While making wishes, they blew out live candles on our root-balled Blue Spruce. I photographed them. This became a tradition that delighted everyone.

Christmas celebrations transported our family into a joyful time of fantasy. Our daughter believed in the angel who, on December 24 helped her Papa decorate the tree and left gifts for us to open that evening and she believed in Santa who brought us gifts on Christmas morning.

On New Year’s Day, we planted the tree. Over thirty evergreens grew in our garden.

Growing up, Christmas held no significance. However, I wanted my daughter to experience the wonderment and innocence of believing in Santa. Replete with decorated home, live candles on her



Christmas tree, a bountiful number of gifts, baked goodies, and an Open House she continues our Christmas traditions with her own family and friends in Colorado.

Unlike last year, when COVID 19 made holiday travel verboten, this December, with two shots and a booster of Pfizer vaccine, I will fly to Denver to help prepare for and enjoy Christmas holiday celebrations with my daughter, son-in-law, three grandsons and no doubt quite a number of their friends.

Cheers to lots of hugs and of course safe travels!



Ration Books

Mel Lantz

“December 7, 1941, a day that will live in infamy:” So began the famous speech by President Franklin Roosevelt. Following the speech, war was declared upon the imperial country of Japan. Three days later, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. And so began World War two.

I was eleven years old on that date; too young for military service. We were soon to learn that the war would also require support from civilians. Some materials were needed by those in the service, and were rationed for consumption by civilians. Factories soon began producing war materials and lacked time to replace items consumed by civilians.

During a recent lunch with a friend the subject of ration books came up. I don’t remember the term: Ration Books. We were rationed in many ways, but I don’t recall that we were issued books. Since I lived in a small town in the midwest, and my friend was from the city; perhaps the system was different. I was still young and my parents may not have shared that a book was needed to buy various goods. We were so poor that we couldn’t buy much anyway.

The government needed to determine what was to be rationed. One item I remember was groceries. Meat and sugar were prized items. The public was encouraged to start ‘Victory Gardens’ to avoid a shortage of vegetable products. We lacked space in which to grow anything, but my parents were eager to follow the advice: they loved to garden. Dad asked permission from a nearby farmer to use a corner of a field. I recall helping with hoeing, harvesting and digging potatoes. Once I had a bad accident when I was digging potatoes. I became upset by the difficulty of forcing the fork into the ground, and drove a tine through my shoe. Luckily, the metal passed between my large toe and the next leaving only scratches.

During the war, use of Spam helped to substitute for meat shortages. Some believe that the word meant, “Scientifically Produced Animal Matter”. First produced before the war it became a meat substitute and many meals were built around Spam. During a recent visit to the grocery store, I searched for Spam and learned that there are still several flavors available.

When I mentioned the term ‘nearby farmer’, that was important because our car was old and undependable. Also, because gas was rationed at one time to no more than 4 gallons per week. We needed a way to get to the garden and our old car was it and, hopefully, we wouldn’t run out of gas.

Another shortage was tires. The Japanese had captured the Asian land in which rubber was produced, and artificial rubber was not well developed at that time. We heard on the radio,



“Drive under thirty five.” The object was to save wear and tear on tires and, also to increase the mileage of gasoline consumption.

The subject of rationing brings back a flood of wartime memories. We collected scrap metal after school, made model planes to help officials recognize enemy planes. This had happened in Pearl Harbor when officials on the ground failed to recognize that they were being attacked. Windows were used to display stars which represented those who were in the service. A blue star meant that one family member served; two or more stars accounted for additional service members. Hopefully, it would not be necessary to display a gold star.

Then there was the draft: the dreaded draft! Local communities formed draft boards and all young men were subject to be called for service. I was drafted in 1954. I worked in Idaho at the time and one of the executives I worked for had talked me into joining the Naval Reserve. I received a notice from the draft board of West Union, Iowa telling me to report for service. I asked for active duty in the Navy and escaped service in the Army. We were at war in Korea at that time and the Navy was a life-saver.

Regrettable, President Roosevelt failed to survive the duration of WW2. He had recognized the Pearl Harbor attack as an act of war and President Truman was in office when the Japanese surrendered in 1945.

**The Gal That Got Away – Twice
A Story Of Love And Loss, And Love And Loss Again, In Song.**

Peter Lee



WE MET

“I’ve just seen a face I can’t forget the time and place where we just met...”

WE FELL

“Fallin, oh yes I’m fallin...”

WE LOVED

“Love, love me do, you know I love you...”

WE STAYED

“Love will keep us together”

WE LASTED

“Open up your eyes, then you’ll realize, here I stand, with my everlasting love.”

WE COASTED

“It’s just another day...”

WE DRIFTED

“You’ve lost that lovin’ feelin, oh-wo that lovin’ feelin’...”

WHERE IS SHE?

“Your Cheatin’ Heart...”

SHE’S GONE

“Oh I can’t forget that evenin’ or your face when you were leavin’

SO SAD

““One is the loneliest number that you’ll ever do...”

COMES THE DAY

“If we’d thought a bit ‘bout the end of it when we started painting the town, We’d have been aware that our love affair was too hot not to cool down..”

YEARS LATER

“Let it please be her, dear God it must be her, or I shall die...”

REMINISCING

“Seems like old times...”

CATCHING UP

“What’s new? I haven’t changed - I still love you so.

THE FINALE

“So goodbye dear and amen, here’s hoping we meet now and then, it was great fun, but it was just one of those things.”





Say What!

Martin H. Levinson

I

Say “Have a nice day” you’ll be taken to task
for not saying a great day or one that will last,
whatever you say may be misconstrued
so say precious little, merci beaucoup.

II

To put words in writing is palpably worse
than talking to people and here is the curse,
when you write something down farewell the excuse
you misheard heard what I said, j’accuse! j’accuse!

III

Nonverbal messages shun and negate
they confuse other humans which isn’t so great,
stay stiff as a board when speaking with others
except in the case if those others be lovers.

IV

To downgrade the chances of being misread
die and have people connect with you dead,
but beware this device is subject to fail
for they say in forensics the dead can tell tales.



Rituals

Tony Parlatore

Some of life’s most poignant rituals play out in our presence but unfortunately we often are unaware of them.

One such happening unfolded most Friday nights on a commonplace fishing pier in Florida.

A thin, bent over old man could be seen walking the length of the pier clutching a large pail filled with shrimp. At its end, he unceremoniously, but reverently, emptied the pail one shrimp at a time, feeding the waiting gulls who somehow sensed his arrival. He was often a solitary human, surrounded by a flock of grateful gulls, alone with his thoughts.

Imagine his chapped lips curled in a smile as his soft voice whispered with each tossed shrimp “Thank you, thank you!”

He’d make his way back home passing fishermen casting off that pier and nothing would be exchanged by these mortals save for an occasional nod. Their nonchalance would have morphed into awe had they known who he was, and why he kept feeding those gulls!

The old man had been a pioneer in auto racing and placed seventh in the inaugural Indianapolis 500 in 1907. The next chapter in his remarkable life played out as a World War I aviator. He was awarded eight Distinguished Service Crosses, one of which was upgraded to the Medal of Honor in 1930.

Old Eddie’s life continued its storybook heroism when the Second World War escalated and he was summoned to be a military advisor to both the United States and Great Britain.

On a routine reconnaissance mission in 1942 he and seven other airmen encountered mechanical problems forcing their aircraft to ditch in the Pacific Ocean. All souls scrambled into one life raft and set adrift in the shark infested waters. After eight days their rations were exhausted.

The hopes of a miraculous intervention faded.

One day, which could have been his last, a lone seagull circled the raft and began its decent. Eddie summoned his remaining strength and clutched for the bird as it approached. He subdued his aggressor, broke its neck and rationed its carcass to his mates to sustain them another day. This survival ritual continued over the ensuing days with several other gulls who tried to prey on Eddie and his crew.

After twenty four days adrift, Eddie and six other survivors were rescued.



Eddie would forever feel a cosmic, supernatural relationship with that initial life giving seagull. And he would honor that relationship in his ritualistic walk to feed the seagulls as he experienced the melancholy of old age.

To a casual observer of people going about the rituals of their lives, many of those rituals might seem inane, or absurd. So many people passed Eddie Rickenbacker on that dock as he returned with an empty pail and a thankful smile on his face, never knowing the depth and beauty of this man’s connection with the gulls following him to shore.

I wonder how many opportunities I’ve had to share rituals with the likes of Old Eddie to which I was oblivious.



The Age Thing

Pete Pedersen

I don't know when I started thinking about age. Age as it related to me. Age as we use it to separate young from old. Age as some sort of measure of our physical vitality or mental acuity. I've been a member of OLLI for over 10 years and one of my favorite classes has been David Bouchier's sessions on classical music. Timeless compositions over the centuries and discussions about the composers who penned them and the times in which they lived. What always struck me was the relatively young age these musical geniuses passed on to that great symphony in the sky. Mozart was 35. Beethoven, 57. Bach lived to the ripe old age of 65. Doubtful I would have focused on their ages when I was in my 40s or 50s. Without realizing it was I using their ages to measure my own longevity?

Three of my four grandparents died before I was born, or when I was a very young child. Because most of the adults around me were in their 30s or 40s I had little concept of what “old” really was. As a result I guess “old” could be whatever I wanted it to be.

When I was a young child my father always seemed old to me. My mother not so much even although she was only a couple of years younger than him. My father was 42 when my youngest sibling was born. As a ten-year-old that was not only old but almost ancient. Not to mention the realization my parents were still capable of doing “it” while in their dotage. As I approached 42 myself I began to take a different view of age milestones. Life expectancy was changing. People of my parents' generation were living to their 70s and some into their 80s. As long as I could keep that thought maybe there was a whole bunch of life ahead of me. “Old” was really a moving target.

A friend of mine in his early 60s told me he seemed to slide from 59 to 61 without a second thought. It was only when his wife reminded him did he realize he had turned sixty. It was, he said, just a number. His big concern would be turning sixty-five, the mid-point between sixty and seventy. Because then he would be as close to seventy as sixty. There was a certain scary logic to that.

I had long passed 65, Bach was in the rearview mirror and my next mid-point was fast approaching. But after all that was still just a number



Charlottesville, Virginia 2017

Joel Perlman

When you grow up in the shadows of the dark clouds of the Holocaust,
You are never at home in the world.

When you sit at the Thanksgiving table and look around at the guests,
You wonder why one side of your family has disappeared.

When you see a movie at age ten about the concentration camps,
You always make sure the Gestapo are not waiting for you in the corners before you close your bedroom door.

When you learn that your uncle was accidentally killed by the liberators,
You lose faith in the ability of the military to protect you.

When you go to the beach and are confronted by so many tattooed bodies,
You shudder and think of your elderly cousins and the faded numbers on their arms.

When you finally visit Auschwitz and see couples taking selfies in the gas chambers,
You want to grab their cameras away and shout, “This is not a photo op!”

When you pass by the remains of the four crematoria,
You return to the second one to say a prayer, because that is the one from which your grandparents’ cries still echo.

So, when you sit in your den and images of marchers with torches appear upon your screen, you feel as if your home is invaded.

And when you hear their shouts of “Jews will not replace us,” your nightmares become real, and trembling, you reach for the remote to turn off the set.



The 18-Wheeler Truck Driver

Rachelle Psaris

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

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

We talked about child rearing, work ethic, family life, our jobs, etc. His wife joined in on the conversations as well. He drove an 18-wheeler, she had two jobs. Derrick and I talked about how things have changed with respect to the rules of the road and how even some 18-wheel truck drivers do not adhere to the rules of the road. We talked about our children and he shared some unhappiness about his two sons when they were living home. He called them lazy. “I work 14 hours and when I come home, I don’t want to come home to things that don’t work”-the “things” he referred to were his sons. I laughed because I thought the statement quite clever. He and his wife laughed too, but I knew deep down he wasn’t laughing. I told him how one of our sons had left home after graduating from college when we asked him to pay rent, but moved on to share an apartment with someone else and pay rent. I liked that story! Derrick got his point across-his sons had to leave home because they did not go out and work.

As we chatted, I thought to myself, “How much more different do I need to be with this African American man? Do I ingratiate myself to prove that I am not a racist and that I do not and never will forget about my country’s crimes against humanity?” He shared with me the fact that he is HIV positive. I commented that he looked well and he quoted the lab results illustrating how well he is doing. I asked him if he found out after donating blood. He just said that it was from a history of “bad behavior” many years ago. You know, my heart went out to him. I felt no judgment, as I would not have if he were white. Bad things happen and when we were young and felt invincible sometimes really bad things happened and we eventually had to pay the price years down the road. I felt a great deal of



admiration for him- seemingly comfortable sharing his stories with me-a white woman. I am not color blind to race-I see the color of people’s skin. I am no more or less blind to them as I am to patients, who are morbidly obese, or dirty, or smell, or who are angry and lash out at me because of their own emotional problems compounded by their needing surgery. They are living breathing beings as I am. They are just different from me in other ways, ways that make us human and original.

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



Ode to William Golding

Sy Roth

There it is,
A little puff of light in that Pillsbury-Doughboy brain
Bouncy room for a thought in the cushiony corpus collosum.

No escape
For it is a beacon
Not sure of what just yet
But it seems to signal, a brainwave,
And he clings to it
Bravely.

Unsure what its E.T.ness is signaling
Perhaps wanting him to approach it.
There are no phone homes
Only some inane remembrances
As he wraps his arms about its essence.

Realizing finally that there is no real essence
Just an ephemeral sadness,
A loss perhaps
Of that essence.

Does it provide warmth
As he nears it?

Only disenchantment for not having clung harder to it
When its pulse becomes less earnest.

For there is no heat
Only regret
Regret for a life half-lived
In the sanctity of safety,

A molycoddled little snowflake
That the light may melt.



He rests his eyes
And in the darkness the puffs become
A nonentity
And he ultimately fades
Slipping from the rock,
Golding’s anchor.



I Am Life

Len Sciacchitano

Thin, weak, he knows he will die soon,
one hand on his life support
he moves slowly in small cycles.

He stops,
closes his eyes,
lets the music come,
that voice, anger, despair,
triumphant,
his eyes now alive,
hand press to his chest,
mouth open, he inhales
that magnificent voice
peaks, drives him,
his face joyous,
twisted,
his hand now a fist,
he whispers her words,
I am life.

The music lingers,
ends.

Exhausted, he exhales
closes his eyes,
and wait for the music.

10/31/21



I Wish I Knew

Bob Stone

I Wish I Knew

how many molecules it takes
to make water wet

how to eat rice
with chopsticks

the name of little white flowers
in alpine meadows

why I sleep better in my chair
than in my bed

how to summon the angels
with a saxophone

why the skin on my neck shivers
when I hear “Nessun Dorma”

why fifty degrees feels different
in February than in September

why I just turn the page when I see
a child’s bloated belly

if the spirits of the dead
still exist

how to remember
how to forget