

Kelsey Review



Volume XLIII
Fall 2024

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Cover photo, “Tohickon Creek Aqueduct,” courtesy of Sean Cuddahy.

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Manuscripts for *Kelsey Review* are solicited exclusively from people living and working in the larger Mercer County area, New Jersey.

E-mail: kelsey.review@mccc.edu

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As a community-based publication, we welcome sponsors and supporters interested in joining *Kelsey Review* and other MCCC endeavors.

From the President

Mercer County Community College is delighted to once again share with you the work of many local writers and artists in *Kelsey Review*, the College’s county-wide literary journal. This year marks *Kelsey Review*’s 43rd issue, and it is a pleasure to see how this journal continues to serve the community by sharing the work of talented individuals who live and work in the larger Mercer County area. This journal is just one of the many ways the College highlights and shares the cultural wealth of our area.

MCCC directly serves thousands of county residents, and indirectly tens of thousands through its many ties to the community. Not only can county residents be a part of *Kelsey Review*, they can also enjoy the many other community offerings that MCCC has to share. WWFM broadcasts quality programming that listeners can enjoy in Mercer County and all over the world by listening online. Kelsey Theater stages a wide range of dramatic performances for county audiences, who also have access to the college’s Art Gallery. Our nationally-ranked MCCC athletic teams offer chances to root for stellar local athletes. Learn more about the college and Mercer County at www.mccc.edu.

For this particular issue, the *Kelsey Review* editorial team has expanded the geographic scope to other parts of New Jersey to ensure the highest quality literary offerings.

Kelsey Review is now available online, where it can be shared worldwide! To keep up with the *Review* year-round, please “like” the publication on Facebook.

Each edition of the *Review* presents professional-quality poetry, fiction, non-fiction, art, and photography that provoke thought and spark inspiration. Enjoy what you find here.

Sincerely,
Deborah E. Preston, Ph.D.
President
Mercer County Community College

From the Editors

We are delighted to serve as co-editors of *Kelsey Review*! We follow in a great, longstanding tradition of publishing the work of talented local writers and artists. While we are new to the editorship of this community-based literary magazine, we are not new to either Mercer County Community College (MCCC) or to writing (see our bios at the back of this issue).

For Issue 43, we have continued to include the work of many of your favorite area contributors of photography, poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. And, we have reached out to writers such as Mimi Schwartz, Peter E. Murphy, and Marian Calabro to introduce you to the voices of other established New Jersey authors. At the same time, we're excited to publish the work of MCCC alumni like Sophia Boor, who makes her professional writing debut in this issue. In this issue you'll find work about loss, the past, and introspection.

We are excited to curate from and nurture the Mercer County literary community and plan to offer online events, such as a launch party for the magazine, and a clinic in writing cover letters and formatting literary work.

Please follow us on Facebook
(www.facebook.com/MCCC.KelseyReview)

We are grateful for the support of many people in the county for helping us publish Issue 43. First and foremost, we thank former *Kelsey Review* editor Jacqueline Vogtman for her careful and comprehensive guidance. We thank our first readers—Roberta Clipper, Luray Gross, and Ellen Jacko—who carefully reviewed each submission made during our open reading period for quality and clarity. We thank Liberal Arts division executive assistant Lyndsey Goehrig for her tireless support. Thanks also go to the College's Publications department for helping us navigate the change in our literary magazine's trim size and binding as well as design and production. Also within the Marketing department, we thank Brad Kent and Tim Fitzpatrick for keeping our website

current with the online version of *Kelsey Review*. We must thank Denise Ratti, Grants Director, for her assistance in applying for grants under tight deadlines and to Theresa Palughi for grants accounting. Of course, we thank Dr. Debi Preston, MCCC President, and Dr. Robert Schreyer, Vice President of Academic Affairs, for their continuing support of this project. Finally, we thank the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission for a generous grant that enables us to print *Kelsey Review*. It is more important than ever to support the arts, and these many people have shown their support for *Kelsey Review*.

Gwen Weerheim Jones, MFA
Professor, Liberal Arts

Barbara Krasner, MFA, PhD
Associate Professor, Liberal Arts

Contents

From the President	3
From the Editors	4
Upstate Autumn	8
Today	9
Snow-Covered	9
rot.....	11
my first conscious effort to forget you	12
Heading Home	14
Wonton Soup	15
Scarves After Midnight.....	16
The Story I Did Not Want to Write	18
Kandinsky at the Guggenheim.....	24
Testimonies of Women.....	25
Woman with Red Earrings.....	29
Ode to My First Car: A 1973 Volkswagen Beetle.....	30
Fridge Notes.....	32
Things I Know to Be True	34
#1: Trees Are Moving Away from the Shoreline	34
#2: Infants Need to Be Touched in Order to Thrive	35
#3: It Takes More Than 21 Days to Break a Habit.....	36
Pockets of Time	38
Fall Harvest.....	45
Gibberish (Eclipse No. 1)	46
Lunch with the Girls: A Sonata	49
For Mike, 1937-2024.....	50
Journey to my Mother's Funeral.....	52

Narcissus Wants to Become His Lover	53
Halloween in Allentown, New Jersey	55
Love Letter to Night	56
In your gravity	57
Casting the Stone	58
Smoking Cessation: A Meditation in 20 Marlboros	59
Winter Golf.....	66
The Day I Set My Pa on Fire	67
Wall of Tears—El Muro de las Lágrimas—Galapagos, 1945- 1959	77
Imps of Darkness, Galapagos	78
Contributors	79
About the Editors	85
Submission Guidelines	86

LAUREN FEDORKO
Upstate Autumn



WANDA S. PRAISNER

Today

It's the now, waking
to someone
you love making coffee,
no matter the smell
of toast burning—
that first breath of morning—
knowing it will
never be today again.

Snow-Covered

I missed the kill, midair
and swift, hidden in gusts
of dust-like snow—
a sharp-shinned hawk

near the road, the day
gray as driveway stones,
cedar trunks

and the mourning dove
clamped under its claws.

For an hour the raptor pumps
steady as an oil rig
until the remains redden,

bones and feathers
dangle from its bill,
talons clutch only stone.

It flaps off silent
the way a soul might rise—

the only evidence on the drive:
an indentation,
a twist of entrails

already frozen, one small feather—
snow-covered—
white as the paper
on which I write what little I know.

LAUREN FEDORKO

rot

some mornings
your body hangs
 like thick fog
or black onyx
and you loom
over the peaks of
 my shoulders
when the fog lifts
I'm left more memory-empty
than I was
before
 your passing hasn't
gone
unnoticed—
it's left purple ridge-bruises
 in arcs
across my ribcage
other times it slopes
glittering emerald
down the nape
of my neck
it's like a weather-tattered
 vessel returning with
certainty to its
home harbor
Death falls in love
the most when it's
 cold—: frostbitten
 steam rising from caves
it walks slowly
through painted galleys
and
forks
 itself into
the space
beyond

the present
Death falls in love
the most when you're
comfortable
we're drawn to sun-honey sweetness
when it's
always destined
to tarnish
itself
brown.

my first conscious effort to forget you

I piled you in the
center of my bedroom floor:
modest mouse ticket stubs
my watercolors
your paint brushes
a host of your sketches done in red
lemon-scented soap
chunks of palo santo
dirt from the pockets of big sur
your letters tied in chronological order
a glove you left in my suitcase by accident one
of your t-shirts

my plan was to scoop
your left-behind pieces
into a bag and drag you
out to the curb

I wanted to watch
the garbage men take you
with the
tuesday morning trash
until you were just a speck

at the tail end of
my street
making a left-hand turn to
nowhere

VIDA CHU

Heading Home

On the long drive home from Vermont
the couple sat mute as mannequins.

Snow came but he refused to slow.
She grasped the overhead handle.

The car zoomed underneath a bridge.
Hit black ice.

Veered to the left. Wheels in a ditch.
The car flipped. Landed on its roof.

The pair held by seatbelts, upside down.
State trooper broke the window. They crawled out.

A tow truck hauled away the wreckage.
Dropped them at a gas station near Albany.

He called for a taxi. None came.
She stood frigid by the pumps offering cash for a ride.

Night was falling. An old housepainter and neck-tattooed son
agreed to drive them to Princeton for three hundred dollars.

The old jeep choked and skidded on the frosted thruway.
No heat, hard rock blasted the entire four hours.

Tentatively she reached for her husband's hand.
He latched on as if it were a lifeline.

SHAOYAN WANG

Wonton Soup

Long-tailed fish rise in a bowl
pushed to the surface by seaweed.
Drops of sesame oil
like fragrant dot flowers
separate and drift
above the clear broth.

You'd think the soup is bitter
because bok choy sheds sad tears.
You'd think the broth is stained
because we add a little black vinegar
to liven up the flavor.

This is a soup world, after all,
a chaotic and mystic world.
For the best possible palatability
we honor our taste buds
with our eyes shut.

Hunger, like loneliness, is perpetual
and always comes back to haunt us.
When it wrenches our heart,
a bowl of wonton soup brings happiness.

Yet the hunger for other things
will follow when our bellies are full.

MIMI SCHWARTZ

Scarves After Midnight

I go to the refrigerator for a glass of ice water, and in the alcove, on the bench, is my pile of crumpled scarves, waiting for months for attention. I stop this time—it's 2 a.m.-- take out the iron and folded brown bath towel on the dryer (my ironing board since the real one broke), and start pressing warm into cold with growing delight. How easily the crushed becomes smooth and beautiful! I, scorcher of countless shirts, do not ruin a single scarf—not the Chico cotton paisley, or pink silk from the fair, or the frail blue mesh Stu had bought me in Japan. Thirty minutes later all the scarves are ready to wear. I carry the pile upstairs, and I sleep until 8 a.m. I haven't done that since my husband Stu died eight months ago.

The next night I wake up—it's 4 a.m.—frantic to find the extra button for my blue coat is in my old night table, the one I used before moving to Stu's side of the bed. I roll across the mattress, turn on the light, and pull down the hinged door. There are my five pairs of reading glasses, too weak to wear. *My daughter might need them! She's always looking for hers.* I start a Give-as-Gifts pile on the floor. And my sack of single earrings and broken chains *Someone just mentioned an amazing jeweler who repairs everything!* I start a Fix-it pile. And my four lens cleaners, two cloths for cleaning silver, and three unused make-up cases. Reality sets in. *Not even the Rescue Mission will take them!* I label a Whole Foods shopping bag "Garage Sale" for whenever I have one, spring maybe fall.

Way in back is the button box, full of white shirt buttons that Stu used to sew on with his button machine. (He'd bought it for shirt independence, which lasted till year twenty when the cleaners took over his shirts) Plus, a handful of brass and silver extras from sweaters my mother knit me, solos from long-gone suits and dresses—and the button I need for my coat, not quite the same brown as its mate, but good enough.

"Good enough" is what I told the plumber last week when he suggested a chrome showerhead to replace our white one. It was half the price. But when he called to say he found a

white one, I said: "I'll take it!" After all, I'm still here, alive in this house. Anyway, matching is better for resale.

Not that I'm leaving. People keep asking, "When are you moving? You must rattle around in that house!" I'd love to shout "NO! Good memories wrap around me here," but that makes people sad. So now I say, "I'm told not to do anything important the first year!" and everyone nods, satisfied that I have a plan.

I close the night table, button in hand, feeling my life is under control. One night table, at least, is organized for good because no one is going to sleep here again, needing it.

On the way to brush my teeth the next morning, I step over my mini-piles and vow to stop by jewelry repair and mail my daughter her glasses. I open the shades, triumphant. The morning sun streams in through the slats, leaving small shadows on my arm, as I open the dresser drawer. I plan to wear a newly ironed scarf, but somehow I reach deeper and touch the forgotten purple one with ruffles always creased, extra-long and sexy, like for a belly dancer. I wrap it loosely around my neck, twice, and feel the vibe. It gives me a lift.

PETER E. MURPHY

The Story I Did Not Want to Write

I screwed up. When I told a story, maybe several stories—I was on a roll—about my younger years, longtime Princeton resident Mimi Schwartz said, “You have to write a memoir.” This was in 2010 at a writing retreat I hosted for friends in Sea Isle City.

“I do?” I said.

“Yes, you do,” Mimi said.

“No, I don’t.”

“Yes, you do!”

This went on until I gave up and said, “All right, but stop nagging.”

I was a poet. I had no business writing stories, especially my story. At the time I knew nothing about writing memoir except that the idea of it was terrifying. In poetry I could disguise myself using metaphor, myth, fairy tales, and downright lies. But if I were to write memoir I must tell the truth. It felt like I would be changing my underwear in public. I didn’t want other people to see what I got. I didn’t want to see what I got either.

“So how’s the memoir going?” Mimi asked a few months later.

“Good,” I said. “I’m making progress.” She knew I was lying.

“I’d like to see it.”

Crap!

“It’s not quite ready,” I said, which was true. “I’ll let you know.”

“Okay,” she said, “I look forward to it.”

In addition to her own memoirs, Mimi wrote the book on writing memoir. Literally. She coauthored *Writing True: The Art and Craft of Creative Nonfiction* with Sondra Perl. I figured a good way to delay writing was to read her book which is wonderfully useful...if you want to write a memoir. However, despite myself I learned a lot. Among the many take aways was to write scenes about the stuff that happened using sensory description, summaries to get to the next scene and then reflect on what you wrote to try to figure out what the heck it all means.

Lots happened in my early life so scenes shouldn’t be a problem...if I wanted to write them. Maybe I could write summaries to skim over the hard stuff. And reflection...I’ve done a lot of thinking about my life and still can’t figure it out. How should I know what it means? In poetry, it’s the reader’s problem. The universe can be nasty and cruel. What else do you want to know?

“Well?” Mimi asked.

I realized that I wasn’t going to get out of it, so I pushed away my pile of unfinished poems and got to work. I decided to write about the people who spawned me, my parents. I mean, my childhood was their fault, not mine. Right? Besides, they’re dead, so they won’t complain. I hope.

My father, Eddie Murphy, grew up on the Lower West Side of Manhattan. When his mother caught his old man screwing the teenage babysitter, she threw him out of their cramped apartment. Eddie, now the breadwinner, was dragged out of his childhood at age fourteen to haul tons of bananas on his skinny shoulders from the holds of cargo ships. He quickly turned from being a kid to being a longshoreman. Have you seen *On the Waterfront*? It was like that. When WWII happened, he figured fighting Nazis couldn’t be worse than what he had to face every day, so he enlisted and found himself stationed near the small city of Newport, Wales. Until then, I don’t think he’d ever heard of Wales.

Thelma Elias Samuel, my mother, my sweet, beautiful, sad mother was born in Nantybawch on the outskirts of Tredegar in one of the mining valleys of South Wales. When she was fourteen, she went to work at the pub her family ran in, you guessed it, Newport. When WWII happened to her, she found herself pulling pint after pint of bitter ale for the invading Americans, who, it was said at the time, were “Overpaid, oversexed and over here.” The GIs retorted that the British were “Underpaid, undersexed and under Eisenhower.” Clever.

When Thelma served Eddie his first beer she was smitten. He was smitten. He played debonaire and goofy. She played hard to get. It was magic. Fairy tale magic. Without the happy ending. Sniff.

They got engaged right before he left to storm Omaha Beach on D-Day. Boom! He survived that horror but was wounded six months later in Antwerp. He loved Antwerp. He was having the best time of his life. When he wasn't on duty, he told me, he went out drinking and whoring. Not long before he died, he confessed that he should written to Thelma to break it off. He was probably right.

This was December 1944, just days before the Battle of the Bulge. Eddie and a buddy were out late carousing. It was snowing. They "borrowed" a jeep to drive back to the base, a jeep that happened to be filled with cases of liquor which they also "borrowed." Of course they crashed the jeep on the icy road. Eddie wound up in a hospital with a concussion and kidney damage. The docs sent him home where he went back to work on the docks. After the war, Eddie returned to Wales to marry Thelma, thus beginning WWII.

"So how's it going?" Mimi asked.

"Great, great," I said. "I'm making progress."

"Good," she said. "What's the title?"

"*D-Day, A Love Story*," I said.

"That sounds interesting. Let me see it."

I gave her the bits and pieces I had.

"This seems to be about your parents," she said.

"Uh huh," I mumbled, hoping that would be the end of it.

"So where are you in this story?"

"I'm not...I don't want to be in it."

"But it's your story. You have to be in it," she insisted.

"No, I don't," I whined.

"Don't be ridiculous. Stop fooling around. You need to write this."

Aaaaagh!

It's nonfiction, right? I decided I needed to do research. And research, I discovered, is a wonderful way to put off writing. A friend told me she found the passenger list of the ship her grandfather took to cross the Atlantic.

"How did you find the passenger list?" I asked

"Ancestry dot Com," she said. "You should look into it."

I signed up for Ancestry, took out a second mortgage to pay for the upgraded World Explorer package, and spent hours searching through the archives looking for...I wasn't sure until I found it, the record of my sailing from Wales to the United States. I was surprised to learn that I crossed the Atlantic not once, but three times. After sailing from the UK to New York City at seven months old, I sailed back the following year, this time without Eddie, who knows why? I left Wales again and returned to New York for the last time in 1953 when I was three years old. I also learned that in the years 1947 to 1953 Thelma sailed between Britain and the US seven times. What was that about? What was it that made her so restless? I began to have a lot of questions and no answers. And there was nobody left to ask. I decided to do research about Wales, the country of my birth.

When Mimi checked in again, I was ready. I was feeling smart. I had facts. "Did you know," I told her, "that in 1850 Wales was considered to be the first industrialized nation in the world because more people went to work in factories and mines than in agriculture?"

"Fascinating," she said. "What does that have to do with your memoir? Was your mother a miner?"

"Well, no, but her family were miners."

I continued, "Women working side by side with men in the hot mines were prohibited from removing their shirts because it distracted the men who of course, could remove their shirts."

"Uh huh."

"Look," I said, "this stuff is important. I bet you didn't know that in 70 A.D., the Romans had gold mines in Wales. Gold mines!"

"Was your mother a Roman gold miner?" she asked.

"No, but..."

"You're stalling."

"I'm not," I protested, thinking I should visit a Roman gold mine on my next trip to Wales.

"You know," Mimi said. Her voice was deliberate, tender. "The more you stall, the more it shows how important it is for you write this."

Damn! I didn't love hearing this. I didn't love the idea of telling my story, but I love Mimi, so I finally got serious and went to work. Here goes.

I thought I had a normal childhood and adolescence even though I was stopped living with my family, who knows why? when I was six and was shuffled around New York City for the next four years. Some homes were kind, some not. None of the neighborhoods were kind. I was kidnapped and tortured by one gang at age seven and held at gunpoint by another at age eleven. A priest developed a crush on me and kept me as his boytoy for a year. After breaking a collar bone and six ribs, I developed a crush on the Codeine pills that sweetened the pain, and when they ran out, I asked alcohol to go steady with me. "Yes!" it said. "Yes!"

As I started to write, I realized my life was perhaps, not as normal as I thought. I began to think of my high school years as Early-Derelict Period. Mid-Derelict Period began when I flunked out of several colleges and went to work at a bar, and Late-Derelict Period when I woke up in the gutter outside the flophouse where I was crashing in Wales. Writing my story helped me understand my younger years and my addiction to alcohol. As a bonus, I began to forgive my mother and my father, and eventually to forgive myself.

Eleven years, hundreds of titles, and thousands of words later, I finally had a Mimi-worthy manuscript. She read it and offered useful revisions, most of which I adopted. And when the manuscript was accepted by a publisher, she wrote the following blurb to support the book.

"How does a boy going nowhere on alcoholism, a self-described 'screw up,' become a young man full of poetry and promise? In Peter Murphy's coming-of-age memoir, we travel with him on his remarkable journey from New York City to his birthplace in Wales, to Ireland and Limerick (looking for limericks) to Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey and back to New York. In his search for identity, told with a special mix of wit and poignancy, Murphy shows us how all who feel lost can be found, or rather, find themselves. A book that inspires, whatever our age and circumstance."

Mimi was right. I did have a story to tell, and the more I resisted it, the more obvious it was to her, and eventually to me, that I needed to write it. Thank you, Mimi. I couldn't have done it without you.

LAUREN FEDORKO
Kandinsky at the Guggenheim



CHRISTINE MCGOEY
Testimonies of Women
Testimony 1

[Compiler's note: Modifications needed to protect identities have been made throughout. Original copies secured elsewhere.]

Begin Testimony Woman 1

We were already in pajamas when Carol came to the back door. I was startled by her knock. I hadn't heard a car pull up and the back steps were partially roped off because they were being repaired. She said sorry to come so late. She parked down the block and came around the back because she didn't want anyone to see her. She needed to talk to us, and it couldn't wait; could I let her in?

She came into the kitchen, set the backpack down, and said, "Your safety depends on what I say next. You have to stay calm and listen carefully. Remember you know me and trust me. I don't have time for a lot of questions. You have to leave the state by early morning. Later in the day, maybe even by noon, but certainly by the evening the border will be permanently shut to reproductive age women and to all girls. We think some elderly women and all men and boys will be able to cross over and back, but we don't yet know under what conditions. The day after tomorrow girls will be barred from school and all women will be barred from various occupations and activities."

Carol said very few people knew what was coming, but a warning had passed from certain unnamed parties who had seen a draft of the directive from the governor. State and local police and militias would be called out to enforce the border closure soon. She did not say how she received the information and said it did not matter.

Carol gave instructions. We should leave very early tomorrow morning. Gary would have to drive. She would give us a letter to show at the border inviting our "boys" to represent their school at the prestigious Under-Age 12 Regional Boys' Assembly for the week. When questioned about our trip out of state, Gary should say the girls, disguised as our "boys," were

going to the Assembly and if asked for proof, he would show the letter. Yes, the Assembly was real; No, we would not actually go there. We would head in in the direction of the Assembly and continue driving as far as possible from the border.

Gary should also say we were only dropping the boys off and coming right back. If asked, we should say we were very proud. Quite an honor. Very excited. We should read the invitation to know about the Assembly. We should dress the girls in their school blazers and plain pants with the uniform sneakers. Give them buzz cuts. Gary and I should dress modestly. I should aim to look pretty. Did I have a softly colored dress? Any chance I was pregnant? Would a pregnancy test show negative if I was forced to take one? Did we have family to go to on the other side?

We had to be prepared for the possibility the border guards would check the trunk. We should use the kids' school- logo duffels for luggage. We had to pack carefully for the girls and not too much, so the clothes matched the story. Nothing too bright. Nothing with flowers or glitter. No personal identifiers, no decorations that would give the girls away. Carol stressed that Gary and I should not pack anything, *not a thing*, because we were not supposed to look like we were trying to escape before the state closed the border for good. *We weren't supposed to know about the closure*. If they did not let us pass, we should return home quietly and wait to be contacted.

Carol couldn't stay. She had other houses to visit; she wouldn't say whose or if they would be given the same letter. She hugged us and opened the backpack. She handed over the Assembly letter-invitation, a package of boys' briefs to add to each of the girls' bags, and a copy of the *Boy's Guide to Achievement* to be open and read as we went through the border. She promised she would try to find us on the other side and left.

Gary looked at me and said this was our home, it was supposed to be our home. We stood in the living room waiting like the house could explain what was happening. After a while I remembered Carol saying we could be shocked later, but now we had to move. I started some coffee and we both got dressed.

I went into the girls' room and started pulling clothes out of Jennie's dresser drawers. One handful of socks and plain T-

shirts, then jeans, black pants, and blue pants. I took two oxford shirts from the closet, unwrapped one of the packages of boys' briefs Carol had dropped off, and stuffed everything into Jennie's duffle. Then I did Julia's duffle the same way. The girls insisted they needed hair bands to tie up and hide their hair, but that was before they knew I had to cut it all off.

I went into the bathroom to look for the hair trimmer Gary's mom had given him when we'd moved here, hoping we hadn't thrown it out.

"Who knows when you'll find a haircutter," she had fretted when she gave him the trimmer. "God forbid if you go around with even a hair touching your collar out there; they have police who beat people for less. I don't, for the life of me, understand why you are risking moving there. And don't 'Aww ma' me about cheaper housing and opportunities."

I remembered we'd thought it wasn't as bad here as everyone said before we left home. Nobody was measuring men's hair on the street and doling out punishment if it was too long. As long as you looked clean, the police left you alone, and anyway there were hair cutters everywhere, at least two within a block from the new house. The new jobs paid pretty good. Eventually, Gary put the trimmer under the vanity sink, behind the pipes.

Before I could use the trimmer, I had to tie Jennie's long hair into a ponytail and cut it off with kitchen shears. Jennie was oldest so she went first. Her hair was thick and hard to cut. I held it in my hands, letting the light pick out the amber from the gold and light brown, and saw a picture of Jennie's hair rippled by the breeze, then Jennie's baby hair coming in soft and almost white, fields of grain I thought, surprising myself. I had a lock somewhere. Could I bring it with us? Where was it? Where was Julia's? I bit the inside of my cheek so I would not cry and picked up the shears.

"It's all right, Mom," Jennie said when I made the first timid cut. "I want to get away. I don't want to stay if girls can't go to school. You are cutting me free."

"I am cutting you free," I repeated and repeated. And then the girls added a tune, and we sang it like a hymn of comfort until Julia's hair piled on top of Jennie's hair on the

floor and I found myself looking at two children in standard boys' buzz cuts with the part shaved on the side.

"Let's go see" Julia squealed, and the girls raced to the mirror.

"Very handsome, Jeff! Very handsome, Jules," they said using their boy names to each other and then their reflections as they practiced what they thought were stoic and emotionless faces. Gary came in just then from loading the duffels and travel snacks in the car.

"How's it going?" he asked.

"We're practicing," Julia said, taking the emotion out of her face. "Do I look like a boy?"

"Is that how boys look?" Gary asked.

"Daaad, what do you think? You look like that right now."

"Like what?" he said touching his hands to his cheeks.

"This is my covering-scared face. My keeping-calm face."

"Same thing," Jennie said.

We crossed the border at 6:30 a.m. the next morning.

The guard peeked in the car and said his son also was reading the *Boy's Guide to Achievement* and the snacks the kids were eating looked yummy. Gary smiled and nodded. Julia opened handed him a bag of chips through the window, to show friendliness, she said later. I held my breath, and we drove through the gate. I was thinking the guard looked nice enough. I wondered if he knew what was coming.

End Testimony Woman 1

ELLEN JUNE WRIGHT

Woman with Red Earrings

After Thomas Eakins, "Female Model," ca. 1867-1869

In her three portraits
painted over several years
by two different painters

she dons the same blue, red
and white madras head tie,
the best one she had

and her countenance—
she's much younger
than she seems and so modern
in her contemplative pose though
joyless whenever we see her
so we wonder about regrets.

What magnitude of gravity
pulls down her cheeks?

What of a Black woman's
life with its many indignities,
even free in Paris,
stakes her to the ground?

STEVE SMITH

Ode to My First Car: A 1973 Volkswagen Beetle

Slow and steady we logged over a hundred thousand miles together. Rolling up and down winding Catskill roads you shining candy apple red, while my hair flapped like a flag in the wind as I leaned out the car window trying to imitate Bob Dylan's gravelly voice on the radio singing *Tangled Up in Blue* back when I was pursuing the fantasy of being an artist who didn't need to think about money.

Slow and steady, I became one with your manual transmission as we weaved through rush hour traffic across the GW Bridge down the FDR behind a blinking stream of red taillights, your engine throbbing and growling as I downshifted and popped the clutch like I was preparing for the Indy 500.

Slow and steady, buffeted on all sides by semis, our nostrils stinging from refinery gas emissions on the Turnpike, we drove to the Jersey shore with Laura, then later Peggy. All of us full of infatuation and hormones. Baking in the sun.

Slow and steady through all those angry years when I worked at the post office, read Bukowski and drank too much, smoked too much pot almost wiping us both out, that rainy night we spun out of control on Route 46 and I like to think it was you who took the wheel and kept us in lane.

Slow and steady, loyal and reliable, you got me through all those years, all those destinations, and rendezvous and back home again, until eventually your shiny red coat began to fade to rusty red and finally you got smashed one night, totaled by the police chief's drunken idiot of a son while I somehow slept

three floors above.

Then slow and steady, I had to start all over again, trying to get used to being without you.

DIANE T. MASUCCI

Fridge Notes

I've always wondered what the first signs of dementia would feel like. Would I get hot flashes or land in a bird sanctuary? The branches of my family tree are marked with some who faded into dementia. I remember accompanying my godfather on a tour of his Florida condo bathroom. "That's nice, Uncle Bill," I said as he grinned. Yep, I silently whispered, he's got it.

During the holidays, I watched *Miracle on 34th Street*, a 1947 movie where a man who identifies as Santa sees a psychologist who administers a finger-to-nose test to help determine mental fitness.

I admire how sharp actor Edmund Gwenn, then 71, was as Kris Kringle. Since age 73, I've struggled with the three seconds to three days memory retrieval of an object on the tip of my tongue. Google saves me often. But what *do* you call that miniature screwdriver that loosens a nut in a small space? It's not Phillips it's a... Hmmmm.

I then sat with my granddaughter to help her assemble money for a secret Santa shopping at school. She counted 10 singles. "Now," I told her, "You have to write the amount and your name on the outside of the envelope."

Her pencil stopped moving. My brain froze; how *do* you write a dollar sign? "I think it's an S," she said, forming it. Stunned, I rushed her off to first grade and gripped the steering wheel. Was I channeling Uncle Bill?

I pounded out my frustration on my old upright piano before I screamed.

The universe that day enabled me to get an appointment with a neurologist. After a series of quizzes for recall he had me stand up. I did the finger-to-nose test and passed. "Doc, we're in the 21st century!" I said. "Don't you have more advanced testing than this?"

He assured me that he saw no signs that I should take other tests for dementia.

"When was the last time you wrote a dollar sign?" he asked.

I considered my use of credit cards, online banking and checks for pilates which automatically fill in the dollar sign. "Fifty years ago?" I said. "I can't remember."

Closing his notebook, he prescribed a dose of reality.

"I suggest you put a large dollar sign on your refrigerator door," he said. "Just to remind you."

Meantime, the yellow dollar sign on my fridge reminds me to be more patient.

As I happily paid my doctor bill, the words *socket wrench* floated into my consciousness...a socket wrench loosens a nut in a small space!

I take a deep breath of gratitude. And I hum. Music, they say, is the last thing to go.

MARYLISA DEDOMENICIS

Things I Know to Be True

#1: Trees Are Moving Away from the Shoreline

Trees are moving away from the shoreline. They know better than we do what the sun and sky do. They don't need our man-made instruments to advise them the ocean's rising. They'll be dying sooner than expected so need to drop their seed behind them now, farther from the coast. I'll be dead too, by the time the ocean reaches my front door. Although it's come closer than I could have expected, and its demolished homes on the island, I'm on the mainland, eight miles away, safe from back-bay or ocean-front flooding, three blocks from the fire and police stations which sit on the highest ground in the city. Smart design. And my insurance is less expensive because the house is in such close proximity.

The house. The moving away from the house seems to be hardest. After twenty-six years, it begins to feel like it's yours. The yard thick with Lilacs, Rosebushes, hundreds of Dutch Iris, a pool of Bearded Iris and rows of Daylilies. Lily of the Valley. Black-Eyed Susan. Clematis. Lambs Ear. Wormwood. Lavender. Thyme. Basil. Oregano. Strawberries, Peaches, Plums, Raspberries. Flowering Quince. Cape Myrtle. Creeping Myrtle. Hyacinth. Tulip. Daffodil.

And the location. Location. Location. I drive across the bridge to the ocean. It's why I stay, and I suppose I could move away, but to where, and how, with what little income I have, could I survive on my own? We rationalize. We make good roommates, my ex and I, which is true, especially now that we're (mostly) past the resentment. It's financial stability for both. It's someone there if one of us falls, as long as it's not too hard and we don't ask too much. I ask too much. I don't ask enough my friends say. I don't ask too much, he says, it's him not me. And my son says mom just do it. Date. Don't think about the what ifs. Don't feel guilt about hurting him. He's never going to change, you know

that — we've had this conversation before. You're not wrong to want to be happy.

The trees don't want to be happy, they only want to survive. Stupid humans, always with the desire for more than to bloom, propagate, lay dormant, rise, die back down to sleep. Always with the need for approval. To be valued. To value ourselves as the trees do isn't enough.

I slowly move away
from you
and stay

#2: Infants Need to Be Touched in Order to Thrive

No More Tears

I try to remember my mother's touch. She brushes my hair, but she's in a mood, so pulls extra hard as she braids, yanking on the strands closest to the scalp. I try to remember something better:

I'm seven. My mother's hands are covered with an orangey goop she rubs hastily on my legs for my ballet recital, complaining the entire time about the required leg make-up and insisting we should be allowed to wear pantyhose. The friction between her hand and my legs hurts. She's frowning. She's rubbing too hard. I try not to cry. I'm not allowed to cry. Or wince. I try to remember something better:

I'm six. My mother rinses my hair in the bathtub. She's calm, doesn't want me to be afraid of the faucet water about to come down onto my head. She's discovered "No More Tears," a new spray that helps to detangle children's hair. This makes her happy. I never know when she's going to be happy or angry. It's not that I'm not paying attention. Believe me, she makes sure I do. But she's unpredictable, and I'm learning to put space in between us. I turn toward other people for advice, and she feels the distance.

I try to remember if I ever sat on her lap. In the drawer where I keep family photo albums, I page through searching for just one picture of us touching. I can't find one. I can't find one of my sister or my brother sitting on her lap or anywhere close to her, either. I can't find any pictures of her touching anyone except my father, whom she adored. So much so, she said to me once, *When I got pregnant with you, it was an accident, and I asked God Why did you do this to me? But, she said, I got your father, so it was worth it after all.*

There's one photo. One. I'm a newborn. I'm wrapped in a white blanket and she holds me in her arms while sitting next to my father. But I don't remember what that felt like. To just sit, and be held.

Rage ripening
a pit in my gut
bitter fruit

#3: It Takes More Than 21 Days to Break a Habit

I open my eyes to be sure it was only a dream. The window is there, and the walls, so I go back to sleep. I slip into a different dream. In this one my ex-lover and I sit naked in wooden chairs in a dirt courtyard surrounded by a crowd. We're pale and smeared with mud. The crowd is waiting for him to prove that he doesn't love me. I'm a criminal, a sinner. The crowd calls for him to beat me with a shovel, so I put my head in my hands and wait, knowing he will go through with it. He picks up the shovel, and even though I see it come toward me and feel the breath knocked out of me, I wake up just a moment before the strike hits. If only real life were as kind.

In real life, I let him bury me. In real life, I feel like my bones have been shattered, my backbone splintered. I'm beaten pulp that can't even crawl away from the heap I've become. A heap of

limp flesh left for dead in a dirt courtyard. And he walks away. He walks away hand in hand with his wife after months of persuading me his marriage was beyond repair. After more than a thousand letters. After hours every day of phone calls and plans. After telephone masturbation and sex in hotels. Concerts and car rides. After taking off each tire to check my brakes. After fixing my light switch so that instead of merely turning it on and off, I could dim it. A dimmer, he said. For mood. After, he painted my room gray. Deep Smoke Signal. We thought the name was significant. Everything was significant, everything was a sign, a symbol that exemplified our love.

I'm not afraid to die I think as I drive through one of the most deserted parts of a city not my city. If anyone threatens to kill me I won't even try to stop them. I'll put my head right up to their gun and tell them to go ahead. I've read about "blue suicides," when someone who has a death wish engages law enforcement, entices them, prods them into killing them. I can't wish myself dead, although I've tried, I have. If I could wish myself dead or get myself killed in some deserted city not my own, no one would blame themselves because it wouldn't look like suicide, it would look like murder or as though I'd died a natural death.

Just let me not wake up, I think as I drift off to sleep. If I were the kind of woman who prayed, you could call that a prayer, but I'm not, and I don't, so instead it becomes a kind of mantra. On a good night I find something else to recite, but most nights lately aren't good nights. And I'm too much of a coward to do it myself, afraid of what's not on the other side and also afraid I'll fail, so instead, I wish myself dead. Just let me die in my sleep, I think. Please let me not wake up. But I do. The window is there, and the walls.

if comedy
is tragedy plus time
add women and stir

LINDA PARISI

Pockets of Time

As we pulled into the small driveway, amid the chaos in my head and the maelstrom in my heart, one tenet rang true—pockets of time could change a life. Thirteen years ago at Camp Farrington, a pocket of time changed mine.

I sat for a moment, trying to catch my breath. My fiancé, Rob, turned off the engine but I couldn't quite rein in all my emotions. I sat for a moment breathing deeply, memories flying through my brain. Still, I kept coming back to that one summer, the summer of no return.

I got out of the car. My gaze took in the patchy dead grass and sparse, dying evergreens. My breath caught at the 'SOLD' sign tacked to the front of the office. My stomach hollowed at the reality.

"Lainey? Are you okay?" my fiancé Rob asked as he came around to stand next to me.

"I don't know." Shocked, I had no idea how to respond. "From the looks of things, no one's taken care of the place in a long time."

He nodded. "Try not to be too disappointed."

Disappointment was a relative term. Disappointment was finding out I was a pawn in my parents' game, to be shuttled back and forth between enemy lines as a messenger of thinly veiled threats. Disappointment was finding my father would remarry as soon as the divorce was final and I would be forced to live with a stranger.

A question popped into my head. "Are you nervous? About the wedding?"

He tucked his chin as he frowned. "Where did *that* come from?"

"I'm not sure. My parents' divorce I guess."

"Ah," Rob said. "How old were you?"

"Eleven. They told me then sent me to camp. At first, I didn't know what to do. Then I tried to bury everything. When that didn't work, I knew I had to accept things as they were even though I hated doing it."

He pulled me close. "We're good, you and I. Solid."

I wound my arms around his back, tucking my head into his chest. His heart beat slow and strong in my ear. Measured, confident, patient, Rob had waited a long time for me to say yes. "I love you."

"I love you, too."

Turns out, my stepmother was wonderful. She'd taken me under her wing and helped me through some very rough times. Only now, as an adult, did I see how unstable my mother was.

But I didn't know that then.

I let go and urged him to walk with me. I wanted Rob to share in the best part of my life, the earth that allowed me to grow my roots, not wallow in the worst poison ivy known to man. Only he couldn't. Not with boards covering the screens of the bunks, not when paint peeled off the stairs of the Main Hall, and they looked like they were ready to collapse. Certainly not with rust stains smearing walls and wood as if painted with an angry brush.

A sear of panic sizzled through me and I stopped short. "No. I'm sorry. We need to leave. This isn't the place I wanted you to see. I don't even know what—" I choked, swinging my arms wide. "*This* is."

"Hey! Stop," he cried, shaking his head. He clasped my hand, squeezing tight. "There's no way for me to experience what you did. I wasn't there. But you can still show me. C'mon. It's why we came, isn't it?"

I didn't know. All the way down the Parkway and Turnpike I couldn't wait to remember, to dive into my memories as I had the huge swimming pool that was the centerpiece of the camp.

And as thought followed thought, I realized part of me wanted to preen, to bask in the glow of being an adult. Look at me. Look what I've done, what I've accomplished, in spite of my childhood. I'm a biochemist with a good job. I have a wonderful fiancée and the promise of a great life.

Rob tugged on my hand so we walked down the hill past the tetherball courts, poles sans ropes and balls. The perfect sand circles around the base of each pole I remembered so vividly, were now overgrown with weeds. Each desecration I witnessed

cut at my roots. I fought my earlier panic and let the rightness of this place fill me. I belonged here. This had been my home for ten summers. I'd lived my best life on this land and no one could take that away from me.

As a child, I'd thought of Camp Farrington as one activity after another, as the freedom to run, play and learn. I'd believed it was a place that never failed me. I could always count on right and wrong here. At eleven years old, I'd been shaken to the core. That summer, as I tried to simply be a kid, Farrington gave me back myself, helped me stand, gave me the will to survive no matter how bad things became. I was asked to be a leader on several of our weekly hikes. I became the stern-man, the "captain" of my canoe, I managed to walk a tightrope without falling.

Strength ran through my veins. I'd been given an unshakable foundation. Wasn't that what Farrington was all about? Could the luxury homes I just knew were going to be built here, ever understand the ground upon which they were to reside? Never. Because Farrington wasn't just a set of buildings and fields and tennis courts, it was the truth—nothing could ever defeat me.

We kept going until the ground evened out. "What is that?" Rob asked in disbelief.

My nemesis? Large wooden poles still remained driven into the ground forming the letter "X" at each end of the filthiest, slimiest, and dirtiest lily pond. The water was brown, nearly black, with an oily film on the surface yet lilies still grew inside, their huge green fan-like leaves reaching upward as if begging to get out of the muck.

How many times had I fallen in? Better yet, how many times had I made it across? Staring at the Monkey Bridge I realized every moment of life was a lesson. To lose was a certainty. But to win? Oh, to win was such a joy.

"That, my darling, is the Monkey Bridge. Imagine a heavy rope strung across where the poles intersect. And two thinner guide ropes on either side. All I had to do was walk across."

He threw me a sideways look, knowing what I neat-freak I was. "You fell in there?"

I smiled. "Many times."

"Unh-hunh."

I bit back a laugh. Rob believed me but couldn't figure out how I managed.

We continued on to the lake, maybe fifty yards or so, getting as close to the water as we could before the ground became too wet to walk on. Had I known the lake was a reservoir back then? Nope. Had I known it'd been created by a dam? Nope. Would I have cared? Nope. I learned a lot of things on the lake, not just boating and canoeing, but leadership and responsibility. Working with a team. "We used to canoe down to Milltown then camp overnight at a reserve in Rutgers."

"Really? You? Sleeping under the stars?"

"After all, Farrington was a sleepaway camp." I laughed. "Digging my own latrines too."

"Impossible. I don't believe you."

"I know."

My idea of camping these days was a four-star hotel. And yet, at fourteen, I'd been responsible for helping to set up the camp, cook the food, and make sure we didn't run out of marshmallows to roast. I hadn't thought about the responsibility, I'd just done what was necessary to make the overnight a success.

Rob slipped his arm around my waist and I turned to my left to go back up the hill next to the pool. I gasped. I leaned on the wooden railing unable to comprehend the chunks of concrete missing from the steps, the white paint of the wall flaking in strange patterns like damaged snowflakes, and the pile of dead leaves congregated at the bottom of the deep end.

"Wow," he murmured. "This is huge."

"Yes." Olympic sized? Probably. "On hot days we'd have General Swim twice a day."

I tried to picture what the pool had been like with the sun glinting off crystal clean water.

"This is where I learned to swim." I pointed to the huge retaining wall built into the hill. "Over there was the shallow end. They split the pool lengthwise."

We were standing by the deep end. I shifted my foot and an empty soda bottle rolled away. I shuddered and stepped back

to walk over to the gate. I watched Rob struggle to imagine what had been, warmth filling me that he tried. For me.

So many memories. We followed periods, an activity schedule for each bunk was posted each day, printed on an old typewriter. Funny, I could still recall the fat, round dots that dotted the 'I's' and ended the sentences. I still wonder how they kept it all straight. Ten groups of kids going to different activities during the day and no two bunks going to the same activity unless it was planned.

Archery. Arts and Crafts. Softball. Horseback riding. Oh, horseback riding, my very best favorite day of the week. Sam picked us up once a week and we sat in the back of his pickup on bales of hay to go to his ranch. We rode a trail, get to canter a bit, even pick wild blackberries warmed by the sun, wincing when they were sour, savoring every bite when they were sweet. And sweets? How delicious were the ices we would get at the General Store on the way back to camp?

Rob touched me on the arm, bringing me to the present. "I'll meet you up by the car."

I nodded, feeling a little guilty. "I'm sorry."

He placed a gentle finger against my lips. He understood. He couldn't really share in my memories, he hadn't lived them. They weren't his, only mine. "I'll try not to be too long."

I swung around to stare at the swimming pool again. A well of sadness ran through me and I tamped it down. Sure I'd lost. My entire world was about to change. But I'd won too. Something unbreakable, something that would never let *me* break.

Treasure Hunt.

Bunks were divided into teams. Each team was given a first clue which sent us to a place in camp where we would have to find our next clue. Every team, through those clues, got sent to the same places so the hunt was fair. So if we found another team's clue, we put it back where we found it. No one ever betrayed that honor system, no matter how tempting.

In the end, the last clue sent us all to the same place where we would scramble and search for the final prize. So

much thought, working together, even the littlest campers being asked for their help. Another life lesson?

I would say so only I don't think I cared at the time. I loved the hunt, the excitement of finally finding our clue, figuring out its meaning, and literally running to the next. One year, the hunt brought us to the pool as our final destination. We had to find a penny on the bottom, a very special penny. I shut my eyes trying to remember the date. A 1954 D penny? I wasn't sure.

My team that year was first down to the pool. Pennies already covered the bottom of the pool, and we were told there were none in the deepest part of the deep end. I begged and begged to be first to go in. The younger campers were taken to the shallow end with a couple of our team counselors to search. Only so many campers were allowed in at a time to be fair.

The second team arrived and I started dancing in place. I wanted to go in that pool so badly. More and more pennies ended up on the side of the pool after being found with the incorrect date. The third team arrived and I nearly jumped out of my skin when my name was called to finally go into the pool.

So hard to slide in by the ladder. Ripples in the water made it hard to see where the pennies were. No goggles for these eyes. Not allowed.

I'd been in the pool for about five minutes when I finally swam to the side to get rid of my handful of 'no good' pennies. I started searching again, and as I came up for air, I saw one of the owners standing on the side of the pool. He threw in a handful more and I knew. I just knew. The prize penny had just been thrown into the water.

I dove in the direction of those pennies and scabbled along the bottom picking up as many as I could before my lungs burst. Wiping the water out of my eyes, I couldn't believe it when I saw the 1954 D penny resting in the palm of my hand. Sound faded. The copper glinted in the sun. I shook my head. The next thing I knew, I was shouting and screaming, "I found it. I found it." My heart threatened to beat right out of my chest as I brought the penny to the side and I was told we'd won. We'd won. I found the prize.

Smiling, I started walking back towards the car. We got watermelon and ice cream as our prizes. I think. Didn't matter. I helped my team win. *That* was what counted.

When I reached the car my fiancée said, "You look happy."

Thinking back to what Camp Farrington gave to me, a place of refuge and time away from the realities of my life, I knew I shouldn't be sad. Because, in essence, I wasn't saying good-bye. I couldn't ever. As long as I carried Farrington in my heart, the camp would continue to exist.

Life was truly a Treasure Hunt, I thought, made of choices. We made decisions every day on how to live. When we found a clue, we had the option to follow the directions and go on to the next clue, or put that clue back and find another. Were some right? Absolutely. Were some wrong? Most definitely. Were some out of our control? Of course.

At eleven years old, during a summer I thought I'd rather forget, I'd lost my concentric family. Had I known I would gain a new one? No. All I knew was that my world had fallen apart.

That same summer, I found a penny. A simple 1954 D penny. And I won. That summer was my first overnight canoe trip and I'd gotten up and down Lake Farrington without incident. That summer I crossed the Monkey Bridge without falling into the lily pond. I won. Winning gave me hope. I would survive. I would continue. I would become the person I was meant to be.

"Hunh," I huffed.

Rob stared and I grinned. A Treasure Hunt, life itself, was simply a road we had to follow. Pockets of time could make changes, some good, some not so good. But no matter what, the road belonged to me. Exactly as it was supposed to.

STEPHANIE CUDDAHY

Fall Harvest



ARLENE GRALLA FELDMAN

Gibberish (Eclipse No. 1)

Eclipse, that charming active adult community in New Jersey—with a stress on the word *active*—is one of many such communities that have invaded the once pastoral farmlands of Middlesex County. As with such communities there is diversity and adversity— games to be played and games played. Like many such communities, it is not without issues. What is so and so doing with pink flamingoes on her patio? There is too little shade here or too much shade there. This unit has more trees than another; trees are dying, trees are too small—others are obtrusive, those trees, over there are attracting Japanese beetles.

And of course, as with such communities, it is not without gossip—every active adult’s most pleasurable past time. Indeed, everybody knows everybody’s business—if not at the moment then certainly in an hour or two. At *Eclipse* word gets around faster than a hummingbird’s wings. Let me give you this recent example that began with the woman on Walnut Ridge, telling a personal incident to the gentleman who lives at 1425 Acorn Circle. The story as relayed to me is as follows...

The woman on Walnut Ridge told the Acorn Circle fellow that she and her husband became really good friends with their neighbors across the common grounds who live on Almond Way. The women shopped together, she said, had their manicures and hair done together and doubled up for tennis. The husbands also were close—golfed every Tuesday, bowled on Thursdays. As couples they did everything together: theater, parties, cruises, and at community events, they were always seated at the same table.

“So imagine my shock,” the woman-on-Walnut Ridge said to the fellow-on-Acorn, “when the husband-on-Almond Way, catches me in the clubhouse and says, ‘We can’t be involved with you as a couple any longer. I’ve fallen in love with you.’ He went on to say he desperately needed to be alone with me. *Desperately!* Imagine!”

“And your response?” asked the fellow from Acorn Circle.

“Well, of course, I would have none of it. I told him he needed his head examined. I told him I loved my husband and would never, absolutely *never*, be interested in another man.” She paused. “You know who I’m speaking about, right—the guy on Almond Way?” she asked.

The Acorn Circle gentleman nodded his head.

“Well, he continued on, saying he did love his wife, but something was missing. *Missing!* Me! I was mortified of course and after I told my husband about this, we decided to just go cold-turkey and never see them again. Can you imagine? Please keep this to yourself. Please—”

The gentleman from Acorn Circle, being a gentleman, assured her that of course, he would keep this to himself and that evening, in bed, as he and his wife were watching TV, he shared the conversation with her. She was aghast.

“My God, he’s so much older than his wife—who I must say, although she is pretty attractive, clearly has had *help*—perhaps *too much* help. By the way, dear,” she asked her husband, “why do you think that woman shared this information with you?” She decided then and there to avoid the woman on Walnut Ridge whom she knew was up to no good.

“Damned if I know—but please keep it to yourself. Hon, do you hear me?” he asked, as she turned over and began to snore.

The following day at Bridge the woman from Acorn Circle felt compelled to give all the details to her best friend, a widow on Chestnut Way, who thought it was all bullshit. She said she never even saw the couples dance with each other at any of the community gatherings and certainly did not hear either of them say anything inappropriate.

“He’s one *sicko!* Everybody knows that,” said the woman to her right, who upon returning home, immediately told the divorcee she was dating that she felt sorry for the wife being married to such a weasel for so many years. They both agreed—lewd, licentious, indecent behavior—what else might you expect from men after all?

The Republican who lives next to the couple on Almond Way wished the gossip would end and he made excuses for his

neighbor. “Look, he said, “the woman who was hit upon has a nice figure—nice *boobs* and *tush*. Give the guy a break.”

The wife of the Republican felt sorry for the wronged woman—who, in this instance, she felt was the wife of the man on Almond Way and not the *slut* from Walnut Ridge. “For God’s sake, she recently lost her mother and she has to deal with the fact that everybody is talking about her screwball husband. He’s pathetic—but to be fair, if the husband of the other woman had any sense he would’ve kicked the guy’s butt.”

Her best friend on Nutmeg Road agreed. “And I question the motive of that one on Walnut Ridge—spreading the story in the first place. You see the way she struts her stuff at the pool. Never gets her hair wet—God forbid!”

The wife of the man on Almond Way defended her husband to anyone who would listen, saying it was the woman on Walnut Ridge who made the pass at her husband. “He’s only human,” she was said to have said.

The new couple on Macadamia decided that they did not know the people involved, did not want to know the people involved and couldn’t care less about their predicament. But then again, as I said, they were new to the community.

The artsy loner on Pecan Lane decided to submit the story to *The New Yorker* magazine. It was accepted—under a pseudonym, of course.

“And it’s not over—” The mother of the woman who lives on Nutmeg Road, who lives in a neighboring community said to her aide. “My daughter said as word traveled, friends of both couples, who were at one time close, became remote, breaking social ties and in general not acting as friendly as usual.”

Lydia Benson at *ReMax* and Susan Mc Kinley of *Century 21* were happy to list the two homes. They were the same model, although I heard the woman on Walnut Ridge certainly had better decorating sense than the one on Almond Way.

ILENE MILLMAN

Lunch with the Girls: A Sonata

for Fran, Cheryl, and Karen

The intro for this string quartet—
chopped salad, rye toast,
but the first rhythmic line quickly enters:
our backs, cataracts, medicines resisting
the pull of gravity

then a bridge
to fast-tempo photos of grandkids
in hockeysoccercheer uniforms
college graduations, weddings

but between
fork-conducted point
and counterpoint
sospirando

passages from my girlhood
composed when we were ten, fifteen
and thought of ourselves
as swashbuckling girls

*Remember we saw our first penis
on that Brooklyn subway
Remember smoking cigarettes out the bathroom window,
and when we piled on top of one another
you peed on my bed*

the fugue elements in this score
loss, divorce, despair, shared
darker melodic lines and modulations
unfold into the movements.
Love, the repeated theme

introduced back then
when we had all the time in the world.

But the coda for this ensemble piece
not yet,
the waiter just brought apple pie.

For Mike, 1937-2024

*“Animals as they pass through the landscape leave their
tracks behind. Stories are the tracks we leave.” —
Salman Rushdie*

large holes are everywhere,
in the kitchen where he is not
baking salmon in a lemon sauce

in the great room where he is not
delighting in the frenzy of birds
upside-down at the feeders he'd filled.

he never acknowledged it,
I'm fine he'd say, flipping
aside the shaggy cloak of age, illness.

ever the flamboyant magician
with laughter as his lovely assistant,
sleight of hand pulling aces, only aces.

This is my life, he'd say
and he mined it,
his past magnetic

tales of an African safari, toddlers in tow,
leaping out of planes in the wet wind,
service at the discretion of the Queen

sneaking behind East-German walls,
signing that piano-playing
English lad with the crazy glasses.

sometimes he'd tell stories about stories,

the happening and the telling tumbling
over and over each other like acrobats.

CAROLYN PHILLIPS

Journey to my Mother's Funeral

I take this trip for the last time
after a decade of visits
made in irritation, haste
love.

Familiar woods glide by,
the trees cold and bare.
The Memorial Bridge hunches
under sooty clouds
Burger King wrappers strew
the Wilmington highway,
a cornfield rests under crusty snow.

In old age she returned
to her childhood roots.
If she came to regret the miles
between us, her farm girl
stoicism prevailed.
She made-do.

As I did
on those endless journeys
which end today.

LOIS MARIE HARROD

Narcissus Wants to Become His Lover

It's the face below
that keeps them apart

the face is the chasm
the rift between black and white

who are we
when we can't see ourselves

as ourselves
as another.

Consider the lines
between rich and poor

gay and straight
stranger and friend

stranger and stranger—
this distance between us

how I have tried to mend it.
What is it I could say

to diminish the wall
the fence the scrim

the surface between us
that even drowning

does not diminish.
So many brothers

have died
might die.

Last night I saw a picture
of someone

who looked just like me.

SEAN CUDDAHY

Halloween in Allentown, New Jersey



SOPHIA BOOR

Love Letter to Night

Night, I never tried to speak
to you before, for your dangerous heartbeat
screams

inside my chest
ready to spring forward and fly.
Years have passed since I felt your skin

slip by mine
scuffed
scratched

sometimes with pleasure,
but I left you alone,
and you slip from inside my wrists.

I remember the swivel and spin of the streetlights
that guided us home and lit our faces,
sweaty and eyes burned from the vivid star earlier that day,

and our dreams became a memory.
I find a fantasy in your icy eyes
that reveals the horrors in your life,

while you sail in, lifting your soul onto mine.
When I go to you now, only at dawn
you fade away,

though I fight for your raw closeness
and presence in death's eternal cold.
But then I wake and yawn and look around,

as my third eye holds blind,
and I grasp that I am speaking to myself
and I am the night.

ATHIRA JACOB

In your gravity

The thing about gravity is that
we are always falling,
the earth catching us each time
beneath our feet.

That's how I imagine being with you,
tethered in your orbit
falling, every second
almost convincing myself
that you will come by
to catch me, ground me.

MAUREEN RIGGI

Casting the Stone

My confidence is a house of glass,
shivering with each quake.
I threaten to break
with the smallest stone cast.

And I am always the one to throw it.

MARIAN CALABRO

*Smoking Cessation: A Meditation in 20
Marlboros*

20

At the start of the pandemic, when it became clear that COVID-19 wouldn't end in six weeks, I decided to stop drinking. I hadn't drunk much anyhow. My preferences were embarrassing: rosé wine, Campari, Aperol. But alcohol gave me headaches, and who needed more of those? So the next time I drove to the liquor store, I turned around and came home empty-handed. For this, I have to thank my mother. She's been dead since 1999, but she set a memorable example by going cold turkey after a lifetime of Marlboros.

19

My mother—let's call her Grace—smoked cigarettes for 55 years. She enjoyed them. She relied on them. She looked past the fact that her husband—let's call him Jim—was a survivor of tuberculosis and thus shouldn't be around smoke. The first time they kissed, he said, "Kissing a girl who smokes is like licking an ashtray." She said, "But it didn't stop you."

18

Cigarettes give a woman's hands something to do. Cigarettes make a woman's hands look elegant. Grace noticed it at 15, when she saw Barbara Stanwyck in the movies. People had told her she looked like a young Stanwyck. The first time Grace held a cigarette between her fingers, she was hooked. Her addiction to nicotine and nail polish grew in tandem. She also enjoyed using cigarettes to tap a baton of smoke in the air and to punctuate conversations with an exhale. When Lucky Strike ran an

advertisement showing a radiant bride in a pure white gown, Grace tucked the magazine into her hope chest. In the illustration, a white-gloved hand extended from under the veil with a cigarette. “I do,” said the bride in the ad. “I do—it’s toasted.”

17

Smoking at work was common during most of Grace’s office career. Her first boss decided to hire her when he offered her a Marlboro and she immediately said yes. She was only 17, but she knew her own mind. Mr. Sonotone didn’t comment on that, but he did say, “Your typing and stenography skills are outstanding.”

16

Times were tight in the Great Depression, but Grace’s job and Mr. Sonotone’s Marlboros carried her through. She and Jim married during World War II, a few months after his final stay at a sanitarium in the Adirondacks. His TB was in remission, so he was well enough to work in his father’s defense plant. Furthermore, penicillin was on the horizon for the common man, even for 4F men like Jim who couldn’t serve in the military. Friends and family pooled their fuel rationing coupons to buy enough gasoline to drive to Atlantic City from Jim’s hometown of Kearny, New Jersey. Ten months after the honeymoon, Grace gave birth to twins. One was stillborn. She would go on to have two more viable children and two miscarriages. “We smoked until we went into the labor room,” she later said. “No one gave it a second thought.”

15

I grew up emptying ashtrays. Emptying them, washing them, replacing them on coffee tables and nightstands. I did the chore. I detested the chore.

14

The year I turned 10, my father read a summary of the U.S. Surgeon General’s Report on Cigarette Smoking in our daily newspaper, the *Newark Star-Ledger*. “It says that smokers are 70 percent likely to die sooner,” he said at dinner. My mother replied: “Coffin nails. Cancer sticks. I’ve heard that stuff since I was a kid. And how about the doctors who gave their approval?” Jim had a comeback: “Paid off. A racket like everything else. But pretty soon there won’t be any cigarette ads.” Grace was right. In her day, every magazine on the rack in her mother’s grocery store—*Life*, *Look*, *Photoplay* and all the rest—were full of ads with headlines like “20,679 Physicians say Luckies are less irritating.”

13

Joints were the thing to smoke when I was 15, the age at which my mother lost her cigarette virginity. I steadfastly refused. I was fine with the smell, which was richer and spicier than Marlboros. I liked the idea of being high, but the reality was that potheads in my big public high school acted like jerks. They thought they were brilliant when they said stupid things. They laughed like loons at nothing. I wasn’t much better. “I get high on art,” I would proclaim.

12

My rejection of dope particularly bothered Tina, my perpetually stoned fake cousin. She was fake because she was the daughter of my godparents, whom I called Aunt and Uncle but who weren’t blood relatives. We both ran in the hippie and Drama Club crowd. But while I swooned over e.e. cummings and Richard Brautigan, Tina inhaled at every available moment. Driving me home from rehearsal for “Brigadoon” one day, Tina all but stuck a joint in my mouth. I swatted it away. When it rolled on the floor of Aunt Martha’s gold Cadillac, Tina went operatic. “Are you

trying to get us killed? Do you know how much this stuff costs? How will I get the burn marks out of the floor mat?"

11

I accepted an invitation to represent my high school at Girls' State, designed to educate young women from all over New Jersey about the mechanics and joys of good governance. I knew I'd hate it, but it got me away from home and into a college dorm for a week. Surprise: the lounge was even smokier, and the ashtrays fuller, than in my living room. My fellow Girls' Stater Loretta Lavery chain-smoked. And I mean chain-smoked—she used the rag end of one lit cigarette to ignite the next one, from breakfast until our midnight chat sessions. Her brassy voice was already tarnished by nicotine consumption. When I looked her up 50 years later, I was astonished she hadn't died of lung cancer. Maybe Loretta went cold turkey.

10

Girls' State taught me little about civic responsibility, but it confirmed a theory I held since junior high: the girls from Catholic schools were the worst smokers. I passed them every day, gathered in clustered at a safe distance from the eye of the Monsignor and the Mother Superior, rolling up the waistbands of their blue plaid uniform skirts, sucking like fiends on their smokes.

9

Cigarette commercials disappeared from television and radio, but not from print media. The first thing I did with my high school graduation money was to subscribe to Ms. magazine. Sucker-punched! Tucked between the feature articles on domestic violence, Zora Neale Hurston and the legalization of abortion were ads for cigarettes, a contemporary spin on my mother's hope chest clippings.

Ads for Virginia Slims, Capri, Eve. *You've come a long way, baby.* "No, you haven't," I'd say aloud.

8

When Grace's employer banned smoking in the office, she felt like an outlaw. "It sets a bad example for a law firm," the managing partner explained. "Besides, very few of us smoke anymore." Grace hated huddling in the doorway on her break, sometimes joined by the only other outlaw, a female attorney.

7

The firm's no-smoking policy forced Grace to cut down to ten a day. Maybe not a bad thing, with the price of cigarettes rising. In the plate glass window outside the office on an overcast day, she caught the reflection of someone short and very stocky. Who was it? But she was the only one there that morning. At home she forced herself to look in the mirror, and she grimaced. She put on a loose housedress and reached for the red pack. "I could get hit by a bus tomorrow," she said. "Everybody has to die of something."

6

Married and living away, I came home to attend the wake of my godmother, Tina's mother. She had died suddenly. Our family attended the wake as a phalanx, as Italian families do. Tina was in the front row. "Well, if it isn't little Marian!" she cackled as she spotted me. "The one who would never smoke!" Geez, I thought, she's stoned. Stoned at her own mother's funeral.

5

My father was next in the sights of the reaper. When Grace saw her husband dying of cancer—pancreatic, not lung, but cancer is cancer—she smoked her last cigarette in the

parking lot of his oncologist. At home she fed him lunch, settled him for a nap, then tossed her half-full pack of Marlboros behind the refrigerator and never smoked again. I was in the next room, and I heard an odd noise, but when I asked, she simply said, “It must have been the cat chasing something.”

4

Grace told no one. I’m not sure my father even noticed. The nest was empty. My mother must have had withdrawal symptoms, but I heard nothing about them. I didn’t see her daily, so the fact of her quitting didn’t register on me until weeks later. By then my father was near death. Finally, I caught on. “Ma, what happened to all the ashtrays?”

3

Grace threw the Marlboros away, and what she went through, I don’t know. They say that quitting cigarettes is as hard or harder than quitting heroin. Maybe she took one of my father’s dilaudid tablets, though I doubted it. Even if his oncologist had offered chemotherapy, my father would have declined it. They both went cold turkey in their own way.

2

Tina was right. I’m a hopeless goody-goody. I have still never smoked one whole cigarette. When I searched the internet for “reactions to quitting smoking,” I saluted my mother. In her self-wisdom and secretarial efficiency, she picked a good time to give up the habit. Most of these reactions would have blended right in with her reactions to Dad’s decline:

Having urges or cravings to smoke.

Feeling irritated, grouchy, or upset.

Feeling jumpy and restless.

Having a hard time concentrating.

Having trouble sleeping.

Feeling hungrier or gaining weight.

Feeling anxious, sad, or depressed.

1

The discarded cigarettes, the final pack, were there nine years later when my widowed mother moved. We watched as the movers wrestled the big fridge through the narrow door. “You go with them; I’ll sweep the kitchen,” I volunteered. The little sticks were largely intact, though dry. The bright red of the Marlboro package was still bright, the cellophane crinkly, and the whiff of tobacco odor still faint.

The Empty Package

My mother didn’t ask for much from life; she wasn’t one to talk about her feelings. However, she did say to me once—in that urgent tone a child always remembers—that she wanted to die quickly when her time came. She got her wish: no lung cancer, no cancer of any kind, but a sudden heart attack in her own kitchen. I dreamt of my dead father a few weeks later. “I’ll tell you how Mommy died,” he said. “A fall, a blur, the end.”

VIRGINIA BARRIE
Winter Golf

Fairways and greens
encrusted with snow

Icy patches beneath
making progress slow

Twilight—purple sky
frozen to the bone!

A long day coasting—
a long walk home

Small fists curled in stiff mittens
the better to keep fingers warm

Little red boots
go crunching along

The sled, tied with clothesline
following close behind.

HARVEY STEINBERG
The Day I Set My Pa on Fire

What with coal rationing during World War II, Pa had a lot of frigid winter, as did our whole family. Outside, pajamas cracked like icicles when my sister Helene and I reeled them in from the clothesline which ran from our kitchen window to a pole in the back yard. Inside our walk-up apartment ten blocks from the frenzied Brooklyn Navy Yard where enormous grey warships were having their blasted hulls repaired, our hot water faucets spewed cold and our bones smarted from winds infiltrating window panes where the caulking was supposed to be.

We had patience against pain; not only was America in mortal danger, but our Jewish people were being immolated all over Europe. In any case, what was there to do? Repair supplies were unavailable, money was scarce, and the landlady made quick getaways after she collected the rent.

For the first couple of years post-war, even clothing stayed scarce. What Pa wore outside in winter depended on whether he was going to work. Work was at “the shop” in Manhattan’s downtown leather district known as “The Swamps,” but just as often going to the shop meant he was playing the horses at his beloved Belmont or Jamaica or Aqueduct racetrack. He’d bring home more anecdotes and excuses than winnings.

For his BMT subway ride to The Swamps, Pa would snug his torso into a wool naval pea-jacket still in style from the war years and sold retail as military surplus. Onto this outerwear a porous wad of ashes emblemizing his two-pack-a-day Pall Mall habit would grayly waft. How Pa fluffed the ashes off without grinding them in gave him a unique grace. Somehow he was always neat and clean. Among my relatives—my honeycombs of aunts and uncles, and the buzzing indefinable collaterals—this trait was held in the highest esteem. “He’s very clean,” our tiny white-haired neighbor we called Aunt Jenny (who claimed to be a Russian princess) would announce, “clean, a mensch,” loaning Pa her halo.

I’m not sure what Pa wore on his racetrack pilgrimages. My memory for that has whited itself into the vagaries of his

comings and goings from Brooklyn. “His Diaspora,” I innocently joked. I do remember he bought his size 11, Triple A shoes at retail and in strangers’ stores, not risking his “tootsies” (as he called them) on the shoe dealers he sold to, because, as he explained to me, “Thieves, all of them!”

There is method to my madness in writing about his attire. I don’t win at gambles, but there was no chance involved when I lit my Pa on fire. What my Ma said was, “So, you go shopping on your own on Havemeyer Street, I could expect something stupid like this of you.”

But I must first tell you more about Pa’s navy jacket.

The pea-coat had inch-and-a-quarter-diameter, thick black buttons which locked firmly on the other side of their buttonholes when you pushed with your thumb. In my earliest years, what sparked my imagination even more than the Admiralty powers I assumed when I play-draped myself in the jacket, were the carvings into the face of the buttons. Incised on each black disc was the figure of an anchor around which curled the image of a twining rope.

My pa appreciated these buttons, too. For years prior to when I torched him, he would use them as touchstones for his fictions. His stories widened concentrically around the button’s anchor: sea tales of monsters of the deep, mermaids, blowfish, Lord Nelson, semaphore signals, sea-horse caravans, and the lot.

Given my early years with all these inventions, it’s no wonder I got my lavish idea when Chanukah came around, hard into that cold December when I was going into my fourteenth year. The war was over. The economy was strengthening. New products from war-sprung technologies were making their way into the stores. Optimism was alive.

My mother admonished me in one high-pitched exhalation that it was ridiculous and out-of-the-question to buy Pa a gift for Chanukah, considering that he had slipped the domicile during the week of his July birthday to fashion his own holiday at a distant out-of-town racetrack. With his departure, our opportunity had likewise slipped to get him his July natal gift. So my sister and I concocted a scheme to save money for the next several months, add past summer earnings to it, and

festoon Dad with a lollapalooza of a gift during December’s Celebration of Lights.

My mother’s several objections tumbled over each other. Children receive gifts during Chanukah, not adults. To give halfway between birthdays was to drum up by-gones and yet-to-be’s; in either case, untimely. Why had he gone off by himself, anyway? It’s a thoughtful idea, but you should donate your money to the starving children of China instead.

Finally:

“Would you do it for me?” she asked.

We had her.

“Yes, we would, Ma. Maybe you can chip in a little, we want it to be special.”

Sis and I yanked at her apron string, war-danced and whooped around her, hid her girdle, made certain she saw us sweep floor dust under her prized parlor rug until she laughed, half-collapsed of a heartburn, and not only assented to this unusual gifting in a tradition-bound holiday but chipped in as well.

Ma set a condition.

“The gift is not from me,” she said, miffed at Pa. “Not even a little of the gift. It’s entirely your own doing and I don’t want your father to think otherwise.”

Trouble was, Sis got invited to a party she had set her heart on, and now she had to get her hair done, buy a clutch of accessories, and otherwise embellish her natural charms. She pulled out of the kitty.

So I did some more figuring about my account at the Dime Savings Bank. This was going to be a big deal, I would pull out all the stops. Get heady, even go bankrupt if necessary, see what it felt like. And Pa would be apoplectic with appreciation.

The gift?

Havemeyer Street—our bust-up, busy shopping quarter which served Brooklyn’s overflow population from the Lower East Side across the river—would yield its offerings.

What offerings?

Pots and ladles, eggbeaters, new *yahrtzeit* glasses holding wax with wicks for devotions, used ones repurposed to

drinking tumblers; straw brooms, vegetable bins wearied with lopsided heaps of cabbages, eggplants, carrots, potatoes, tomatoes over-and-under-ripe; pickle barrels and odious live chickens squawking in doweled cages; fish glinting their scales, some dying, in metal tubs adjacent to iridescent golden chubs hooked onto racks; next door, glittering costume jewelry, barrettes, hair combs; kiddie clothing strung across storefronts; here and there throughout the streets adult garment stalls and shops – a patchwork of all colors of the spectrum. To a boy, an array of goods seemingly endless on rickety pushcarts and within narrow storefronts.

A selective few of the shops, I decided, were expensive enough to satisfy my extravagance.

Never mind the chaff I got from the merchandising geniuses in those stores, who surely believed I was there to pilfer, filch, pinch, or otherwise clip their goods and run. After all, young teenagers did not shop for their own clothes in those days, except for the in-service trainees of a large fighting gang which networked through the neighborhood. For “good boys”—those who cared to keep their bones untrammelled and intact—until about the age of fourteen, moms would tug, push, fit, calculate color, drape shirts across young chests (“Hah, you’re getting broad, a regular he-man!”), tape measure trouser inseams from crotch to shoe-tops (“Stop fidgeting, when will you act like a regular man?”), and otherwise interfere with adolescent pride.

Soon I came upon it and knew it immediately – a man’s bathrobe of the most electric blue textile I had ever seen. When its brazenness drew me toward it at a pipe-rack near the rear of Becker’s Haberdashery, the matter became definitely resolved, for there, on its right hip pocket, epitomizing all that was my father, was stitched in yellow silk thread the figure of an equine in full run, all fours off the ground, jockey atop the steed hell-bent for the finish line.

Wow!

It did cost, and I did bargain. “That’s all I have,” I told Mr. Becker, and that was the truth.

“It’s the latest,” Becker said, “I just got it in. Look, feel!” he urged. “It won’t be too warm for your papa, it won’t be

too chilly. It’s a miracle fabric, new kind of chemicals! Did you ever see such cloth?”

I never had.

“I have my doubts about it,” I said coolly. I had learned bargaining from relatives in the flower trade and my available cash didn’t match his price.

“Heh! It’s good for what ails you!” Becker emphasized.

I was startled. Good for what ails me? There was nothing the matter with me, and I told him so.

He must have misread my meaning and thought I was withdrawing my interest.

“*Ney, yingotchka! Oy, dos yingele!*” he exclaimed, using the diminutives for a favored boy. Suddenly he clapped the flank of the robe against my cheek to exalt its merits.

My instinct was to flick his hand away, but his wrist was as thick as Aaron the butcher’s.

I backed away. “This is all I have,” I repeated. “It will have to do. I can go elsewhere, you know.”

”Yingles!” he exclaimed, this time disgustedly, castigating my entire generation before he said “*Gey gezunt!*” which literally translates to, “Go in good health,” but in angry situations sarcastically warned, “Bother me no more!”

I counted out bill after bill onto his waiting palm. He folded the garment into a paper shopping bag for me to carry home.

So finally we’re up to Chanukah when I set my Pa on fire. It wasn’t my fault—I had banked on Becker’s recommendation—and although I laugh about it now, still, it was my doing. But I don’t get a twinge of remorse as I review it, Pa being a good sport when he went up in flame.

It was the first night of the holiday which retold the miracle of one night’s supply of lamp-oil lasting for eight. Unlike our current decades of unbridled munificence, when it has become the custom to gift a Jewish child on each of the eight nights a successive candle is lit, I never remember that sort of property transfer. One gift the first evening. The remaining seven nights, just candles shimmering in a darkened room.

We would have this celebration in our kitchen. This cook-place also served as the dining room.

Breaching the wall from the kitchen to the living room was an interior window, a means of passing snacks, mostly, from the former to the latter. Now the apartment was spanking clean. The parlor rug designed in rich florals and exotic birds overwhelmed the value of all else in our home. Even in my early teen years, the carpet's intricately-woven fabric excited nostalgia and brought me my earlier memories of when I lay on it and daydreamed within its secret flourishing garden. Elysian Fields in a walk-up flat!

But now that I was almost fourteen, additional fantasies and desires resided within me wanting out, as did objective issues – exciting things, slippery adventures, rough stuff, wise-ass thoughts, the world championship of one-wall handball, excursions to the nearby Carnegie library for Walt Whitman and Charles Lindbergh and National Geographic and for local agitations from the Brooklyn Eagle, internationalism from the New York Post, isolationism from the World Telegram, and other curiosities beyond the walls of the library, all in concert with what must have been a degree of adolescent turmoil. This Chanukah evening I was hopping about within myself, eagerness tweaking my limbs and moving my tongue.

At home, absent a gift box, I swathed the bathrobe in a length of brown wrapping paper as best I could. Initially, I secreted the bulky package under my bed, then in a more promising space behind the kitchen refrigerator. A logistical problem was, when and how should I snatch it from there to present it to Pa? Options teetered on my nerves.

I did not want to forego dramatic effect. The ceremony would be a brief one. This being the first night of the holiday, only one candle was to be lighted by a touch from the ninth, *shammes* candle.

Ready? my mother asked. On the kitchen table the candelabra—the *menorah*—was set up with the shammes and first-night candle. The box of wooden kitchen matches sat alongside. Kitchen lights directly over the menorah were switched off, as were the bulbs in the adjoining living room. Only the low-watt bulbs in the long corridor leading from the front door stayed on for the faint glow they cast into the kitchen.

This would be enough to guide the phosphorous tip of a match to the sandpaper on the side of its cardboard container.

The four in our family encircled the table. My father lit the shammes and I as the youngest applied its wick to the first-night candle for communion with the eerie shadows cast by the meager combustions.

Our Feast of Lights went off without a hitch. Gift packages were set beside me and my sister, although Sis felt she was getting too old for this. So in her new *hauteur* she wasn't about to tear open her gift wrapping. Neither was I, for I had my theatrics to act out.

So when my mother, unhappy with the spooky shadows playing on the kitchen walls, quickly ordered, "All right, that's enough, turn on the lights," I shouted "No!" and, startled, no one did turn them on. "Dad, you've got to go into the living room," I insisted.

No one ordered my father about without being sorry, but my tone must have had a unique catch in it that caused Pa to wait me out for the moment. "Dad, come inside with me," I persisted, "please, I have to show you something." Perhaps his recognition of my growing up fast caused him to cancel his grumbles before they got going.

In the darkness I found Pa's wrist. My hand cautiously closed on it and I led him through the doorway into the living room. Ma and Sis stood by dumbly, as did Pa where I put him. I scooted back to the kitchen, seized the bundle from behind the refrigerator, and returned with it to thrust it into his hands.

"It's easy to open, Pop," I said, "I purposely only put a slipknot around it."

"What's this?" he said, expressing surprise

"Here, slide this slipknot, Dad," I was saying, and he did so. "It's for you. It's a gift." Then I cutely mimicked Becker, "It's good for what ails you."

Silence. He looked at me queerly.

"You'll see!" I temporized.

In the darkness the flashy blue of the robe, of course, could not be discerned, or for that matter, what the pile actually was.

“Put it on, Dad, it’s a bathrobe! Or a smoking robe! Or a lounging robe!” I near shouted.

“Come on, son,” Pa said, “how is it a gift for me? For a father at Chanukah? How could you afford it?”

“We missed your birthday so here it is! Now’s the time to make up for it!”

Well, what could he do but accept it while my shouts and caterwauls fended off Ma from turning on all the lights.

“No, keep the electricity off, I’m not done yet,” I instructed everyone.

The two females stood in the kitchen doorway looking into the parlor, in the dimness everyone’s eyes still only partially perceiving the objects in the rooms. Dad began to enwrap himself in his new posh gown.

I’d saved a brilliant idea for showtime. “Sis,” I yelled, “go back to the kitchen and hand the menorah to me through the window!” She liked the idea so much – as events turned out when she later became a professional entertainer, she was more of a ham than I – that before my mother could prevent the sacrilege, Sis had slipped into the kitchen and did just what I had asked, so I had the menorah with its two flickering candles through the communicating window.

“Look, Dad,” I said, “look down at your pocket!” He had the robe on now, I was excited. “Can you see it? Can you make out a racehorse coming down the stretch, Eddie Arcaro on board?” I thrust the lit menorah at the pocket for him to see. “The material is new chemicals!”

A MIRACLE, THAT THE BUSH BURNED WITH FIRE! AS DID DAD’S ROBE! AND NEITHER WAS THE BUSH CONSUMED! NOR WAS DAD!

“Gevalt!” shrieked my mother.

“The humanity!” cried Sis.

Despite his ordinary build, Dad’s agility was remarkable. He must have had something like this happen before, because in an instant he was on the floor rolling around to suffocate the flames blazing like the robe had been doused in gasoline. Pa was croaking through the sheathe of fire “Blue Blazes!” and “Smokin’ Jimney!” and similar pyrotechnical

exclamations before I could open my mouth. Actually, my mouth was open, with nothing articulate coming out of it.

As soon as Ma realized that her husband had become a flaming pyre, to smother it she rolled the edge of her prize Oriental carpet over the escalating incineration with her man in it just like you might see in an old Danny Kaye movie.

When Pa was extinguished he got up. He was perfectly fine! It didn’t seem possible.

My ma was more angry at Dad than me, for once. In a non sequitur she cawed, “Next thing you know, when you smoke your lousy cigarettes in bed you’ll set the blankets on fire again with me in it.”

He didn’t listen to her (but he never smoked in bed again). He gave me a jaundiced glance, then said with quiet force, “Goddam new material, chemical treatments, you’d think

Roosevelt would have made the sons-of-bitches label their fabrics ‘Explosive’.”

Sis commiserated, “They are absatively and posilutely In-n-n-corrigable!” She liked the sound. She sang out again, “IN-n-n-corrigible!”

There came to my mind to interject, “It’s good for what ails you, Pop,” but my vocal cords were wiser than my mind.

Pa attested, “Truman’s all right too, he’ll get thing squared away.” Still, he’d been in the mid-west and didn’t like it, so then he growled, “A mule-driver for a President!” as he got out of his electric-blue, now blackened and flaking lounging robe, his carbonized stallion and jockey victims of the post-war capitalists who, Pa declaimed, were building new chemical plants from the profits they made at war.

Ma cried about her carpet, the chief victim. To add to my guilt about Pa and my failure of shopping smarts, I was more than sorrowful over the brush fire that had crept through the rug charbroiling the fauna and flora in it.

“Ach-h-h,” went my father, and I seldom heard from him about it again. He must have told my mother to not bother me with it, because it would surely have been her wont to do so. She never did.

If you asked my sister Helene about it, she’d respond with a mystifying wry smile. I think she appreciated, as a fond

memory, how it happened in that distant time and that magical place rife with Pall Malls and resplendent with our Brooklyn Dodgers, a borough where on a brilliantly bright day the dust-motes swirled over the sidewalks and trolley tracks and the shards of glass on the ground glinted beautifully.

Me? I had lost the price of the robe, but to my father's wisecrack, "You've got a receipt to return it?" I knew Becker would have none of it. After hearing my story he'd say, "*Gey gezunt,*" this time in its best meaning, "Go, in good health."

LAVINIA KUMAR

*Wall of Tears—El Muro de las Lágrimas—
Galapagos, 1945-1959*

Stand near the wall at night, if you dare.
Listen souls are wailing.
Travel along stacks of grizzled volcanic blocks
piled seven yards high, three meters wide,
and ninety lava-black meters long.

Listen, even when no wind, to story after story
of suffering of burned feet and skin,
of bleached bones left from starved men.

 Body after body
without water, without food,
 sunk into shallow graves
of useless labor and torture.

At night, watch bones of the dead
rise up to tell tales
of fourteen years
one hundred bare-foot prisoners
dragging themselves five kilometers
in searing heat,
carrying on each back
a huge sharp hunk of rock
cut with a crude tool
to build this wall. To build this useless wall.

Find a statue in the penal cemetery
that honors a dead girl.
She will guide your tour
through the mix of tall bushes and cactus
now able to grow near the wall.

Tales are of prisoners who cried
just to stay alive,
as police drove them, beat them—
 would not let them rest.

Some tried to suck water, like finch,
from tall-as-man prickly-pear cactus.

Sons and daughters of those who made it back
visit beautiful Isabela Island,
learn why their fathers will not
tell them of the torment.

They know it is said—

Here the strong cry and the weak die.

Imps of Darkness, Galapagos

We see them slumped on
volcanic rocks, dark quirky mounds
pulsing like black hearts—knotty
clumps with Mohawk haircut spikes and
long tapered dragon tails.

Suddenly, black iguanas
separate out, they all slow-parade
downhill over sharp lava to the sea. In
water, they are fast. Helped by rudder-
tails and tucked legs, they dive deep for
a seaweed meal. Until they are full, until
too cold, until their bodies yearn for
heat. And so it is they return to land,
plod their cooled flesh uphill to dry beds
of sun-warmed deep grey rock, and to
the embrace of their own soft bodies.

Near sunset they walk farther
away from shore, to the bright pink
house we have borrowed, they cuddle
together on the cozy porch, sleep
entwined in cool of night.

Iguana sauna
Dusky sun-heated lava
Blue-green water

Contributors

Virginia Barrie started writing poetry at a very young age. She has had the pleasure of being published several times and heads up the Senior Poetry Group based at Lawrence Library Headquarters. Ms. Barrie is a local actor and director and has resided in Mercer County for over forty years.

Sophia Boor is a longtime resident of Mercer County and recent Rutgers University graduate, earning her bachelor's degree in biology. While much of her time is devoted to the sciences, poetry has always fueled her spirit. Her collection of poems, written over the course of 10 years, aims to capture the joys and challenges of self-discovery as a young adult. *Kelsey Review* is her first appearance as a published author.

Marian Calabro writes history books, essays, poetry, and plays. She's the author of *The Perilous Journey of the Donner Party* (Clarion/Houghton Mifflin), an American Library Association Notable Book. Her work has appeared in *Brushfire*, *The Smart Set*, *Italian Americana*, *New Jersey English Journal*, *Peregrine*, and *The Rutherford Red Wheelbarrow anthologies #1-14*. Based in New Jersey, Marian leads creative writing workshops in community education settings. <https://mariancalabro.com>

Vida Chu grew up in Hong Kong. She came to America for college and stayed. Her poems have been published in *Kelsey Review*, *Paterson Review*, *U.S. 1 Worksheet*, and many other journals. She has two books of poems, *The Fragrant Harbor* and *The Thirteenth Lake*, published by Kelsay Books.

Sean Cuddahy is an architect who enjoys taking photographs in his spare time.

Stephanie Cuddahy is a retired fitness instructor who enjoys taking photographs on her daily walks. She has previously been published in *Kelsey Review* and *US1 Art of the Pandemic*.

MaryLisa DeDomenicis, awarded a 2024 Fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, is a two-time Pushcart

Prize nominee and the recipient of two Murphy Writing awards, a Toni Brown Memorial Scholarship Award, and a Stillwaters Woman's Words Chapbook award. Her work has been published in various anthologies and journals including *Rattle*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Mudfish*, and *The Healing Muse*. In June of 2024 she tied for first place in Atlantic City's Story Slam. Disabled since 1992 as the result of a craniotomy, you wouldn't know it if you met her unless she told you.

Lauren Fedorko, M.Ed., is an Adjunct Professor of writing at Rutgers University, teaches AP and Honors high school English, and advises the literary magazine, *Northern Lights*, for her students. Her passion for writing is longstanding and ongoing, composed mostly of poetry and creative non-fiction. She enjoys exploring, good company, and traveling the world every chance she gets. Her work has previously been published in *Kelsey Review* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Arlene Gralla Feldman is a retired New York City High School English teacher. She has a Masters of Fine Arts (Fiction Writing) from Brooklyn College. Feldman has been published in various venues; an excerpt from her novella, *One God or Another* was published in the anthology, *Two Worlds Walking: Short Stories, Essays & Poetry by Writers with Mixed Heritages*, edited by Diane Glancy and C. W. Truesdale (New Rivers Press, 1994). "Gibberish" is her fourth contribution to *Kelsey Review*.

During the COVID pandemic, Feldman developed a blog as a creative writing outlet in which she recorded her dreams. Her blog includes over three hundred entries with photos of her artwork as well as that of acquaintances. [About | Dreamz \(arlrn9.wixsite.com\)](http://arlrn9.wixsite.com).

Feldman lives in an active adult community in Monroe Township where she is an associate editor of her community newspaper.

Lois Marie Harrod's recent publications include her eighteenth poetry collection, *Spat* (Finishing Line Press, 2021), and her chapbook, *Woman* (Blue Lyra, 2020). Dodge poet, life-long

educator and writer, she is published in literary journals and online ezines from *American Poetry Review* to *Zone 3*. Find more information and links to her online work at www.loismarieharrod.org

Athira Jacob was born in the beautiful southern state of Kerala, India, and now resides in Plainsboro, New Jersey. She wrote her first poem at the age of eight, about a utopian fairyland that existed only in her mind. Since then, she has written countless more pieces in an attempt to bridge her internal and external worlds. She loves spending her time outdoors, or reading, or both.

Lavinia Kumar's latest book is *Spirited American Women: Early Writers, Artists, & Activists*—short prose biographies of near 90 remarkable women writers, poets, publishers, artists, abolitionists, early suffragettes, and activists. Recent poems appear in journals or sites such as *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *New Verse News*, *New Jersey Journal of Poetry*, *Poets Breakfast*, *The Examined Life*, Silver Birch Press, and *US 1 Worksheets*; and three anthologies. She is the author of three poetry books and four chapbooks. Her website is laviniakumar.net.

Christine McGoey has written her way through life. She grew up outside of Chicago and received her MA in English from the University of Illinois Chicago Writing Program where she was awarded the Anne Hope Selby Award for Critical Writing. She earned her JD from Loyola University School of Law and was Member of the Law Review and Articles Editor for the Law Journal. She practiced litigation for a number of years, and also has worked as an advocate for public causes. Along the way she published poetry and articles, got married, graduated from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing, had two children, and started teaching college writing as an adjunct professor at a university. She lives in Montclair, NJ where she is currently resurrecting her creative self by writing fiction and poetry with the support of an amazing Amherst Writers & Artists (AWA) Writing Group.

Ilene Millman (Hillsborough, Jersey) writes poems about memories, mud, music, making bread, modern times—the array of observation that captures her attention. Her first poetry book, *Adjust Speed to Weather*, was published in 2018; her second, *A Jar of Moths*, was published in March 2024 by Ragged Sky Press. Millman’s poems have been published or are forthcoming in print and online journals including *Nell*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *New Verse News*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Potomac Review* and *Healing Muse*, and included in anthologies such as *She Persists*, and *Forgotten Women*. She was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2022. Before retiring, Millman worked for more than thirty-five years as a speech/language therapist teaching students who learn differently; she published two language therapy games.

Diane T. Masucci writes fiction, poetry and essays. An award-winning print journalist and copy editor, she holds an MFA in fiction from The New School (2013). She has tutored immigrants in English and children in writing at The Montclair Writer’s Room. She authored the biography of Beatrice A. Hicks, co-founder of Society for Women Engineers, for *Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women* (1990), a historical reference book. She lives with her husband in Montclair, NJ, where they raised two children who have delighted them with seven grandchildren. In her spare time, she swims, listens to birds and chats with her friends over good coffee.

Peter E. Murphy is the author of twelve books and chapbooks of poetry and prose including the forthcoming *A Topsy Fairy Tale*, *A Coming of Age Memoir of Alcohol and Redemption* about growing up in Wales and New York City. Recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, his writing has been published in *Guernica*, *Harpur Palate*, *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The New Welsh Reader*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Rattle*, *The Sun* and elsewhere. The founder of Murphy Writing of Stockton University based in Atlantic City, he leads writing workshops around the United States and in Europe. www.peteremurphy.com

Linda Parisi, as a major in Biochemistry with a minor in English literature, always tried to mesh her love of science with her love of the written word. Once a clinical research scientist, now a NJRW Golden Leaf, N.N. Light’s Book Heaven, 2021 Best Paranormal Romance Award winner, and 2022 HOLT Medallion Winner for Speculative Fiction, she creates unforgettable characters and puts them in untenable situations, much to their dismay. Choices always matter and love conquers all, so a happy-ever-after is a must. Linda is the current President of Liberty States Fiction Writers. She has served on the boards of other writing organizations, as a Mentor for Romance Writers of America, and loves to teach the craft of writing at workshops and conferences. She recently signed a contract with Harlequin, and her book *Reunion with The Single Mom* is scheduled to release May 2025. She loves to travel, tries to bake, and lives in New Jersey with her son Chris, daughter-in-law Sara, and Audi and Archer, a pair of pooches who had her at woof!

Carolyn (CAT) Phillips, resident of Mercer County, is a retired teacher of English and history whose work has appeared in several journals. She twice won a contest for ekphrastic poetry describing sculptures at Grounds for Sculpture. She continues to participate in a poetry group which she started twenty years ago, dedicated to the study, reading and writing of poetry, and which meets at the Lawrenceville branch of the Mercer County Library.

Wanda S. Praisner, a resident poet for the state, has received twenty-six Pushcart Prize nominations, the Princemere Prize, Egan Award, Kudzu Prize, First Prize in Poetry at the College of NJ Writers' Conference, and the 2017 NJ Poets Prize. She's appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Lullwater Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Her sixth book: *To Illuminate the Way* (2018).

Maureen Riggi is a poet living in Central New Jersey with her husband, son, and polydactyl cat. She writes from an extremely personal well but shares topics that are accessible and relatable. She is currently working on a chapbook of poems exploring her experience in the first five years of motherhood.

Mimi Schwartz's latest book is *Good Neighbors, Bad Times Revisited—New Echoes of My Father's German Village* (2020). Others include *Thoughts from a Queen-Sized Bed* (2002), and *Writing True, the Art and Craft of Creative Nonfiction* (2006) and *When History is Personal* (2018). She is Professor Emerita of Richard Stockton University and a member of Onstage, a documentary theater ensemble, performing in Central New Jersey.

Steve Smith earned a BFA at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Steve's poems have appeared in *Kelsey Review*, *US 1 Worksheets*, *The New Jersey Journal of Poetry*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Nerve Cowboy*, *The Barefoot Muse*, as well as *Midwest Review*. Steve resides in Pennington, NJ with his wife, Fran.

Harvey Steinberg is a long-time resident of Lawrenceville. As his story suggests, he grew up in Brooklyn, where he also went to college (editor-in-chief of the school's literary journal) and law school. He recommenced writing poetry as an adult in New Jersey, and more recently directs his literary attentions to the writing of fiction. Together with his wife, Marcia, he has written feature articles for area newspapers and for magazines with a wider circulation.

Shaoyan Wang is a librarian who facilitates various poetry programs at a Mercer County Library.

Ellen June Wright is an American poet with British and Caribbean roots. Her work has been published in *Plume*, *Tar River*, *Missouri Review*, *Verse Daily* and the *North American Review*. She's a Cave Canem and Hurston/Wright alumna and has received Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominations. She also hosts a weekly poetry workshop on Zoom for Black poets.

About the Editors

Barbara Krasner holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts and a PhD in Holocaust & Genocide Studies from Gratz College. A six-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her literary work has appeared in *Nimrod*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Consequence Forum*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *LIPS*, and elsewhere. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks, *Chicken Fat* (Finishing Line Press, 2017) and *Pounding Cobblestone* (Kelsay Books, 2018), and three novels in verse for young readers, including *Ethel's Song: Ethel Rosenberg's Life in Poems* (Calkins Creek, 2022), co-winner of the Paterson Prize for Books for Young Readers, Grades 7-12. She is the recipient of the 2024 Fiction Prize by *Folio Literary Journal* for "The Newcomer," and the 2022 Miriam Rachimi Microchapbook Award for poetry, *Miss Emma Lazarus Enlightens the World*. She serves as Director, Mercer County Holocaust, Genocide & Human Rights Education Center housed at Mercer County Community College, where she is also Associate Professor in the History and English departments. Visit her at www.barbarakrasner.com.

Gwen Jones, MFA, is a Professor of English at Mercer County College in West Windsor, NJ, and a mentor in Western Connecticut State University's MFA in Creative and Professional Writing program. Her work has appeared in *Writer's Digest*, *The Connecticut River Review*, and *Kelsey Review* (Pushcart Prize nominee for "Hawks,"), and is the author of three books for HarperCollins Avon, *Wanted: Wife, Kiss Me, Captain*, and *The Laws of Seduction*. Past Vice-President of the tri-state writers' group, Liberty State Fiction Writers, she is a staunch supporter of the Oxford Comma and all things satirical. Gwen lives with her husband, Frank, on the edge of the Pine Barrens in a state that gets her—New Jersey. Visit her at gwenjoneswrites.com.

Submission Guidelines

Kelsey Review is published each Fall. Submissions are open from January 31-May 31. We respond no later than August 15. The *Review* considers submissions from those who live and/or work in the larger Mercer County area.

We accept all submissions through our online submission system, Submittable, at <https://kelseyreview.submittable.com/submit>. We no longer accept submissions by postal mail (or email!). We welcome simultaneous submissions, but we ask that you please withdraw your submission (or send us a message through Submittable if it's poetry or art) if your work has been accepted elsewhere. All rights are retained by the author. *Kelsey Review* remains available online after publication.

GENRE GUIDELINES

Prose (Fiction, Nonfiction)

Length: Maximum of 3,500 words

Although we accept nonfiction work on any topic, we are especially interested in essays and articles about the people, history, businesses, educational institutions, artistic traditions and/or government of Mercer County and the surrounding area.

No multiple submissions

Poetry

Send no more than six pages (submit all poems in one Word or PDF document, Word preferred)

Artwork & Photography

Upload as a jpg file

Multiple submissions allowed

Except for art and poetry, *Kelsey Review* generally only accepts one item per author.

PUSHCART PRIZE NOMINATIONS

Each year we nominate up to six published items for the Pushcart Prize. See www.pushcartprize.com for more information.

Send questions via email to Kelsey.review@mccc.edu, and find us on Facebook and at <https://kelseyreview.com>.



