

THE AGORA

Volume 2, 2012



PLATO

Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization

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PLATO Mission

PLATO is a participatory, member-led, learning-in-retirement organization committed to continually developing and promoting intellectual and cultural enrichment opportunities for its members in association with the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

***The Agora* Mission**

The Agora is a juried publication of PLATO, the Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization associated with the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Division of Continuing Studies. The journal seeks to share the creative talents of its members by publishing their literary and artistic contributions in a periodic volume of original works, including poetry, short fiction, nonfiction and pictorial and photographic art. Of particular interest is material that has a distinct point of view and is inspired by broadly humanistic values and the liberal arts tradition.

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THE AGORA

Volume 2, 2012

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Dedication

The Agora Volume 2 is dedicated to Wendy Kerr, Christina Finet and all of the magazine's contributors whose expertise, effort and commitment to the arts make this publication possible.

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Cherokee Circles, by Ginnie McCarthy

At the Blue Note

by Norman Leer

If you walked around Chicago on a windy gray day with your head down, you would barely notice it. The Blue Note was a drab second story walk-up in an undistinguished building on the corner of Clark and Madison. I think it was above a greasy spoon. During the 1950's, that corner and much of the Loop was a gray clutter of square utilitarian buildings. A few, like Carson, Pirie, Scott, two blocks east, had filigreed bronze ornaments from the earlier Chicago school of architecture, but the overall impression was unadulterated masculine practicality, punctuated by the flashing neon arrows of delicatessens and cut-rate clothing stores and the green and yellow zigzag blur of taxicabs and streetcars.

But the Blue Note was a very special club, a major jazz venue, on a par with New York's Five Spot or the Village Vanguard. It brought in all the big musicians. When I was an insecure jazz-loving teenager, one of the bright spots was the fact that the Blue Note had a balcony for underage fans. It was off to the side of the room, not the greatest view, but you could sit there with a date or by yourself, as I often did, nurse a Coke, and through the hazy purple light listen to the legends live. Some of the same bands also played at the nearby Chicago Theater, which had stage shows between glossy first-run films. But that was a different, far less intimate experience. The theater itself was overdone and cavernous, and the musicians, sensing a larger, more diverse and perhaps less interested audience, would play only their more popular numbers or, as was then the style for black musicians, clown to please the audience. At the Blue Note, jazzmen knew they were in much more certain territory. Most of the audience knew and honored them as artists. We had come to share in their creative moments, to hear what they had to tell us.

And tell us they did. I remember watching Louis Armstrong and the All Stars several times. The band, along with Satchmo, usually included Trummy Young on trombone, Barney Bigard, formerly of the Ellington band, on clarinet, Earl Hines or Billy Kyle on piano, Arvell Shaw on bass and the Chicagoan Barrett Deems on drums. Sometimes the buxom Velma Middleton would be added for vocals, and while I found her vamping a bit cloying, there was an ironic sexuality, a sense of tacit complicity, between her and Louis.

Still, the instrumentals, sometimes interspersed with Louis' own scat singing, were the highlight. With the forming of the All Stars, Armstrong had recognized the revival of early jazz during the forties and gone back to his

own New Orleans roots, resurrecting such songs as “Perdido St. Blues,” “Careless Love,” and of course the ubiquitous “Saints.” But the All Stars were not a simple resurrection of the Hot Fives or Sevens. Armstrong was by now an undisputed king, and he showed it, usually ending each number with a string of piercing high C’s that were almost athletic, like a runner leaping ten hurdles at a time.

In his book, *Stomping the Blues*, the African-American jazz critic Albert Murray distinguishes two kinds of blues. There is the introspective, down from the bottom sound that most of us recognize as a major part of the jazz vocabulary. But Murray points out that in black culture another way of handling sadness is what he calls “The Saturday Night Function,” an extroverted display of music and dancing which functions as a combination of self-assertion and reduction of pain. The jazz played by Armstrong and his cohorts came from this second blues tradition. There were lots of pyrotechnics and self-display, but these were always mixed with irony and a knife-like anguish that if you really listened almost stripped away your skin.

Listen to any of the well-known blues Armstrong does on the album, “Louis Armstrong plays W.C. Handy.” You’ll know immediately what I’m talking about. Trummy Young’s trombone and Armstrong’s trumpet are not the lonely train whistle of the more conventional blues. They sound hard and somewhat urban, as if the train is not only blowing its whistle but flexing its pistons and laughing, all at the same time. Barney Bigard’s clarinet has a dark, low-register quality, more rhythmic than singing. It’s a little like the Muddy Waters blues band marching in a New Orleans funeral parade.

The other major band that I remember seeing at the Blue Note was Duke Ellington’s group.

Though with the addition of “Cat” Anderson on trumpet, this band also had a more strident sound than earlier Ellington groups, the Duke still retained many of the important sidemen from the thirties and forties bands, especially Johnny Hodges on alto sax, whose sound was like Sidney Bechet licking your ear.

The Ellington band embodied another dimension of “The Saturday Night Function.” The virtuosity was certainly there, but usually couched in a post-impressionist blur, a fusion of Debussy and the blues. Ellington would come on stage, dressed in a top hat all the way down to his feet, and would slyly intone his signature, “I Love You Madly.” I don’t know if he did, but his audience certainly loved him; and over the years, listening to Ellington has taught me much about really hearing seemingly smooth music and catching all its nuances and colorings of phrases. If Armstrong let you laugh with, though not at him, Ellington insisted on respect and usually earned it. His was a self-assertion through a kind of formality that went much deeper than the customary graces. If you listened, there were many faces there.

Chicago has a history of jazz clubs, dating from the black migration north in the early twenties. I remember once when Roosevelt University gave an honorary degree to Illinois Poet Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks. Since I had helped arrange the award, I was invited to a luncheon before the ceremony. Gwendolyn brought along a cousin, an older African-American woman, who talked about hearing King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band live as a young girl. It would have been around 1923; she had stood outside the door of the Sunset Café on the South Side, and heard this legendary group, which brought Armstrong to Chicago, and which I could only hear on very scratchy recordings. I was jealous.

Despite the primacy of the Blue Note, there were other important venues during the forties and fifties: the 1111 Club on North Bryn Mawr where George Brunis played; Jazz Limited run by clarinetist Bill Reinhardt and his wife; and the Sutherland Hotel Lounge which featured more modern jazz musicians. With the onslaught of rock during the sixties, many of these clubs, including the Blue Note, disappeared. The lounge at the Sutherland has been revived and Joe Segal has moved his Jazz Showcase, the real heir to the

Blue Note, three times. It has recently re-opened in the South Loop.

I've gotten older, currently live in Madison, Wisconsin and long ago broadened my musical horizons to include folk and classical music. But jazz was my first love, the music that helped me find my way inside myself, and the Blue Note was the first place where I saw the big names live. It was a great beginning, and I'll never forget it.

Dead Winter

by Daryl Sherman

A grey, spiritless day,
Sullen, dull, deep in snow,
The icy wind gnaws at my heart.
All hope lies dead.
But with the sudden sun,
Innumerable diamonds glitter:
My heart leaps at the piercing beauty.

Sunken Treasure

by Edna Canfield

Maryann watched the bubbles swirl around her as she slowly descended to the ocean floor, carefully picking her way through the scattered debris of the sailing ship Newcastle Rose. The dream that she'd saved, trained and planned for was finally coming true. They all doubted her, but she had learned to dive and now, anchored above her was the ship and crew she'd hired. Reaching for what looked like a plate encrusted in sediment, she could make out what looked like a band of gold on the edge, was it solid gold? Looking around, she saw something glittering in the feeble light from above. Carefully moving through the murky water, she wondered, was it silver? She reached out and...

"Maryann, will you please stop day-dreaming and finish those dishes! Listen to your mother. Your hands will look like prunes if you don't stop playing around in that dishwater."

Maryann nodded and started to wash and rinse the supper dishes. But, she smiled to herself as she thought about the tattered, old book hidden in her room. The tattered book she'd bought at the estate sale of an old, old sailor who'd passed away. The book that held a folded yellowed map showing the final resting place of the shipwrecked Newcastle Rose. She knew she had to save and plan to make her dream come true. But, she had plenty of time, after all, she was only nine years old.

The 1970 Battle of Midway

by Rita Hack Rausch

They sat there in a circle, those five boys from four houses whose backyards touched. A little bored on that hot July day—long after the excitement of school being out, after July 4th with its bangs and whumps and dazzling lights and colors, after the picnics with seconds and thirds when parents were busy not watching. This was a nothing-to-do-day.

Five boys, 10-12 or thereabout, deciding how to change the quiet, dismissing one suggestion after the other, until one hit. “Let’s do The Battle of Midway” peaked their collective interests.

It was the time of the gray plastic models, hundreds of pieces hooked together in sheets, a time of bonding for dad, boy and glue. Every boy had several completed ships catching dust in household spaces. Off they ran to collect their navy. Little brother’s wading pool... “Yeah! That’ll be the Pacific Ocean.” Here...firecrackers left over from the 4th for ammunition.

The pool was filled, battleships placed strategically along harbor shores, cannons on decks, fuses lit. The sharp staccato bursts of ignited ammunition held their interest for minutes. But, it wasn’t the battle they had read about. Something bigger, something more volatile! Charcoal lighter fluid, yes... poured over the ocean waters and ignited.

WHOOM! BLOOOM! WHOOSH! Fire leaped in a horrifying dance through, around and in their ships. Heat and destruction everywhere! Flames raced up the spill of fuel toward the container. At the last second, a boy’s hand opened and released the can as it exploded in a blazing whoosh at his feet. The smell. The toxic, acidic, foul smell...

Those five boys from four houses whose backyards touched sat wide-eyed, stunned into silence. Their ships were gray blobs of fused plastic, the pool melted, the Pacific Ocean leaking out on to the blackened grass, their Battle of Midway etched in each memory forever.



Bird of Paradise Abstraction, by Daryl Sherman

The Lightning of Courage

by *Claudia Melrose*

During thunderstorms in northeast Iowa, my three-year old self imagined that the magical streaks of light crackling with fierce sounds came from the big dark tree at the top of the hill. When I heard them, I would run my little legs to my perch at the second floor window where I could watch and feel the excitement with my whole being.

Storms always fascinated me the way they began announcing themselves hours before arriving. The changing feel in the air as the humidity rose. The changing smells carried across the soil-rich plains. The changing sky of cumulus clouds increasing their size, all moving with intensifying speed, passing each other, colliding and morphing into endlessly entertaining forms. More collisions, bigger shapes, darker forms. Stronger winds pushing them together and apart. The atmosphere gradually becoming darker. The birds disappearing and the animals becoming quiet. The wind would finally die into a heavy stillness. Even the air didn't breathe.

Suddenly a shocking crack broke the waiting air. Torrents of rain came crashing down and giant trees bent with the furious gusts. My tree on the distant hill would do a splendid job at those times. It would hurl gnarly light bolts from down to up and up to down and no matter how hard I peered from my safe window perch, I could never tell whether the wiggly flashes came from the earth to the sky or the other way around. Sometimes the loud snakes of light would just dance across the sky and meet another gnarly flash. I clapped my hands and shouted in glee and yet, with a bit of apprehension. My parents told me that once one of those flashing snakes shot down and shattered the light bulb over their bed. Although they didn't say so, they must have been very frightened. I would sometimes think about that when I tiptoed past their bedroom door.

My mother often told me that those years on the acreage with her new husband, the horses, and farm animals were the happiest in her life. She said this in spite of the fact that the only man she ever loved became ill and crippled merely one year after they were married. That day, he collapsed nearly unconscious from causes unknown. Dad fought for his life for nearly a year. At one point the doctors at Mayo Clinic pulled the sheet over his head and pronounced him dead. Alerted to this, my Dad's brother, a surgeon on staff, flew into the room cursing loudly, ripped off the sheet and demanded oxygen be given. My father regained consciousness quickly, looked up at his distraught

young wife and said, "Coordinate, Mommy, coordinate!" Astonished, she laughed through her grateful tears. She probably quipped right back but that was never part of the family story.

Their humor was one of the many glues that kept them close through the years. The first night they met, they attended a symphony and laughed so hard they left early. Eight days later my father proposed to this witty, energetic woman on whom he would lean for life itself. After nearly a year in the hospital (she stayed right there with him), my parents moved to an acreage where my father slowly recovered. He introduced my city-raised mother to small farm "chores," taught her how to play bridge and to ride one of their five-gaited horses. Three years later I was born. For my mother, living on the acreage brought joy and fulfillment. For toddler me, it was a barnyard play land of wonder with the thunder tree's protection in the near distance.

Another daughter later and a son on the way, my parents bought a handsome three story Victorian house in town. Most adults were probably impressed with the stained glass windows, rolling oak doors, marble fireplaces, walnut carved woodwork, huge rooms and tall windows. But for my sister and me, the infinite nooks and crannies in the attic and basement offered the most allure and action. In the summer when it stormed, our rainy day ritual was to play paper dolls on the front porch. We could be part of nature's drama, smell the air changing, feel the wind on our skin and hear the lightning crash about us while safe in our screened shelter.

Mom never allowed us to go outside during a storm until after the lightning rumbles were far in the distance. Then we would run outside and splash in every large puddle we could find. Sometimes after the front had passed but the rain was still torrential, we would ride our inner

tubes in the rushing water down the culverts to the river. One day when she left us alone for a few hours, a strong summer storm hit. This time we didn't wait for the lightning to disappear in the distance. We rushed outside with the dog and rode our tubes with abandon amid the crashing and rumbling and barking. We shrieked with delight. How we loved to play outside when nature was so powerful and wild. As fate would have it, Mom came home early while lightning still charged close by. Her face and words were very angry, unusually so.

Another storm of significance, the effect of which remains with me to this day, occurred during the last summer of my father's life. He was very ill. My mother in her effort to get him to an environment in which he might recover, packed up clothes and food, three kids, a sick husband and the dog for a two week respite in northern Minnesota, his favorite fishing territory. After two weeks, Dad wasn't improving so she moved us to a different locale for another two weeks. The new abode had few amenities: just one big room with a stove and fridge in the corner, a vinyl topped table, some chairs, and one double bed with a bare light bulb hanging over it. Our cabin and three empty ones were situated unusually close to a large lake on a jut of land with few pine trees or any other attractions of nature.

In my pre-teen eyes there was little to offer there except the possibility of my father regaining his health. That was reason enough; we'd make it work, we'd find things to do. My sister and I would run behind the cabin to the two flimsy outhouses and sing silly songs back and forth at the top of our lungs, laughing and laughing. Almost daily we would take my little brother out in the boat for hours of swimming, not so serious fishing and very serious messing with the smelly bait. We read many books and played

endless board games. But Dad didn't get better. He was bed-ridden and looked terribly gaunt. Sometimes he would start coughing uncontrollably and my heart would pound with fear.

We whiled away our time at this bereft place for nearly a week when the storms hit. Midwest storms in the flat lake lands are truly fearsome during the summer heat when they roll in thundering night after night. By the end of the second week my mother's nerves were frazzled but she put up an effective front for her children. Dad was so sick he couldn't tell the difference. The night before we were to leave, the sky broke and lightning charged the lake so close to our cabin that I almost peed in my pants. Instead, I hunkered over the in-house bucket, my guts locked with anxiety and unable to relieve even one drop.

Squatting and trembling, I looked about the big cabin room. The scene was surreal. My brother and sister, unaware of the ominous sounds outside, were sleeping peacefully on the floor strewn with half-packed bags. The dog was snuggled up next to my father whose high grayish cheekbones reflected the garish light from the single bulb over his bed like a Van Gogh painting. Steam swirled from the teakettle moistening the air to soothe his incessant coughing. What I saw in my gripping fear was a theatrical tableau of stillness and illness happening in a time warp, a stillness detached from the relentless violence outside. Suddenly I felt so alone. Where was my mother?

My mother's love and presence was the grounding rod of our childhood and given the fact that my father's severe hemophilia put our life in turmoil more than most, her steadfastness was truly our grace. But where was she now in this hellish reality that my twelve-year old mind could not grasp? Her absence was totally out of character.

When did I last notice her? Did she go outside in the torrential downpour? Why would she? There was no place to go. My stomach still in knots, I got up, threw a poncho over me and ran into the pelting rain shouting for her. No answer. I ran to the outhouses. No mother. I ran to the car and pounded on the windows. No nothing. My body jerked with dread. Where was my mother?

Shaking, I ran back inside the cabin to the bucket and threw up. Then my emergency self clicked into gear. I started gathering my forces, talking quietly to myself with logic, as Mom had taught me. I reconsidered where she might have gone and why. I threw the poncho on again and ran back to the car. I really pounded this time and shouted louder than the thunder and lightning combined. This time the door opened in the rain to reveal the queen of my life huddled in fear in the corner of the front seat, her eyes rimmed with tears. She was trying not to break, not to let her daughter see her fear. The lightning flashed.

Late the next afternoon I helped her pack the car and somehow carry my six foot four skeleton of a father from the cabin to the car. My sister, brother and the dog climbed in and, at last, we were leaving for home. Mom asked me to sit next to her. She didn't say why, but I knew. As we began traveling the rural roads from Minnesota to Iowa I realized I was no longer just a daughter. My mother would still try to protect me from knowing the worst and from worrying about my father for the next grueling six months, but after I had found her frightened and huddled in the front seat, our relationship had irreversibly changed.

We had driven only two or three hours when the sky darkened. The air and the smells changed. The winds rose sharply. No calm before the storm this time. The front of the storm hit our

solitary car with a fury I could not comprehend. The car's light beams were not even visible on the road and the windshield wipers could not keep up with the rain. Mom asked me to open the window, stick my head out and try to be her eyes. Nothing. The blinding lightning came closer and louder. Neither of us could see the edge of the road. We were two women soldiers bonding in a night battlefield of nature's powerful forces. I suggested we pull over, but she refused to stop. She would stay on course. She had a sick husband in the car and she desperately needed to get home to safety.

Dad was coughing and groaning in the back seat. My brother and sister were fast asleep on the front and back floors. Mom was leaning over the steering wheel, trying to peer out, furtively wiping off the inside of the windshield over and over. The wipers outside made rhythmical repetitive clicking sounds. Surreal again. Otherworldly. The inner and the outer were not meshing. I was being initiated into a reality of fear I could never have imagined. This time my mother could not make me feel safe; I was trying to help her feel

safe. But in the wildness of this storm no one was safe. The car was shaking with every gust of wind in the unnerving flashing light. Then the unthinkable happened. The car engine cut out.

What followed created a respect for my mother that nothing could ever destroy. Shaking like a leaf, she reached down to release the trunk latch, got out in the rain, lifted the hood and, in the light of the incessant lightning, tried to find and re-connect two black wires to restart the engine. I saw her bend over with a flashlight pitifully looking for the loose wires as the rain pelted her and the thunder and lightning assaulted. I think she was beyond fear at this point. After many attempts she managed to re-connect the wires and hurried back into the car. In potent silence we hardly dared to breathe while she turned the key in the ignition. The engine sputtered and started right up. I clapped my hands and cheered in relief and appreciation. Such courage. Mom smiled at me wanly and I reached over to hug her drenched, exhausted shoulders. Together we continued on into the abating storm with a sick husband, two children and the dog.

Old, Old Man

by Sparrow Senty

Mostly gray these days,
his face
forgets to smile.
He reaches out
in slow motion
or not at all.
We face each other
in the silence
of our conversation.
His words,
nods and grunts.
His eyes close.
Wisps of life
slip from his body.
Imperceptible,
relentless.
Time pushes him,
gently,
ever gently,
to the edge of living.

Me and the Dalai Lama

by Frank Springer

Mim's son called me to "Come right away! She's bleeding through her mouth!"

Her apartment was only a few blocks from my office and I was there at her bedside within minutes. She was lethargic, sweaty, cold and had suddenly vomited a large volume of bright red blood. She was in shock.

I called for the ambulance (which at that time, in our area, was the same as the undertaker's station wagon) and rushed her to the hospital. After receiving two units of blood, Mim was stable and out of shock, but the nasogastric tube was still pulling bright red blood, indicating a continuation of the bleed.

This was long before medications such as Tagamet or Prilosec or such tools as the gastroscope were available—or even dreamed of—in clinical practice. An acute bleed from a peptic ulcer was not uncommon in those days, and if the bleeding did not resolve spontaneously, surgery would be necessary. That would mean opening the stomach, finding the ulcer and tying off the artery causing the hemorrhage. This was the obvious remedy in this case.

Within an hour, a surgeon-colleague and I had opened her stomach in search of what we thought was a bleeding ulcer, but were dismayed to find that was not the cause at all. Rather than a single source of this bleeding, we found diffuse inflammation of the entire inside lining of the stomach; she was oozing blood from thousands of small capillaries. She had a condition untreatable by surgery or medications. Our strategy now was to maintain blood volume with transfusions and to hope the bleeding would stop spontaneously. Monitoring the nasogastric tube for the presence (or absence) of blood would tell the story.

In the intensive care unit, she was monitored constantly and continued to bleed throughout that night and into the next day. At 10:00 pm on the second day, Shirley, the supervising nurse, called and said the bleeding had not let up at all and she was worried. I told her I would be right over.

In the car on the way over, I had about thirty minutes to think about it, and the consuming problem that loomed over me was:

"What am I going to do when I get there?!"

There were no other surgical or medical solutions to this problem; it wasn't a matter of reexamining her or getting another blood test or ordering another

procedure. It was...well...there was nothing more to do.

But then, a revelation! It suddenly occurred to me, as I drove along, that I had recently listened to a taped lecture by the Dalai Lama. In his presentation, he exhorted all physicians to be “vanguards” in advancing the understanding in all of our patients that within all of them, within all of us, there lies an enormous, mostly unconscious, power. Power to heal, to repair. He explained that this power, this energy, could be amplified by meditation, encouragement and directed concentration. Aha!! Now I had a plan! Jubilation!

Mim was the only patient in the unit when I arrived. The room was dimly lit, the only light coming from a small fluorescent lamp under the countertop of the nurse’s station. Mim was lying on her back, eyes closed, and Shirley stood at the foot of the bed. Leaning in closely, I whispered, “Mim. It’s Frank.” She opened her eyes. “You’re still bleeding,” I said. Without further explanation, I placed my right hand over her upper abdomen, palm down, and inserted my left hand, palm up, under her back. “Mim. I now have your stomach between my hands, and I want you to repeat after me. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

Quietly I said, “Stop bleeding.”

“Stop bleeding,” she said.

A few seconds later...“Stop bleeding!”

“Stop bleeding,” she echoed softly.

Another few seconds, a bit louder, “Stop bleeding!”

And again, she repeated, “Stop bleeding!”

In the silence of that still, dark room, I continued to hold her stomach between my fingers for eight to ten seconds, intensely concentrating with my eyes closed. I felt a tingling sensation at my fingertips. “I think it will stop now. I’ll be on my way and I will see you in the morning. Goodnight.” And I left.

At home, too worried to sleep, I sat in my library, fidgeting. It was now after midnight. The phone rang. It was Shirley, excited and almost crying, “The bleeding stopped!! It stopped! It stopped about an hour ago, shortly after you left. The night nurse came on at 11, but I decided to wait around and see if it started up again and it hasn’t!! It was beautiful, just beautiful!”

One Sunday morning thirty years later, I was at the hospital when the emergency room nurse called to say that a patient of mine had come in with a severe headache. It was Mim! She was there with her son. A CT scan of her head confirmed what I suspected— the presence of blood overlying the surface of her brain—a sub-arachnoid hemorrhage. I alerted a neurosurgeon, on-call at a larger hospital 20 miles away, that I would be sending Mim over. When I informed Mim of the findings and the plan, she managed a sly little smile as she looked at me and said, “Why don’t you just put your hands around my head and say “stop bleeding?!”

Mim recovered spontaneously and is still living and well.

Far's Birthday Fest

by Grethe Brix-J. Leer

My two younger sisters had been preparing for Far's eightieth birthday for a very long time and it was finally all beginning to fall into place. By the time my husband and I arrived in Raaby, the small Danish village where I grew up, almost everything was ready for my father's big day. Nearly all the villagers had been invited for the dinner in the forsamlingshuset, the only place big enough to hold such a large group. My sisters had decorated the long, somewhat generic room with colorful pillows borrowed from another town hall several miles away. These softened the seats and livened up the hard narrow benches under the windows. Colorful bouquets from Far's garden made lovely centerpieces and along with many bottles of wine and sparkling glasses promised a lively festive evening. A naturalistic mural by the local artist depicting the farms outside flowered off the back wall in a blaze of red, green and yellow. These tones were a bit overdone in the eyes of the local villagers, whose daily lives were more muted. Still, they were proud to have real art and a real artist among them.

Outside, a huge rotating spit was operated by the local butcher, wearing a crisp white apron and cook's hat for the occasion. He was the expert and handed us a taste of the traditional roasted pig from his sharp carving knife. The moist flavorful meat was delicious and suggested old pagan memories. Inside, I, along with my husband and three younger sisters, stood in a line to welcome the guests, who now began slowly to arrive. All the old villagers had known Far for most of their lives. Their faces were almost motionless and you couldn't tell from their slow sliding walk whether they were going to a funeral or a birthday party. They knew this road; they had been here many times through generations, marking the celebrations and mournings of many lifetimes. They all wore uniform black suits, the same suits that many of them had bought for their weddings years ago. From a distance they all looked so fine. Up close, you couldn't help noticing the inevitable spots that hadn't budged, even after the yearly soaking with fresh snow from the first big storm of the winter. This was the traditional way of cleaning suits, which couldn't be washed. No one would dream of such wasteful nonsense as sending them to the nearest dry cleaner's, twenty miles away.

The guests automatically assumed their places in the line according to long established unspoken rules which were never broken. After greeting us, they moved slowly toward the buffet. Each display of food had to be carefully inspected, and if you looked, you noticed a sudden focused determination

in their eyes and bodies. This was after all what they had come for—the food and lots and lots of it! The crisp spit-roasted pig with the fresh potatoes and vegetables from the garden was eaten slowly and deliberately, interrupted only occasionally by Far turning around, looking each person in the eyes and recognizing his or her presence. Raising his glass of wine, he uttered a “skål,” which was answered by a muddled chorus of “skaal” from the guests, who briefly stopped eating but then quickly resumed their methodical enjoyment of this feast.

For some time, it was almost entirely quiet in the long hall, until the worst hunger had been satisfied and the line of faded suits began to shuffle back for seconds. Everyone raised wineglasses, which my sisters kept filled. The conversation was now considerably livelier. At some of the tables people were almost laughing, comforted by the predictability of all the old jokes that the same people told over and over again on such occasions. They agreed that this was indeed a fine party.

And now, there was a break before coffee and dessert. Time to lean back a bit, to look around and nod at other guests. The smokers had to have their cigarettes. A few went outside to stretch and loosen their belts, but most stayed inside, exactly where they'd been at the tables, with the people they'd known all their lives, with whom they were comfortable either mingling or just sitting quietly.

Sitting at another table, I'd all the time been aware that my childhood friend Finn, the mentally slow boy I'd grown up with and liked, was sitting next to his older brother at a table with other villagers. When we were children, he dared me with his pranks, which I was forbidden by my parents or too scared to participate in. He had no qualms walking into the dirty waters of

the village pond and catching tadpoles or leeches, which he proudly showed off in a jar filled with yellow muddy water. I shivered with scared delight when he let one of the leeches cling to his skinny leg and triumphantly showed me the blood dripping from his wet skin. He would release the sharp bite of the black creature by ripping it off and dumping it back into the jar. He grinned broadly, thrilled to know he had once again managed to shock me. He wasn't able to talk much, but he and I understood each other and spent many hours exploring the world as it unfolded around the village pond.

But here we were, fifty years later, Finn still living in the village. I had moved far away and was only visiting this place that once had been my entire world. I wondered if he'd remember me. As I started crossing the floor from where I was sitting with my family and my American husband, I felt as if I had crossed another ocean, gone back in time and space. And yet, this was now. “Hello Finn, do you remember me?” I asked, and at the same time became aware that all talk and eating at his table had stopped. The other guests were only a blur of faded black suits, lumped in their chairs.

“Ja, I remember you.” His slurred voice came from somewhere deep down under his stooped head and shoulders. He was my age but he seemed very old. He didn't look at me as he continued in his barely audible voice, “You're Soren Jorgensen's Grethe,” and that was all. I was glad. I felt we had connected again after all these years.

The townspeople around the table still didn't move. I had come all this way from another world to be with my dad for this important day, and they too remembered me as a child growing up among them. But they didn't know me now. Even if I spoke Danish they also knew I spoke another language, had seen places they'd only

heard of and had moved away from the village and them. I was a visitor. They knew I would leave again.

At another table, all Far's brothers and sisters were seated, many of them with their wives and husbands. There was no mingling with anybody at that table. To me they almost looked the same as they had forty-five years ago when I had last seen them, except that now they'd become more like the stones around the village pond. A bit more moss and spots had gathered in strange places on their faces and bodies. They seemed surprisingly unchanged, just older. Even here at this safe known gathering they felt awkward and huddled together like little brown well-coiffed birds, carefully nibbling their cakes and coffee. They seemed to seek and find comfort in each other, becoming one family body with many heads.

After having enjoyed the food, the wine and the after-dinner drinks, Far again stood up and, unfamiliar with public speaking, only said "Velbekomme"—"May the food become you well," indicating that the meal was over and the entertainment could now begin. Far played the banjo together with his old friend Per who manipulated the accordion with only nine fingers. He had lost one finger in an accident, something Far often talked about because he was amazed that Per managed to play so well without that important finger.

While everyone remained seated, listening, one of my aunts, Far's youngest sister, having had her share of red wine and after-dinner drinks, became animated by the music. In a swirl of iridescent red, green and yellow polyester, she began dancing and moving between the tables. While twirling alone on the floor, she announced that her new hip really was working and wasn't it

great that she once again could kick up her legs like this!

The others sat still. They knew her. She always did this. They knew that after a brief burst of colorful movements she'd suddenly realize that no one else had joined her in her frenzied attempt to have fun. Her red-lipsticked giddiness abruptly stopped and she sat down next to her husband, who was sick with cancer and very pale. She kept quiet for the rest of the evening. Half a year later, her husband collapsed at the wheel of his car while driving and crashed into an oncoming motorcycle, killing both the biker and himself.

The slow playing by Far and Per continued for some time yet. The guests were enjoying themselves and only moved their hands slightly while applauding after each piece. Far stood up, perspiring, with a shy smile, accepting their friendly recognition. Everyone knew that Soren Jorgensen played the banjo and also the saw, and they were proud to be part of this community and this celebration.

It was getting late and one by one they came to say "goodbye" and "goodnight." Only these two words and a firm handshake. I stood there along with my sisters, my husband and my dad. I knew that I most likely would not see many of these people again. I couldn't help myself, and with a smile added a "thanks" to each "goodbye" and "goodnight" I said to these people who had all been such a big part of who I am today.

Later, I found out that my next oldest sister had been embarrassed and annoyed with me for my inappropriate display of such emotions during what had otherwise, in her opinion, been a perfect birthday celebration for our dad.



Troy Gardens Still Life #3, by Ginnie McCarthy

Mediquette

by David Hyson

“Don.” A stentorian call reverberated throughout the waiting room. Don struggled to his imbalanced stance and caned his way toward the formidable herald. The woman in white greeted him with the inevitably perplexing greeting, “And how are we today?”

After a reflective pause, Don replied cautiously, “Uh, I’m not exactly certain how you are, but I’m feeling rather poorly.”

Nonplussed, the greeter frowned slightly, regained her poise, and stated, “Step in here.”

The usual antiseptic room was uninspired save for a print on the wall depicting an abattoir. “Let’s get started,” intoned the somewhat jaded nurse, or, was she some other specialty? Don, mildly alert to the evolution of medicine since the Great Depression, had tried to keep up with the specialization within the medical establishment. But he had more or less given up trying to be current, especially after he had erroneously addressed someone as a paramedical, certainly a respectable term, but somehow it had seemed pejorative to the medical person.

“And what brings you here today?” the woman in white asked.

Don cryptically listed a few symptoms, knowing he’d have to state the same damn things when the physician arrived. “Low energy, vague aches at midnight, physical and mental imbalance...”

“OK, let’s take your blood pressure and pulse... 129 over 84.”

“And the pulse?”

“86.”

“Irregular?”

“Yes, the doctor will see you soon,” the minister of an uncertain specialty stated. She had gradually seemed less automatic to Don and he thought that his idiosyncratic style had improved her mood as she exited the room. He did think he heard some sigh of relief with some four-letter allusions.

After an appropriate 11-minute wait, Dr. Prime arrived. He was cheerful, but Don sensed some tension in the physician’s manner. Perhaps the previous patient had been difficult, unlike Don with his well-rehearsed affable veneer.

“Well, and what brings you in today?”

Don, a septuagenarian, was always hoping the doctors would refer to him as “my son.” He missed the old days when he was addressed that way by the family physician and, not infrequently, by the parish priest. Ah, those pristine days of envying the altar boys. He had not wanted to get quite that close to God. But his mind had wandered.

“Actually, doctor, I’m concerned about not having much energy, writhing at 2:00 a.m. following a night terror, and wondering if my multiple complaints are diagnostic of hypochondriasis.”

“Hmn, well, that’s a delightful conjecture--you haven’t been reading the *Merck Manual* again, have you?”

“Well, I do like to review the 1976 edition I retrieved at the Salvation Army, and, uh, could I ask why these medication side-effects are so threatening?”

“I’ll be technical for a moment. Most of those side-effects might be termed false-negatives, that is, they sound bad but actually only occasionally are bad.” (Don, recalling his ‘C’ in Statistics 101,

knew that “occasionally” could be euphemistic for 49 percent.) Dr. Prime consulted his computer and said, “Well, you were just here last week, but I’d better palpate your spleen.” Don welcomed this exploration of his arcane organ and reflected on Dr. Prime’s assiduousness. The solicitous physician concluded, “Only slightly inflamed. You would really be better off if you would ignore those extensive prescription warnings. You should concentrate on positive things, such as your relatively good health, your family and your outstanding rebound from the frontal lobotomy.”

“Uh, uhm, I guess you’re right. I have been ungrateful, and, with my recent acceptance by a local interest group, I should be happier.”

“And what group is that?”

“The Society For The Advancement Of Perpetual Ingrates.”

As Don exited the waiting room, he winced at the mandatory prescription from the receptionist, “Have a nice day.”

“Damn it,” he grouched, “just when I wanted to be pharmaceutically litigious.”

The Boy and the Veteran

by Ken Richardson

“When you were a baby, you seldom cried,” my parents said, “Even when wet, or hungry, or during the night. Most mornings we found you playing quietly in your crib.”

When my mom took me for checkups to the doctor, she would mention that I hardly ever cried. After checking me out the doctor would say, “Don’t worry. There’s nothing wrong with Jack that I can see. Consider yourself lucky.”

When I was three years old, my mom was carrying me in her arms and she slipped and fell down several stairs. She tried to cushion me from the fall and when we hit the bottom I barely cried. My mom wrenched her back and twisted her neck, but I seemed okay. When she saw I had trouble moving my right leg the next day, she took me to the pediatrician. An X-ray showed I had broken my right leg between the knee and the hip. As the doctor set the broken leg and put it in a cast, he said that I hardly cried.

At age five, I learned to ride a bike without training wheels. I fell often, skinning my elbows, knees and once my nose. Yet I seldom cried.

When I was seven, my older brother and I would get into fights, wrestling and sometimes punching. Usually I lost, but I hardly cried. “Boys will be boys,” my dad said.

One day my mom asked me why I didn’t cry more often when I got hurt. I thought for a few moments and said, “Well, it hasn’t hurt enough for me to cry.”

When I was nine, my dad asked if I would like to go to the Veterans Day parade the next day. He said there would be a marching band from the high school, a fife and drum corps, fire engines, many colorful flags, and veterans from different wars.

“You bet,” I answered. There were crowds of people in town and we were lucky to find a parking space for our car.

“Let’s watch the parade from a street corner,” my dad said. “Would you help me find a good spot?”

“Of course!” I replied, and we both looked for a good spot on the parade route.

“Here’s a corner,” I pointed out, “and only one person is there.”

As we approached the corner, we saw an old man sitting on the sidewalk. But he wasn’t sitting in a chair. He was actually sitting on a wooden platform with rollers. And then I noticed that his legs were missing.

I thought to myself, I don’t want to stare, but I can’t help myself. I’ve never seen a person without legs.

I looked away and then I looked back, my eyes wandering from the old man’s knees to his waist. He was wearing a pair of cut-off blue jeans and instead of a belt he had a piece of rope, slipped through the belt loops and tied on the side.

My eyes continued up the old man’s shirt to his face. He seemed to be looking past me out of one bloodshot eye, the other eye had an old, soiled bandage over it.

Next to the old man was a hand-lettered cardboard sign. “Veteran. Homeless. I have lost everything. Please help me. God Bless You.” An American flag on a stick was jammed into a hole in the cardboard sign and the flag drooped to one side.

The veteran held a metal cup in his right hand. His thin fingers poked through partial gloves and the cup shook as some people bent down to drop coins in it. Most people, however, walked by without looking at him.

I stood rooted to the sidewalk. My dad gave me a twenty dollar bill. I reached out and put it in

the cup. The old veteran whispered, “Thank you, young man, may God Bless you.”

I responded, “You are welcome, sir,” and looked into his bloodshot eye. The old man’s eye was moist with a tear starting to slide down from one corner.

“Sir?” the old veteran whispered, “No one has called me ‘sir’ for a long, long time. In fact, people hardly speak to me anymore. I wonder if they really see me?”

My mind raced backwards and wondered what this man was like growing up. Whose little baby was he? Was he loved by his mother and father? Did he have brothers and sisters? How about friends and playmates? Did he go to high school? Or college? What war was he in? Did he lose his legs in that war? There were so many questions I wanted to ask, including how did you end up here on this corner with nothing?

During the parade, I began to realize that the old veteran, who watched in silence with no one waving to him, with no one with him, had lost more than his legs. Maybe he had lost friends, and love, and hope. What hurts more, I wondered, losing your legs or losing hope?

As my dad and I walked back to the parking lot after the parade, I kept thinking about that old homeless veteran. Before we got halfway to our car, tears started to trickle down my cheeks. Then the tears came faster. As we got into the car, I could hardly stop crying.



Just Fishin', by Ellen Maurer

Points of View

by Joanne Lee Storlie

I hold the phone steadily while your
Uncensored words reach my attentive ear:
“Oh, she called yesterday to ask
If I were going to the musicale today.”
“Are you?” I ask.
“Yes,” you reply. “And we might
have coffee afterwards.”

How, I wonder, can you tell me this
Without hesitance or guile
When I am never able to reveal to you
His invitations to share segments
of our separate lives
during a casual lunch or
lecture of mutual interest?

Is it because the love you offer me
Is lightly held
As one would hold a
Delicate and exotic butterfly
Never demanding control or possession
Believing you will stay as long as you can
And leave when you wish to
And that either way I will not crumble
Or rail against fate because I understand
That love between humans is ephemeral—
Fashioned of hope and expectancy
Yet bounded by truth and reality?

Is it because the love I offer you
Is tightly held
As one would hold a
Rare and precious gemstone
Demanding assurance of continuity and durability
Believing that I need you less and
Might someday slip from your grasp
Leaving you injured and alone,
Floundering in a sea of unwanted consequence
Doubting you can ever again
Gain a steady footing on life—
And I know it?

The Bracelet

by Kathy DiGiuseppe Gomes

Fifty-three years ago, with low voice and confidential tone, Mama told me of my birthright. I was the first of five daughters. The gold bracelet, which stood for her own betrayal, would be mine.

In the years during the Great Depression, my mother had to leave high school. It had been the one place, out of her ethnic sphere, where she could be accepted by the “real Americans.” She told them that her own name, the sound of which made her bristle, was not Concetta, but Consetta. Back at home, she slipped back into her Sicilian culture, relieved to escape the performance necessary to bookmark her place in an American world.

On the day she came from school to find her father weeping at the kitchen table, she understood instantly. “Peppina,” he sobbed to my grandmother, “I tried, but I just can’t do it. We are on the county.” A month later my mother started out for her job at the shoe factory. By week’s end, she would return home with her pay, which Papa would deposit, with not a little shame, into the family’s coffee can, nailed to the floor within the darkness of the bedroom closet.

During those years there were no birthday parties except her own. Born on the 4th of July, she would pretend that the annual purchase of a gallon of ice cream on that day was to celebrate her birthday. She could not hide her resentment, though. Later she would tell her daughters of the injustice she had to endure at her father’s hands, turning over all her money weekly and writing his parole letters monthly. The number referencing his place in the penitentiary system would so indelibly be etched in her memory that, not even dementia at age 90, would erase it.

She did not tell all her daughters, though, about the sharpest thorn lodged in her heart. She told me.

Papa knew that the surrender of my mother’s paycheck each Friday left her smarting, a simmer that might erupt into a full boil. So he made a bargain. She would continue the arrangement during those teen years without objection, in return for which he would give her a thousand dollars upon her engagement. She was appeased. She was resigned.

The day would arrive when Papa gave his permission for her to marry, but he did not have the promised dowry. Instead he presented my mother, his eldest child, with a gold bracelet. She winced, yet looked at it in wonder and

slipped it on. It had an expansion band, each link, a scroll. On the middle of my mother's wrist lay a heart, engraved, and at whose center was a smaller heart of rose-colored mirror.

When I was 12, she called me to the family cedar chest, where all the family treasures were kept. She came very close to me and reminded me that, unlike families of means, our family had no heirlooms. Then she reached into the chest and produced the bracelet. She fingered it for a long moment, lost in thought, then turned to me and said in a conspiratorial tone, "I was a first-born daughter. You are my first-born daughter. This bracelet will be yours one day. I want you to pass it on to your first-born daughter, and she to hers, down the generations. Then there will be an heirloom. It will make up for all the rest. The rest."

My pride was tempered only by my discomfort. What about my four sisters? Didn't they deserve a legacy? Yet the thoughts and preoccupations of adolescence assumed center stage and no further scruples would be spent on it. On Saturdays, sick days, and when I was left to my own amusement, I would steal away to the cedar chest to wonder at the bracelet. Never in all the world, in all the ages, would there be another to compare to it. It was the seat of the family honor that my mother had craved all these years.

The day I discovered it missing was filled with fever, shame and feelings of doom. The torture persisted for months. The knowledge that I had lost it would be the source of my mother's new anguish. She would realize, of course, that her hopes and dreams had been dashed by her own daughter.

Many years later, the reappearance of the bracelet would become a stratified event, with layers of honey and gall. It was the evening of our youngest sister's prom. The stockings, the crinoline, the gown and at last the jewelry. As she opened the small box atop her dresser, she lifted out a single piece carefully and solemnly. Four gasps, followed by voices in unison. "MY BRACELET!" We looked around us in shock, each questioning the others' birthright.

In the moments that followed we sifted through a basket of memory fragments. Recognizing that, although our births had been separated by intervals of three years, we had each experienced a solitary, unique childhood. Our single common experience had been the bestowal of the bracelet and the trauma of its loss. The manner of delivery had been the same: the confidential tone, the legacy, and the promise. She had never told each of us not to tell, but we all knew. Ours was a family of secrets. After the night of that prom, we never spoke of the bracelet again. It was like all the other subjects we would never discuss.

On the eve of our mother's death, our youngest sister approached me with an old velvet box. She said that it was time for the bracelet to come back to me, that she felt that it had always had been rightfully mine. As I opened the box, I was overwhelmed by familiar feelings of guilt and betrayal. It seemed oddly like stolen property.

Annie engaged my eyes intensely with her own. "This is just between you and me," she whispered. "Don't tell anyone."

Mothers are Forever

by Lorna Kniaz

I feel my mother in me,
Watching my children.
Still turning at a mommy-call
From far away.

And in a quiet moment
Eternity gets tangled in my mind.
I wonder at the reverberations
Of the generations.
I lose the linearity of time.

The echoes flow back and forwards.
So that the great grandmothers I never knew
Rock the cradles
Of the great grandchildren
I will never see.

Unable to stop the ripples
As they pass and circle around us.
We keep our places for a moment,
A pause in time to be.

We cannot keep our babies
As our mothers could not hold us.
But they carry our memories
And take along our dreams.

Sand washed from stones and pebbles
Flows down streams and rivers.
Stops, and makes the beaches,
Where children come to play.

Mothers are forever,
Carried by our children.
As they travel with our mothers' mothers,
Locked in their hearts.
Where children come to play.

The Tractor War

by Ellen Maurer

Growing up in Pennsylvania in the 1920s and 30s held many adventures for my mother and her family. Neighbors needed each other for labor in farm work, machinery sharing and in case of fire. Everyone dreaded house or barn fires as there was often no way to put them out. Relatives were important too. Mother told me this story about the struggle to make it on the farm.

“I remember that Uncle ‘Wall’ Wallace Hess, Dad’s brother-in-law, helped us buy a team of horses and later some basic machinery. He looked at the horses’ teeth to make sure they were healthy and to see how old they were.

“But farmers depended more on neighbors. One of our close neighbors was the Lawton family of William, “Will” or “Bill,” and Dora Lawton. They lived down at the bottom of the hill in the red brick house with their children, Josephine, Bill, and Joe. As neighbors, we were sociable but not real chummy. Well, sometimes they were kind of aloof – not overly friendly, but we got along quite well. We often helped each other with farm work. It was always necessary to be on friendly terms with neighbors as you never knew when you might need them.

“All the neighbors knew, when we moved up from Philadelphia, that we didn’t have much equipment. One rumor went around the neighborhood, “Here come these city slickers up from Philadelphia! And they think they are going to farm! What do they know about farming?!” They didn’t know that Dad worked on farms as a boy and knew how to farm.

“Because the Lawtons had been farming for a lot longer than we had, they had accumulated more farm machinery. Dad had to borrow some from them now and then because we didn’t have much. Dad didn’t like to do it, but he had to in the beginning.

“Dad wasn’t an expert with machinery, but he learned as fast as he could. After we stopped using horses, Dad’s first tractor was a used Fordson, Henry Ford’s answer to help small farmers find a reliable cheap tractor. During the short time they were made, for 10 years, from 1918 to 1928, they were the best selling tractors in America.

“But they were contemptible tractors to start especially in cold weather because the oil congealed on the cylinder walls and clutch plates. You had to crank it by hand over and over again. Often strong men took turns cranking

between intervals when they tried to adjust the ignition. Some farmers even built fires under their tractors to warm the crankcase and gear-boxes to make it crank easier.

“Of course, this was dangerous because the tractor ran on kerosene but needed gasoline to start. Then to get the tractor to move, you had to shift gears by ramming the shift lever into position and listening to the grating noise from the partially engaged clutch. Then you had to jump out of the way and leap on because the tractor lurched forward immediately.

“Dad and Will Lawton each had a Fordson. One time in the cold weather of early spring, they each got their tractors started and were both plowing. Dad was plowing below the barn and Will was right across the Bottom Road from him. At noon Dad turned off the tractor and came in the house for dinner.

“After he had eaten, he went back outside and tried to start the tractor. He cranked and cranked and it still wouldn’t start. He worked at it and

adjusted it and cranked and cranked. He was still at it at 3 p.m. when Will Lawton finished plowing and walked over to Dad.

“He was carrying something and handed it to Dad. It was the rotor from Dad’s tractor. Will said that his had cracked and his tractor wouldn’t run. So while Dad was eating dinner, Will had come over, removed the distributor cap and took the rotor, which shot sparks down a wire to the spark plugs. He had used it all afternoon while he watched Dad cranking and cranking trying to start the tractor for hours. Dad never thought to look under the distributor cap for a missing rotor or that someone would actually steal part of his tractor motor.

“Today some might say that neighbor is lucky he didn’t get shot! But although extremely frustrated and furious, Dad was a good Christian. The worst he would ever say about that experience with Will Lawton was, ‘That wasn’t very nice of him.’”



County Fair, by John Hoffman

The Pay-Back Dinner

by Julie Pretell

I looked forward to this dinner party with nothing but outright dread. My husband had invited his boss and the chairman of his department and their wives to partake of a traditional dinner from Spain at our place. He had found an exotic recipe for paella in the newspaper and presented it to me as “the menu of choice” for the occasion. He had assumed that I knew how to cook.

We had only been married for a few months, but this invitation had been motivated by my husband’s completion of a three-year clinical fellowship and our pending move to his native country in South America. As a previously eligible bachelor he had received many invitations over the past three years during his tenure at the hospital, both from local “hopefuls” as well as from his colleagues and superiors who may have felt that it was their social duty to welcome him or just felt sorry for him because he was “living alone with no one to take care of him.” Now that he was married and about to leave the country, it was time for him to “pay back” all those favors before he left the country.

When I looked over the more than twenty ingredients of the paella recipe, I realized that I had never heard of many of them, had no idea where to buy them and no clue how to cook them. I had lived with my parents right up to the time I was married, but had not learned much about cooking while growing up. My mother had not been well and oftentimes it was my father who boiled the potatoes and opened the cans of creamed corn, green peas or green beans or maybe even canned spaghetti or Boston-baked beans and brown bread for our evening meals. When my mother did cook, her menu did not add much other than the occasional pot roast, chicken or lamb for special occasions, basted in pans of water in the oven. I don’t think she had ever received much instruction in the art of cooking when she was growing up either, because she had always seemed very insecure in the kitchen and didn’t want any onlookers or helpers interfering. My sister and I had usually avoided the kitchen, especially when it looked like things weren’t going well and that my mother might pitch whatever she was trying to make onto the floor.

But I digress. I am trying to make excuses for my lack of culinary skills when I assumed my new role as the doctor’s wife. I had managed to get by cooking simple fare so far and apparently had convinced my new husband that I

knew more than I did, as well. But now I was in a pickle. I had to create this dish and I didn't know where to turn for help. My sister was still acquiring her homemaking skills, too, and my good friends had only minimal experience in this type of cuisine. Besides, they all lived out of state and in those days I wasn't going to call them long distance just to discuss a recipe! I finally consulted a few people at work who were a little more savvy about world cuisine and they suggested where I might be able to buy the necessary ingredients I needed for this fancy dish.

It was now the evening of the party. I never did find all the ingredients I needed, but I had run out of time. I was going to have to go with what I had, even though I didn't have the expertise to know what difference it would make if some of them were missing or not.

I set the table and then began the task of translating this exotic recipe into real food. The directions called for cooking several of the ingredients in a paella dish, which I didn't have. Our kitchen was rather sparsely equipped. We had not received the typical household wedding presents as others did, because everyone knew we were about to leave for Peru and thought that money gifts would be more appropriate than items requiring expensive shipping.

I decided to use a Pyrex pan that I had borrowed from my mother. I should have remembered that she had always cooked everything in it in the oven. I painstakingly prepared each ingredient as instructed and then simmered or lightly fried them in the pan on the burner. All seemed to be going well, even though the pan was getting hotter and hotter. I was about half way through the ingredients when it was time to add the shrimp. Of course, it was supposed to be fresh shrimp, but at that time I did not appreciate the difference between fresh and frozen shrimp and

had bought the latter. Without thinking, I began to shake the frozen shrimp into the hot pan with all the other ingredients. It was not more than a second when the pan began to sizzle loudly and suddenly exploded. Pieces of glass and food shot out at me, the stove, the refrigerator, the wall and everything else in its circular path. Smoke filled the room as hot food sizzled directly on the burner.

I stood there stunned. It took me a moment to realize how lucky I had been. The pan had not exploded in all directions like a giant fireball—only out to the sides and I was not hurt. My exotic paella had exploded into tiny debris and was plastered all over me and the walls, however, and it was less than an hour before the guests would be arriving!

My husband came home to find the apartment filled with smoke and me scrubbing food off the walls. Not wanting to panic me, he wisely decided that the menu had to be changed. He ran downstairs to a nearby store to buy steaks. He barely arrived back before the buzzer announced that the guests had arrived. We cheerily greeted them, explaining away the smell of smoke. My husband whisked them into the living room. I excused myself to try to recreate a second pseudo-paella dish with whatever ingredients I had left, this time in a real stovetop pan. I looked at the steaks as if they were foreign fare. Certainly, we had never eaten them in my house and I had no more knowledge of how to cook a steak than how to make paella.

While I was inventing myself as a cook in the kitchen, my husband proceeded to kill time entertaining his guests with cocktails. I floundered around in the kitchen and stuck my head out every now and then to make excuses for dinner taking so long.

After more than an hour, I finally finished preparing some sort of meal and went out to the living room to announce that dinner was ready. I found the guests alone talking among themselves and my husband nowhere in sight. I thought perhaps he was in the bathroom, but that room was empty. To my chagrin, I finally found him in the bedroom, fast asleep, having entertained one cocktail too many.

I rustled him awake, and, at last, we sat down to a “gourmet” meal of cooked steak and rice filled with a potpourri of ingredients from the second

half of the recipe. Fortunately, by this time we were all so hungry that we would have eaten anything. Someone mused that this was the fashionable time for one to eat dinner in Peru. We made polite conversation. They finally left and we wearily cleaned up.

Such was my first “pay-back” dinner. So much for decorum and making a great impression on important people! I have since learned how to grill steak and cook many other things, too, but to this day, I will never make or eat anything that resembles paella!

The Sewing Box

by Wil Selbrede

It was early morning. Dark clouds hid the rising sun. He had slept badly, as usual, waking several times during the night to the sound of nothingness in the blackness of their bedroom, finally throwing off the covers in disgust and padding to the living room, where he sat in the shadows. After all those years of hearing her breathing next to him it was hard, so hard, to face the silence of the night.

The clouds parted briefly and a golden finger of light slanted through the window onto the sewing box next to his chair. It was as though a Higher Being was pointing out the task that awaited him. He sighed. “Right after breakfast,” he muttered to himself, “I’ll get at it right after breakfast, so stop nagging me, Gabriel, or whoever is pointing that celestial flashlight!”

His silent breakfast hastily eaten, he padded back to the living room and carried the sewing box into the light of the kitchen. Actually it was more than just a sewing box; it was almost a family heirloom. Her mother, Agnes, had purchased it from the Singer Company in the 1930’s, when every woman was expected to be a seamstress in addition to her other wifely duties, using money she had carefully saved from making dresses for other women in the village with less sewing talent. Agnes had given the sewing box to Cathie one Christmas, after their three children came, saying, “Here, you need it now.”

It was then, and still is, he thought, a beautiful piece of Swedish woodworking—solid maple, with six individual trays in three layers. It was cleverly cantilevered on the two ends so that when it was opened all three trays on each end were in plain view. This always reminded him, with some amusement, of the gaping mouth of “Homer the Hungry Hippo” down at the zoo. That wasn’t its name, but their oldest child, Kirk, had given him that nickname during his first trip to the zoo and it had stuck through the years.

He opened the sewing box. Spread before him, layer after layer, were the reminders he had so dreaded seeing and touching since her death, but it was a task he must complete. Gingerly, he reached into the gullet and pulled out several pincushions full of sewing needles, some pins and a few crochet hooks. He selected a small pincushion, a stuffed Ferdinand the Bull that would be suitable to his own small needs, and set it aside. He made a small pile of the scrambled bits of cloth, lace trim, shoulder pads and other bits and pieces of past dressmaking projects. These he would discard. A methodical search through the multi-colored rows of spools of thread yielded his

second objective—two spools of sturdy button thread, one black and one white. These would cover his needs for an occasional missing button. All he had ever learned how to do was sew on buttons.

It had been years since Cathie had done any sewing, even before she got her fatal illness. The kaleidoscope of colors of spooled thread amazed him. When had she needed all these? Then he remembered—it was their beautiful and popular daughter, when she was heavily into the dating game in high school. Their girl was a whiz on the Singer Touch & Sew, and could whip out a new formal from scratch the day of the dance and it always looked great—providing, he remembered with amusement—one didn't look at how the seams were unfinished on the inside.

Fighting the tears, he rummaged through the trays until he found Cathie's good Singer scissors, the yellow tape measure, her little scissors for nipping thread and the largest of the thimbles, which would just fit his little finger. These he set aside for his personal sewing kit, then gently closed the sewing box for the last time. Later that day he would, as Cathie had insisted in her last days, give it to Jane, a neighbor lady, one of her dearest friends and an excellent seamstress. He knew that Jane would give it a good home, which is all that mattered now. He was at peace—somehow, he knew that Cathie was happy, watching.

Kenyan Haiku

by Bert Adams

On Lake Baringo
hot springs perfect for cooking
potatoes and eggs.

Out from underground
tongue licking up the termites
Aardvark in the night.

Long-necked gerenuk
hooves high up in the tree
giraffe wannabe.

Five large male lions
Three elephants chase away
the king of beasts Not

Traffic counter stretched
across road No. Twenty-five
foot, slinking python.

Screeching fish eagle
dives into Lake Naivasha
comes up with nothing.

Zorilla looks like
long version of U.S. skunk.
But doesn't smell bad.



Blue Energy, by Gail McCoy

Lifting Mist

by David Berger

Life on earth we hope is endless.

Not so the life of the individual

bug

tree

me.

With a certain detachment

I feel my stiff fingers,

the trouble I have getting out of the kayak.

I notice the spots on the backs of my hands—

like the spots on a dying northern pike?

No, not yet.

It's just that I can see the other side of the lake now.

Love Affair With Kirby

by Joanne Lee Storlie

I recently read with rapt interest an article published by a well-known research firm. On the basis of data gathered from a variety of sources—among them mental health professionals and the clergy—this firm estimated that approximately thirty three million women in the United States have engaged in at least one extramarital affair. It is my hypothesis that this estimate is about fifty million short, for at least that many women throughout the fifty states carry on a relationship that has all the markings of a passionate attachment with an inanimate object that personifies a most satisfactory paramour.

The proof of this statement will require the reader's forbearance for I can offer no documented evidence to substantiate this claim. I will, however, present my own testimony and experience and let the reader be the judge.

My extramarital love affair began more years ago than I care to admit. Although I had been experiencing some unnamed yearnings and vague discontent early in my marriage, I had done all I could to overcome temptation. I had successfully resisted the almost overwhelming desire to make a place in my heart and on my living room bookshelves for a complete set of Encyclopedia Britannica. And nerves of steel and high resolve were required when I turned my back on a set of stainless steel pots and pans that promised to stand up under all conditions for my entire lifetime. But a woman can fight her natural impulses just so long. One look at Kirby and I knew I had to have him. When I heard he had been giving satisfactory service to millions of women from all walks of life for fifty years, and that his attachments could execute the most amazing feats, I traded in all my S&H Green Stamps to make the down payment and gave up my claim to Christmas and birthday gifts for the next five years to make the monthly payments.

As with most affairs, it was tempestuous at first. We found time to be together nearly every day. Suppers were late, appointments forgotten, children neglected. We romped from one room of the house to another in a never-ending pursuit of happiness and cleanliness. He went to extremes to please me: no task was too difficult, no request too demanding. He was, in fact, inexhaustible. Everything from chandeliers to radiators took on a glow to match that in my eyes as we vacuumed, dusted, polished, buffed and shampooed everything that didn't move.

Though I didn't realize it at the time, he became an escape for me. When arguments in the children's playroom over a tricycle grew to mammoth

proportions, or when Hubby's TV hockey game began on the heels of a TV basketball game, which was preceded by TV Olympic skiing and a TV bowl-a-thon, often Kirby and I would sneak off to clean an untidy bedroom where the soothing sound of his motor calmed my nerves and allowed me to fantasize about life as a seagull or a porpoise. The family often noticed my glazed eyes and Mona Lisa smile when we emerged, but they mistakenly attributed it to overwork or boredom.

From the early joys of discovery, we progressed to a deeper, more mature relationship. I learned I could always depend on him in moments of trial and tribulation. When last-minute guests phoned to say they'd be over in an hour, Kirby put forth his best for me. When Hubby and Children abandoned the house because of an occasional cranky and belligerent attitude on my part, it was Kirby who stayed behind, held my hand, and saw me through the day.

The years have come and gone and Old Kirby is still with me. I guess you could say our affair has stood the test of time. I know I could replace him with a newer model, but he still springs to life at my touch so I put up with his idiosyncrasies. True, he works at a slower pace now, but then, so do I. We've both come to realize that half the fun is getting there. What do I care if his bulb doesn't light any more? We compensate for that by rendezvousing during the day. What do I care that his step-on starter has been stepped on once too often and no longer works? We achieve a satisfactory, albeit abrupt, start by simply engaging his electrical cord. No matter that I had to hand-stitch a rip in his bag because we once got carried away on the basement stairs, or that having him overhauled and replacing his brushes hasn't brought back his old power. I love him just the way he is. I guess you could say my

feelings are much like those expressed by Henry Higgins about Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*:

I've grown accustomed to his Pace.
He almost makes the day begin.
I've grown accustomed to the way he vacuums
every day,
His stops, his gos, his highs, his lows
Are second nature to me now,
Like breathing out and breathing in.
I am serenely satiated and content because
we met,
He's rather like a habit I can always break,
and yet
I've grown accustomed to the way he helps me
through the day,
Accustomed to his Pace.

I know what you're thinking—that these are unusual circumstances and that I'm one of a kind. Let me tell you, you are wrong. For years I kept my affair a secret, but recently the need to confide in someone became irresistible. Naturally I turned to two of my closest friends—one a roving reporter and the other a strident promoter of feminist causes. Would you believe the reporter confessed she's been having a "thing" with her Hoover for years and the promoter "gets it on" with her Eureka all the time? Looking back now, I am astounded that I didn't catch on before. I should have realized there was something strange behind their refusal to lend their cleaners to me that time two years ago when Kirby was on the blink and couldn't function. Of course they wouldn't lend them. They weren't just vacuums, they were lovers!

I rest my case with this last declaration. Although I conducted a very limited poll, three out of three is a ratio that simply cannot be swept under the rug. Since at least 100 million women own vacuum cleaners in the U.S, don't you agree that my estimate is relatively conservative?

Cold Secret

by Marvin T. Beatty

“Wantuk, one of the elders just told me you were in a big ice-flood when you were young. Why have you never told us?” Eb’s and Wantuk’s eyes met. Then the stooped old man looked away from his grandson, toward the meadow around the collection of hide-covered huts. “Wantuk, you’ve always told us not to keep secrets, to always tell the truth, and to tell all we’ve seen and heard when we’re around the hot-smoker as Sun goes to sleep. The other elders and you will begin to teach me my manhood rituals when Moon shows her full face again. How can I trust what you tell me when you have kept a secret from us?” Eb scraped his bare toe in the dirt and stared at his grandfather. Wantuk rubbed his gnarled hands on his bony knees to try to stop the pain and kept avoiding Eb’s eyes.

“I’m not sure I can tell you now, Eb. My knees hurt a lot. The hot brew from the water bush I drank this morning hasn’t helped much. When they hurt so much it’s hard to remember. And I hurt all over when I think back to that terrible time.”

“Just sit here on this log and let Sun warm you, Wantuk. I’ll get Oma and Wo. Oma will bring you more hot brew and a skin from a soft-coat to warm you. Then tell us at least a little.” Eb smiled at his grandfather, and when he got a slow smile back, he went to bring his sister and brother.

Wantuk shivered and said to himself, “I’ve tried to forget those days. I wanted to spare them that terrible story. But I’ll have to tell them. Eb’s almost a man and Oma’s not far from being a woman. It will be very hard, but I’ll try.” He looked toward a grove of trees and said a short prayer to Earth Mother. Then he sat thinking until Eb, Oma and their younger brother, Wo, came from the hut. Oma had a skin pouch of hot willow bark tea and a sheepskin.

“If you’re ready I will try to speak of the terrible ice-flood. But I may not be able to tell all the story if my knees hurt too much.”

“That’s alright, Wantuk. We’ll help you,” Oma spoke softly, close to her grandfather’s ear as she draped the sheepskin over his deerskin shirt. Wo sat close and took the old man’s hand. Eb pulled a log from the pile near the fire pit, for himself and Oma. After a long silence Wantuk began his story.

“We lived in a valley in the direction where Sun awakes. When I had grown almost as tall as my father he told me it was time to begin preparing for my manhood rites and my vision quest. He and the other elders began to teach

me and my cousins things a man must know to survive and care for his family. I was the first one to be sent to seek my vision from Earth Mother. The elders sent me alone up a sky-stabber behind our camp. I left very early one day when Sun was showing herself longer and the grass was green again. The elders gave me some spears, a sling, a sleeping pad, a sack with some water and a round carrier that held some smoking moss from our hot-smoker to start a fire when I got to my special site. I climbed from the time the sky began to turn light until Sun was above my head. When I got far above the trees and up where there were big rocks among the grasses and sedges I found a niche among some rocks and Earth Mother told me this was where I should stop. Now I have to stop talking and rub my knees.”

“Don’t stop. Tell us more. We want to hear what happened,” Oma insisted. “If I bring another skin from a soft-coat to wrap around your knees and some hot brew from the water-bush plant, will you tell us more?” Wantuk nodded and the slim tall girl brought a sheepskin and another bag of hot willow bark tea for her grandfather. After a long pause and several swallows of the hot tea Wantuk spoke again.

“I used the smoking moss to start a hot-smoker in some dry grass and pieces of wood that I’d collected. As I was arranging my spears and sleeping pad beside some tall rocks I heard a bang so loud it hurt my ears. I jumped about this high.” He held his hand about knee high. “It was louder than all the winter-sleepers in the woods roaring at once.” He watched Eb, Oma and Wo’s eyes widen in wonder.

“Then a big, cold wind blew me down. I hit my head on a rock and Earth Mother put me to sleep for a while. When I woke up my whole world had changed. I couldn’t tell if I was seeing

my manhood vision or if the flood in front of me was real. About a stone’s throw below me racing water filled the whole valley. And it wasn’t just water. Big trees, chunks of ice taller than a lot of trees standing above one another and dead animals were swirling by toward where Sun goes to sleep. I saw hairy big-ones, buglers, soft-coats, sharp-tooths, swift-runners, winter-sleepers and big-manes and even the bodies of people carried by the water faster than you can run. When I looked behind me there were a few long-eared hoppers, some hungry sharp-tooths, a few buglers and some winter-sleepers up there with me. It was then I knew my whole clan was in that water and I was alone with the animals.” Oma and Wo began to cry and Eb looked worried.

“How long were you up there alone with those sharp-tooths, Wantuk? Didn’t they try to eat you?” Wo managed to squeeze the questions out between his tears.

“This many Suns,” Wantuk held up six fingers. “The sharp-tooths and winter-sleepers began to kill the long-eared hoppers and buglers. When they were full and asleep I carried my spear and a piece of wood from the hot smoker to their kills and got some of the meat. They were scared of my hot-smoker, but the last night after all the long-eared hoppers and buglers were dead and eaten they came for me. I killed one sharp-tooth with my spear and hit a big winter-sleeper with a rock from my sling. After that she and the others stayed away.

“While I was alone up there I talked to Earth Mother many times. I begged her to keep me safe; asked her why she’d sent the ice-flood and killed all my family. She told me to trust her, that she would guide me. She said that I must find where the ice-flood started. Then I’d know why it had come and if there’d be another one soon. She promised to show me the way. I

thought of my family and cried every day. When the flood had gone away I cut and dried some meat from a hairy big-one that had been washed onto the ridge near me. Then I made a new sleeping cover from the skin of the sharp-tooth I'd killed. When I felt ready, I took my pack and walked down the sky-stabber. It was all just rock now with big ice pieces where the top of the water had been."

"Did you ever see anyone else? Was everybody drowned?" Oma wiped her eyes and tucked the sheepskin tighter around Wantuk's legs.

"Not for a very long time. Do you want to hear more of the story?"

"Yes, yes!" The three young listeners cried out together and looked imploringly at their grandfather. Wantuk ran his hands across his face gathered his thoughts and then continued.

"When I got to the bottom of the sky-stabber the place where my family had lived was just bare rock. I asked Earth Mother to care for their spirits and then turned and walked toward where the ice-flood had come from. I was scared another flood would come and wash me away. But Earth Mother had told me to find where the flood had come from and I had to obey. After Sun had awakened and gone to sleep this many times," Wantuk held up three fingers, "I came to a place with rock the same color as the hair on a soft-coat. I stopped overnight and then kept walking toward where Sun awakens. The valley became very narrow and the sides were steep and tall. There was no sound. I was so scared I shook all over. There were big sky-stabbers on both sides of me. Then the path turned and all I saw was walls of ice on both sides of me, with a wide hole in between. Behind the hole it was level and covered with bare stones as far as I could see. I was so scared I ran back around the corner. Then

there was a roar and a crash so loud my ears hurt. When the noise stopped I looked around the corner again and saw pieces of ice bigger than this many hairy big-ones." Wantuk held up both hands, thumb and fingers extended. "They covered the place where I had just been standing. The ice reached almost all the way to the other ice wall. Then I understood that the ice wall had broken and the water behind it ran out all at once and caused the flood. And I understood why Earth Mother had sent me here. And I ran back the way I'd come as fast as I could I was so scared."

Wantuk stood up slowly and walked toward the fire to warm his hands. His grandchildren gathered around him and begged him to tell them more.

"I don't think I can tell any more today." Wantuk shook his head and turned away.

"Even if we give you some of the water-swimmer Eb caught this morning?" Oma's question caught Wantuk off guard. He hesitated a minute and then nodded that he would. The grandchildren went into the hut and Oma soon came back with a large trout on a piece of flat wood. Her brothers were right behind her. Wantuk ate some of the fish and then began to tell them more about his saga.

"I felt so alone and lonely then that I could hardly walk. When finally I got back to where the rock was the color of the hair of a soft-coat, Earth Mother told me to stop and look around. At first I thought it was all just the same rock, but then I discovered a few pieces of rock the color of blood in a little crevice. I picked up a piece and after I put it down my hand was red. I crushed a little of it between two other rocks. Then I understood what Earth Mother wanted me to do. When Sun awoke again I climbed high on a

sky-stabber, higher than where the ice-flood had torn everything away. Then I hunted for two Suns until I saw some soft-coats eating. I crawled close enough to spear one, empty his food sack and filled it with some of his blood. Then I took his skin, some of his meat, the food sack of blood and went back down to the place where I'd found the red rock. When Sun awoke again I crushed the red rock into powder between some harder stones, mixed the powder with the blood and made a wand from some of the soft-coat's hair. With the wand I drew my father, my mother, my brothers and sisters and the rest of my clan on the pale rock wall. Also I drew a sky-stabber and then myself near the top looking down. Just as I was just starting to draw the dead animals that I had seen in the ice-flood I heard a voice. It surprised so much I jumped and spilled most of the blood and rock powder mix. The voice came from Nola, your grandmother. After we talked a while I drew an outline of her alongside me up on the sky-stabber looking down at the ice-flood. Then my blood and rock-powder mix was all gone.

"Your grandmother, Nola, used to carry each of you when you were young. Do you remember her doing that?"

"Yes, that felt good," Oma smiled as she remembered her grandmother. Her brothers nodded assent.

Wantuk was caught up in telling his story now and started talking again. "Nola had been searching for a man to help her take care of what was left of her clan. They lived closer to where Sun goes to sleep than my family did. When the ice-flood came she and her father and two of her sister's children were high up on a sky-stabber picking blue-fruit and the water didn't reach them. All the rest of her clan drowned just like mine. She told me her father, Akon, was old and

could not hunt much anymore, and her sister's children, Ewan and Elsa, were still too young to hunt and gather food alone. She needed a good hunter and Earth Mother told her to come from their rock den to watch the valley for people. That is when she saw me drawing. I needed a woman to talk to me, share my sleeping mat, prepare the food I killed, gather plants and make body covers. She needed a man to hunt and to teach Ewan, her dead sister's son, how to hunt and kill animals. So I gathered my tools and sleeping mat and went with her to her rock-den. We believed Earth Mother wanted us to start a new clan.

"We gathered and dried food for the time when Sun sleeps late and the white powder piles up. So many animals had drowned in the ice-flood I had to hunt all the time. We were hungry many nights. But we stayed alive. Nola's father, Akon, could only sleep, eat a little and sit by the hot-smoker. When Sun began to wake early again he went to be with Earth Mother. Nola wove reeds that grew along the water to make a body-cover for him. We all had water in our eyes as we built a wall of rocks over him to protect him on his journey to Earth Mother."

"Just like we did for Nola?"

"The same way, Eb. I miss her every day. She was a strong woman." Wantuk sat quietly for a long time wiping his eyes on the sheep skin Oma had put on his knees. Eb, Oma and Wo looked at each other, stepped back a little and waited, watching their grandfather's tears. When he looked up they came close and hugged him. "I think I can tell you more now."

"After we sent Akon on his journey to be with Earth Mother, Nola's belly got big and round. She told me what would happen. When she began to scream in pain I was afraid she would

go to join Akon with Earth Mother. She told me to be calm and how to catch your father when he came out of her belly. She had made a body cover for him from skins of long-eared hoppers. We wrapped him in that. Elsa, Ewan and I cooked the best food we could find for her and helped her care for him. We named him Lon, and thanked Earth Mother for giving him to us. After Sun had woken up late and gone to bed early this many times," Wantuk held up three fingers, "Nola's belly got big and round again and Ara came to be with us. Ewan, Elsa and I had to hunt animals and gather roots and berries all the time for us to have enough to eat.

Wantuk looked directly at his grandchildren.

"Telling you my cold secret makes me feel better.

My knees do not pain me as much now." He stood up and walked to a pile of logs, selected one of the largest and carried it on his shoulder to the fire and tipped it into the coals.

Eb took his grandfather's hand and asked, "When it is time for my manhood rites would you ask the other elders if I could try to find the wall where you painted the story of the ice-flood? If I can find that wall maybe I can have my vision there."

Wantuk smiled at his eldest grandson. "Of course I will ask them, Eb. And I will tell you how to get to that spot. As best I can remember."



Leaves and Light, by Daryl Sherman

What the Leaf Doesn't Know

by Myrna Williamson

Outside a second floor bedroom window
I see part of the canopy of a magnificent oak tree,
Many, many years old,
Here perhaps before the old house was built.

A single leaf attracts me
Swaying in the breeze,
Sometimes touched by the sun's rays,
All its many companions arrayed around it.

The little leaf is part of a twig,
Which is part of a branch,
Which is part of one sinewy arm among many,
All swaying in the wind and dappled by sunlight.

And the living tree is also part of something larger,
Literally rooted below and spreading out above.
It derives nourishment from earth, water and air.

In turn, the tree roots the earth and moderates the wind.
And releases oxygen to the atmosphere.
And in the fall—by their fall—the leaves
Provide even more nourishment to tree and earth.

Each leaf lives its life and serves its purpose,
Then withers and dies in so short a time,
Unable to imagine it was part of something so large,
That the tree only survives by the presence of every leaf.

What the leaf doesn't know, nor does the tree,
What they are not aware of and awake to,
Is the invisible, continual sharing,
The giving of work and taking of needs,
A communion between everything,
That which is called living as well as that which is not.

Would it make a difference if the leaf knew?
Perhaps not to the leaf.
But when I am aware of and awake to all my connections,
It makes a big difference to me.

Let's Talk Scirocco

by Sparrow Senty

“Rissa, what are you doing?”

“I’m sitting here in this little red car.”

“But, Riss, I’m talking terms with the sales manager to buy the tan Jetta four-door. Remember? You and I agreed just ten minutes ago the Jetta would be the best car to buy.”

“Well, you two were so busy talking.”

“Sure, we’re putting the deal together. Then I realized you had wandered away. Bob’s holding the papers in the sales office. And here you are, sitting in this sports car. What’s going on?”

“This little red car caught my eye and since we hadn’t really looked at it all that much...”

“Just a minute, Riss. You and I spent a good hour in this showroom looking at almost every car on the floor, sitting in them, getting into the backseats, looking at trunk space, checking engines. I thought we decided to buy a four-door because it had more room for taking our friends without having them crawl into back seats.”

“I know, Tom, but this car...it’s so cute. It’s so...so sporty.”

Rissa beamed at her husband from where she sat in the driver’s seat of the Scirocco.

“Rissa, are you just looking or what? I’ve got to get back to Bob and close this deal.”

Rissa grasped the black steering wheel in both hands, turned and looked out the windshield, beyond the car’s hood across the showroom floor and outside to the road. “I could enjoy driving this one,” she mused aloud.

“Riss,” Tom’s voice interrupted. “Riss,” he said again. “This is a sports car. It has two doors, not four.”

Abruptly, Rissa got out of the car, slamming the door with finality.

“I like this car. I like its looks.”

“I didn’t think you liked sports cars.”

“But, Tom, this one’s different.”

“What about the Jetta?”

“Actually, Tom, I think it’s too conservative for us.”

“Conservative?”

“Yes, it gives me a feeling of being old retired folks.”

Tom laughed. “But we are retired, Riss.”

“That doesn’t mean we have to buy a car that looks retired, does it?”

“Well, I like sports cars. You know that,” Tom conceded.

“And I like this one,” Rissa declared.

“Hmmm,” Tom thought a moment. “Guess I’ll get Bob to scratch the deal on the Jetta. Let’s talk Scirocco.”



July Morning, by Gail McCoy

Country School

by David Lewke

One of my earliest memories was waiting for my sister, Janice, to come home from grade school. There was no one to play with when she was at school. I couldn't wait until I was old enough to go to school, too. When I reached five years old I finally got to go to school, starting right out in the first grade, since there was no kindergarten.

We went to a one-room school, located approximately one and a half miles from our farmhouse. The name of the school was Sunny Slope. It was located south of Columbus, Wisconsin at the corner of Highway 89 and County V, on the southern slope of a knoll, hence its name. When it closed in the 1950s it was sold and converted to a residence.

All eight grades attended this school. At any given time there were 15 to 20 children there. One teacher taught all grades. Often, children from multiple grades were combined in one lesson. The teacher would advance a student at whatever pace he or she could capably handle. These teachers were not required to have a bachelor's degree. Most of them graduated from "County Normal" two-year programs. Columbus had a two-year college for teachers at that time.

My first year I had one classmate. His name was Mervin. He had a learning disability and was around ten years old. There were no "special education" programs in those days. He attended school until he was about fourteen, and then was gone, probably to work on his parents' farm. My second, third and fourth year, I was the only one in the class. The next year a girl named Marie moved into the neighborhood and soon after that another girl named Donna did, so then there were three students in the class.

Our school was heated in the wintertime by a big iron stove in the back of the room. Local farmers cut wood and delivered it to the school in the fall. There was a crawl space under the school about three and a half feet high. The boys crawled under the schoolhouse and neatly stacked the wood. In the winter the older boys were assigned the task of fetching the day's wood from under the building and filling the wood bin, which had a clever design, with a door to the outside and one to the inside, near the stove.

The teacher had many jobs before the students arrived in the morning. Some of the jobs included stoking the fire and filling a 30-gallon crock full of drinking water for the students. The school had a well and a hand pump in

the sink for water, so it was no easy task to fill the crock. After the lessons were finished for the day, the girls helped the teacher by erasing the blackboards, cleaning erasers and sweeping the floor.

Outhouses for the boys and the girls were located along the property line behind the schoolhouse. One day as I was in the outhouse, I noticed some pencil writing high up on one of the walls. It was the name of my father. My dad had gone to the same school as a boy and apparently practiced graffiti. Naturally, I signed my name below his!

Getting to and from the school in the winter-time was a real challenge. When the snow had drifted the road shut, my cousins, my sister Janice and I would be taken on a sleigh drawn by a team of horses with my dad or Uncle Carl driving. I can remember kids who walked to school in the blizzards and who had frozen fingers and ears when they got there. The teacher would rub snow on the cold body parts in the mistaken belief that it would prevent frostbite by slowly thawing the skin.

My mom packed my lunch box every day. I always ate well, but some of the children did not. Welfare did not exist in the 1940s in Columbus. There was a poor family that lived about a mile from school, who had a boy a few years younger than I. His usual fare was lard sandwiches. One day he came to school and proudly showed everyone his lunch. His dad had shot a squirrel and he had a fried squirrel leg to eat that day.

The school put on a Christmas pageant every year. White sheets were draped on wires in the front of the classroom for curtains. There were skits and lots of singing and Santa Claus always made an appearance. I remember a Christmas

when my little brother, Ronald, was sitting on Santa's lap. He reached up and pulled hard on the cotton that was serving as a beard and lo and behold, Santa turned into one of my uncles! I don't think any kids ever believed in Santa after that episode.

The school had a merry-go-round, a slide and some climbing bars. The big recreation, however, was softball. To keep things even we always chose up teams before the game. The little kids were always the last chosen. In the spring a day was set aside for spring cleanup. The whole school and many parents participated in raking, burning, painting and doing whatever repairs were necessary. Then we had a softball game of the kids against the parents and a big picnic lunch.

One of the resources available to country teachers was the Wisconsin Public Radio. We used the radio for music class, using music books provided by the state and lessons about nature from Ranger Mac. In a student essay contest sponsored by Ranger Mac, I won my first literary achievement. I wrote an essay about my pet garter snake named Sammy. To my surprise my essay won first prize! I was asked to go to Madison to read my essay on the radio. My parents drove me to Madison in their navy blue 1946 Plymouth. I was so excited! I read my essay "Sammy the Snake" with confidence. The kids back at my school listened to me read my essay with pride. When I returned to school the next day, I was treated like a hero. For my prize I was given a book about dogs. I treasured that book for a long time.

While the one-room country school sounds primitive, I believe it had its advantages. It taught responsibility. It also taught respect for others and for property. In a tight community like that, you never wanted to bring disgrace to

your parents. The older kids were taught tolerance of the younger kids. The younger kids respected the older kids. The older kids were also role models in a small way, perhaps.

The teachers certainly had a challenge with their limited resources, but I think overall they did an admirable job in preparing us for further schooling. Of the three children in my class, Donna went on to become our high school class valedictorian; Marie graduated from Edgewood College and became a teacher; and I went on to gradu-

ate from the University of Wisconsin and had a career as a business executive.

My sister and brother, several cousins and many others that I knew from Sunny Slope School, went on to college, something that was not very common in Wisconsin small towns in the 1950s. As I think back, I realize that our love of learning and sense of responsibility was very much shaped by those dedicated one-room country school teachers.

Water

by Evelyn Rueckert

In 1976, before the Berlin Wall came down, we were living in the city the Russians never ceased calling Piterbourg. In our time there it was Leningrad. The fluctuating temperatures of Russian winters caused much freezing and thawing and made February in the city particularly messy. Rumbling as it slid down oversized drainpipes, chunks of snow melting off building roofs occasionally landed on the people standing below. In typically hardy Russian fashion, women in their ubiquitous knitted caps laughed as it dumped on their unsuspecting heads.

One afternoon as I was sitting at my sewing machine in the hallway of our third floor apartment, people shouting in Russian pounded on the door. I soon understood why they were upset; water was beginning to pour through the ceiling in our son's bedroom. Joining my agitated fellow tenants, I dashed up to the fifth floor where, after no one answered our knock, someone managed to open the apartment door. Through a thick cloud of steam I glimpsed a room full of beautiful Scandinavian furniture. Was this the abode of our rumored KGB neighbors? While these curiously affluent tenants were away, a water pipe in their apartment had frozen and burst. Water had been flooding into their rooms for hours, finally pouring down through the ceilings of the rooms below. As I tore back down the stairs to my own apartment, I encountered more angry tenants. In my halting Russian, I tried to explain that the water was not coming from my flat but was cascading through it. Eventually, the water rained through two more floors until it reached the street.

On consular business, George was freezing in Murmansk so he could not help, but after my frantic phone call two Consulate people hurriedly arrived and began helping me to move my two years' supply of paper goods to the opposite side of the apartment, away from where the water continued to pour down. For some reason the kitchen stayed dry so it was still functional, but for the next six weeks our 12-year old son slept in the living room.

The insulation in the old building was made of sand, and before the walls could be re-plastered and painted it was necessary to wait until they dried out. Being naturally paranoid—after all we were in Russia—we became suspicious of the metal objects that were emerging through the peeling plaster. Finally the walls had dried enough so that repair work could begin.

It seemed like forever, but for a week I struggled to attempt a normal routine as women dressed in dirty coveralls brought buckets of tinted whitewash

through the front door. Then one day as I was on the telephone I looked down the hall to see that the women, who had not even begun to work, were heading out the door carrying the buckets. When it dawned on me what they were doing my rapidly developing Russian assertiveness came to the fore, and in a tone that could be understood in any language I shouted, "You bring that blankety blank paint back in here!" The person listening on the other end of the telephone probably heard my cleaning lady's gentle admonition, "Eveliinin!"

While we waited for the apartment to dry out and be repainted it was impossible to do any entertaining, which I didn't mind in the least. But for weeks afterwards, when the family was at work and school, I sat in the Consulate's USIS library trying to get away from the dampness. My hair was completely frizzled the day a man whose name I don't remember listened to my tale of woe and consoled me, saying: "Ah well, just think of this as part of your Russian experience!"



Resilience, by Sandra Haspl

The Last Thing She Said

by George Faunce

Doris died several hours after she met me.

In the short time we were together, she told me a personal story that one wouldn't normally share with a total stranger. But I think she knew intuitively that I might be the last person she would have a chance to really talk to, given the seriousness of her condition. Why else would she treat me with a directness and intimacy that I had not earned?

Doris was in her eighties and very sick, requiring constant medical attention. Just recently they had given the nod for her to receive hospice care, the last of the dances. I had that same week finished training to be a hospice caregiver and, as fate would have it, Doris was to be my first assignment.

We sat side by side in her room, looking out a picture window. It was early spring and everything outside was so tentative, so shimmering. She spoke in a soft, warm voice, almost a hush, as though we were sharing a secret. Occasionally she would glance sideways at me, shyly, and give a wry smile. It made me feel as though I had known her for years, or should have.

Her story took place in the 1930s, with the country devastated by the Great Depression, and her family living in Camden City, New Jersey, struggling to get by. Once a month, however, her parents would let Doris, then fourteen, take her younger brother to a movie theatre in Camden called The Liberty to see the Saturday matinee—a special treat for both of them.

On this particular Saturday, however, the ticket lady stopped Doris before she could go in and said, "That will be another ten cents, young lady."

"But I gave you thirty cents, ma'am."

"That's fifteen for the little one there, but you no longer qualify for child's rates. Look at you! You're too big. You're an adult now. Another ten cents, please, if you want to go in."

Not having even a penny more, Doris got permission to seat her nine-year-old brother in the movie theatre, told him not to move until she got back, then did a mad dash for home, hoping she wouldn't miss too much of the feature. On the way, to save time, she summoned up her courage to take a short cut through the cemetery—something she had never dared to do before.

“I ran right past the grave site of Walt Whitman!” she said to me, smiling impishly. “I had been told in school he was buried there, but it was such a shock to actually see his name carved in the stone. Right there before me.”

Breathlessly, Doris reached her row house and found her parents sitting there on the porch, very surprised to see her.

“Honey, what’s wrong?!” her mother gasped.

“I’m too big. I’ve grown too big, Mama!” Doris answered. “The lady said I’m an adult now. I need ten cents more to get in.”

Doris’s whole posture changed as she was telling me this. She stared at her hands for a long moment, rubbing them slowly together, remembering that day.

“Mama started to cry. She just bent over and started sobbing, rocking back and forth, and I had never seen her do anything like that before. I looked to Daddy, but he glanced away. They didn’t have another dime. Not a dime. They had been saving up all they could each month just to send us to one matinee, so we would have something special to look forward to. And they had nothing left. It must have broken their pride to have to tell me that.

“Don’t worry, Mama,’ I said. ‘I know what to do.’ And I ran back to the movie house and waited outside on the street corner until the show was over. Then I was allowed to go back in and get my brother and take him home.”

The ticket lady, it appears, had been like a fortuneteller. Instead of a crystal ball, she sat inside a ‘crystal booth,’ dispensing people’s futures with each ticket. “You’re an adult now,” she had uttered, “You’re an adult now.” And that very afternoon marked a turning point in Doris’s life.

Within three months after watching her mother cry, Doris dropped out of school and got a job to help lessen the financial burden on her family. She was put to work as a live-in maid for a wealthy lawyer’s family in nearby Haddonfield. There she had her own room, did all of the cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing and canning. She was given every Thursday and every other Sunday off.

Her first week on the job, the mistress of the house, who had just delivered her second child, came down with the mumps. So Doris was the only one well enough who could touch the baby. Immediately she became the caregiver of the entire household, handling the newborn babe and the five-year-old sister, as well as their terribly sick mother, twenty-four hours a day. Doris became beloved of this family and stayed with them for many years.

And on every Thursday, her day off, she would always go to the movies...

This is what Doris told me that one and only time we met. Within hours after I left she slipped into a coma and died. I didn’t think it was right that she should slip away completely, however. I wanted to be able to tell somebody—I guess to tell you—the story she had shared with me.

Watching a Norwegian Church on CNN after the Killings

by Norman Leer

The choir women are crying
while they sing. I am almost
crying while I watch them:
the pointed window arches, robes and candles,
the endless four-line hymns,
necessary and helpless, like holding
your ears after an explosion.
It is all as redundant
as the mass killings on Friday, perhaps
all we know how to do. The killer
was a Christian fundamentalist
who hated Muslims; we are all
in our religions forgiving and arrogant.
I do not know the early pain
beneath his vain beliefs. Now
the carnage done and inundating us
again, connecting us in ways
too painful to recognize, I want
to remember to imagine
what we cannot know, the pain
of both killer and killed,
in order to be neither,
to find new words for what I cannot name;
forgetting is another way of dying.



Beekeeper, by Susan Hoffman

Dad and Darwin

By April Hoffman

Entering Dr. Spooner's basement office with Dad, I stared at the rows of large glass jars crowding against each other atop the shelves. In each jar, a long dead specimen floated in formaldehyde. In one, a giant mud puppy, replete with frilly gills and stubby, gelatinous toes, rubbed against the rounded glass. But at four years old, I was most taken with the human baby. After decades of death, this newborn had turned putty colored. A wisp of something opaque now swirled around his umbilical cord. Each time I saw him, I longed to stare forever into his filmy eyes. They seemed to hold the answer to a mystery I couldn't yet fathom, but already understood was profound. In comparison to Dr. Spooner's collection of oddities, Dad's smaller jars of pickled reptiles and amphibians seemed boring.

Dad and I had met the year before. When he returned home from WWII, I was three, and from that moment on he viewed me as a rival for Mom's affection and attention. When Mom was near, he ignored me, but when she was away, he tormented me, then shook his fist in my face, threatening to hurt me if I told on him.

One of my first memories is of sitting on his lap and combing his hair with the small black comb he kept in his shirt pocket. As the comb plowed tiny furrows in his pomaded hair, I braced myself for the moment he would knock me off. I remember feeling surprised when he didn't. Several days later I asked to comb his hair again. He said, "No." I don't remember sitting on his lap after that. Not surprisingly, I spent years humiliating myself in failed attempts to win his approval.

Strangely, though, when Dad decided to teach me something, he became patient and encouraging. Although I knew never to let down my guard, I enjoyed the times he patiently taught me how to tell time, the monetary value of his pocket change and the stupidity of religion. One of my earliest memories of him was his teaching me how to light matches, while carefully explaining how dangerous they were.

To me, Dad was scary and all-powerful, but when we visited Dr. Spooner's office, he became awestruck. Dr. Spooner was one of Dad's professors. A petite old gentleman with a shock of white hair, he wore ties to work and always called my Dad, "Philip," instead of "Phil," the way other people did. His Harvard PhD earned him reverence at tiny Eastern Illinois State Teacher's College.

Dad seldom took me with him to Dr. Spooner's, but when he did, he invariably showed me two items. One was a long, vertical chart of a tree. Branches stuck out all up and down its trunk. Dad reverentially explained that this was Darwin's "Tree of Life." It showed the different species of animals and when each first appeared on Earth. At the bottom, intertwined with the roots, were the one-celled animals. At the top, in the tree's crown, were the words, *Homo sapiens*. That was us. Dad said that *Homo sapiens* meant wise man.

The second item that Dad always explained to me was a framed cartoon of a monkey holding a human skull. In the drawing, the monkey scratched his head as he pondered it. Dad told me the word on the skull read, "Darwin," and that this illustration was meant as a joke.

Even at four this blasphemy shocked me. I knew already that Darwin was no joke. When Dad mentioned him, his voice grew husky and I often listened as he and other zoology students discussed evolutionary theories late into the night. I knew early on that Darwin's Theory of Random Selection trumped LaMark's Theory of Acquired Characteristics. But though Darwin's ghost filled our house, I never considered him godlike.

Gods were not welcome in our house. Dad preached that religion was for weak people who needed a crutch, not for rationalists like us. When well-meaning relatives gave me children's Bibles as gifts, he would smirk at me, letting me know he'd consider me a fool to buy into these primitive beliefs. It took me years to realize that Dad's dogmatic atheism wasn't so different from the religious zealotry he disdained.

This realization occurred after I was an adult and Dad had become a moody, depressed alcoholic. As I grew up, Dad liked me less and less. He

repeatedly referred to my emerging personality as "obnoxious," and he abhorred the liberal value system I embraced as an adult. My reaction was to continue making frantic efforts to please him.

On a visit home in my thirties, knowing full well he had no desire for my company, I again mustered my courage and joined him in the den after dinner. I always hoped that this might be the time he would finally see me as acceptable. As Dad stared into the whiskey glass seemingly glued into his one hand, and twirled his cigarette between the fingers of his other, I pondered what topic might interest him and lead to a meaningful conversation. I, brightly and stupidly, mentioned that I'd heard that some contemporary scientists were questioning Darwin's theories.

Dad's reaction nearly knocked me backward off my chair. Spinning around, gripping his glass so tightly that whiskey splashed out, he furiously sputtered, "Those God damned iconoclasts!" Then, coughing violently, both from outrage and the chain smoking that would soon kill him, he stomped from the room, leaving me stunned.

When my breath returned, the darkening room seemed to fill with my sadness. I'd blown it again. No matter how hard I tried, Dad despised me and every desperate attempt I made to win him over caused him to dislike me more.

But suddenly I remembered Dr. Spooner's office, and slowly, I began to see Dad in a new light. It was his angry use of the word, "iconoclast" that tipped me off. Why would an atheist use "iconoclast" as an epithet? Wasn't HE supposed to be the iconoclast?

Suddenly, a "Let there be light" moment shone through the smoke-clouded window. Shimmering above me in the air in big block letters, I saw the TRUTH. My Dad wasn't such a big atheist.

My Dad had a god. His god was Darwin. And he had a Bible. His Bible was *On the Origin of Life*. Dad even had a Torah, that “Tree of Life” chart!

When this revelation occurred, I felt the way a balloon might as the air slowly escapes—increasingly relaxed. Then I felt amused. Now that was

an emotion I had never felt in conjunction with Dad. Suddenly I almost laughed out loud.

Could it be that the Emperor had no clothes? I had considered this at various times before, but was always too terrified of Dad to sustain the belief. Now I wondered again, and the possibility made my next encounters with him just a teeny bit easier.



Tale Bone, by April Hoffman

An Old Fish Story

by Ken Richardson

Of course I've met a dinosaur,
eons ago we shared Earth's scene;
but they don't live here anymore
in water, the sky, or in between.

They've passed from view
these ancient greats,
to be compressed
in fossil states.

Yet, I'll keep both eyes peeled
just in case
they return and are revealed
to the Human Race.

Highly improbable,
this I grant!
But, possible?
winks the coelacanth.

And with a swish this fish appears
from the depths of 70 million years.

Chebeague Island

by Judith Zukerman

The house hums with a tingle,
a solitary bell from India rings with the chimes
of the grandfather clock on the hour
with stories aged in wooden beams
on a Maine island where year rounders wave to everyone.

Voices laugh from the upstairs bedroom
over early morning tea and heart medicine
while the rare sound of ten cars outside
announces the 6:40 ferry,
early morning rush hour on Chebeague Island.

Contributors

Bert Adams is a professor emeritus who joined the UW Madison sociology faculty in 1965, and has taught 20,000 students. He has been president of the National Council on Family Relations and published textbooks on family and social theory. Adams has taught and traveled in Uganda and Kenya frequently since 1970.

Marvin T. Beatty is pleased that *The Agora* offers him the opportunity to share things he learned while volunteering for the Center for the Study of Our First Americans in the American Northwest. That experience gave him new understandings of our ancestors and of the natural forces which shaped that landscape.

David Berger writes a poem once in awhile. “It is so satisfying when a poem works! Barbara, Frank, Kim and Jane help me know when one is working.”

Edna Canfield took early retirement from Marquette University and moved to Sun Prairie and then to Madison. “I wanted to live in an area that provided intellectual and cultural opportunities (plus, my daughter’s family lived here). When I found Madison Symphony Orchestra, American Players Theatre and PLATO, I knew I had made a wise move.”

George Faunce is, according to recent polls, now between 82% and 87% Badger, after moving to the beautiful state of Wisconsin in 2008. “One more hearty winter and the transformation should be complete.”

Kathy DiGiuseppe Gomes was born in Wisconsin but lived most of her adult life in New York. “Returning to my home state in 2008 stirred many early memories.” A teacher of memoir writing for some 20 years, “The Bracelet” is her first published work.

Sandra Haspl studied art at UW-Madison, Layton Art School in Milwaukee and Valparaiso University. She became interested in porcelain painting because of its luminosity. Her work depicts people and designs in nature. Sandra’s work is in collections in UW hospitals, the university, and offices and homes throughout the Midwest.

April Hoffman is a retired librarian who enjoys socializing with friends and gardening. Last June, she and her husband, John, visited gardens in England and Wales with the Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society. She also belongs to a book club devoted to studying historical children’s literature.

John Hoffman has taken many photography workshops, both in the U.S. and abroad. His photos have appeared in a variety of publications and exhibits. Although his early work featured figurative photography, he now enjoys creating humorous pictures. One of these appeared on an *Isthmus* cover last year.

Susan Hoffman is a retired reading specialist, who studies drawing with Robert Schultz. Her work in acrylics has ranged from abstracts to realistic portraits. “‘Beekeeper’ is somewhat autobiographical. I have a strong reaction to bee stings but am hosting hives at my Madison home.”

David Hyson has been writing from time to time since the 1940s. He has had one poem and one digest published. He played saxophone in dance bands during the 40s and 50s and worked as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. “I miss playing tennis, but do enjoy dialogues with medical specialists.”

Lorna Kniaz says, “My mother was a poet. Words have been in the books I read, the feelings I exchange with friends and family, and the thoughts that live within me. Sometimes they run away and will not stay in line but I always enjoy the ride.”

Grethe Brix-J. Leer is a native of Denmark, who has exhibited her visual art both in Denmark and America. She has been writing memoirs and journals for most of her life. In Chicago, she taught memoir writing and art to older adults. She teaches a women’s writing course for PLATO.

Norman Leer is a professor emeritus of English at Roosevelt University in Chicago. He has published three books of poetry, a critical study of Ford Madox Ford and articles and poems in several journals. In 1990, he received the Illinois Significant Poet’s Award from Illinois Poet Laureate, Gwendolyn Brooks.

David Lewke served two years active duty in the U.S. Army during Viet Nam. After his service, he began a 38-year career with Oscar Mayer, working in several states before joining the corporate office in Madison. In retirement he enjoys PLATO, world travel, fishing at his cottage and visiting children and grandchildren.

Ellen Maurer retired from UW-Madison as a Senior University Relations Specialist in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. She leads PLATO’s morning reminiscence writing group. She and her husband, Ken Pippert, enjoy a little lake cottage in northern Wisconsin where they canoe, hike, bike and geocache.

Ginnie McCarthy describes her work as “an unplanned process that begins when the first brush stroke is applied to the canvas. I love the improvisation and problem solving involved in completing a painting.” Her past experiences include teaching art, operating retail stores and selling real estate. “I’d rather be painting.”

Gail McCoy is a former first grade teacher who now spends her time creating collages and watercolor paintings. She is a board member of Wisconsin Regional Artists Association, a member of Wisconsin Visual Artists and the National Collage Society. Her work may be seen at Grace Chosy Gallery in Madison, as well as in galleries in Mineral Point and Milwaukee.

Claudia Melrose spent her professional adult life choreographing dances by “shaping dynamic images in space and time.” Since retirement, she has returned to playing piano and writing, where she can move words around the page and continue to shape rhythms and images. “Playing with sounds and word meanings is just as satisfying and often easier; words don’t get tired!”

Julie Pretell is a former academic in the field of hematopathology and immunology. After retirement she joined PLATO and was happy to refocus her writing from grant applications to memoirs. She recently graduated with honors from a multimedia program at Madison College where she expanded her artistic endeavors to include audio and visual production, digital photography, graphic design and animation.

Rita Hack Rausch taught high school in Port Orchard, Washington. After earning her master’s degree, she was a dietician at Purdue University and, later, was the UW Agricultural Extension Agent in Marinette and Jefferson counties. “My MSSW allowed me to combine social work counseling, consumer science, business and law. In addition to having my own business, Family Budgets, Inc., I wrote a book on money management.” Ms. Rausch has five children.

Ken Richardson loved art in elementary and junior high school, drifted into writing in high school and college and earned a living by writing in a business environment. “Art and writing remain my constant companions (after Julie, my wife) wherever I live, whenever I travel.”

Evelyn Rueckert entered the U.S. State Department’s Foreign Service in 1954 as a code clerk and secretary in Istanbul, Bonn and Washington. After her marriage, she accompanied her husband to postings in Basel, Edinburgh, Stuttgart, Prague, Leningrad and Antwerp.

Wil Selbrede has been writing short stories, memoirs, a little poetry and some “opinionated essays” since his retirement in 1987. “Along the way I graduated from simple memoirs through topical essays, some timid, unpublished poetry and hit my stride when I discovered the joys of short fiction. I’m still writing!”

Sparrow Senty has enjoyed writing short stories and poetry since high school. She became a mid-westerner when she married her husband, Al, sixty-five years ago. Together, they have shared a love for traveling, wilderness canoeing, reading and, most recently, the woodland garden that surrounds their retirement home.

Daryl Sherman was educated in one-room schools. “I was allowed the run of the school library, where I read literally everything. A biologist, I favor literature and history for leisure reading. I have been a published photographer for a half century. I have taught biology, photography and ESL English at junior college and university levels.”

Frank Springer was born in Elmwood, Wisconsin in 1923 and graduated from UW-Madison School of Medicine in 1946. After internship and a tour of duty in the Navy, “I returned to Elmwood in 1949 to visit my parents for a few days. Why I accidentally spent the next 60 years practicing medicine in that tiny hamlet ‘where nothing ever happens’ is another story.”

Joanne Lee Storlie is “an indefatigable seeker of feelings, emotions and situations to write about, which makes for a varied, often interesting, but not always comfortable life—which is my primary and only teacher in the art of writing. I am also the mother of four, grandmother of six and still kicking while ‘gettin’ up there.”

Myrna Williamson grew up in Chicago and San Antonio, then lived in the Poynette area with her husband and two small children. She was a chemist at Argonne National Laboratory, a science librarian with Dow Chemical, then an archivist for the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison. Now retired, she started writing poetry late in life. “I love the use and play of words and phrases and the ability to express my ideas, feelings, thoughts and problems in concise form.”

Judith Zukerman is the author of *Amsterdam Days, a journey through poetry*. She is a Chicago native and long-time Madison resident. Her recent work appears in *Drash Northwest Mosaic 2012*, *Grey Sparrow, Fall 2011*, and Wisconsin Poets Calendars 2012 and 2013. She is a Mind’s Eye Radio Collective participant, as well as a poet in schools resident.

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Marvin T. Beatty

Edna Canfield

David Hyson

Ken Richardson

Sparrow Senty

Joanne Lee Storlie

NONFICTION

George Faunce

Kathy DiGiuseppe
Gomes

April Hoffman

Grethe Brix-J. Leer

Norman Leer

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