

REFLECTIONS 2023-2024





REFLECTIONS is the literary and art annual of the Renaissance Institute, a learning community of older men and women affiliated with the Notre Dame of Maryland University. Writing and artwork are created by members.

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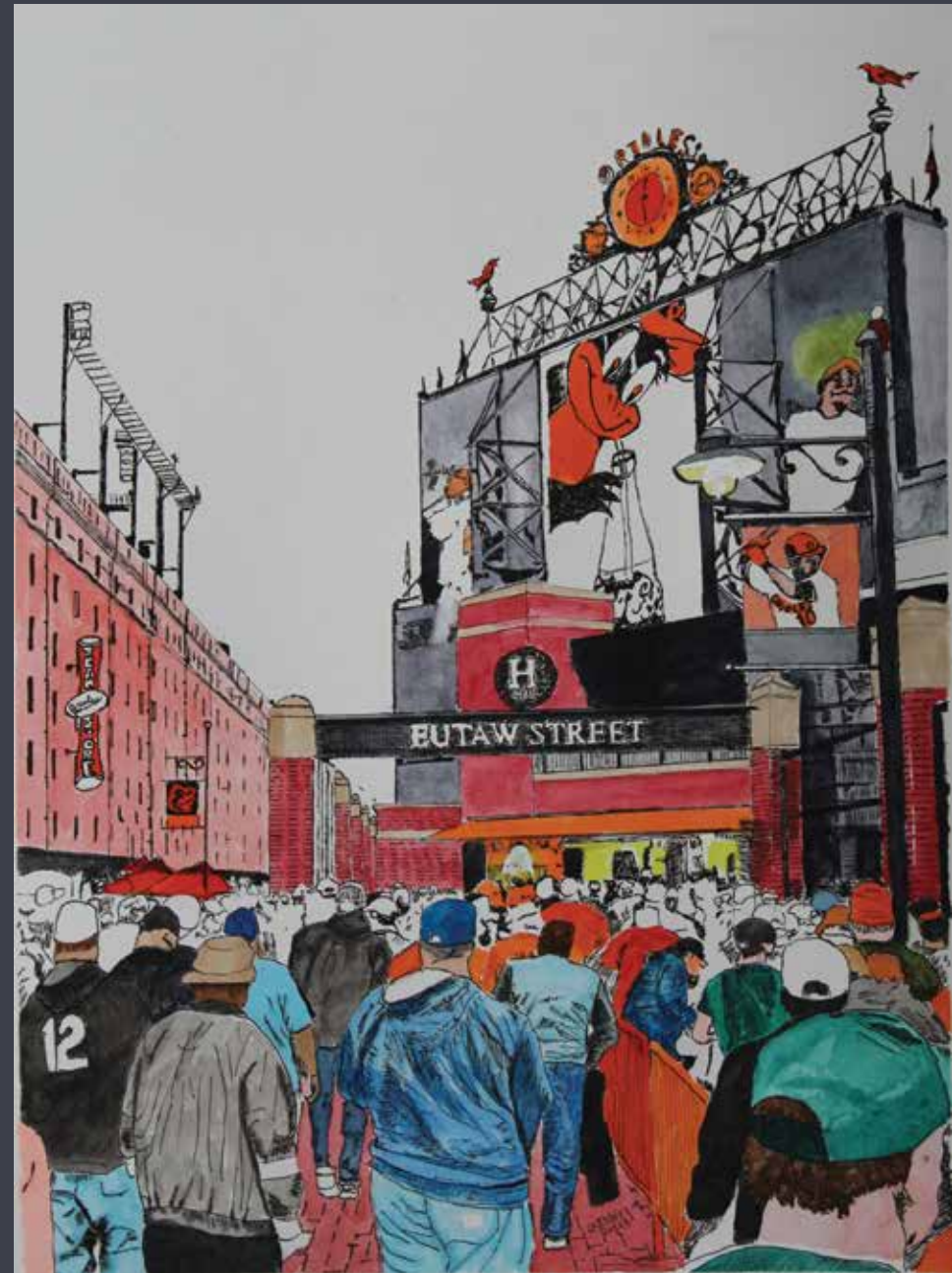
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INSIDE FRONT COVER: Zinnia in Morning Light, Digital Photo, Terry Weiser

FACING PAGE: Opening Day, Watercolor and Ink, Lee Kexel

BACK COVER: Mountain and Steam Vents, Digital Photo Bruce Rosenberg



Pruning My Expectations

Joyce Dennison

What is it like to be an octogenarian?

I am currently navigating the span between 80 and 89 years of age. Putting aside various health-related issues, my main irritant is a recurring sense of being extinct as the dinosaur. I keep stumbling over this feeling when I encounter the loss of little things I had always taken for granted. I suppose my great-nieces would say I'm "living in the past," or being "old school."

For starters, I'm thinking of prunes. It never occurred to me that this breakfast mainstay would require any intervention or improvement. How could prunes be controversial?

It all started in the year 2000, when I noticed that it was getting harder and harder to find prunes on supermarket shelves. Granted, they were always more popular among old people, and were a bit of a joke among the young; but old people do a lot of shopping, so why would prunes disappear? And what happened to the tasty and salubrious prune juice?

The answer was: a marketing decision made by the California Prune Board. (Did you know that California produces 90% of domestic prunes?) They decided that the prune "brand" was old and corny and needed a drastic change. Prunes reminded people of old age and "irregularity" and who wanted to pay good money for that? So, literally overnight, prunes became "dried plums" and were marketed as such. Prune juice became "PlumSmart." Not knowing about the official re-branding, I thought prunes had been banned and after I asked for them a few times and got blank stares from supermarket clerks, I decided that they had gone the way of cod liver oil and Epsom salts.

Another thing I've witnessed is the disappearance of postcards. I used to enjoy sending silly cards with cheeky remarks to friends and family members--when I was traveling, or sometimes for no reason at all except to keep in touch. I didn't realize right away that postcards had become obsolete, because I always have an extra supply on hand. But I went to the post office to purchase postcard stamps and was told they had been discon-

tinued for standard postage. Then, the next time I went on vacation, I had a hard time finding any postcards whatsoever in gift shops. I was told that people now prefer sending cards electronically—unless they're in such constant contact with everyone they know, through social media, that *any* kind of card is utterly pointless.

I was hit with another sign of my cultural outmodedness when I decided to observe my great-niece's 50th birthday by making her a money tree featuring 50 half-dollar pieces. After visiting four banks and emerging with not one single half dollar, I threw in the towel, got with the program, and bought her a 25-dollar gift card. How utterly ordinary! I was despondent

But the occasional miracle does happen. The other day, while looking for a box of raisins, I happened upon...a box of PRUNES! And they were labeled as such, plain as day. I briefly wondered if I was having a senior moment or a mirage, but there it was, an entire prune section in fact.

Turns out, twenty years after the California Prune Board changed the name of prunes to dried plums, they decided to undo the name change and market them as prunes once more. The reason? "Gut health is now fashionable. Prunes, it seems, are back in fashion and proud of being prunes.

Perhaps, in time, postcards and 50 cent pieces will make a comeback, too, and I'll no longer feel extinct. Check with me later. I'm rebranding.

Art in the Lobby

*It's quite an ordinary movie theater
differentiated from its neighbors
by the paint-splattered rectangles
hanging on the off-white walls.*

*First, of course, appear
the proper Bohemians:
with just the right amount of wine stains
on Capri-water-blue shirts
and carefully-tattered tweed jackets.
Pursing lips, half-closing bloodshot eyes,
they emit small cries of anguish at the
compositional aspects,
sipping black coffee slowly,
never forgetting to sneer
at the others.*

*Those in pressed button-down shirts and black-flannel pants
harvesting the cleverest remarks
and feeding them to their dates—
who, ruminating on long-filter-tipped cigarettes,
swallow eagerly.*

The eyes of the pigments/gleam in amazement.

Jay Brodie



*Multicolored Scalloped Hollow Form, Turned Wood,
Bruce Rosenberg*

Elementary

*I would be you, I say
as I tap at your photograph
with the tip of my pencil--
the photo on the flyleaf of this book
in which your finger points to your eye
as if to explain how to—*

*Look for the crack in tedium
the mirror behind the light
the closing line impossibly removed
from
yet a perfect fit for the opening*

*As in the movies, you carry
in the tiny suitcase of the poem
an inexhaustible wardrobe--
clothes in which you dress the world*

Susan Marshall

Naming

Kitty Yanson

I have read that adolescents in some indigenous cultures go on a quest in the wilderness to find a map for the path they will follow in their adult lives. They return from their hero's journey trials with a vision revealing their token animal whose characteristics closely and uniquely match their own talents and aspirations. They also come home with a new name.

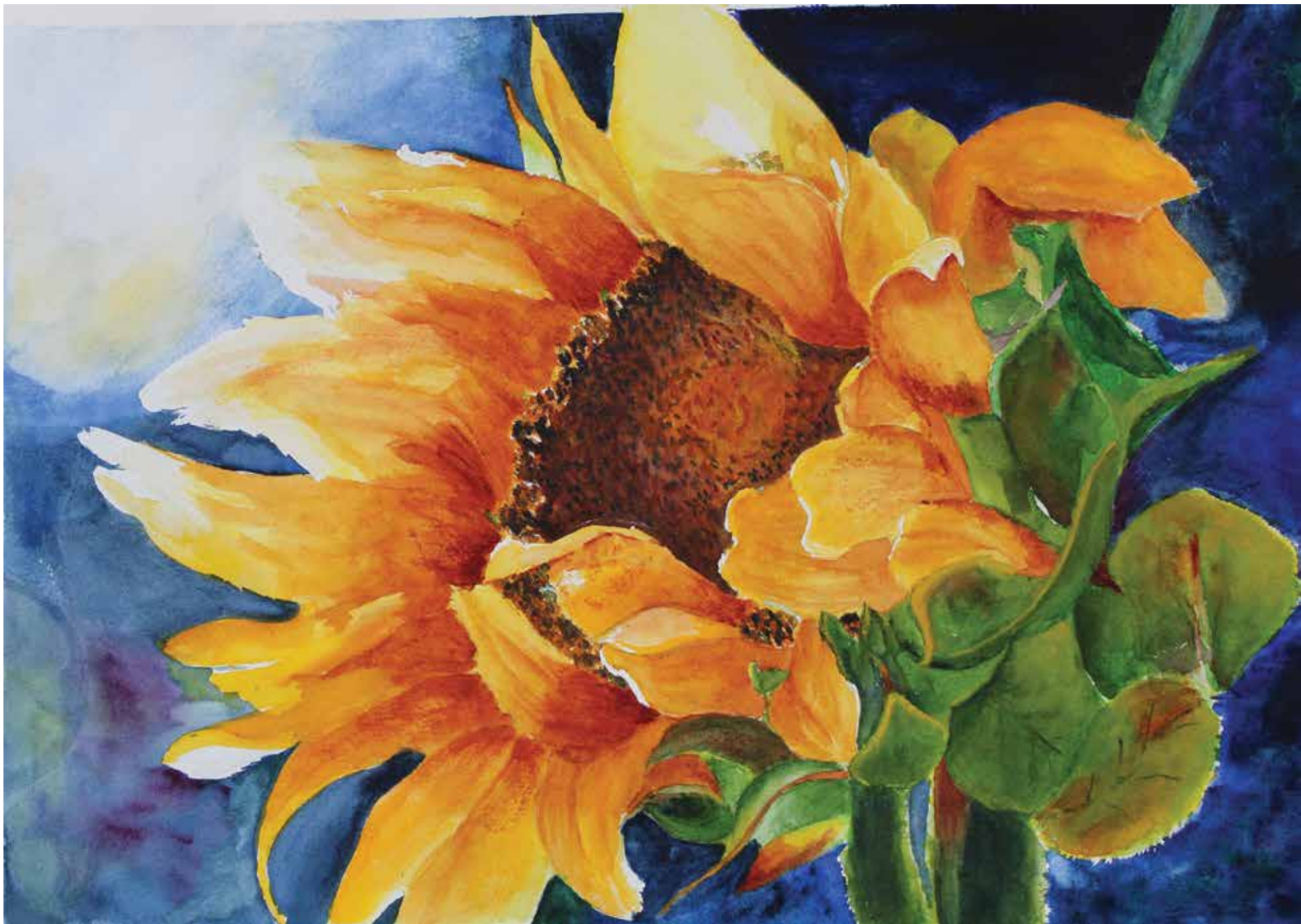
In the symbol system of Catholicism within which I was raised, this initiation was the sacrament of Confirmation, a ceremony marked by a mild slap on the cheek calling one to be a warrior for Christ and, a new name. I chose my mother's name Constance, at the time not for any dedication the quality of consistency that the name reflects, rather, because it was also my older sister's name as firstborn whose birth had been marked by a firstborn's million photographs in a pink upholstered baby book. I had no baby book and one photo of me as a scowling infant swallowed by the family christening dress. I wanted what she, my elder by two years, had. But, as it turned out, consistency was the task of the first half of my life, and Constance was aptly, if unconsciously, chosen.

The psychological theorist Carl Jung describes the path to becoming who you truly are as one in stages. The first half is the hero's journey made famous in the work of Joseph Campbell. It is a time of ego formation and container building during which one builds identity, importance, and security in the world. Until the age of thirty-four, my life was characterized by active addiction to alcohol, the disease that took too young my father and two of my brothers, during which I changed careers and partners in the very antithesis of consistency. But my recovery from alcoholism taught me the secret of that trait in its gentle, day-at-a-time discipline in the company of many, many caring people. Sobriety brought me a divorce from someone I probably never should have married in the first place, a masters degree, and a career that gave me a consistent identity as a good teacher. But it also taught me to love in ways I never thought I could: my students, the subject matter I taught, and ever-exciting ways to bring the two together. In the process, I learned to love myself.

When I was forty-five, I recorded in my journal a dream about a red velvet horse, tall and beautiful in stature who allowed me to bridle it as it nuzzled close to my chest, nickering softly. In my imagination I wrote to it: who are you, why are you here? For the first few times, the horse said nothing. Finally, he said, my name is Steadfast. I thought that this dream creature was mispronouncing and meant to say Fast Steed. But no, this messenger from psyche was not about speed, for the lessons I learned had collected slowly like dust motes that swim in sunlight beams, only to be noticeable on my desk when I forgot to dust. I had lived my way into this name I had chosen: Constance.

Now I am two years into retirement from this job I loved and my identity as a teacher. Jung says that the second half of life is about individuation, becoming the person one was always meant to be, the oak tree present in the acorn of one's birth. This process of individuation does not really "end" even as I undergo a reprise of the hero's journey in the trials and tribulations of aging. In my initiation into this stage of my life, I am searching for the name of this person I am becoming. Perhaps I never will find it. Maybe it is the name that God calls me in the silence of my heart. Maybe it is the sound of the wave before it returns to its true nature as ocean. Maybe it is many things. Maybe it is one. Maybe both. Maybe it is mystery.

Or just maybe I need no new name at all as I learn each day anew to celebrate and celebrate and celebrate again the precious Constance of my breath.



Growth Rings

*once couldn't wait to get away
now can't wait to go home again
like trees we change over the years
growing inward more than skyward
our rings are full of memories
experiences leave their marks
seasons are not always easy
over time once strong limbs weaken
now back in the place of our roots
we see things through different eyes
home is no longer the same place
slowly growth rings make us anew*

Michael Reinsel



Mother and Daughter, Ukraine, Oil on Board, Peggy Egan

Ivory-Billed

*Why is it always fishermen
whose stories are never to be trusted?
And, why is it they who sight
the mythical or elusive creatures,
or those believed to be extinct?
Perhaps it is in a fisherman's character,
the seemingly unlimited patience
to cast out and wait, and then cast again.
Are these fishers just creators of a lazy day
on the pond, bobbing along its waters?
Are they attuned to the doldrums,
caught in mid-air day after day?
Or, do these fishermen, these dreamers
who loll about on gilded afternoons,
hone their heightened sensitivities
while drifting upon the waters?*

*It is a known fact of physics
that sound travels farther over water.
Can it not be surmised then
that two fishermen heard the sharp
unmistaken call of the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker?
In fact, they were able to record the bird's
haunting cry on their cell phones,
held so high and steady in the air,
while visiting the dead quiet waters
of the swamp where the bird was last seen.*

*Here after such passage of time,
here in this very place among the rushes,
among ancient cypress and hanging moss,
lived the fabled kingfisher of birds,
ivory-capped and flitting about branches,
providing an ethereal show on a golden
afternoon to be witnessed just this once.
Or, is this a fisherman's power of dream,
to blur light and water, hear an impossible
call, look up and exult in the sighting.*



Oyster Fishing on the Chesapeake, 1905, Watercolor, Paula Murphy

Lost and Found

Kathy Stone

Lalit and I strolled arm in arm along Preston Street on a warm spring evening in 1985 gayly heading to the Meyerhoff Symphony Hall. We were in love. Lalit was quite excited to attend this concert, a solo performance by an up-and-coming young female pianist from Japan, Mitsuko Uchida, whom he had recently seen while in Amsterdam. Parking had been a chore. Round and round we drove, down St. Paul, up Charles, finally landing a space at the corner of Calvert and Preston.

Suddenly I felt a hard jerk on my right arm and saw a group of teen-aged boys run like the wind up a perpendicular alley about a block before the theater, breaking street lamps as they ran to obscure their flight. In an instant I realized that my purse was no longer on my shoulder. I screamed and the police appeared. Soon they had gathered all the pertinent data, and left in pursuit of the thieves.

The following morning, I headed for my office where I spent several hours making calls to credit card companies, the MVA, and any other entities I could recall whose cards would need replacement. I made an inventory as complete as possible of the entire contents of my stolen purse. The phone rang, odd because it was a Saturday and not a business day, and I jumped. I heard my teenaged son's voice excitedly say that a man named Mr. McPherson had just called to say that he had my purse. His two young grandsons had found it in the sandbox of their neighborhood playground. Would I want to come to his house that afternoon to retrieve it? I immediately called him, got the address and directions, and called my son to ask him to accompany me. He was happy to come along.

We drove through downtown and headed southwest into an area that is now known as "Sowebo." We pulled into the narrowest street I had ever seen in Baltimore. It was only a block long with two-story narrow brick dwellings on either side, some of which had been re-faced with form-stone, a popular row-house material in South, West, and East Baltimore in the forties and fifties. Each had wooden steps, which I was told later by a professor of Baltimore Urban History had once been "brought in" each night to provide protection for the family while they slept. (How

many times must they have been replaced, I wondered, in the more than a century and a half since they had been built?) The same professor also informed me that these homes were what were now known as "alley houses." Lanes (alleys) were once built *between* the streets and these tiny houses built upon them. They were originally inhabited by some of the poorest of the white working classes: "gandy dancers" (railroad workers), servants, pig farm workers, and others, and from what would soon become clear their occupants were still poor, white, members of the lowest rung of the working classes.

The sun was setting in this narrow lane when we arrived, and to our great surprise in the middle of this dead-end street stood a throng of neighbors, clapping, and cheering. Somehow the word had gotten around that a woman would be arriving to collect her stolen purse from the McPhersons, whose grandsons were the heroes of the day – apparently the heroes of the block! Clearly, not much happens around here, I thought.

We parked and climbed the wooden steps and were greeted by an elderly, corpulent, white-haired man in a tobacco-stained sleeveless white tee shirt who introduced himself as "McPherson." Immediately upon entering what was the smallest house I had ever been in, we were asked to take a seat at the dining room table, which took up most of the space between the walls and into which we nearly collided when we stepped inside. Seated at the table, was an elderly, heavy-set woman with no teeth, whom he introduced as Mrs. McPherson. They were shy, very pleasant and polite and spoke very little, but when they did it was with kind of speech that mimicked Cockney-English. I was reminded of many Dickens characters. We were offered iced tea but politely declined. The shadows were falling and we actually had no idea how to get out of that neighborhood.

"Jackie! Georgie! Come on downer with what yooz two fount today!" The steps creaked loudly as the twins (there could be no doubt) bounded down the wooden stairs. They smiled identical smiles, "beamed" is more

like it. They were fat boys, about 8 years old, whose cheeks were round and a deep pink color. Their heads were nearly bald, with the slightest bristle of pale red hair visible on each, double chins, and tummies that actually shook when they moved. Khaki shorts and white tee shirts heavily soiled were their identical apparel. Dirty high top tennis shoes completed the picture.

After what seemed like five minutes of total silence, with the boys looking down or anywhere other than at us, they both began to speak, their words sort of bumping into those of each other. Then, one of them jerked the purse from behind his back. “Heer it is! The stuff inside was all buried in the sand. We saw somethin’ like gold or silver stickin’ a tiny bit out of the sand an’ we started diggin’ ‘til we thought we got it all. An’ here it is, all back for ya! Then we found this pockabook in a trashcan. We figgered it was yourn. We ran alla way backeer to show Gramps and Granny!” And they handed my familiar purse to me, while each holding a piece of it, smiling shyly and looking at the floor. There it was! My burgundy leather shoulder bag was back in my possession. “Wouldja check if we fount alla stuff?” one blurted out. After carefully checking, I confirmed to their delight that all appeared to be there except some small amount of cash. That was all the thieves got for their risky behavior and long run to South Baltimore! They were so proud of themselves. Their grandparents smiled broadly. I had never seen such a combination of joy, pride, and shyness in anyone nor have I since.

As we rose, thanked everyone profusely, and shook the boys’ hands, I reached into my pocket and handed each of the twins a twenty-dollar bill. If their faces were deep pink when we met them, now they were beet red. The family came to the door to say their good-byes, and we descended the old wooden steps. The group that greeted us upon our arrival, though it was now dark, was still out there in the street, and as we backed out and waved, they set off another cheer and continued waving until we were out of sight.



Raven, Charcoal, Susan Steigner

Harbinger

*One chilly April morning
I witnessed, by chance,
A pair of doves beginning
Their mating dance.*

*I watched with delight
From my open kitchen door.
Had never seen a sight
More wonderful before.*

*Passionately pecking each other
Just as their forebears had in the past
She would be a mother
And their bond would always last.*

*I was given a precious gift that day,
Which will live in my heart forever.
By the way, I talk to God when I pray
And thank Him for being so clever.*

Eileen Gallagher



Cylburn Tree, Watercolor, Carol Kurtz-Stack



Her Room, after Andrew Wyeth, Watercolor, Diane Schaefer

The Time Capsule

Marge M. Hentschel

I remember feeling so empty, unmoored, and distant from all that once anchored me. It had been a few months since the Covid Pandemic hit, and the disconnection was deafening as I tried to make sense of the fear, loss, and confusion of it all. Staring up at the bedroom ceiling, my eyes turned downward to a framed, wedding invitation sealed in the back with brown paper and hanging there, as it always had, on the wall.

“Open it anytime,” I remembered my departed, grandmother saying, some thirty years ago to the date, (yes, today, was my wedding anniversary), or “Save it for a rainy day.” And then, in an instant, there it was. The “Perfect Storm” of the rainiest of days, the quietest of anniversaries, and the 37-year survival of a wedding gift still wrapped behind a picture frame. It was time to open this “Time Capsule” of sorts and see what was inside.

That evening, we lit a pair of used candlesticks on the table, enjoyed a small, anniversary dinner, and my husband ceremoniously, but carefully, opened the back. On the surface were the usual mementos; an engagement photo from the newspaper, a matchbook from our reception, an engraved napkin with our names. But, the deeper I went, the more I seemed to find HOPE in BIG capital letters on a document containing a Novena and medal to St. Rita, “The Advocate of the Impossible and Hope of the Desperate,” A dried rose petal, specifically for CURES, blessed at the Shrine of the Lady of The Roses; another blessed medal of St. Benedict; weekly masses offered leading up to our marriage.

As my hands touched the aging papers and medals, I could sense this wise and faith-filled woman reaching out and connecting with both of us in such a comforting and reassuring way and at such an extraordinary time. No doubt, her spirit could be felt, and she was offering blessings, HOPE, CURES, and the power of prayer for any difficulty no matter how impossible or desperate. And, at the time, and with no vaccine, Covid-19 seemed to check all the boxes.

My husband and I embraced feeling her gift of love and support traverse time as the contents from behind the picture frame now lay there on the table in the candlelight. She had been there with us through the early stages of our courtship, so light and carefree, always dependable with a great sense of humor, and it only felt sturdy and right to feel her presence once again during fragile times.

As I look back today, several years later (and with a mild but persistent case of Covid-19) I think of the profound impact The Time Capsule had on us that evening. My grandmother knew what many people know: that married life, and life in general, presents its joys and challenges, in sickness and in health, but the gift of a strong faith helps guide us through the Perfect Storm, especially if you make the choice like I did, to unwrap the gift at just the right time, or at any time, as my grandmother suggested, over and over again.



Oh, Canada, Watercolor, Gail Kramer



East of Blaine, PA, Oil on Gessoed Wood, Barbara Sheffer Rooney

Some Times

*some years bustle with action
some years whisper reflection*

*some months cry out for a friend
some months love lifts us high*

*some weeks glow in sunshine
some weeks drip from rain*

*some days soar on untold dreams
some days float away on memories*

*some moments beg forgiveness
some moments quiver with thanks*

*some things are easily said
some things are never spoken*

Michael Reinsel



Sunrise Glimmer, Watercolor, Jeannine Mantz

The Cat and the Moon

*For the cat it is a singular friendship
the cat does not know the moon
but it reclines in the moonlight
the gift given so easily in the evening
by the ancient beauty of the night*

*Nor does this little cat know how
huge a place from which the light flows
it simply sits in the moon's dusky glow
pounces gleefully on shapeshifting shadows
curious that they move, change, realign*

*And the trusting cat will never need to know
that the moon is a cold and distant orb
it only knows that the queen of the night sky
belongs to it and only it. Why else does
moonlight always sit in sync with a cat's
eye?*

Kathryn Pettus



*Autumn Reflections, Digital Photo,
Laura Kittel*

Renaissance Song

*Oh hail our RI members
We come from far and near
With open hearts and eager minds
We join with all our peers
And we will always honor
The values and the goals
Of the Renaissance Institute
Forever strong and bold!*

Keats Smith

Zoomers - Random Acts of Whateverness

*“Remember to stay muted
while stories are read. I can’t unmute
you. If you have a comment, unmute.”
Someone enters the meeting late
with loud background noise.
“What a nail biter, those Ravens...”*

*“Okay, what stood out to you in this story?”
“Sally, you’re muted... Unmute yourself, Sally.”
“Can you hear me now?” “Yes.”
“Can you hear me?” “YES.”
Next story is read, second latecomer.
“Sorry I’m late, the gas man came early.”*

*“Now, how can we connect these stories?”
Interruption: “I never got them.” Another:
“May we please get back to a discussion?”
“Good idea. Would you like to comment first?”
“I don’t have a comment. Wasn’t able to read both.”
“Guess that’s all the time we have for today.”*

Sheila Scriggins



Birds Nest, Digital Photo, Nadine Yoritomo



From Times Past, Digital Photo, Elizabeth Fanto



Cactus at the Conservatory, Graphite, Carol Kurtz-Stack



Yuri the Blue Russian, Pastel, Gail Kramer

Times for Reflection

Bill Bennett

Sitting alone on the early morning beach, I watched the ocean waves roll in and roll out. A warm salty breeze and bare feet dug in the sand brought further comfort. I knew the waves were rolling long before my finite existence began and that they would continue long after I am no longer here to watch. I find the waves very soothing, especially at this time, as our society can't seem to get enough violence and competitive speed. The waves provide a time-out to reflect on where life has taken me and what I have learned over these past eight decades. At the same time, I am also anticipating more valuable and enjoyable moments of learning, as I continue in good health through years yet to come.

Sometimes it is difficult to realize blocks of time have passed. It wasn't just yesterday that I enjoyed those Broadway shows in the summers as I grew up. Most of the stars of the 1950's and 1960's have passed on. Their names and music are generally unknown to the rising generation. Naturally, the young have their own stars and music, which I can't seem to relate to.

Getting married in April 1972 brought about wonderful changes to my life. Kathleen, her three sons, Craig, 11, Jeff, 9 and Colin, 7 and I became a family. I remember returning from our Bermuda honeymoon and having Colin, in a rare expression of affection, run across the living room and jump into my arms. I guess he thought I wasn't coming back.

In summer 1974, we stayed at Rehoboth for a week and thought about buying our own place there. We came back in September and looked around with real estate agent Kitty Cole. The houses we were shown all required additional construction work, even the \$68,000 one. "Wow! Kathleen, does she think we are millionaires?" The next year, we found a two-bedroom condo in an old apartment building being renovated directly facing the ocean at Dewey Beach. It was \$37,000. We bought it. Remembering that my parents only grudgingly took my brother and me the thirty miles to the beach about three times a summer, I said we won't tell my parents, who will think it is a bad investment. We rented it to other people, but did choose a July week for ourselves, after Colin complained that off-season was no fun.

In 1980, we five took the old Oldsmobile to Quebec City and Montreal for a few days and returned to New York for Radio City's Summer Spectacular. On the Henry Hudson Parkway leaving New York, the exhaust pipe came unhooked. We jumped out, found a coat hanger and wired it back up. That year, we moved from Loch Raven Village to a small two-story brick colonial in Homeland. Colin enrolled in Boys Latin and Craig went to Salisbury University. Since Jeff was not a trouble-maker like Colin, he quietly completed high school in the county in 1982 and went

to Frostburg University. After two years at expensive Roanoke College, Colin informed us that he wanted to leave there because there weren't enough bars in town. *I don't think he will be our achieving student.* He eventually did some studying and graduated from the University of Maryland at College Park. One day, we were amazed that, while we were there, his roommate's girlfriend called from Paris. After learning he was not there, she went on talking to Colin as if she were calling from next door in this pre-cellphone era.

In October 1988, Jeff was killed while working the night desk at the Holiday Inn on Loch Raven Boulevard. That first year was rock bottom for us, the most depressing ever. As the years went on, the pain lessened, but will always be there.

That first year, Kathleen helped me learn Bridge and we joined the Cathedral Bridge Group and met some friendly people. Old friends invited us out for dinner and to go sailing on their boat. We even attended the Cathedral Ball that year. Her cousin Michael invited us to Stowe, Vermont to spend a relaxing week at the ski resort with his family.

After selling the Dewey Beach condo, we bought a town house on the bayside at Dewey. We rented to a great group of employees of Texaco, Wilmington. There was never any damage and they were always helpful in keeping up the place.

Finally, after eighteen years as landlords, we wanted a place we would never have to rent. It was a buyers' market in 1994 and we were able to buy a small rancher three blocks from the ocean in Rehoboth Beach, which we have enjoyed ever since. We took Craig and Colin to Italy and Sicily in 1990 and to Switzerland, Austria, Germany, and Northern Italy in 2000. Colin married Molly in a wedding that included a reception at the Maryland Club for 175 people in December 2003. Craig married Nicole in a slightly smaller wedding in April 2006. "Mom, we have 29 people. We just can't include our cousins."

Colin produced the two granddaughters. (Colin, all is forgiven!) I believe our greatest joy over the past seventeen years is being closely involved with our granddaughters, Isabelle, now 17, and Lelia, now 15.

I am about to leave the beach, but here come the girls to play and laugh in the waves as they have since they were toddlers, so I will stay a little longer to enjoy their enthusiasm.

We are grateful to see the future through their eyes and know we will continue to be involved in their experiences.



Coleus, Watercolor on Yupo, Sharon Rabb

Friday Evening

*In the situation of the black cat
much depends on circumstances.
If you cross the cat's path, and she is still
if you angle your car, pull parallel
to her, though at a short distance, to see
if the small cowering lumpy thing is ok,
witness her frightened looks around the empty lot,
watch her slink toward shrubs along the side street,
her luck may be worse than yours, since you
merely drive home with your pizza and guilt
while she is headed into the dark, even though
you might return with a paper plate and dog food.*

Susan Marshall

*walking back is near impossible among life's picks
as I veer downhill towards the seemingly inevitable
despite my protestations, mostly inward, that it doesn't
necessarily mean I am doomed to become those I resist
or lament*

*walking back is near impossible
because in the moment I would rather think
I know what is what
than admit I don't
or won't*

*walking back
my hands tied by the drawn curtain
ears longing for applause - but none
I imagine fixing those broken laces
that tripped me up*

*walking
is certainly preferable to improbable fleet
footedness
striking a balance between
intent and acceptance*

*with thanks to Steve Sutton for the first line, borrowed from
his Walking the Cat*

Peter Whedbee



Messenger from Heaven, Digital Photo, Nancy Caplan

HO-HO-HO

Elizabeth Howard

When I was five, I desperately wanted a pair of ballerina shoes for Christmas. I could picture myself dressed in a leotard and tutu twirling around and around on my toes, and I looked so beautiful in that fantasy it took my breath away. Mama taught me early to pray to God for what I want. She was probably thinking world peace or an end to famine; I was thinking “toe-dancing shoes.” And I had learned early not to bother my parents with even my most desperate needs.

Like a scientist, I put it to the test. On the nights leading up to and including Christmas Eve, I prayed my sincerest prayer. “Please, God, bring me some toe-dancing shoes.” My disappointment Christmas morning was palpable. Not only were there no shoes; there was nothing else I wanted.

Santa left some hard candy in a wool sock for me. When I tried to eat it, lint and threads stuck to it, so I spit it out. I got a few pecans and an orange in the same stocking, but I couldn’t peel the pecans, and I got oranges every day. Big deal! Under the tree was a bicycle, but in my disappointment, I ignored it.

After weeks of pondering the failure of my prayers for the shoes, I reasoned that it wasn’t God bringing me Christmas presents; it was Santa Claus! Why was I praying to God? He obviously wasn’t sharing any intelligence with Santa, who, understandably, didn’t even know about the shoes. So, at six, I started praying to Santa Claus. Over the next few years, each winter of my discontent congealed into a cynical view of the whole idea of Christmas, Jesus included. Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. It’s His birthday.

Fast forward about twenty years to 1968. As the mother of three-year-old Kiss, I was determined that she would not be disappointed in Christmas. I gave her a Sears catalog of toys and told her to check everything she wanted. This activity kept her engaged for days. By Christmas Eve, she had circled just about every toy in the book. I took her to the mall where she sat on Santa’s lap and gazed into his eyes, spellbound by his beauty.

On one holiday shopping trip to Fed Mart, Houston’s early rendition of Walmart, Kiss, in the basket, and I shopped for ornaments for our tree when Santa Claus suddenly appeared by the wreaths. I smelled him before I saw him. Reeking of old alcohol, he greeted us with a leer.



We are Stars, Paper Cut with Calligraphy, Miriam Rittberg

Kiss sang, “Santa!” The red-clad wino attempted to talk to her as I turned on two wheels to get away from him. He stayed right with us, inviting me to go to the back of the store and have a glass of wine.

Kiss sang, “Santa!” Again, I changed aisles as fast as possible, but he was getting closer, still trying to lure me to a more private place. Desperate, I turned to face him and whispered, “If you don’t disappear right now and leave us alone, I’m going to call the cops!”

As he turned to wander away, Kiss said, “Bye bye, Santa.” In the car on the way home, she chattered nonstop about Santa coming to visit her in the store.

Can we fast forward again? This time about twenty more years to the childhood of Kiss’ daughter Shannon, who didn’t trust Santa, dressed in that ridiculous red suit with the fake beard. She did not like his looks! He popped up on street corners and other unexpected places. Santa, according to five-year-old Shannon, was a creepy fraud. When she was five, she turned to her mother and said in a strident voice, “Mama, don’t let that man in this house! Tell him to leave my presents on the porch.”

Twenty more years passed. Shannon grew up and had Connor; her sister Rachael had Bendi. When these babies were five and three, respectively, we took them to the mall in Tyler to sit on Santa’s lap. Both became hysterical, screaming for their lives and reaching for their mothers. Their photo made the front page of the newspaper. Connor panicking on the left, Bendi, kicking off her shoes, on the right. Connor’s sister, Maddison, three months old, with eyes and mouth as wide as dinner plates, was wondering what kind of crazy family she’d fallen into. Santa Claus looked at me and said, “A person could get a complex in this job.”

The adult Kiss still loves the whole idea of Santa, each year packing huge stockings with candy and gifts for Connor and the rest of her grandchildren. However, twelve years after the photo fiasco, the rest of us have pretty much dispensed with S. Claus in my family, just a polite nod during the toddler years of Dylan and Ben.

All my kids are following right along behind me. Whatever it is, it runs in the family.



Summiting Mont Blanc, Digital Photo, Patricia Ryan-Thiel

Where did You Leave Your Feet



Solitude, Digital Photo, Laurie Rosenberg

On Belonging

A triolet

*When where I am I am unknown
none call my name or sing my song
there where I stand I stand alone
when where I am I am unknown.
There when I gaze at faces in stone
of folks who think I don't belong
here – when where I am I am unknown
I will call my own name, sing my own song.*

Kathryn Pettus

Peggy Beauvois

In the sand - literally - covered up to the ankles in damp grittiness. My little grand-daughter's shovel digs down deeper into the wet innards of the beach to bury my feet even deeper. I wiggle my toes. I knew my feet were still there — out of sight but still alive and kicking!

“Where are your feet, Grammy?” Kaitlyn asks, with a sly grin.

“Oh no!” I exclaim. “They have disappeared! What will I do without them? You will have to carry me home.”

She squeals with delight at the thought, then declares in her own self-assured way, “I can, you know Grammy. I am very strong! I'll take you piggy back like I do my book bag!” I smile at her image of herself, her confidence in her strength, and her caring love for her Grammy.

All my life, my feet have been a problem: flat, flaccid and “bunioned” with painful Morton's neuromas, and ensuing surgery. I would have gladly left them somewhere, anywhere. They have been the source of much misery, until now. Seeing the fun their burial brings to one small child, I can find it in my heart at last to forgive them!

Reaching

Peter Whedbee

Yesterday, I watched my two youngest grandchildren move about their worlds in Maryland and Illinois during video phone calls. They are both about one year old and walking tentatively, remarkably at ease, engaging (in brief snippets) with their grandparents on a screen. I suppose it should be no surprise, as they have spent time with us in person and on the phone since birth.

What they have in common is determination, curiosity, and a self-directed interest, exploration. They are reaching.

I remember thinking in my middle years about the distinction between “reaching” as “not quite there, but making the effort” and “reaching” as “arrival, or culmination.” Which, I wondered, was the more vital and fertile position in life? At the time, it seemed no contest to me that the act of stretching boundaries was more important than accomplishment.

Ava wrestles with a box, reaching inside to pull out the puzzle pieces she knows are inside. She rejects her mother’s suggestion to turn the box upside down and let the pieces fall out. The box flaps persist in catching on her arm, which must go in past her elbow to reach the prize. The element of identity, the “I am,” is encapsulated in the process, far more than in the success.

Jude stands on tiptoes, his fingers grazing the lower curve of the doorknob that he knows leads outdoors. No wail of frustration. Just, this far. And, another try. As adults, we know he will grow and eventually turn the knob. I don’t think he knows that. My only question is whether he will push something over to stand on before he gains the necessary height.

Raising children is reaching. Parents may know something about it, but information is only a brief shadow of experience. The mystery to me, the beauty, is how each in their own world, parent and child, inform the other, form the other inwardly, and guide the other over the edge of the horizon into the unknown.



Cow in Austria, Acrylic, Babs Bierman

New Year's Eve in the Golden Years

Saul Lindenbaum

I don't like New Year's Eve. It all started when I was sixteen years old and Edna Parker backed out of our date about a week before the holiday, with the phoniest excuse I'd ever heard. She could have just said she got a better offer, which I'm sure was the case. Thing was, I didn't even *like* Edna Parker that much – she was just the first one to accept my invitation. Maybe she sensed that, so it was mostly my fault. Who knows?

Anyway, it seemed imperative as an adolescent to have somewhere to go on New Year's Eve, and someone with whom to go there. The planning began months ahead. Who might be free? When was the right time for a guy to call (because guys always did the calling in those backward times)? If you called too soon, you risked looking desperate. But if you waited too long, everyone might have made plans. Would an acceptance hold, or would it be canceled if a better offer came along? (See: Parker, Edna.) Oh, the agonizing moments spent in the phone booth in Zimmie's Luncheonette, working up the courage to make *the call!* Does anyone miss that? I know that I don't. And then, assuming you had a party to go to and a date to go with, there was the question of how much to indulge in intoxicating substances. Too little, and you looked like a prude. Too much, and there was the risk of making a fool of yourself, not to mention the misery of the next day's hangover.

The New Year's Eve situation improved greatly after marriage---as a couple, we were guaranteed a date---but the drinking, and the often-forced gaiety of large parties remained problematical. For many people, I believe, the dilemma of how to handle this most overrated of holidays continued to linger through the years.

Recently, however, a snow-bird friend of mine sent me an article from the *Senior Sentinel*, the newspaper of his retirement community in Muchos Ancianos, Florida, which tells how one couple in their seventies has arrived at a common-sense way of celebrating this holiday. I pass it along for your consideration.

Wishing to observe the New Year with some sort of gathering, the couple arranged, months in advance, to spend the holiday with a group of compatible friends. In that way, unwanted invitations could be turned down with a truthful, "Oh gee, I'd love to, but we already have plans." In addition, being among friends made it comfortable for people who are single, for whatever reason, to attend the party without the need to find an escort, although they could bring someone if they wanted to.

The article goes on to suggest that the party begin at noon on January 1, so that no one has to stay awake past eleven P.M. the night before (assuming that one hasn't fallen asleep much earlier, while watching TV or reading a book.) The duty of the host is to DVR the magical moment of midnight, preferably from Times Square, for playback at the party, so that everyone can feel that they have complied with tradition. If desired, the sound on the recording can be muted, and replaced with "Auld Lang Syne," as rendered by Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians. If anyone still has a vinyl copy of the old 78 rpm, and a phonograph on which to play it, this is the preferred mode of listening. If not, someone's grandchild can almost certainly be prevailed upon to find said music on "the YouTube," as a friend of mine calls it.

The *Sentinel* notes that New Year's celebrations would not be complete without the traditional eggnog or glass of champagne. But for those with a more adventurous disposition, it recommends a new drink called "The B-29," a combination of prune juice and vodka. Introduced in the Fall 2012 edition of *Mixology Today* (v.5, No.3, p.111), it is a drink that promises to get even the most sluggish senior citizen up and moving.

Whereas fifty or sixty years ago pills of an illicit nature might have also been a part of the celebration, the article observes that nowadays any mention of pills at a Golden Years gathering is more likely to refer to medication for cholesterol or high blood pressure than to uppers or downers. And, they astutely add, if the word "acid" is uttered during the evening, it probably has more to do with reflux, than with LSD.

In the old days, slow dancing was all the rage, and the *Sentinel* recommends a return to it – not out of nostalgia, but for safety's sake. As we all know, rapid movements, even if possible, are likely to have unpleasant consequences for people of a certain age.

The article concludes with the sensible recommendation that a Golden Years New Year's party conclude by four in the afternoon, since many of the revelers will want to get to Applebee's in time for the early bird special. On the way there, they can be thinking about their New Year's resolutions. Speaking for myself, I resolve to get subscriptions to the *Senior Sentinel* and *Mixology Today*. I can't wait to see what they recommend for Valentine's Day.



Baltimore 4th of July, Watercolor, Sharon Rabb



Reykjavic, Watercolor; Pen and Ink, Josef Nathanson

Even Before

*She remembers how it all took root
His golden eyes ringed with gray
Found their home in hers of blue
Sealed their compact
Even before she felt five fingers
Land softly on her shoulder
The electric charge, the prickles rise
On her neck like fear but not like fear
As they descended the dusty steps
Dark red like dry blood
Chipped gray like a sidewalk beneath
Even before she ran five fingers
Slowly over his nutmeg face
Cool like silk
Felt his full mouth on hers
Like Christmas Dinner with chocolate pudding
for dessert
Even before the world dissolved into a frothy
near-nothingness
Under the gossamer throw that night
Even before*

Kathy Stone

Missing Dates

*She was losing
her sight, memory
the obvious signs
the tight cramped handwriting
on cards that were never mailed
mail that was never read
her world grown small
so much was missing*

*She didn't trust herself
to see this shadow
called her daughter
recognize the sound of my voice
know the smell of my skin
but she would run her fingers
through my hair feeling
the tight curls wrapping
themselves around themselves
pulled them high on my head
in that familiar celebratory finish
and would know I am I*

*I called her on my birthday
she hadn't remembered
I didn't remind her
she led the conversation
said the day was special
she wasn't sure why
please forgive me, she said,
I have been missing dates.*

Kathryn Pettus



All in a Day's Work, Digital Photo, Terry Weisser



Time and Tide

Ellen Lindenbaum

One hot July day in the summer of 1980 while vacationing on Cape Cod, we decided to walk on the Brewster flats, following the outgoing tide from the beach. Our kids splashed ahead, sand pails swinging, to collect shells, large and small, big dark green ribbons of seaweed, and maybe a horseshoe crab skeleton or two. The wet sand cooled our feet as my husband and I sauntered along behind them. We wanted to see if we could follow the receding water out in the bay to its farthest point, almost two miles, we had been told. The kids soon filled their pails and ran back to the beach to build castles and moats from the wet, malleable sand.

We continued, squishing our toes into the rippled surface, and splashing across tidal pools, as the sounds of laughter and shouting softened, and then faded away. Light breezes and the sharp tang of salt air brought a sense of calm and other-worldliness. In that moment I found it – a perfect Channeled Whelk shell, bumping gently against the inner edge of a tidal pool. It was light in my hand, its snail inhabitant long departed. The surface was the palest shades of cream and tan. One end, as large as my closed fist, formed a swirl that resembled soft ice cream poured into a cone. Ridged concentric circles first grew larger, and then suddenly changed into a long, curved whorl, ever more slender, ending in an opening no larger than a hollow drinking straw. The inside was smooth and had the soft glow of a precious pearl. And when I held it up to my ear, I thought I could hear, ever so faintly, the sound of the sea.

Our stroll continued until looking back, the beach and bluff appeared to be a miniature stage with a few tiny people and dogs here and there. Realizing that the small rivulets tickling our soles were now flowing back toward the shore, we turned around, walking just a bit faster. The shallow water moved steadily over the rippled sand, creating a dazzling, star-like light show that had a somewhat dizzying visual effect. We concentrated on looking at the shoreline, and soon reached the beach. Once we had admired the sandcastle kingdom, we all headed back to our cottage.

I showed my shell treasure to the kids who agreed that it was a “keeper.” So I wrapped it in a soft towel and placed it in my suitcase.



Channeled Whelk, Digital Photo, Ellen Lindenbaum

Over the years my shell has survived several household moves, each time wrapped and packed up as carefully as a precious crystal goblet. It always has a place of honor on, or near my desk, and periodically I pick it up, running my hands over its smooth shape, and holding it close to my ear. Each time I wonder: will this be the time that it whispers some of its tales of adventure and peril, speaking of regattas, or sea captains, Portuguese fishing boats, or Nor’easters?

Granny

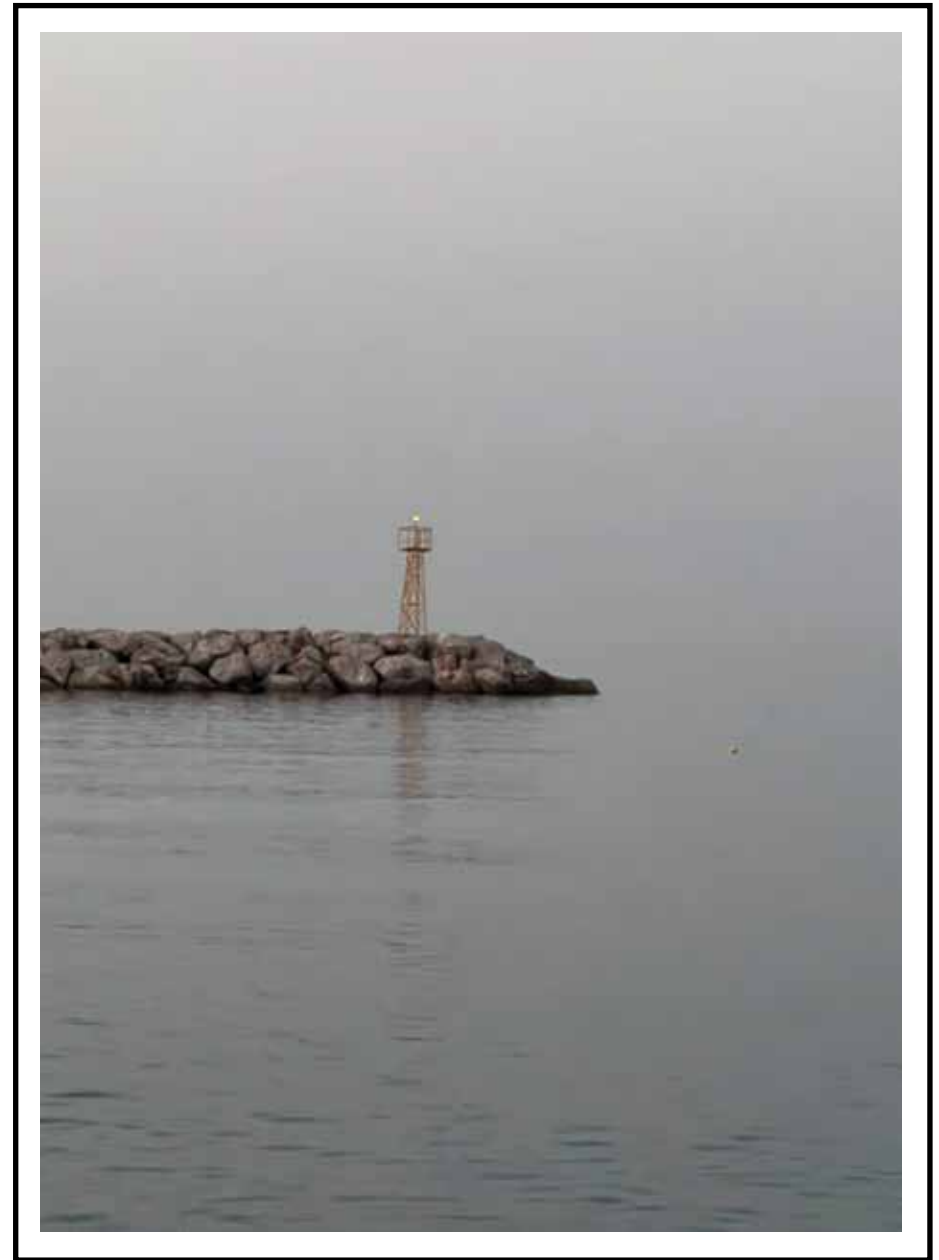
*I am the very model of a great and glorious granny.
My accumulated skills and smarts they say are quite uncanny.
I don't know all the modern games, which puts me in a pickle,
But nothing makes a better game than a well-placed tickle.*

*I make paper dolls adorable and zombies most deplorable.
They bleed indeed and moan and groan with phrases oratorical.
I'm consummate at hide and seek. To you my hiding place I'll leak.
I fit into a chimney very nimbly, because my legs are really rather spindly.*

*My disciplinary tactics I think will set you reeling.
If you step out of line, I will stick you to the ceiling.
My cultivated calculations show I'm not a dunce,
For I've never had to do this more than once.*

*If I must make supper, it will be a fixer-upper,
But I always always serve it with a flair.
Veggies are dispensed with. Ice cream is commenced with.
Criticize me, parents, if you dare.*

Becky Kennedy



A Study in Grey, Digital Photo, Armand Pulcinella

Memoir of 1971

Mary Hom

It happened more than half a century ago, yet the horrific memory lives deep within my mind and soul. It was as if it were yesterday.

Each summer a variety of churches in the Baltimore Metropolitan area sent their high school students to an ecumenical retreat center in northeast Maryland. At this retreat, some of us were surprised to learn that we lived within a short distance of one another in north Baltimore. Almost neighbors!

That is how I met Simone and learned about her father's ministry as pastor of their nearby church. I could sense the pride she felt for her dad, Pastor Anderson, so much so that I thought he was someone I would find interesting to meet.

Time ebbed away into the school year, and I was distracted from my plan to meet him. Instead, the group of us attended a Folk Arts Festival in North Carolina as well as more local events. Simone and I played guitar with the group as we sang. We were enjoying our time together.

—

One morning Pastor Anderson woke up before the alarm and quietly dressed, combing his hair just so. He checked both of his trouser pockets – yes, he had enough.

The early spring air brushed past his face as he momentarily turned back to look at his home, pausing, deep in thought. With a brief sigh, he resumed his walk down to the bottom of the hill where the local filling station was located. He had remembered to ask the manager, Jake, who would be working at the station today, and was relieved to discover that the new rookie would be in charge.

"I'd like to buy that large can over there," the pastor said to the young attendant as he pointed to the bottom shelf. "And a gallon of gasoline to put in it – regular," he concluded.

"Where is your car, Sir?" the young attendant asked. "Do you need a ride to your car?" he added.

"NO!!" Pastor Anderson bellowed, slamming his fist on the counter. He cleared his throat, restoring his composure. "Just the can and the gasoline, please." he spoke gently and calmly, in his pastoral voice which he barely recognized as himself.

"Yes sir," the youth answered, nervously, "Right away, Sir." The young man was sweating profusely.

After the transaction, Pastor Anderson picked up the can. "It's full, already?" he asked.

The attendant nodded. The pastor reached into his pocket, withdrew a \$50 bill, and tossed it on the counter. "For your trouble," he muttered. "THANK YOU, SIR!" the attendant exclaimed.

Pastor Anderson left him at the cash register and, once outside, looked upward. *It's a beautiful day*, he thought to himself. *A beautiful day, indeed.*

He smiled as he slowly opened the can of gasoline. And pulling a kitchen match from his pocket that he brought from home, Pastor Anderson raised the can over his head, drenching himself, then, he struck the match.



Monarch Galaxy, Digital Photo, Deb Maruyama

Cobwebs

*I have wondered if I, at my age,
am seen as covered in cobwebs?
Have I just hung around too long,
much like the cobwebs that are spun
around the cornices of windows
by busy spiders so intent each Fall
to catch camouflaging debris?
They set a trap for the unwary,
a place where I could age
for quite some time. But then,
I hear in my daily discourse of activities,
“Just hurry up, Pops, and drive,
drive that car the way it was intended!”*

*We used to call it, “Blowing out the cobwebs,”
when I was in high school, a phrase to justify
driving like bats out of Hell, intent on being
the speed demons of the roads.
But, time took care of those dangerous
whims and care-free attitudes.
Now, I am a walking statue that cannot
even run, but gathers its own set of cobwebs.
I am too slow on the uptake,
can barely even utter, never mind
boisterously call out, “Eat my dust!”
The spiders are just too fast.*

Stephen Sutton

Junk

*it was a love affair
the junkyard
filled with discards
the sour scent
of failure
buried
but still ripe*

*I scavenged
I polished them anew
and gave new life*

As an aside, this poem can be read as two poems,
one across and two from the top down

*when I first found
a treasure trove
of broken dreams
of musty mildew and mold
and sometimes lost souls
in existential disarray
with possibilities*

*giving them a home
those possessions
from that graveyard*

Elizabeth Fanto

Hide and Seek, Digital Photo, Nancy Caplan



Adelphi: A scattering of Remembrances

Mary Dean Dumais

On the train from Philadelphia to New York City, my mind was a jumble of plans, doubts, fears, and excitement. I had completed my student teaching in a primary school when attending Rosemont College and while continuing to work on my BA, part time. I was pretty much on my own after Dad's death but had reconnected with my Jesuit brother, Tim, who was at the University of Louvain, Belgium, where he had been ordained, and he had arranged for me, at no charge, to finish my degree at the branch of Fordham located in lower Manhattan. The next steps marched quickly: an interview at the Dorothy Marder Teachers' Agency, a couple of letters of recommendation, a meeting with Headmaster Hathaway at Adelphi Academy in Brooklyn and I had a job teaching second grade for \$3300 a year. I was in heaven!

Adelphi just escaped the dicey Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood by one stop on the subway and was housed in a huge, six story, square building. On my side of the building were grades from preschool through 6th. Arriving for teacher orientation, I discovered that the school was over 95% Jewish, that most of the kids were bussed in from fancier neighborhoods like Flatbush and Ocean Parkway and that I was now, to my surprise, assigned to teach 6th grade boys! There was no turning back; I had to risk it. How could I have ever known that the next four years were to be among the happiest of my teaching career! An overprotected Irish Catholic in her twenties was about to discover and embrace an entirely new cultural milieu. For those of us who were kids during World War II, the horror of the holocaust was still unfolding in the 50's only a few years after WWII

As it turned out, my class of 15-18 boys, was more fun than 6- and 7-year-olds because of their energy, their "no holds barred" when it came to discussions on any level and because they got my jokes and sometimes, I even got theirs. There are so many stories to tell, but I could never forget Martin Goldstein, who regaled us with his production of a birthday party for his mom, whom he called, Arlene. He sent out invitations, engaged the caterers, and bought her a pair of stiletto heels to add to her shoe collection. No father was in sight or ever mentioned, but Martin carried it off to her delight and that of her friends. No small feat for a 12 1/2-year-old.

Then there was Philip Beckerman, a very good student, with almost perfect attendance although he looked thin and frail. The headmaster had offered to increase my salary that year by \$2000 if I would organize a children's chorus and direct several plays for Morning Meeting assemblies. I had studied vocal music and sang, and at that time was enrolled in classes at the Herbert Bergoff Acting Studio in the village. I decided on Pinafore and cast Philip as the Captain. He came to life and wowed everybody, for which his parents never could thank me enough. His dad owned a bakery

on W. 86th St., and every Friday, Philip brought me sweet treats: pastries, cupcakes, and occasionally, a pie or cake and his mother called me every year at Christmas, long after I had left Adelphi.

Then there was Maurice. In whispers, several boys told me that Maurice was adopted, but he didn't know it. When I met with his bejeweled and minked mother for a parent conference, without any prompting from me, she revealed the truth, saing, "If you knew who his mother was, you would die!" but she kept her council.

The boys could be mischievous without a doubt. The first time I was absent they confiscated the class list and gave the substitute their newly claimed nicknames: Scarface, Mugsy, Killer etc. and then convinced her that a tour of the boiler room was on my agenda, and they should go and explore it. Needless to say, I was never absent ever again.

In my first spring, we went to Prospect Park to play baseball. I was kibitzing from the sidelines. (Yiddish words were becoming part of my vocabulary) After the last batter, they insisted that I play. Here, I have to admit that, although I loved team sports, I am really a klutz and could contribute nothing more than energy and enthusiasm to team games. But I was trapped. There was no use in making a tzimmes so I stepped up to the plate, swung the bat over my right shoulder and prayed. The gods must've been with me that day. As I swung with all my might, the ball somehow connected with the bat and flew out of sight. It would be my only moment of sports glory, ever. The kvelling of "Miss Healy hit a home run." secured my credibility in the whole lower school. I never played again but rested on my laurels.

There was the time when the headmaster was observing me teaching Greek history and the Trojan wars. Every time I used the word, Trojan, there were rolling eyes and furtive glances. The problem was that I had no idea that the word, Trojan, was the name of a condom. Afterwards, the headmaster only said, "You could always just use the word Troy and that it would be easier on you." He always treated his faculty with candor, care and a sense of humor as on one day when he stopped by to tell me that the Brooklyn Dodgers were about to win the Pennant in the next game. I could teach if I had a mind to, but he would suggest letting them bring in a radio or a small TV. This game was of monumental importance to Brooklyn kids. There was joy in my classroom that day as the Dodgers pulled it off.

In my fourth and final year at Adelphi I was married right after Christmas. I had the chutzpah to ask the headmaster if I could have two extra weeks for my honeymoon in Mexico and he thought it was a good idea and hired a substitute for that time...it truly was a mitzva for me. Toward the end of that semester I decided it was time to inform the boys that I was not going to be returning the next year because I was having a baby. Nonchalantly, they told me they'd known it all along.

One day, out of the blue, a boy asked me, "Miss Healy (they never really got Dumais) what religion are you? I was about to answer when Lance Rosenberg said, "Jewish, what else?" To my surprise, I let it go. After all, I did belong to a Judeo-Christian religion and had studied the Old Testament and at that moment I felt so welcomed and included. I had been as close to these boys and their families as was possible for a goy. It had transformed my thinking, and my love for a people, so unjustly treated.

So Shalom my wonderful boys, wherever you are. I'm kvelling that I'll never forget you.



Julia, Watercolor, Paula Murphy

Floribunda

*A young father takes his small daughter's picture
against a bank of floribunda roses that lines
the labyrinth called Thanksgiving Place.
Portrait done, she grabs handfuls of petals
to form balls of floral snow that promptly
fall apart; they will not stick as she wishes,
falling to the ground, an apricot carpet.*

*Her father walks away, calling her to follow.
She refuses, grabbing another then another
handful of petals, squeezing, dropping them,
Thickening the blanket's loft, leaving
not an inch of ground uncovered.*

*I walk this circle as my morning prayer along
its switchback path to my center, turning, and moving
outward from my beginning. I imagine this child
walking the labyrinth of life many years hence.*

*I want to be her and stamp my foot, ignoring again
my father's call as he stands just beyond the vanishing
point at the end of my breathing's path. Stubbornly
planted near a bank of flowers, first, I demand,
first, this rough earth made deep with beauty.*

Kitty Yanson



As French as a Baguette, Watercolor, Diane Schaefer

Damn, it was Good Knowing Him*

Laurie Rosenberg

(Dedicated to Winston Koury 1953-2023)

I am not a poet but have always been able to write poems about my loved ones. Winston has been gone for many months now and I can't get past the title. Soulmates! I think we are more an O'Henry story.

He was 25 and I was 30. He was the cool guy – the Fonz of Ocean City. I was the PTA mom. Yet we managed to find each other. I should have recognized fate then and fought for him harder. We were together such a short time out of our lives---three wonderful years. It was more of a wrong place wrong time for us.

Yet we never lost touch. Over the years we kept in touch always by phone. Later, we came together as lovers and then good friends. We spoke many times of getting back together. I had gotten heavy and old and didn't want him to see me like that. When we talked on the phone he bragged of his heavy partying - which wasn't really true - and I didn't want to see him like that.

I could always depend on a birthday call and holiday wishes from him. I still have some of those voice mails which I can't bear to delete.

After 25 years of phone calls, I got to spend some of his last days with him. I sat on the sofa and curled up in his arms. Talk about muscle memory. We just came together and sort of fit. His family said he always talked about me. I was the one that got away.

I think we both wanted to remember each other as we were when we were young. Such a shame – we could have had many years together. But who knows? I have so many great memories that maybe a lifetime with him would have taken away the magic. I doubt it.

*From the Kenny Chesney song "Knowing You"



Untitled, Watercolor and Ink, Vivian Appel

Pipe Down

Amanda Joyce

It was a clogged pipe under the kitchen sink that made Jeannie genial, and who would've guessed it would be Wally Windex who gave her the prod.

Lately, Wally Windex had been Jeannie's best friend, not that he was really a friend, he was her plumber; and his name was not really Wally Windex, it was Wally Wendachowski. But his childhood playmates gave him the nickname, and it stuck.

She had only Wally to talk to right now, because Jeannie was housebound – she'd slipped in the puddle by the sink and twisted her knee. "Heck of a way to find out you've got a leak," he said the next day, at 7 AM. "Dangerous to fall down, late at night, when you're all alone."

Well, she didn't need him to point that out, but it couldn't be helped. Her husband Frank was long gone, and her two sons were far away; Frank Jr. with the State Department in Japan; and Lewis in South America, doing some sort of spy thing. Jeannie had never been a joiner, so there was no mahjongg or bridge to fill up her time. Before she wrenched her knee, she'd been on a strict walking schedule; she'd also been re-reading everything by Charles Dickens: his books being so many, Jeannie always had a task.

She noticed, as Wally tinkered under the sink, that he was not just talkative, but downright chatty. She was sitting in a kitchen chair, reading *Our Mutual Friend* with one eye and keeping track of Wally with the other eye. By the time he put the finishing twist on the "P-trap," as he called it, she knew when & where he was born, his wife's first, middle and maiden name; his wife's first husband's name and occupation; his son's grade point average; his daughter's boyfriend's criminal record; and the reason plumbing was undervalued.

A week after the P-trap was fixed, Jeannie's hot water heater failed and Wally Windex was back again.

"Glad you didn't slip in it this time," he said. "Bein' that it was in the basement, you coulda been there for days."

She had a picture of herself lying in a heap on the sodden carpet, crying for help in that watery gurgly voice she had, when she was submerged in a nightmare. She glared at her bad knee and resettled herself on the ratty sofa in Frank's old "mancave." (She'd had to bump her way down the stairs on her backside, after first leaving the front door open.)

"Bet you had to bump down all them stairs on your posterior," said Wally Windex cheerfully, as he crouched on a plastic mat and peered under the water heater. Jeannie

didn't want to discuss this, nor did she want to hear any more of Wally's life story, so she said the first thing that popped into her head.

2

"Have you ever had the feeling that you took a wrong turn? In life?"

Wally went silent.

"Well now," he said, after a pause, "I'd have to say yes and no. Maybe not the kind you're talking about. I remember the time my brother and I ..."

O no! Jeannie didn't want to listen to another barrage of Windex lore... She'd gotten interested, in spite of herself, the last time he'd launched into it; she remembered every detail, and it was unseemly to know one's plumber that well.

"You just have this feeling," she forged on, "that you made a wrong turn, but you don't know where, or when..."

"In the dark!" said Wally. "You're in the dark...just like Mrs. Fopping." His eyes were shining, he looked alert and interested.

"Mrs. Fopping? Who on earth is Mrs. Fopping? No one's name is Mrs. Fopping."

"All right," said Wally. "Miss Fopping. I always call the older ladies "Missus" to be respectful. Call me old-fashioned."

"But who is she?" Jeannie searched her memory for a Dickens character by that name.

"Your neighbor down the street! In that house with the awnings."

"But the Fitzpatricks live there! Justin and Laurel."

"Not now. She got a year off to teach in Australia—"

"A sabbatical?"

"And he went too, he can work from his phone, whatever that means. This Miss Fopping is the great aunt. She's taking care of that fat poodle with the purple raincoat—"

"Jason."

“Heavy-set is what I meant.”

“No, Jason’s fat,” said Jeannie. “But I told you I thought I’d made a wrong turn, and you said—”

“Exactly—just like Miss Fopping, but she didn’t make a wrong turn, she lost something...down the drain...’cept I didn’t find anything in the trap.”

“What did she lose?”

“Well, that’s my point! She doesn’t know what she lost! She heard it drop, but she doesn’t know what it was!”

3

“It’s not the same thing, Wally.” Jeannie picked up *Our Mutual Friend*, hoping he’d take the hint. No such luck. By the time the hot water heater was patched up, she knew all about the time Wally and brother Wendell lost their two dates in the infield at the Preakness. Rain, mud, and beer were involved, imagine that.

By the time Jeannie sent him on his way, she was ready to bump her way back upstairs for a long nap. She hadn’t been sleeping well, which was probably the reason for the nightmares and the weird thoughts. Still on the sofa, she dozed off.

She heard the front door open and shut and wondered if Wally had left a tool behind. She was cross with him, because she’d told him to lock the door.

A light footstep descended the stairs, and a wiry old woman with a frizzy ginger perm appeared. She had a string bag in one hand.

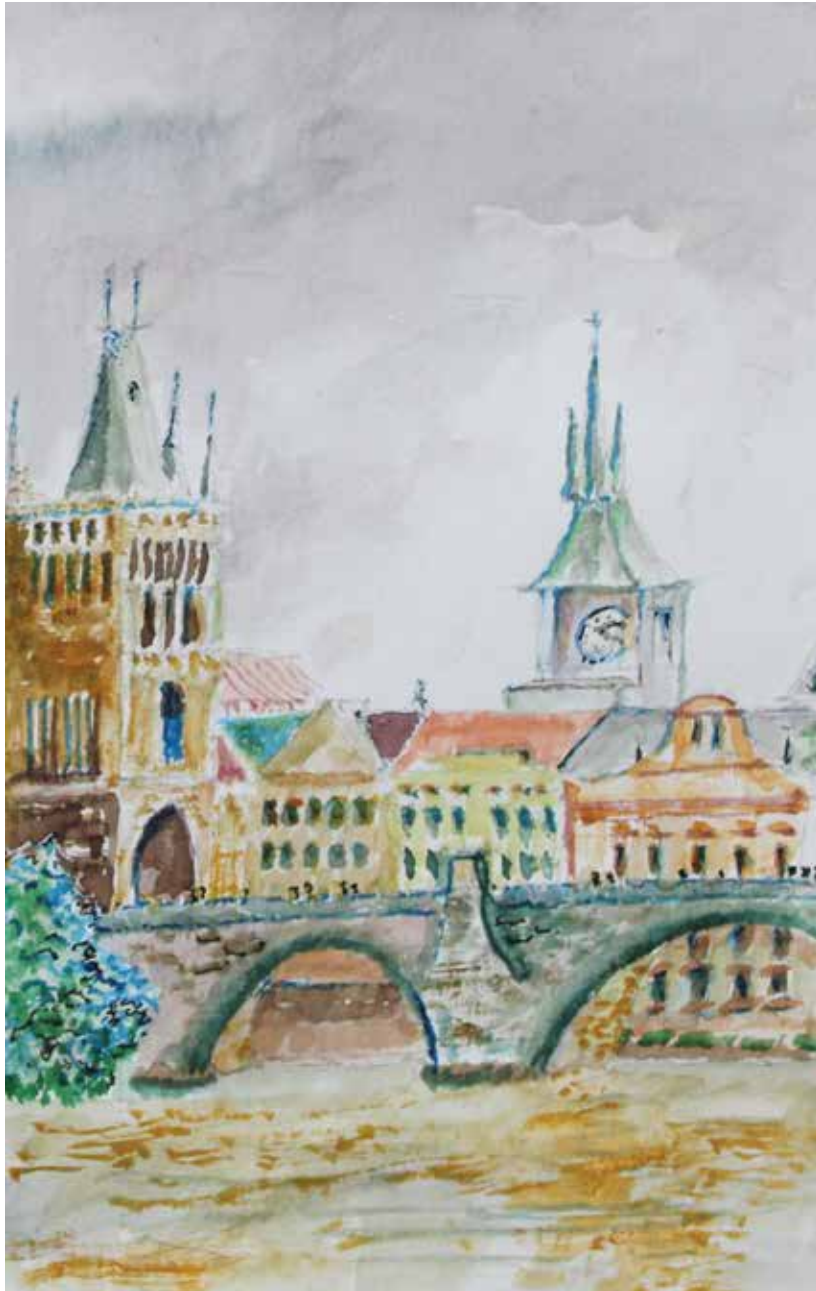
“You must be Jeannie!” she said. “I’m Lois Fopping. Wally said we should meet, so I thought I’d pop down. He says we have a lot in common.”

“We have nothing in common!”

Ms. Fopping laughed. “Who cares? You’ve got a bum knee and I’ve got banana bread!”



Ruin, Watercolor, Harriet Jenkins



Charles Bridge, Prague, Watercolor, Josef Nathanson

Vanishing Act

Elizabeth Fanto

When Alice realized she could become invisible, she was thrilled. As the oldest member of the family, she found many social events tiresome and boring. Everyone greeted her with love, that wasn't the problem. But eventually, they moved on to their own conversations, activities, TV shows, and she ended up sitting in a corner, "invisible." They loved her, but they were involved in their own lives. She understood.

At the last Thanksgiving dinner, she closed her eyes tightly, and wished she could be invisible. She felt a sudden chill. When she opened them, she realized...she was! Someone almost sat in her seat and her son said that the seat was saved for her. She was sitting right there!

She got up, went outside for some cool fresh air and no one chided her for not wearing a coat. And no one noticed her absence. When she went back, she was a bit fearful...could she reverse the process? She closed her eyes and wished fervently to be visible. Again, that chill. *Voila!* She was.

This began a new set of adventures. She had to be careful, but she sampled foods they felt were bad for her, had an extra glass of wine without their concerned looks, and she could go do something else when things got too slow for her.

It was a challenge to be sure no one noticed. The only one who did was the five-year-old great-grandson, but he believed in magic, so she told him it was magic. When he told others that Grandma Alice could disappear by magic, they all smiled.

So did Alice



A Secret Garden in Italy, Digital Photo, Armand Pulcinella

Day Dream

*Looking out the botanical window
A late blooming dogwood waits,
Beckoning me.
Come*

*Bring your tree swing and we'll sing
Long ago melodies, etched forever
In your heart.
Come*

*We'll wait until the petals fall
Like big snowflakes, then summer
Melting the memories.
Come*

Sheila Scriggins

Pawpaws

Andrea Wilson

We reserved our campsite at least four months in advance, since it was the most popular spot in the park and in great demand. The site was back in a corner, isolated with the trailer door facing the forest. We felt like we were completely alone on our vacation. An added benefit was a trail that went from our site down to the North East River. No one could see it except us.

Almost every day, I would walk the trail, stepping over or stooping under fallen logs, avoiding the sticky thorns on bramble bushes and waving a stick to take down the spider webs in my path. It was a dark walk with trees forming a solid canopy overhead. The trail ended in a meadow with a picnic table. Walking across the meadow I saw the magnificent view of the wide river and the houses and trees on the opposite bank. Sometimes I would bring a book and sit at the picnic table, sometimes I would stroll the bank of the river and sometimes I would just stare at the scene.

One cool September day I was coming back up the trail when I saw several strange fruits on the ground. They were light green and oval shaped about the size of a peach. I picked one up to take back with me. When we couldn't figure out what it was, I took it to the camp host. He said he didn't know what it was either, but he'd try to find out.

The next morning, he knocked on our door and said "I asked the Ranger. He said the fruit is a pawpaw. It's native to Maryland and perfectly edible." We thanked him, and he left. I couldn't wait to taste it. It was full of plump black seeds with just enough flesh for a spoonful or two. It was love at first bite. The first small spoonful tasted like mango, but the next tasted like peach, then a hint of banana. I'd never had anything like it. Needless to say, I went back to the trail to gather all I could find.

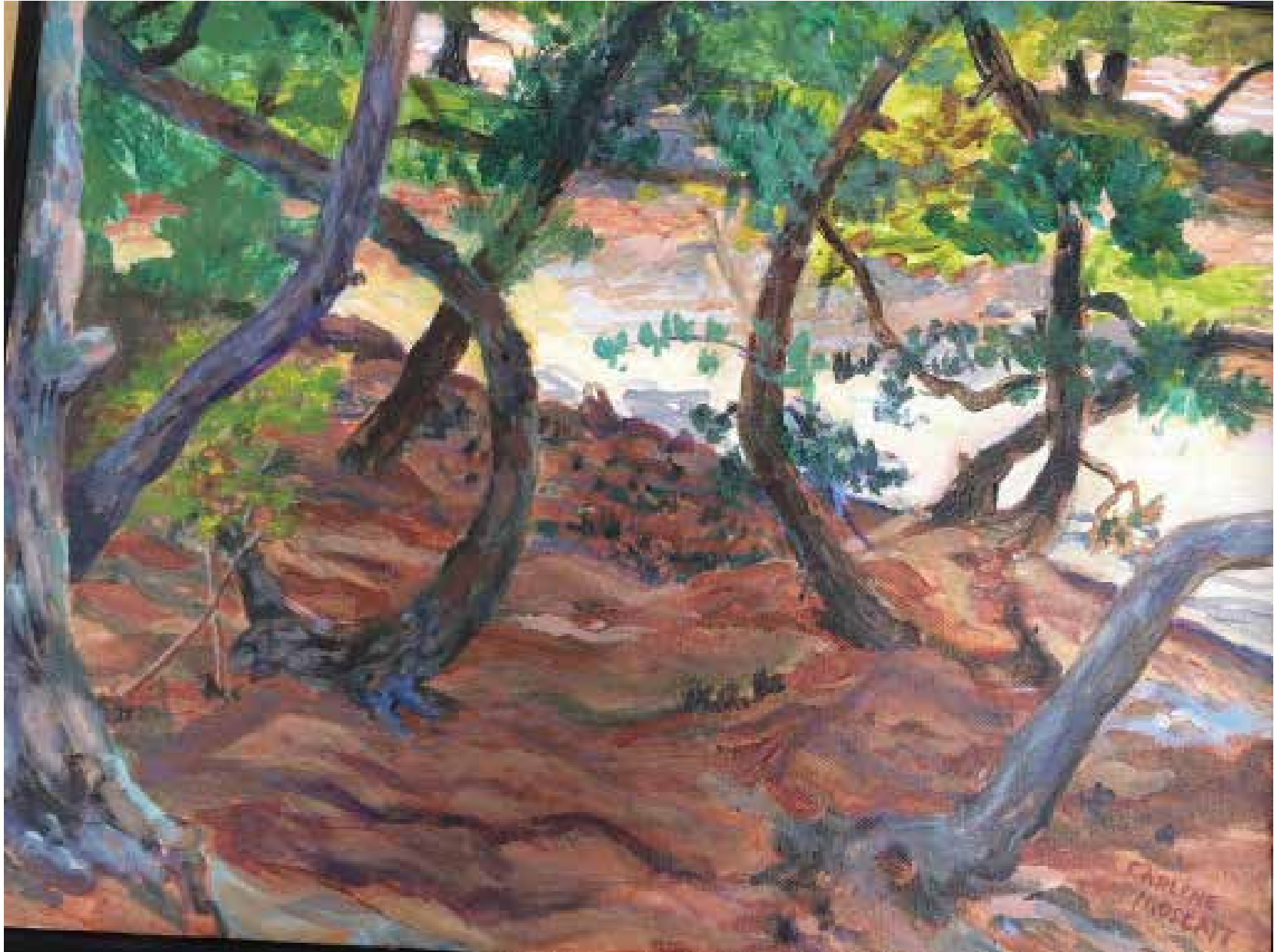
When we arrived home, we went to a nursery that only sold native plants, and they had pawpaw trees. We bought one and planted it next to a fence. One year later, there were no pawpaws. I researched the tree and found that it was related to a papaya and needed a partner to cross fertilize, so back we went to get another one. The two trees grew into beautiful

healthy plantings, but again, no fruit. I went back to Google and read that it took five years to bear pawpaws, so we had nothing to do but wait.

The years went by. After five years blossoms appeared on the older tree. They were strange looking, dark purple/brown and bell shaped. When no fruit appeared, we thought maybe we had bought two female trees that couldn't fertilize each other. That showed how little we knew about vegetable sexuality. We shrugged our shoulders, but the trees were so full and lovely that we wanted to keep them whether they bore fruit or not.

More years went by. We gave up waiting for the pawpaws to appear. When the trees reached the age of ten in late September, my husband said, "You have your pawpaws." I looked at the ground under the older tree, and there they were! Four ripe egg-shaped fruit. After all this time, they felt like a gift. Pawpaws aren't easy to eat. I don't bother picking out the seeds. I just scoop everything inside the shell and suck the flesh sticking to the seeds and spit out the clean seeds. It works for me.

If patience is a virtue, this adventure proved it. My gift is a delicious, home-grown native treat that was worth the wait.



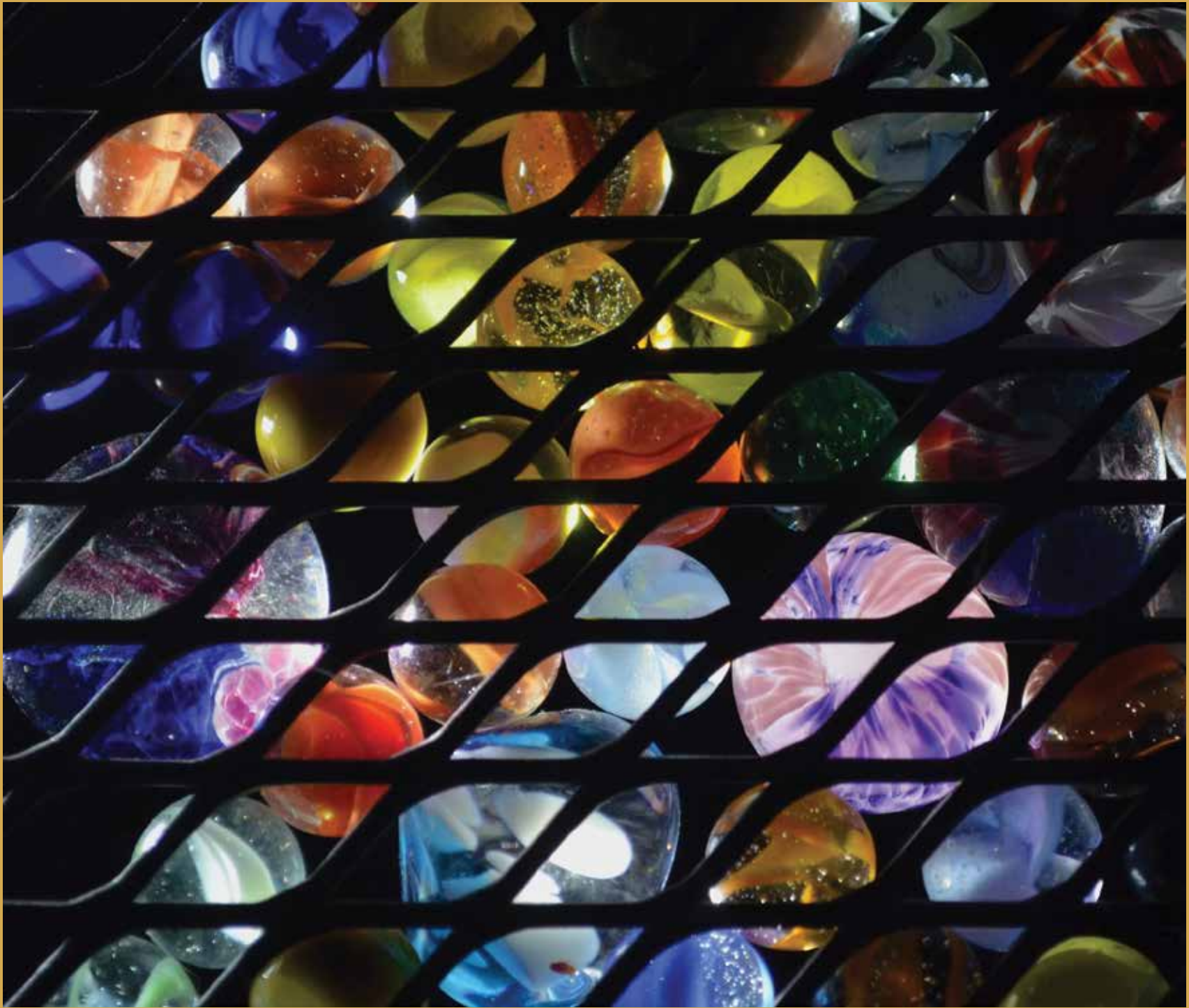
Cape Henlopen, Acrylic, Carlene Moscott



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Lost and Found, Digital Photo, Deb Maruyama



Renaissance Institute Come for the classes, stay for the friendships

