



Reflections

A Collection of Writing and Poetry

by Oregon's Elders

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*Reflections contains original writings submitted to LeadingAge Oregon
by residents of member communities.*

These authors have vastly varying backgrounds and experiences.

*Some have advanced college degrees, while others have limited
formal education. Some have had works published in national
publications. For others, this represents a “first time” experience.*

*All are published here in their entirety, as originally
submitted by the author.*

“No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader.

No surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader..

Robert Frost

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Judges' Choice

Aftermath, Gulf Coast

Robin Gault, Holladay Park Plaza



All night we hid from the fury, the screaming
wind clawing the branches, tearing down the leaves
while the waves' fists pounded
on the sand, shattering the crockery
of empty cockle shells and sand dollars.

This morning a tentative peace
under empty skies, the storm past,
the waves still white-edged, gray
with last night's rage but calming now,
smoothing the salt-soaked edges of the beach.

And in the midst of all the broken fragments
a delicate gleam, silver rounds like soap bubbles,
jingle shells translucent as new moons,
fragile enough to snap between your fingers
but whole and shining in the morning light.

Judges' Choice

Two Hearts

Irene Ebel Ertell, Mary's Woods at Marylhurst



“Come on, old woman. We got to get home ‘fore dark.” Walter, tall, gaunt, stepped from the front door of the shop and headed for his pickup truck parked across the street. He wore blue overalls and a green and white checked shirt, both clean and faded from many washings. A broad-brimmed straw hat, sweat-stained on the band, covered a shock of white hair.

The small, slender woman to whom he’d spoken gathered her packages from the counter and placed them in a woven basket. She tucked a tendril of brown hair that had escaped the bun on the nape of her neck.

“Thank you, Jenny. Good to see you, Ora Mae.” She smiled and hurried to catch up with her husband.

“That old codger,” said the owner of Jenny’s Fabric and Notions.

“I’ve never seen that man smile,” said Ora Mae Miller. “I’ve always wondered what kind of life she has out there with him on that farm. After William and James went into the Navy, you’d have thought he’d cut back some. My Marvin says he hires a few seasonal workers, but he and Susan do the rest.”

“She’s still a pretty thing. Poor Susan.” Jenny and Ora Mae shook their heads.

Walter turned the truck onto the dirt lane that led to their home. On either side were rows of tall cornstalks almost ready for harvesting. Three large dogs of varied breed and color greeted them and ran beside the truck. Surrounded by a low white picket fence containing a profusion of bright flowers and two oak trees was their white frame house.

Walter drove around to the back and unloaded boxes and paper bags. Susan took her basket from the front seat and went through the kitchen into the bedroom. She paused at a freestanding quilters frame holding royal blue satin squares joined with narrow red strips.

The white middle square held two gold stars. She brushed away the tears that always came. “I’ll have you finished soon.” She put the basket underneath the table and hurried from the room.

In the kitchen, Susan put away grocery items in the pantry and refrigerator. At that end of the large room were polished maple cabinets, up-to-date appliances and a large butcher block in the center. A window behind the sink looked out at the barn and a chicken pen with several coops. At the other end of the room, a large bay window looked out to cultivated fields that rolled away to a dense woodland. Two recliner loungers afforded a continuing, changing view. They ate at a table in the center of the room. Walter had crafted the kitchen cabinets as well as shelves that reached the ceiling, filled with books, National Geographic, family pictures and mementos.

When Walter came in after seeing to the stock, Susan was putting dinner on the table. They folded their hands and bowed their heads in a moment of silence. The knives and forks clinked occasionally, but quietness wrapped them in a cocoon of intimacy and familiarity with no need to speak. When they finished, Susan reached for Walter’s empty plate. He brushed her wrist with his fingers. She touched his forehead with her lips.

A bit later, the dishwasher hummed as the two of them sat comfortably looking out the window. The sun had already gone down over the distant hills, leaving swishes of purple, yellow and orange across the sky. The fields changed into varied shades of green.

“You know this day, don’t you?” Walter said.

“Yes. I’ve remembered them. Like we do every day.”

“Our boys are at rest. Too soon.”

“I miss them so.” Susan brushed a tear from her cheek.

“We always will.” Walter reached for her hand.

They read for a while, then turned out the lights. In the bedroom, they stood at the table and looked at the quilt.

“It’s almost finished,” Susan said. Walter pulled her gently toward him and held her for a long moment. Susan settled her head on his chest.

Later when Walter entered their bedroom, Susan was sitting on the side of their bed wearing a granny gown. Her feet didn't touch the floor. He knelt in front of his wife and began to massage her feet, ankles and lower legs with a soothing cream. He felt the tightness give in and knew the pain would go away, for a while.

Walter got into bed and switched off the lamp. He pulled up his pajama top and lay on his stomach. Susan squeezed some of the cream onto the muscles in her husband's back. She used pressure in a smooth up and down stroke across his shoulders and torso. She felt him relax and knew to stop.

Susan turned onto her right side away from him. Walter turned toward her, holding his wife as he had all the many years.

“Goodnight, old woman.”

“Goodnight, old man.”

At Twilight

Gerard A. Lindgren, Terwilliger Plaza



When age has come, and youth is gone,
And all our friends and loves have passed,
Yes, family too, lost one by one—
Their requiems we've sung, at last.

Where art thou, lads?
Where went thee, lass?
Where be our kin and parents too?
Where went my prime?
Where fled all joys?
Why did tomorrows fade away?

But while I weep and shed my tears,
I will not cradle all my fears,
But looking back one last time, say
Goodbye past nights, hello new day!

Arap Segem

Mildred Gackle, Homewoods on the Willamette



Ernie looked back and forth at Betty and me, his face full of concern. “I have just admitted a patient who needs blood transfusions and surgery ASAP. We need to look for donors right away.”

Ernie, our doctor, had been in Kenya only a few months. We had done a few surgeries, but never any transfusions.

He had just admitted an elderly man named Arap Segem who, according to his history, had been very sick at home for several weeks. He seemed to be recovering but suddenly started bleeding rectally.

In his equipment from the States, Ernie had bottles and tubing for four transfusions. We would have to pray that four transfusions would be enough for Arap Segem. Our first order of business was to find donors. Ernie ruled out letting any of the medical staff (American or African) donate because we were all being exposed to many diseases every day.

Next we looked at the rest of the missionaries. That was easy. Each one knew his or her blood type already and we didn’t need to “type” it to find out if it was useable. One missionary, Gene Lewton, was a universal donor. He would give the first unit of blood.

Ernie checked the gardener who cared for the hospital grounds. He had the right type but wasn’t sure he wanted anything to do with giving his blood to someone else. So I told him he could have the rest of the day off if he gave us some blood, and he was happy and agreed to do it.

About that time I got a call from Bomet, the Indian Village 5 miles down the road. Someone there wanted to see the doctor, but it was not an emergency. So I told the caller what was going on and asked the patient to come the next morning.

Ernie was still checking anyone who was healthy and seemed interested in donating, but he was having little luck finding people with the right type of blood when a big flatbed

truck with sideboards pulled in. Standing on the bed of that truck were 20 or 30 Indians from Bomet, mostly men, but a few women. They started unloading immediately.

Didn't I explain they were to come tomorrow? I thought as I went out to meet them. As the first group came closer, I said a bit reproachfully, "Didn't we agree that you would come tomorrow morning?"

"No, no," one of the men said. "We have come to help."

My face must have registered a lack of comprehension because he quickly added, "With the blood – we can help?..."

He was watching me closely to see if I would accept their offer. And it seemed important to them that they be allowed to help.

"Oh," I said, "OK. Let me go tell the doctor."

Ernie and the lab technician quickly drew blood and typed it, and before long they had two more donors!

As I think back on this incident, I marvel that all three cultures (European, Asian and African) came together to help one man whom none of us had ever met before.

Arap Segem had come from near the border of Kipsigis territory – probably 20 or 30 miles from Tenwek – and probably had come by ox-sled or some similar form of transportation. He was accompanied by three wives who were quiet and stayed close together had a good bond and an interdependence that supported and encouraged each other. None of the four seemed frightened of the surgery.

Ernie's pre-surgery diagnosis was typhoid fever with resulting intestinal lesions (called Peyer's Patches) that were bleeding and would not stop bleeding on their own. Instead, they were likely to perforate the intestinal wall.

I have little recollection of our preparation for that surgery. I suppose Ernie drew the blood ahead of time and then refrigerated it. We probably sterilized the instruments in Ernie's wives pressure cooker.

Our "surgery" building was small (10 feet x 10 feet) and had no running water. We did have electricity. We kept the door and windows shut at all times except when we needed to go through it.

The windows were high and on two sides of the room only. Everybody at the hospital knew when we were doing a surgery, and in a short time other patients or family members had placed boxes or blocks of wood below the surgery windows, and people were standing on them so they could watch what we were doing inside. This was a good thing because the more the Africans understood what Ernie was doing, the faster they would trust him.

We had no plumbing at the hospital and so “scrubbing” before surgery was a problem. We “scrubbed” in boiled water in a granite basin that also had been boiled, using a stiff-bristled sterilized brush and a new bar of soap. After scrubbing for the prescribed number of minutes, one of the nurses’ aides poured cooled boiled water over our hands and arms, and we dried them with a sterilized towel. We scrubbed in a room next to the surgery, but we had to go outside and walk a few steps to go into the surgery room. Nurses’ aides were there to open and close the doors because we could not touch anything.

Betty and I were the only nurses available so one of us gave the anesthetic under Ernie’s watchful eye, and the other was the instrument nurse. Almost from the beginning Ernie included one of the African nurses’ aides in that first surgical team. Ernie’s habit was to pray with each patient before surgery. He briefly explained the plan of salvation, asked if the person wanted accept Jesus as Savior right then, and followed with a short prayer for health and recovery for the patient and for wisdom and guidance for us. Often he ended his prayer with the phrase “and may Christ have the pre-eminence.”

We started the first unit of blood before we started the surgery. Arap Segem’s blood pressure remained good all during the surgery, and by mid-afternoon we returned him to the big ward and to the care of his wives. He had an IV going, and his wives had been instructed to give him nothing to eat or drink until the doctor said it was all right.

He made a good recovery and in a few days was off the IV and up and around.

Every week day, we had a service in the chapel. Usually one of the local African pastors spoke, and we expected all ambulatory patients to attend. Arap Segem and his wives attended, and one day he stayed after the service, prayed with the pastor and accepted Jesus as his Savior. He told his wives they now were going to be a Christian family.

When Arap Segem was strong enough, he was discharged, and the grateful family returned home.

About three weeks later, Arap Segem returned to Tenwek; he was bleeding again. Unfortunately, Ernie and I were in Nairobi attending the annual medical meetings for Kenya. Betty offered to take Arap Segem and his wives to the government hospital in Kericho, but he refused, saying, “Tenwek has become my home, I will die at Tenwek.”

The Kipsigis believe evil spirits are all around and come at the time of a death and take that person away. But sometimes the evil spirits take the wrong person, so the Kipsigis have experienced much fear at the time of a death. Normally Kipsigis women usually left the scene of a death, running and screaming at the top of their lungs.

When Betty heard that Arap Segem had died, she went up to the hospital to see if she could be of any help. As she walked into the room, she saw the three wives standing around the bed, praying.

Betty was impressed with the wives response; so was I when she told me about it. I’ve always been intrigued by the changes in people’s lives after they accept Jesus as Savior, and this was an unusual example. These women were believers because their husband made the decision and told them they were part of it. They accepted that, and the Lord gave them faith and understanding, and in only three weeks’ time their behavior was changed. They could face widowhood unafraid and look to the Lord for guidance in the days ahead.

I believe that if I had not already accepted Jesus as my Savior years earlier, I would have done it then because this was such a striking change in three lives all at once.

Autumn in Sullivan's Gulch

Betsy Cameron, Holladay Park Plaza



I look out my window
at laughter!
It's the same amazing view,
looking east
from the 13th floor,
that I never
dreamt to see,
with faint Mt. Hood,
pale wrapped
against paler sky,
a Lego toy hospital
on the horizon,
and a naked red crane,
pointing to it,

But, this October day,
I see laughter
under floating birds,
as these hometown trees
begin undressing.

Those slender yellow skirts
have fluttered down,
but red tipped maples
are shyly quivering ,
and the orange-red

Japanese maples
just stand
and glow, as if
hands on their hips,
they laughingly refuse
to change!

The Big Red Dog

Loretta Hoagland, Mary's Woods at Marylhurst



Mom and a friend were on their way to church for a mid-week luncheon with the ladies, always a treat. It was a hot day and in those days before the luxury of air conditioning, they rolled down all the windows to catch a breeze.

At the church they decided to leave the windows open. After the luncheon they walked from the church and stopped cold. In the back seat of the car was a big red dog. In fact a monstrously huge red dog.

They approached the car warily, opened the door and Mom said in a firm voice "Out you go!" The dog just looked at them, content to be where he was. Mother reached for his collar to pull him out. His hackles went up and he gave a nerve shattering growl. Mom jumped back. Soon other women leaving the luncheon noticed the problem. Some tried their luck with the same result.

Finally mother said to her friend, "Let's drive to my house and I'll find some meat. That'll get him out." When she arrived home and went into the kitchen she realized all the meat in the house was in the freezer. Never mind. Perhaps the dog would smell the meat inside the ice. She unwrapped a solid block of hamburger. The dog yawned in her face.

Time for Plan Two. Mother drove up and down the streets of town. Every time she saw someone, she would stop and ask if the person recognized the dog. No luck with that plan, but everyone was eager to try to get the dog out of the car. Again raised hackles and growls. It was a mean looking dog and nobody wanted to tackle it.

Finally a patrol car passed by and the policeman, seeing a large crowd, thought there might be an accident. When he had the situation explained to him, he said, "Oh, for hell's sakes," opened the car door and said "Get out." And to everyone's amazement the dog hopped out. Everyone clapped.

The policeman was pleased to be of help “You just have to know how to treat a dog.” He turned around to return to his patrol car. Unfortunately his windows were down. And in the back seat was the big red dog. The policeman opened the car door and demanded the dog leave. Raised hackles and growls.

The last the people saw of the policeman was him driving away in his patrol car with the silhouette of a very large red dog in the back seat.

Big Trouble

Eva Christian, Parkview Christian Retirement Community



There seems to be a problem
When people reach old age.
Each year we march along
And add a brand new page
Of changes in our bodies,
Of aches and pains galore,
But the biggest problem that we face---
Weight we've ne'er had before.

When I moved into Parkview,
I weighed a trim one thirty-four,
But bit by bit I've added
Twenty-some pounds more.
Desserts---I've said 'Goodbye' to.
Oh, I've missed those yummy pies,
But I've comforted myself
By thinking I am wise.

Still I haven't lost a pound,
I've studied diets, tried each one,
No diet worked for me.
None, none, none, none!
I suppose I'll have to be content,
As slim and trim, I'll never look,
As described in every book

I'd given up my lovely dreams
I went back to eating pie.
Depression hovered over me
I couldn't help but cry.
BUT THEN I passed a window
In the Beauty Parlor place
And stopped to read a warning,
My heart began to race.

DON'T SHAMPOO IN THE SHOWER

The warning sign read.
JUST READ YOUR SHAMPOO
BOTTLE

Guess what my bottle said!
It will give you EXTRA BODY.
Your VOLUME will INCREASE.
Shampooing in the shower
Immediately must cease!

It seems the problem happens
When we rinse the shampoo out.
It rushes down our body
Leaves behind the FAT, no doubt.
But then I read on further
Research has helped us out.
There's a way to take off fat.
I gave a lusty shout.

Folks, there is an answer –
Just buy dishwasher DAWN
The bottle says it will dissolve
The fat that's sticking on.

Now if you don't believe me,
Go check those bottles out.
I'm sure you'll understand then
What this is all about.

Now if you try to call me,
And I don't answer you,
It's because I'm in the shower
Washing off a pound or two.

Bombs Away

Bob Robinson, Mary's Woods at Marylhurst



The afternoon was balmy on August 30, 1985, in Portland's Sellwood District. The pleasant weather made the setting perfect for a wedding in the quaint Oaks Pioneer Church. Seating was limited to approximately 75 so this was to be a small wedding, just what my daughter Nanette wanted as she would become the wife of Lee Hammerschmidt.

Anyway, there I was in my rented tuxedo with a white jacket, proud and ready to escort Nanette down the aisle. Because the church was so small, we had to wait on the front porch for the wedding march to begin. I sighed in relief that all of the preparations were finished. The rest would be a piece of cake, or so I thought. A message was sent out to us that the march would begin in about three minutes.

"Just relax and enjoy," I told my daughter moments before a most disturbing thing happened. A seagull from on high unloaded and I felt a wet splat on the right side of my forehead. I reached up and learned the worst _ my forehead and some of my hair were covered with seagull poop which was running down to my right ear.

Panic doesn't begin to describe my feelings at that moment. I had to clean up in a hurry and there was no restroom with running water in the church. At least the poop hadn't gotten onto my jacket. "What can I do?" I said to Nanette. She was too stunned to speak _ or laugh.

Then I heard a voice from across the street. A man sitting on his front porch had seen what had happened and he was waving to me. "Come on over here and clean up," he shouted.

I ran as fast as I could to the man's house and he directed me to a bathroom and handed me a washcloth. As quickly as I could, I washed away the mess, dried myself with a hand towel and combed my hair back into place.

As I raced out of the house and back towards the church, I offered heartfelt thanks to my emergency host. He was grinning from ear to ear. I understood. The scene had to be hilarious to an outsider.

Halfway back to the church, I heard the soft tones of the wedding march. I saw Nanette waiting and still looking to be in shock.

“Here, take my arm and let’s go,” I said.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“No, but I’ll be fine as soon as I get you to the altar,” I replied.

We strode down the aisle with heads held high, smiles on our faces, and no one could have guessed the ordeal that I had gone through thanks to that seagull.

The wedding went off without a further hitch and it seemed as if everyone had a delightful time at the reception. The groom cracked up when he heard my seagull story and, of course, everyone became aware of it within a matter of minutes.

At one point, I wandered back across the street to give further thanks to the man who had saved my day. No one was home. I had a frightening thought _ “What if that man hadn’t been home earlier?”

Not surprisingly, there has been a lasting effect from the harrowing experience. I am reminded of it every time that I see a seagull in flight. I cringe and go into a high alert mode.

A Brief Encounter

Irene Etlinger, Terwilliger Plaza



I was on the streetcar coming home from a dental appointment. It was a little crowded, but there was an empty seat next to me. It appears that some people prefer to stand by one of the doors rather than to sit. At one of the downtown stops a middle-aged man carrying a large duffle bag got on. He gave me a questioning look, as though asking if it was all right to sit down next to me, I patted the seat and nodded, and he sat.

It was one of those gorgeous autumn days we had this year in September, so we talked about the beautiful weather. I mentioned that for my 95th birthday a few days ago, we had had a lovely lunch outside on my daughter's patio. My traveling companion expressed amazement at my age, congratulated me, and started to rummage in his bag. After much searching he found what he was looking for, a fully blown-up light blue balloon on a string which he presented to me with a flourish. He said it matched my blue jacket and that I should have it for my birthday.' told him that my father used to buy me a balloon whenever he took me to the park when I was a small girl. Because it sometimes got away from me high into the sky, my father would tie the string around one of my coat buttons. I was delighted with the blue balloon and asked the gentleman to fasten it to my jacket button. He did, and we had some more conversation. He may have been homeless, but I felt he had a good upbringing, a mother or grandmother who loved him and whom he had loved. His eyes were clear and blue, his clothes neat, and he called me "ma'am".

At the stop in the park blocks he got off. As the streetcar pulled away and I waved to him from the window, he drew himself up, stood at attention, and saluted.

I shall never forget that gentleman. We connected on a basic human level and shared a precious moment.

Christmas 1943

Mary Andrews, Willamette View



It was Christmas morning. My older sister, Peggy, and I sat on the steps outside our second-floor bedroom waiting to descend to the living room to see what Santa brought us. Daddy, wearing his bathrobe and slippers, his black hair disheveled above his sleepy eyes, tiptoed into the dark hallway. He grinned, walked downstairs, turned on the Christmas tree lights, and returned to us. “Wait until Mommy and Baby wake up before you go downstairs,” he said.

I quivered with anticipation.

On Christmas morning each member of my family received one gift. My seven year-old self wanted only one thing - white figure skates. Peggy and I had shared a pair of skates for two years. They were boy’s skates with brown spots visible through worn black leather and long racing blades that made turning and spinning impossible. Peggy and I took turns taking them to the park near our South Minneapolis home. Those ugly skates seemed to fit Peggy just right but were too big for me. Extra socks did not prevent my feet from wobbling or my ankles from bending inward as I struggled forward on the ice.

The Portland Avenue Park covered an entire City block. There were snowy hills for sledding on three sides, a large flat area in the middle for summer sports and a ‘warming house’ at the north end for ice skaters. Each winter I waited eagerly for the great day when men arrived with their fat hoses, connected them to the fire hydrant, and flooded the middle area until it became a huge, bumpy, skating rink. From the age of two, I had strapped dual runner skates to my boots while daddy walked beside me on the ice. At age five I had been relegated to wearing ugly, boy’s skates. I knew that I would never skate like my idol Sonja Henie, the Olympic champion, in old, black racing skates and my parents did not offer much hope. “Santa is short on skate-making elves, Mommy said that winter. “You should not get your hopes up.”

Morning light filtered through the upstairs hall window as Mommy and Baby woke up. “OK,” Daddy said, “Time to go downstairs.”

Peggy and I raced down. Five gifts were nestled under the tinsel tree. We waited for our nursing mother and baby to cuddle into a chair before opening our gifts - youngest to oldest - making the event last longer than it would have if we’d opened them at the same time. I was second in line. I knew I would try hard not to cry if there were no skates in the package that had my name on it. I tore off the Christmas wrapping, pulled the cover off the box and there they were, white and high-topped, with beautiful curved blades. I clutched the skates to my heart, and gave each of my parents a hug. Peggy, Mommy and Daddy opened their gifts and then we ate our Christmas breakfast.

Finally I was allowed to take my beautiful new skates to the park.

No one walked with me as I ran two blocks to the one-room warming house. Gray smoke rose from the chimney. Inside, long benches had been placed on three sides of the room for skaters to use when putting on their skates. Shoes and boots were stored under the benches. A blazing fire crackled in the fireplace on the fourth side. The sound of skaters clunking across the wooden floor, and out the big double doors to the snow-covered rink, filled the space.

There I was, in the early afternoon on December 25, 1943, perched on a long wooded bench in the cozy warming house. Older skaters sat next me, lacing up their skates. I thought they would notice my gorgeous Christmas gift but they did not. I unbuckled my boots and shoes, placed them under the bench and put my figure skates on. The hooks that held some of the lace-holes were not the same as those on the old boy’s skates, but I laced-up as best I could, while imagining that I would soon be twirling, gliding, and skating backwards on the ice.

That did not happen. My ankles bent, though not quite all the way to the ice. I could skate forward but not backward. Further, I was so busy admiring my skates that I bumped into other skaters and fell, many times. Falling didn’t bother me. Unlike my heroine, Sonja, who wore tights and frilly short dresses I wore snow pants, a sweater, a bulky jacket, and Mommy-knitted hat and mittens. I was well padded.

One of my falls knocked me out. When I ‘came to’ several people were standing over me, peering down, their eyes big and brows furrowed. Their faces, topped with bulky hats, formed a circle above me. I couldn’t figure out what they were looking at until they began asking me if I was OK. I heard an adult say, “I think we should call an ambulance, she may have had a concussion.” I sat up quickly and said, “I’m fine.” A young woman with blue eyes and bright red lips reached out to me. She smiled and said, “My name is Karen.” She pulled me to standing as her long blond hair fell to her shoulders beneath a bright green, tasseled, hat. “Your skates are laced too loosely,” she said. “If you tighten them it will be easier to stay upright. Come with me to the warming house, I’ll show you how to lace them properly.”

I felt dizzy but skittered to the warming house hand-in-hand with Karen. We sat on the wooden bench by the roaring fire as smoke tendrils floated to the ceiling above us. The smell of Northern Pine filled the room. My new friend removed her gloves and showed me how to lace my skates. The tightened skates felt good. We returned to the rink and stayed close as we floated around the edge of the ice. My ankles seemed sturdier and I didn’t fall. I felt like I was the most beautiful skater in the world.

Suddenly, Karen stopped skating. She looked up at a young man standing by the side of a red truck at the top of a hill. He waved to her. She hugged me, said goodbye, and without removing her skates walked up the hill, through deep snow, to the truck. She kissed the young man on the cheek before he opened the truck door. She climbed in and they drove off. I never saw her again - my very own Sonja Henie.

I skated awhile longer. My ankles ached, my toes were cold and the sun was fading in the west. A cold Minnesota wind blew swirls of snow across the rink. I picked my way across the bumpy ice to the emptying warming house, took off my skates, tied the laces together, put on my shoes and boots, hung my Christmas gift around my neck, and walked home. My family and a warm home-cooked dinner were waiting for me.

It was the happiest day of my young life.

Composing Her Further Life

Karla Klinger, Holladay Park Plaza



New selves evolve, develop as she ages,
strain to remain in harmony.
The fervent Christian child becomes
a questioning agnostic
respectful of many religions,
uncertain about truth.
Her husband-to-be is not blond and Lutheran,
but she marries him anyway
and learns about the Holocaust second hand.
He was taller and smarter, as her grandmother
advised, but his frame is shrinking now
and her eyes are wearing thin.
She was prepared to be bright and creative
but not a mother. Her children forgive
her mistakes because she always cared.

She is slightly sad
to never again help adults
fit college into their lives.
She wants to make a difference.
In her retirement community,
she composes her new life
from dinners and reading, news and exercise.
She enjoys sharing the sensual pleasure
of clay with others.
Words will always matter--finding, holding
and arranging them to explore and express
what's going on inside.

She is still a searcher, student, teacher,
an elder who loves tuna sandwiches,
who observes from the bower of
her not-sycamore tree,
awed by a complex universe,
ecstatic about burgeoning flowers.

Continuum

Evelyn Cole, Rose Villa Senior Living



Some day all that I am,
all I have been,
will be only a memory
for my children.
Suddenly, for no reason
a son will think of me
as he drives his car to work,
my daughter will stop a moment
remembering something I have said.
Maybe he will frown –
was it the time I denied him?
Maybe he will smile
at the silly things I did,
she may feel the tears
for we were close,
yet still protest our similarities.
There will be days
when they don't remember,
busy as they are,
yet there will be other days
they will wonder why
they think of me so often.
There are times I wonder
if they will forgive me,
resolve their youthful angers.
My own memories of

times even longer ago
tell me the love, the forgiving
will happen for them
as it has happened to me.
Sitting here remembering,
I wish I could say
to my own parents
what my children will wish
they had said to me.

The Day My Brother Saw Roy Rogers

Lindsey Daniel, Holladay Park Plaza



My little brother Butchie
Idolized Roy Rogers.
For his sixth birthday,
Mom and Dad took us
to the Roy Rogers Rodeo.
We had seen all of Roy's movies,
But this would be the real thing;
We'd be in the very same place with him,
in person!

After we'd watched calf-roping
and bull riding, complete with clowns,
all of the arena lights dimmed to dark.
Then . . . spotlights!
In the middle were Roy and Dale,
side by side on their horses, singing "Happy Trails."
Roy's white satin cowboy shirt dripped with fringe;
it's shoulders blazed with bright embroidery.
My brother's eyes were wide.

At intermission, I took him to get popcorn.
The popcorn stand had a really long line.
Nearby was a roped-off corridor
with a tired, yellow sawhorse that said:
"No admittance."
We ducked under the rope and went to explore.

Along the wall was a line of doors.
One had a star and the name, "Roy Rogers."
The door wasn't closed all the way.
It took just a little push.
We could hear voices and see light.
We eased inside.

There stood the King of the Cowboys in his undershirt,
the white, ribbed kind with shoulder straps,
not a t-shirt like Dad wore.
Roy's back was turned, but we could see our reflections in his mirror,
a stunned look on our faces,
a startled look in Roy's eyes.
He turned and stared right at us.
"Who let these kids in here?"

We ran.
I had to drag my brother
because he was running backward,
desperately trying to keep Roy in sight.
Back at our parents' seats,
My brother's eyes were wide.
"I saw Roy Rogers," he gasped,
"in his undershirt!"

Duck Story

Patsy Steimer, Willamette View



My father built the sandbox cement-block strong
And filled it with clean, brown sand
Hauled one wheelbarrow at a time down the driveway,
We loved the sandbox—digging and inventing
Tunnels and bridges—imaginary infrastructure.
Then one day the Easter Bunny,
Perhaps unaware of the consequences,
Brought two fuzzy, yellow baby ducks.
My father dug a pit in the sandbox,
Covered it with a tarp and created a pond.
The ducks paddled in and seemed quite satisfied
with the oak tree, dandelions, honeysuckle and fescue.
They had no interest in exploring
Beyond the boundaries of the yard.
We named them Albert and Ike, and they thrived:
Their little yellow bodies fledged out with smooth, white feathers;
Their voices changed. Albert became Alberta, but Ike remained Ike.
We wondered if they might get married and start a family.
Then one school-day afternoon, an early summer storm
Dumped buckets over the neighborhood.
My mom stood at the kitchen window and watched the ducks
Joyfully waddling as fast as they could up the black pavement.
The world was their pond!
In pin curls she dashed after them, apprehended them,
And imprisoned them in the basement.
Home from school, we found the ducks' audacity amazing.

Soon after, the family piled into the station wagon
And drove the ducks to a farm, a real farm.
We said our goodbyes and released Alberta and Ike
Into a huge pen filled with ducks that looked just like them
As they disappeared into sameness.
Later the sandbox returned to its former purpose,
But strangely, it had lost its charm.
It must have been occupied by ghost ducks.

The Eagle Whisperer

A True Story

Rie Luft, Mary's Woods



He stood framed in the open doorway to the kitchen of the Audubon's Wildlife Care Center hospital - a tall lanky man in his early 40's, wearing faded jeans and a plaid flannel shirt, sleeves rolled up over muscled forearms. His long hair tied back in a ponytail, he stood hip-cocked, a slow smile on his face, his eyes quiet. Three of us stood transfixed on what he loosely held on that cocked hip. He followed our gazes, glanced down and, in an easy drawl, allowed, "My buddy here needs your help." His "buddy" was a very large Bald Eagle, most likely a female due to its size, being nonchalantly held by an arm slung around the eagle's midsection, its talons hanging free and splayed out. The eagle's yellow angry eyes surveyed these new surroundings. No one said a word.

Under my breath I finally urged someone behind me, "Find Deb." We were all staring at this hemisphere's most dangerous raptor under nothing that could be called control. Unlike other raptors that only attack with talons, the Bald Eagle, along with our area's other eagle - the Golden Eagle, attacks with both talons and beak. Its talons hold the potential for exerting up to 1200 pounds of pressure per square inch; its scythe of a beak can shred its prey in seconds. With a wing span of 80 inches, a body length of almost 3 feet and a weight of 9 to 10 pounds, this is a bird worth consideration. Staff alone handles eagles and then only after extensive training. None of us moved an inch. The scenario before us represented a very real potential for serious hurt.

He introduced himself as John and later told us his story. He had been mountain biking in our local area and was on his return run when he sensed something that seemed out of place in his peripheral vision. Glancing over he saw the eagle on the ground some ways off the trail. Dropping his bike, he sauntered over and immediately recognized the problem. Embedded in the eagle's leg was a fishing hook with its line caught around one of the wings. Bird and man looked at one another.

“Well, buddy, you’re in trouble, that’s for sure. Let’s see if we can get you some help.” With that he scooped up the eagle with his left arm, walked over to his bike, and the odd twosome rode a bumpy several miles down the hill. Arriving at his pick-up, John again shared his thoughts with his companion, “Now, listen here, buddy. I’m goin’ to put you on the passenger seat on your back; you’re to stay nice and quiet there.” With that he drove the 10 miles to Audubon, stepped out of the pick-up, and again nestled his buddy against his hip and strode into our Center.

When our veterinarian arrived I could just hear under her breath, “Ho-ly shit!” Deb quietly told us to move slowly into the reception area. We slid like shadows behind glass doors and watched as she moved forward, drawing on large gauntlets, and in an easy tone of voice told our Good Samaritan exactly what she was going to do and how he was to respond. With her first move toward it, the eagle immediately went berserk, giving a raucous scream and attempting to free its wings, but Deb was one step ahead. With practiced ease and in one smooth motion she grasped the legs just above the talons with one hand and with the other turned the eagle, with its rapacious beak, away from her, securing the wings as she drew it onto her rib cage. All the while the eagle struggled to lunge upward at her face, the wings pounding against the restrictions of her arms. Once secured in a cage, with a curtain drawn over the opening to create the safety of darkness, the eagle quieted and we were once again able to breathe. We looked with expectation at this individual who only now realized just what kind of creature he had befriended. The smile now held respect. “Dang, that is one ornery critter!” was his first remark.

I’ve heard of other stories of man and animal relating to one another under unusual circumstances and have come to believe that two factors are involved: First, the animal recognizes its need for help but, second, it will only accept that help from someone else who is in its “zone.” There has to be an understanding between them on the most primitive, intuitive level. We’ve all heard of Horse Whisperers. For one afternoon, John was an Eagle Whisperer. He readily admitted he knew little about birds, never mind eagles. All he saw was the hurt and the need, and in his naivety he responded to the bird as he would have to his own child, not considering the risk or danger. And for that one afternoon the eagle recognized and responded to that trust - made that leap of faith - and a small miracle was the result.

Some days later our eagle was ready for release. Deb, John, his wife and two young children, and several more of us climbed the hill with the eagle in its carrier. Finding the open space where this story had begun, John unlatched the door. The eagle rocketed outward, its powerful wings carrying it upwards to a nearby tree where it roosted for several minutes while gathering its bearings. Without a backward glance it lifted up into the sky, back into the wild. We all stood there with silly grins on our faces, radiating contentment, our hearts filled with song.

Edinburgh

Trish Mitchell, Columbia Terrace Retirement Community



You captured my heart and hold it still
In a castle keep upon the hill
And all my thoughts to you return
Of ancient streets and whiskey's burn
Of ghostly nights and stellar days
Beguiled by your Scottish ways
I shall not rest until I've heard
Your pipers and your rowdy throng
Calling me back to Edinburgh
To the land where I belong.

First Bird of Morning

Betty Burke, Mary's Woods



First bird of morning—
when I see you
I know I am alive.
We have dreamed away
another nigh-time,
you and I.
Now we witness
our morning miracle.
We will sing or work
or write — pray past
another time space.
We may even die today,
you or I.
We may know love,
perhaps put hatred behind.
We will suffer the very
beauty of existence
for all we are worth.
And as angels know
that's quite a lot.
Dear morning bird—
first you — then two
and now the flock.

The Garden

Lois Manookian, Holladay Park Plaza



The garden, beyond a wall of glass
gorgeous green and full of trees
while poems hang nearby, quietly, inside.
A group of writers, poets surely, place their verse
for all to read,
sharing things they know from life
and thought,
finding who we are today
or were some other week
before the smiles were put on paper;
also pain, with other views.
We read them all and search.
The garden seems quite silent beyond a wall of glass.

Grandma Found Her Memory

Allan F Wilson, Village Retirement Center



Caleb, your Grandma was excited to go to an award ceremony with me,
Only because she knew how much her going would mean to me.

But dragging her heels described her level of enthusiasm,
Until, as I looked at a map and asked,
“Does a little spot in the road called Lincoln mean anything?”

Her eyes lit up,
As she whirled around stating,
“That’s where I lived with my Grandma for two years!”
“How about Zena Rd.?” I asked.
“That’s where the one-room school house was I went to!”

Her mood changed, from reluctant to eager.
At seventy-eight, road trips are not our first choice,
But anticipation of searching old digs
Brought forth an enthusiasm
That had been missing for quite some time.

Even the threat of thunderstorms and snow
Failed to thwart her willingness to go.
We dutifully followed the map to West Salem,
Turned northwest onto Wallace Rd., and
With growing anticipation sought out her lost childhood.

Turning left onto Zena Rd.,
We found that the old school house was gone,
But not her memories, as kid’s names flowed from her lips.

We continued our search for our awards ceremony,
But the Manor we sought was nowhere in sight.

In the distance, she saw something she recognized,
And insisted we continue.
We zigged up the hill,
Where stood the old Zena Community Church,
Surrounded by tombstones of pioneers, past.

I knew what she was experiencing
Was more important than my reading a poem,
But duty called, so we made a quick dash back, and found the Manor.
I promised we would return after the dessert,
To go see her Grandma's place. . .

For fifty-eight years, I have heard of the one room school house,
And the two years on the farm, next to the Willamette River.
As we turned onto Lincoln Rd.,
And went by old houses and haunts,
She continued blurting out names from her past.
She was an encyclopedia of sights and memories of past years.
I couldn't have given her a better gift!
Her Grandmother's farm is now a State Park,
Which was closed the day we were there.
I can tell we need to dig deeper, to find more of Grandma's memories.

I Try To Open My Eyes

Kate Birdsall, Rose Villa Senior Living



I try to open my eyes
As I get out of bed
To start the new day
I begin the familiar routine.

As I get out of bed
I throw on some clothes
I begin the familiar routine
With my eyes half closed

I throw on some clothes
And leave the house
With my eyes half closed
I greet the new day

And leave the house
In the still of the morning
I greet the new day
In the waking city

In the still of the morning
Others appear
In the waking city
In the growing light

Others appear
To begin anew
In the growing light
At the start of now

To begin anew
To start the new day
At the start of now
I try to open my eyes

Just a Second Daughter

LaVelle Goheen, Capital Manor



She's just a second daughter,
She never raised a fuss,
To get someone's attention
But she needs a gentle touch.

When growing she was awkward,
Was always getting hurt,
She wore her shoes out quickly,
And often ripped her shirt.

She's just a second daughter,
She must have had a thirst,
To do the things her sister did
And just once, do them first.

So shy and so self-conscious
It couldn't have been fun,
To watch, but be afraid to make
New friends with anyone.

But how she grew and blossomed,
A flower sweet and rare.
Her many friends are loyal now,
How beautiful her hair.

She's sweet and kind and thoughtful,
Her sense of humor quick.
You'd have to look a long, long time
To find her kind of wit.

She's just a second daughter,
But she'd win in any race.
I wouldn't trade the world for her,
No one could take her place.

She's a sweet and loving daughter,
She shines just like the sun.
I couldn't be more proud of her
My lovely special one.

La Casa Real

Barbara Nelson, Capital Manor



La Casa Real. We'll stay awhile.
A bit of Mexico, in Spanish style.

Arched stucco walls hold trailing vines.
Black wrought iron light with amber shines.

A cozy table, just for two.
Pots of clay, and tiles of blue.

Tortillas served by Spanish maid,
With swirling skirt and coal-black braid.

Music softly, while we eat.
Castanets and rhumba beat.

We can linger, if you wanna"
Save our cares until mañana-----.

Love-Seat On The Freeway

Arlene Peterson, Hope Village



It was no ordinary love-seat. It was an Early American style maple rocking love seat. A beautiful piece of furniture with spindles under the upholstered arms with maple wood rounded at the ends. The upper sides had small extensions that were covered with maple at the edges.

It was purchased in the 1970's so therefore it had a large orange floral print which was the style at the time. After we did some remodeling in our old Queen Ann Vernacular style 1905 era home, we gave it to our daughter who had it covered in a rust colored fabric. Her daughter was in high school at the time so she and some of her friends would load up furniture on the back of a pickup and drive down on Interstate 5 to Dallas, Oregon where there was a Drive In Theater. There they would sit in the back on the furniture and watch the movie.

Some furniture is heavy and traveled well. That was not the case for this love-seat. One time they took this rocking love-seat. As it was not very heavy it fell off on the edge of the freeway. (It would have traveled better lying on its back). Her friend that was driving did not want to stop and pick it up, but my granddaughter told him that her grandma had said not to ever let anything happen to it. She told him that her grandma wanted to keep it, so she insisted that they stop and rescue it. Believe it or not, it survived the fall with minor damage to the bottom foundation pieces that made it rock. It was then taken to an upholster who also repaired old things and even had a piece to fit the bottom of this rocker. So now it sits in my home at Hope Village covered in an off white beautiful brocade fabric. No one would ever know that it took a ride to the drive in and survived a fall on the freeway. It is a lovely place to rock.

#MeToo

Carol Flanagan, Holladay Park Plaza



This hashtag has made me think
of all the excuses I made
of all the precautions I have to take
of all the accommodations I have to make
of all the second guessing
of all the thought I have to put into
being a woman.

Making sure my building is secure
taking a cab home late at night
crossing the street
waiting for the next elevator
constantly being on guard
always aware of my surroundings.
Who's that walking toward me?
Is someone behind me?
This is just something I do
being a woman.

Did he really say that to me?
He was joking, right?
Did he really think I was interested in him?
Did I lead him on?
It must have been something I
said, did, a look I gave him.
Next time I'll be more careful.

It must have been my fault.
It's exhausting
being a woman.

Me, a Daddy?

Velma Stewart , Homewoods on the Willamette



I'm such a klutz. I've hurt her feelings again. She's my wife, Cindy. Even when she's upset she's beautiful. She's kind. She's patient with me. She wants to be a mother. What's wrong with me? I told her I wanted children. But not so soon! We've only been married three months. This is supposed to still be our honeymoon time. I'm sorry I hurt her feelings. But, me, a daddy? I'm only 19 years old. She's only 17. She won't graduate for another two months. We're too young to have a baby.

Okay, so we're having a baby. She'll be a good mother. I hope she won't ask me to change the diapers. I'd gag.

Now she wants to go shopping? For the baby? This baby is already costing me money and he's not even here yet. Of course the baby needs a bed. I know that. And a chest of drawers for the baby's clothes. And a changing table. My mother never mentioned a changing table. I think she changed my diapers on the floor. Or on her bed. Or on the table. Cindy wants me to paint the nursery? When we find out if it's a boy or a girl. Of course, the room must be pink or blue.

She wants me to go to what? Lamaze class? She has to learn how to give birth? Can't the doctor just tell her what to do? Maybe we can find a class online. I don't want to sit on the floor with a bunch of pregnant women. Telling her to breathe. I need to learn what to do? Why? So I can be with her when she gives birth? Does the doctor want me to be there? Won't I just be in the way? She wants the baby; she can have the baby. Oh, no. Now I've made her cry again. But I'm not good at baby things. I've never been around tiny babies.

All right, I'll drive her to Lamaze class. I'll watch through the window. But, no, she says I have to go in.

It's time for our second Lamaze class already? Oh, goody. I'll learn to hold her hand and talk softly to her. As though I don't already know how. I've been holding her hand since we were sophomores. I don't remember how it started. I suppose I wondered how to get

her hand in mine. Should I grab her hand from her lap? Do I touch her arm and slowly move down to her hand? Do I hold her hand gently, or do I squeeze it? I just remember we held hands at the movies, at the football games, or when we were walking together. I don't remember having to learn it. I remember she always looked at me and smiled when I took her hand. Will she smile at me when she's having the baby?

We're going to Lamaze again? I have to keep telling her to breathe? Over and over? And tell her she's doing fine? When she's screaming in pain? What about me? Who tells me I'm doing fine? What if I can't remember what to do? What if I faint?

It's going to be a baby girl? How can she tell? All I see is ink spots like those inkblot things they used to use to determine your personality. Shouldn't we have a boy first?

What? How does she know it's time to go to the hospital? Oh, yeah. They told us at Lamaze. Keep track of the time between contractions. Why did she let me sleep while she was having pains? Where's her bag? Where are the car keys? What if the car won't start? Why am I so nervous? She's the one having a baby.

Oh, Cindy, please don't have the baby in the car. I'm hurrying! What if a cop stops us for speeding? Please be okay, Cindy. Please have a healthy baby.

She really wants me with her? In the delivery room? Maybe I can wait in the hall until I hear the baby cry. Oh, I don't want to make Cindy cry again. I'll go with her.

How does the doctor know it's going to be an hour or two before the birth? Of course, he's a doctor. He's supposed to know these things.

She seems fine between contractions. Is that normal? I hope someone is timing the contractions. Contractions. Funny word. I always thought contractions were ways to shorten two words into one, like don't for do not, or he's for he is.

I wish the baby would hurry up and get here. I don't like hospitals.

Oh! She's squeezing my hand really hard! I don't want her to scream. She must really be hurting. Breathe, breathe. That's what I'm supposed to be saying.

It's coming! The doctor said it's coming!

It's here! We did it! The baby's crying. He's alive! I keep calling the baby he but Cindy said it's a girl. The doctor said it's a girl. The doctor is cutting the cord. Doesn't that hurt him? I guess they told us about that in Lamaze, but I didn't listen too well.

What is the nurse doing with our baby? Where is she taking him? Of course. Of course, she needs to clean him up.

She wants me to take the baby? I might drop him. I mean her. You've wrapped her in pink!

My little girl. How did I ever think I couldn't be a daddy? She feels good in my arms. She's perfect. I love her already! I'm a daddy!

Misfortune

Sandra W. Felkenes, Willamette View



Home from war my friend had survived,
but not part of his leg
and not without scars,
not without pain.

Images from war returned him to battle
on streets no longer familiar
with people he felt beyond reach.

Like a thirsty desert bloom
the village came alive,
grief and joy united.
Their brother was suffering –
he was shattered;
but he was back where he belonged.
And he was also a hero, his name and village
featured in The County Register for all to see!

Neighbors responded with skills and care,
surrounding him with gifts and a remodeled home.
They felt necessary, on a mission, enriched.

My friend had given life to a stolid little town,
misfortune igniting the fold.

And I had someone to love.

Morning Mist

William K. Ousterhout, Capital Manor



Down in the valley,
Bordered by cottonwoods,
Flows the river,
Idling its way to the sea.
Early this morning it's hidden,
A vaporous curtain blocks one's sight.
Morning mist, they call it as
It whispers its way along,
And the valley disappears.
The first robin sleepily calls its mate
As the sun creeps toward the horizon
And dawn arrives.
Soon, soon, the fields, the marsh, are masked
And at sunrise, the valley lies smothered
Under a billowing gray blanket.
First rays of the sun glisten
With beams of gold and silver
Over the tops of the blanketed valley.
There's a feeling in the air
As the sun begins its trek across the sky.
A soft breeze nibbles at the edges
Making thin tendrils of mist,
Edging their way into the blankness.
Slowly, slowly the trees appear,
Then the fields and the marsh.
And only along the river
Does the mist remain.
Then it, too, fades into nothing
And the day has begun.

My Worst Christmas Ever

Patsy Fitzwater Wiemken, Willamette View



When I was 16 and still knew everything. My dad worked for the Union Pacific railroad and they provided our family free passes to travel. My mom announced one early December day that she was taking my brother, my sister and me to Illinois for Christmas with my grandparents. Well, needless to say, I was having none of that. After all I was 16. I was in high school and I had a job. I certainly was not going to miss school and ask for time off from my job. In fact, I told myself, I couldn't take time off from my job, I worked at a roller skating rink, and all the kids would be there during Christmas break. After long discussions with my mom she finally agreed that I could stay home with my dad.

So off they went. I need to tell you that we lived in rural Multnomah County, several miles from downtown Portland, where he worked. We had no car and our family rode the bus to work, school and play. We lived ½ mile from the bus stop.

My dad worked a swing shift from about 2pm to 11pm. He never got home before midnight. Well, I was in hog heaven. I was on my own. I could stay late at school and enjoy all the things I thought the town kids did and stay late at work, as long as I didn't miss the last bus. Independence was going to be wonderful.

Now you may have gotten the impression my family did not have a lot of money. You are right. However, most families did not have a lot of money at that time. So Christmas presents were always something necessary, clothes, shoes, books, etc.

I came home from school one day to find a letter from my mom in the mail box. It was addressed to my dad, not to Paul and Patty, so in my heart I knew that I was not to open that letter. However, since I knew everything, I decided to steam open that letter and read it. "Dear Paul, etc., etc." Then that wonderful sentence, "I forgot to tell you where Patty's Christmas present is. It is hanging on a nail, under the basement stairs, in a brown paper bag." So I resealed the letter and went downstairs. Sure enough, there was a brown

paper bag hanging on a nail. How exciting. I quickly opened the bag expecting something wonderful. My heart hit my stomach hard; for there was the worst dress that I could imagine. I just wanted to cry.

Once again being 16 and knowing everything, I now realized that this would be the only Christmas gift that I would receive. I had not only done an unthinkable thing, but I had ruined my Christmas. I quickly folded that awful dress and put it back in the brown paper bag and back on the nail.

Christmas Eve came. I was home by myself for my father had not returned from work. We had no Christmas tree for my mom was not home and that was her job. There were some decorations that I had put up, a small gift from me to my dad, and on the table a brown paper bag with a bow.

I, being so smart, had spoiled Christmas Eve, one of the best times of the year for my family.

My dad got home around midnight and woke me up so we could have Christmas together. It was a sad time all around, my mom was not there. My dad was sad because he missed her, and my brother and sister. I had ruined Christmas for me.

That was 65 years ago, but to this day I remember seeing tears in my father's eyes, and I was devastated. Suddenly I realized that I really didn't know everything.

Amazing Christmas Eve's have come and gone in my life with my families. But, to this very day you do not have to hide a package at my house, for even if it comes in an unwrapped brown paper bag, I would never shake it or feel it or open it. Sometimes lessons learned are especially hard and long remembered.

The Piano

Betty Foster, Mary's Woods



Everyone has dreams and as a ten year old girl, part of a large family during the depths of the Depression, I was no exception. There were seven in our family--Mom, Dad, and five children. We lived in a poor community at the end of town, surrounded by other families and living as we did, pay check to pay check. As a family, we had dreams and deep concerns about our future. The biggest dream was that someday we would be able to move to California to live. Our biggest concern was that Dad was able to get enough work at the Foundry to keep us in food, coal for the furnace, and enough warm clothing.

Our second dream was that somehow, we could get a piano for Mom. She was a natural musician and only had to hear a song once and she could play it. We always had a hand-cranked Victrola and a non-dependable radio and they were played constantly.

My brother Bill and I went to the local Catholic grade school. It, too, was one of the poorest parishes in town, so when a richer church gifted us with a piano they no longer needed, it was an amazing event. Our school was the upper floor of a small, brick building. The first floor was the church and stairs led up to four classrooms, a small apartment for the nuns, and a small, all-purpose space at the top of the stairs. We had an old piano there, much battered and scratched which we used for choir practice and music.

One morning, when we came up the stairs, we saw two pianos standing there. One was the old, battered one and the other a new, honey colored, beautiful piano with no scratches and all the ivory overlays still on the keys. Sister Fredericka appeared, beaming. She shoosed us to our classrooms and told us not to touch the new piano and get it dirty.

Next Sunday's Bulletin announced this wonderful news to the congregation. The new piano would replace the old one that would be for sale for \$30.00. After church, we all went upstairs to admire the new piano and have Sister Agnes play it. Walking home, Mom said that was a wonderful gift but in her opinion, the old one had a much better tone.

Days passed and no one bought the old piano. Sister Fredericka walked around with a

worried puckering of her mouth, furrowed wrinkles on her forehead. Three weeks later, with still no offer, the price was dropped to \$20.00, then \$10.00. A small look of hope crossed my mother's face when she read the Bulletin. She glanced over at Dad who sat with a thoughtful look on his face.

Several weeks later, I was walking quickly past my parent's room, afraid that Mom would somehow guess that I had reached into the brown sugar box and stole a lump of sugar. It was lying now on my tongue. I glanced in the door and saw my mother sitting on a chair and wiping her eyes. She was crying. I didn't know what to do so I wandered outside aimlessly, cold with fear.

That evening at supper, all seemed normal, as Mom filled our bowls with vegetable soup and passed around biscuits. I could hardly eat and after supper, I followed my sisters into their room. They turned, startled, as we younger ones were not allowed in their room. I went to Virginia, the oldest one and blurted out that "I saw Mom crying today." Virginia looked quickly at Doris, my second sister. She gave a little nod and Virginia took my hand. I thought, "This is bad," and whispered "is someone dying?" Virginia shook her head, "No, no. It's that Mom just found out there's going to be another baby." I stood, shocked. "Why is that bad?" I whispered. Doris said sharply, "Because we can't afford another baby. We can barely make it as it is." I lay in bed that night pondering.

Dad had a good week at his job, with three days of work. I kept my eyes on Mom. One evening, when Mom had gone to bed early, Dad beckoned the two older girls into their bedroom and then followed them in. I felt left out.

Days passed. The battered, old piano stood in a corner of the room, covered with dust and a \$10.00 for sale sign leaning crookedly from the music stand. No one wanted it but the sisters decided to be patient.

Dad's days seemed to last longer each day, and it was frequently dark before he got home, looking exhausted. I worried about things that no ten year old should have to worry about, but I was not alone. The Depression got no better.

One day, I saw my Dad nod his head to the two older girls and they went into their room together. Mom, Bill and Davey, the four year old, went into the living room to listen to the radio. I watched quietly, then followed my Dad to the girls' room. I heard them talking

and by pressing my ear against the door, could make out most of what they were saying. Dad seemed very happy. “It’s done. I finished that last shelf today. The piano is ours!”

I could contain myself no longer. I shoved open the door and burst into the room. “Dad, what’s happening? What do you mean that the piano is ours?” Dad grabbed me and put his hand over my mouth. Doris jumped up and shut the door. Then Dad told me, after making me promise to keep it a secret. He had been going in to build shelves, put up cabinets, and paint the storeroom for the Sisters. For that work, the Sisters had given him the old piano. What complete joy overtook me! Dad was laughing, the exhaustion wiped from his face and big smiles on my sisters’ faces.

Ernie, the janitor had an ancient old truck, and he would help my Dad move the piano here next Saturday when Mom was going to visit her Aunt Jessie. All went well. Mom took Bill with her, and as soon as they were out of sight, Dad and the girls pushed the small table away from the wall where the piano would go. Dad started, almost at a trot, for the church which was about eight blocks away. In a short time, they were back, Dad standing in the back to steady the piano. They managed, with many a grunt and groan, and planks to make an incline over the front steps, to get the piano in the house.

There it stood. We stood admiring it. The girls got dust clothes and wiped away the dust. We felt so rich! When dreams are many and few are answered, they assume almost unbearable happiness when one comes true.

Mom and Bill came home a short time later. When Mom opened the door, she dropped the package she was holding in shocked surprise. She stood transfixed and Dad leaned over and whispered “Do you like it?” A look of such love, joy, and excitement passed between them. It was almost electric. Mom gave Dad such a hug, then went to the piano, leaned over to the scarred old top, and wept a few tears. Then rising, she wiped her eyes, sat on the piano bench and played song after song. I have had many joys in my life since then, but none so great, so sweet, and so filled with love than that night.

Possibility

Ronald A. Shrock, Terwilliger Plaza



He could see her coming. Way off, easing up the grassy, treeless slope, up the path created long ago by public workers grateful for the jobs. Here she came - wouldn't you know, a woman and a dog. He hated the sight of them. But it was a public path, on public property, a long public bench at the top, plenty of public room. No problem. No no. No problem. God damn damn damn it.

He sat in his faded Levis, swooshed sneakers, canvas L. L. Bean barn coat, and Red Sox cap – blue on red. His gaze returned straight out, beyond the grassy edge of the cliff twenty yards in front of him, to the sea and sky purified by the off-shore wind. No fence, not even a warning sign. Someone could get blown off here. His fascination with that thought lasted less than two seconds. He was not interested in such mundanities; that was not why he had come. Nor was sharing the planet with a sweated, bandana-ed, and fat-ankled old woman with her dog.

Turning from them, he thought back. An official voice of unworldly calm had informed him of Addie's death ("instantaneous"; "no suffering"), thereby benumbing him. She died no more than two hours after they had parted, both late because expressing love once again lingered long in their bed. Since then a small, functioning part of him had played the role of suddenly bereft lover and companion, doing it well - standing in the spotlight, speaking his lines clear-voiced, nurtured by the audience of family and friends. When all the immediately-required decisions and rituals and hugging ended, he retreated out the stage door to the dark alley of panic at the onset of melting numbness. He ran, he fled.

The old woman and her dog could now be heard approaching, crunching the pea gravel, angling in from slightly behind him. The sound ceased nearby, at the end of the bench. Holding his outward gaze, he could see the dog at the edge of his vision, standing near the cliff, more or less looking at him, smelling the ground, glancing up at the woman. The dog: white with black splotches, mouth open, panting, happy, calm.

“Beautiful day, isn’t it? Mind if we join you for a sit?”

He turned to his right to look at her, then at the empty bench space. The tiniest of nods and a moderated frown signaled his helpless assent. He returned to the horizon, back to the thick gray-green under the delicate blue, still blind to the stark beauty surrounding him.

She sat. “Thankee. Thank you, very much.” Slow, yet crisp, cool, proper.

The dog approached to reconnoiter his knee and his shoe a few times, as the wind played with its shaggy hair. Satisfied, it trotted on, out of sight, seemingly at home.

Home. The place he had fled not two days ago, crossing thousands of miles and an ocean to reach this transparently barren place, to find this solitary bench, to be still, to sort out the unfathomable. He had begun thinking – with promising clarity and focus before the intrusion of walking bodies – of wells and chasms, and of echoes and howls, from something one of the many well-wishers had given him:

“Only extended daily renewing can build, strengthen, deepen, and fill the wells of a relationship which, when suddenly emptied, will echo under the shallows of subsequent days. Only from such chasms having been formed slowly, iteratively, incrementally, with purposeful caring, will the howl of emptiness reverberate.

The sound will never cease. But its presence slowly loses its stridence, its urgency, in the accumulation of new issues, new experiences. It becomes part of the music of living, of moving on, its dissonance no longer as harsh. The sanity of the survivor requires that.”

Of the entire flood of well-intentioned words through which he had swum, only these offered buoyancy. A talisman grasped, memorized easily, but not yet yielding full meaning – only its possibility.

“I come up here to remember. To remember and forget. Aye, most days we come. Elmore and me. We like to do it.” Was she speaking to him? Or herself? Or just aloud? “Yes, there’s a great peace here,” she continued, then paused. “Don’t you agree?”

He sucked in air, and exhaled it in a sigh. More words to swim through. “I’m sure there is” He looked away, left, out to the north where he could make out an oil rig’s platform far away. “I’m trying to find it.”

“Aye,” she said. “So.”

The dog returned from behind them, sniffed his shoe and hand, licked his hand once, then sat beside his leg, tongue out, panting. It glanced up to catch his eye. He moved his hand out, then pulled it back. They sat, the three of them, looking out at the sea, at the horizon, at the white birds with long, narrow tails, soaring in random arcs that broke up the open space, reducing it from infinity.

At last: “Well, come on, Elsmore. We will go now.” The dog’s ears rose. It sat by the man until she got to her feet, then trotted off to the path, stopping to wait for her. “Aye, we’ll go now.” She stopped at her end of the bench and looked back at him. “I hope you find it. The peace, you know.”

He turned his head her way. “Thank you. Thanks.”

They were gone, no longer heard, no longer in view. His focus, his hope, set aside with their arrival, departed with them. Despite more gazing, more time, and the blessed quiet, his mind was surging with an overload of anger, disbelieving grief, and confusion. Not like before they came. Suddenly he stood, turned, and kicked the bench.

“I didn’t need that; I didn’t need them to show up. Goddam dog!” He kicked again, cheered on by his roiling emotions. And again, hard. “I DIDN’T WANT THEM TO COME!” Arms waving, “I DIDN’T WANT THEM. TO COME, I DIDN’T WANT THEM – TO...” Again, again, pacing now, feeling better, shouting, shouting more, waving, kicking. Raspy, hoarse, spitty, profane screams. “I DIDN’T - AAGHhh ...”

He stopped, something stopped him. He heard her laughing – that laugh.

He heard Addie laughing. Warm, deep, enveloping, familiar, so familiar, that laugh. As he dropped to his knees, frozen, she laughed on, that beautiful, comforting, liquid, ringing, precious laugh – that laugh, judging and forgiving, laughing not at him but at something he was doing – the laugh that said I love you always but you are being stupid right now. That ... laugh. He listened, on his knees, immobile.

It ceased; the laugh faded and he could hear it no longer. Had it continued but only moved away? Or died, had it died? Slowly, he tipped onto his side, drawing into a ball, knees at chin. His moaning commenced, as did the small agitated movements that found

no position of comfort. A deep, pure eruption of sound grew louder, louder – the wailing of loss and the lost, the reverberating howl of emptiness, issued into the off-shore wind and carried away to the green and blue horizon, leaving behind the germ of possibility.

Search Again

James V. McGoodwin, Terwilliger Plaza



The Very thought
That the “sought-for”
Might be under the shelf
I’ll next be searching
Gives a surge of hope –
Which, for an instant,
Overcomes the knowledge
I’ve search there
Three times already

Sojourn of a Wandering Cloud:

Looking outside from the inside or looking inside from the outside.

Sati Sil, Capital Manor



I am the daughter of Earth, Sky and Water,
imbibed with the free spirit of a cloud,
long and far have I wandered in space and time,
across the continents and oceans.

I have soared high like Shelly's 'The Cloud'
or Kalidasa's 'Meghdoot' (cloud messenger)
Am I a fleeting speck in the universe or an indestructible mass and energy,
locked into a perpetual Newtonian motion,
engaged in a dynamic dance of ever changing shapes and colorful hues
and swinging moods from calm bliss to thundering ferocity?

Sojourning from the shores of the Arabian Sea, springing to life,
like a dark creature from the depths of the cradle of Mohenjo Daro, Sind,
nestled in the bosom of the Indus River Valley,
I embark on a momentous journey,
seeking an unmarked destiny and a message.

Nurtured and nourished by the ancient Indus valley civilization,
I tear through the veil of blood and tears,
thirsting for freedom, shedding the shackles of a bonded colonial life.
I race across the majestic Western Ghats,
heeding the call and allure of the mighty and holy Ganges river in the east.
Buffeted by the ferocious tropical monsoon,
I am transformed now into a thundercloud,

immersed and baptized in the lessons of life
and meaningful living.

Fortified and matured, I fly westward on the wings of hope,
across the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea,
tempted by the siren call of the Dark Continent.
Looking outside from the inside.

I bask in the Ethiopian Highlands blessed with thirteen months of sunshine
and the majestic beauty of the Blue Nile,
I dwell on giving lessons on life and living.
Under the shadow of Haile Selassie's monarchy,
I realize I have more lessons to learn than give.
Now looking inside from the outside.

I drift once more as a fair weather cloud,
heading towards the shores of the Pacific Ocean,
seeking a new destiny in a New continent.
Revitalized and enriched, dwelling amidst the verdant forests
of the exotic Willamette Valley,
stirred again as a restless wandering cloud,
I am drawn back to the warm bosom of Africa.

Tearing across the hot, dry, dusty Harmattan fabric of sub-Sahara,
I transform into thunderclouds once more.
Listlessly rolling across dense equatorial forests
of the Niger River valley, I lose myself finally,
in the deep, cool blue waters of the Atlantic.

Is this my final destination?
Is my destiny a certain space and time defined
by national boundaries, caste, creed or religion?
Or something different? I wander again and wonder.

I seek a state of mind and space,
portrayed by the evocative image
and eloquent words of the Noble laureate poet: Rabindranath Tagore:
“Where the mind is without fear,
and the head is held high,
where knowledge is free,
where the world is not broken into fragments or narrow domestic walls
where the words come from the depth of truth...

This is where I wish to be.
That is where I can be true to the essence of free spirited cloud,
unbound, fearless, everchanging and in ceaseless motion.
Once again, looking outside from the inside.

The Song of the Doves

Nancy Hersey, Homewoods on the Willamette



“Mom, how would you feel if we brought Dad to my place when he’s ready to leave the hospital?”

How should I answer my daughter? Although Ken and I had been married over 30 years, we’d been divorced for a long time. Recently he’d been diagnosed with terminal cancer, which had already metastasized. Right after the diagnosis, our daughters, Julie and Ciel, began making plans to take care of their dad at his place with the help of Hospice. And then, without warning, his house caught fire! I stood there beside the girls staring in disbelief as the flames leaped skyward, and the fire engines sprayed relentless streams of water all around. . .but to no avail. The fire would consume its prey. Ken’s house was no more.

Our younger daughter, Ciel, had been living in the downstairs apartment at my home on the river. She was in the final phase of completing her Masters’ program and obtaining her counseling degree at Lewis & Clark. I figured if she and her sister could take care of their dad, I would do my best to support them any way I could. Of course, he could come!

My heart ached for Ken as the ambulance attendants carried the gurney around the house and down to Ciel’s apartment. It was a bitterly cold December day, and Ken had always hated the cold. (I wasted no time in getting the names “Ken, Julie and Ciel” on the prayer list at our church.)

In less than a week one of his friends from the tavern had secured a barrel of hazelnuts, which the local squirrels, were delighted to feast on. We placed his hospital bed in direct line with the outdoors, so he would miss nothing. We all watched the squirrels’ tails disappearing down a hole in the barrel top. Soon a little gray head would appear, clutching a nut in his teeth. We also tried to keep the birdfeeders full. Not surprisingly, the squirrels performed marvelous gymnastic feats, swinging through the air and trying to clean out the birdfeeders.

The doctors had unanimously predicted Ken wouldn’t live very long, probably two weeks

to two months. (Colon cancer does that). The girls tried to live each day as though it were his last. Music from the '40's filled the air, Glenn Miller, the Dorsey brothers, the Andrews sisters. Our son Kirk called from Los Angeles every few days to let his dad know he was valued and loved.

On Ken's 75th birthday we celebrated with Chinese food, lots of balloons and as many friends as we could squeeze into Ciel's rather limited space downstairs.

As the warm days of spring arrived, my son-in-law would lift Ken's frail body out of his bed and into the wheelchair and roll him out so he could see the river better. One day I came home and Ken's wheelchair was facing the river. On either side of him, sitting in the green folding chairs were Julie and her son Kyle. Ken's head was nodding, but he was where he wanted to be. Down on the riverfront a flock of doves made themselves at home. Their gentle cooing added to the aura of peace.

Occasionally the mallard ducks would waddle up to his windows looking for treats. I discovered that if I left a trail of duck food from the steps toward the house, they would sometimes approach the house closer to see what treats might be available. (This was before we had cats in the neighborhood.)

Our older daughter Julie wanted her dad to see the river traffic from his hospital bed. So she decided the English Laurel hedge had to be trimmed a few inches, so that her dad could see the boats better. One day I heard Ken yelling, so I rushed downstairs, certain he must be in mortal pain. He was watching Julie use the hedge trimmers, and loudly giving her instructions on how to do it. I carried messages back and forth between Ken and our wayward daughter. Although this was not her first experience trimming a hedge, she came in several times to politely listen to his suggestions. After the third trip in, she told him firmly, "Now, Dad, I know what I'm doing! If you don't stop yelling at me, I'm going to pull this blind down, and you won't be able to supervise!"

The Hospice workers were unfailing kind. Diane came twice a week to bathe him. She'd lost her own father to cancer and always made a special effort to make Ken comfortable. From upstairs I could always hear their laughter. As Ken got weaker and weaker, the dose of morphine would be increased to make it easier for him to be bathed.

One time I said to Ciel, "I really admire your patience with your dad", and she replied

“Mom, Dad isn’t going to die of cancer, I’m going to kill him!” (This was because he had little conception of time and was apt to interrupt her sleep whenever he got a little bored.) She was getting her Masters at the time and was his primary caregiver 24/7. She had a Native American friend from Lewis & Clark. Ken loved to answer the phone and would yell in a loud voice, “Cindy, it’s that Indian guy!”

Now the doves were right outside the window. Many times when I came down, one of the girls would be holding his hand as they watched television. Late at night Ken would sometimes voice his fears. “What happens next?” “What’s on the other side?” He felt uneasy about the prospect of leaving the world he knew, but the pain was becoming more than he could bear. He declined to have our priest come.

One day when he was looking out toward the river, he saw a woman of incredible beauty. She held out her arms to him and said she was waiting for him. Ken asked, “Don’t you see her?” Julie had to admit that she didn’t. They wondered if his vision was just a reaction to the medication.

Seven months after coming to his place by the river, Ken passed away. The children planned the memorial service, always keeping in mind Ken’s wishes. The day of the service, three family members suddenly found themselves with cars, which they couldn’t start! Ciel figured her dad didn’t want people making a lot of fuss. He wanted only to be buried in the local Veterans Cemetery.

The room at the mortuary was packed. The girls filled it with flowers. My son-in-law greeted the guests and thanked them for coming. Julie, Ciel and I told the assembled group some of Ken’s remarkable adventures. Often the room exploded in laughter as we recalled his amazing exploits. Afterward several people came up and said, “You forgot to tell about the time. . .” The mortuary director told Julie it was the first service he’d ever attended when he wished he had known the deceased!

In the days prior to Ken’s death, a flock of doves gathered outside his window. Each day the flock got smaller. The day he died, only one lone dove rested on the window ledge. Since his death, we haven’t seen any doves around.

Ken’s niece lives in Bend. The day after the service she and her husband were sitting on their deck drinking a toast to Ken, and all the good times he and the family had enjoyed at

the beach together. As she raised her glass to honor her uncle, she was startled to see three seagulls! Because Bend is several hundred miles from the ocean, her husband told her the birds couldn't be seagulls. . . . but, as they circled overhead, there was no doubt. . . 3 seagulls far from home. She was sure Ken was saying goodbye!

After Ken's death we saw no more doves for a long time. So one time many years afterward, I was startled to see a flock down on the riverfront! I happened to be talking to Julie on the telephone and remarked how surprised I was. There was a pause and Julie asked, "Mom, do you know what day it is?"

"Of course," I replied. "It's Thursday."

"No, Mom! Today is July 29th, exactly nine years since Dad passed away!"

We both have no doubt Ken was sending us a message!

Spring Flowers

Glenna Brinker, Parkview Christian Retirement Community



The heads of daffodils
and tulips
turn their faces
toward the warming sun.

Their colors:
 sunshine yellow,
 vermillion red,
 deep purple.

They bob and sway
in the soft, clean breeze,
dancing in their green skirts.

Summer of Love, 1967

Carol Knowles, Willamette View



Fifty years ago, during the summer of 1967; 100,000 “hippies” gathered in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco. Nearly 500,000 American soldiers were fighting in Vietnam, and large race riots broke out in Detroit and Newark.

In June of that year, several of my friends flew to Haight-Ashbury. How I longed to join them. Instead, I stayed in Memphis, Tennessee, where I was a 20-year-old college student enrolled in every philosophy and psychology course available to me. I’m 70-years-old now and, looking back, I’m glad I remained in Memphis where I came-of-age in one of my city’s few counter-cultural hang-outs, The Half-and-Half Coffee House

How can I explain the euphoria I felt at The Half-and-Half? The young adults I met there were as eager as I was to understand life beyond the rigid mores and deeply conservative politics of the Deep South in the sixties. Over strongly brewed Folger’s Coffee, with acoustical guitars playing in the background; we dared to think outside the box. We asked each other probing questions. We listened to one another, and we began to realize that politics, religion, gender and race were all complex issues that would take us a lifetime of experience to understand.

The Half-and-Half became a safe haven for Paul, one of my closest childhood friends. Paul was gay, and, in Memphis in 1967, if he wandered into the wrong bar or the wrong neighborhood; his life was in danger. At The Half-and-Half, without fear of being ridiculed or beaten, Paul could share his story which was a unique blend of Southern Gothic and Italian Renaissance. With ancestors that included Edgar Allan Poe and Robert E. Lee, Paul was part of a Memphis family noted for its Southern eccentricities tinged with genius tinged with madness. Growing up, Paul had frequently been beaten by an older brother. When he turned eighteen, he moved into his family’s guest house where he spent most of his time writing poetry, collecting antique Bibles, listening to classical music, and studying the masterworks of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci.

Also a gifted artist, Paul painted his guest house walls to look like the Sistine Chapel. In the center of his ceiling, with shimmering acrylics and expressive charcoal line-work, Paul had recreated Michelangelo's "The Creation of Adam." True to the original, Adam and God are both reaching out, straining toward one another, almost touching. Like many of his friends, I cried when I first saw Paul's painting. Better than I have ever understood before or since, I could feel Paul's and Michelangelo's (and my own) need to be connected to and accepted by the Creator.

I first met Chris, another Half-and-Half regular, when he drove his Harley-Davidson up to the front door of the coffee house. He was dressed in black leather with a motorcycle chain wrapped around his shoulders. In spite of the weight of the chain, Chris walked across the coffee house floor like a large cat looking for prey. His posture was erect but relaxed; his hips were flexible; he moved in long fluid strides. By the end of the evening, I understood where Chris had developed his gait. He had just returned from a tour of duty in Vietnam where he spent many hours walking through the jungle attempting to keep himself and the men in his platoon alive.

Chris was an independent thinker who refused to believe that Vietnamese were subhuman or that homosexuals were evil or that women and blacks were inferior. Surprisingly, he developed his open mind while a member of his motorcycle gang in San Francisco. This chapter of the Hell's Angels had formed close ties with counter-cultural journalists, writers, and spiritual thinkers like Hunter Thompson, Ken Kesey, and Ram Dass. Many Hell's Angels, including Chris, were more interested in speaking out against injustice than they were in brawling or boozing.

David was another regular at The Half-and-Half who, at the age of 32, had already lived several lifetimes. During his twenties he had been a successful portrait painter. By his late twenties he drank heavily. Then he "dried out" and became an Episcopal priest who was excommunicated for his unorthodox views. Most importantly for us, when David first came into our lives in June of 1967; he had recently discovered Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism. We were lucky enough to join David in his quest to understand Eastern thought. We read numerous books about Eastern philosophy as well as about Western religion so that we could explore spirituality from many different vantage points.

The impact that David had on me lasted a lifetime. On another hot summer day in Memphis

in 1987, I biked along the street on which The Half-and-Half had stood some twenty years earlier. I heard laughter; I got off my bike and listened. The quality of the laugh brought David to mind. It possessed the same gentle, wry questioning of a man who recognizes the foibles of humankind (especially his own) but is still eager to understand the world. I stood beside my bike and continued to listen. The sound of the laughter expanded, further and further out, until it seemed to fill the sky. Later I learned that David had died that afternoon. What a fitting goodbye from a friend who had encouraged me, and everyone else at The Half-and-Half, to reach beyond ego, to laugh with the Buddha.

The connection Chris and I shared also lasted a lifetime. It lasted until he was redeployed and killed on a jungle trail in Vietnam. Before his death, Chris gave me the most valuable experience of my life -- the love of a young man who had no time for bullshit, who knew life was fragile, who during the Summer of 1967 wanted to experience friendship and love as deeply as he could.

That Time in the Islands

John Eells, Capital Manor



The “coconut chicken” in the Capital Manor dining room reminded me of sailing the Virgin Islands with my wife and some friends on the 36’ sloop “Whisper.” We anchored on the mostly uninhabited island Jost Van Dyke one evening and rowed ashore in the dingy. About the only thing on the beach was a palm thatched 2 x 4 framework that served as a bar. We stuck our toes in the sand and started off with a few drinks. Meanwhile a guy who seemed to be bumming around the islands by himself decided to try his hand at opening a coconut with a machete. As you probably know, the coconuts that grow in the Caribbean have a thick fibrous husk that must be cut away to get to the nut inside. As it turned out he hacked up his left hand very badly and was bleeding profusely.

We applied a tourniquet as best we could and since there was absolutely no medical facility on Jost Van Dyke we rowed him out to the Whisper with the intention of getting him to the nearest hospital in Rodetown on the island of Tortola. On board the Whisper we placed the injured guy in a deflated rubber raft to catch the blood, hauled anchor and set off with a good wind under the starry night sky.

With the strong following wind we were making good time and left a swirling wake of blue green phosphorescence astern. But the guy had lost so much blood that he just didn’t make it. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way across the channel we knew that he was dead and it hit us that sailing into a port in the British Virgin Islands with a dead guy was not a good idea. The authorities would force us to remain there and there would be lots of bureaucratic complications including an inquest and probably a criminal investigation. It could take weeks or even longer.

So we wrapped him tight in the deflated rubber raft, attached an extra piece of chain to the bundle and dropped him overboard. We cleaned up any remaining blood from the deck and cockpit and fortunately never heard another thing about it.

The Toast

Zona Putterman, Rose Schnitzer Manor



Zounds, zircons, and zebu, what have we here
A luncheon for Frieda, the bride of the year

We're all so excited, so happy and glad
For the sweet little lass and Ray her good lad

All these zippy people have gathered for lunch
Couse we want to let her know that we care a bunch

Something for the occasion is surely in order
For our zissah senora from south of the border

Bring a gift to the club, your initials if you please
But I know none of you has a name beginning with Z

So I called all my friends to tell them of my need
An idea for a good Z with them I did plead

Then I said to my mother you have dealt me a blow
Such problems with my first name you never will know

I checked Mr. Webster, I went straight to the source
But the pages within were not of much resource

That letter of the alphabet could stand some additions
If we added some Z's would that be considered sedition

So with initials like mine what could I do
I did have some ideas, here are but a few

I could blow in a zephyr or I could spit a zygote
But don't the above two seem rather remote

How about a zither, maybe one could string up
Or bake a luscious zablione on which she could sup

From entertainment '83 I could give her a pass to the zoo
So she could Allison and Aliza a zebra or two

I could make her a zodiac, offer her up a zone
But these two items would just be a loan

A Zoroastrian, a Zen Buddhist or give her a zoologist
But thinking it over she already has a dentist

I hope that you like the best and pick of the lot
There pretty silk zinnias all fixed in a pot

For our girl who is zealous and so full of zest
We zoomed in and zigzagged to come welcome out guest.

Two Thoughts About Cats

Jean Marie Purcell, YaPoAh Terrace



1.

T. S. Eliot wrote about them in a play.

Hemingway collected them.

If interviewed any one of them would say. neither fact affected them.

2.

The way mine stares at me conveys

he knows I've outgrown better days

and takes me for a well-meaning fool

while he's attained the essence of cool

The Vacuum Cleaner

Sabina Shalom, Rose Schnitzer Manor



He was a pleasant fellow, the Consul. Fortyish perhaps. No Clark Gable, but possessed of a certain charm. One's first impression of a merely formal interest in one's mission, was quickly dispelled on closer observation, by a lecherous gleam that lurked behind those somber, myopic eyes.

I had become, as it were, rather chummy with him and it was my habit whenever I visited the Consulate to stop by his office and if, convenient, have an eight minute chat and a two minute flirt - a sort of fillip to those days of tedious routine which this amusing encounter partially relieved.

They were moving house he said, and in the general conversation about domestic affairs, mentioned that among the items they were disposing of, was a Hoover vacuum cleaner. An appliance I badly needed as my own was always breaking down and spare parts were unavailable here. He suggested anytime on a Saturday morning would be convenient to see it and to call the house and leave a message with the maid if his wife was out. This I did and duly presented myself at the appointed hour, on the dot - punctuality being a bit of a thing with me, though regarded by most as a bit of a farce in these parts.

The lady of the house herself opened the door. I had never met the Consul's wife and was momentarily stunned by her blonde beauty- "How odd", I thought, "that the Consul should fall such easy prey to the attractions of other women when having so delightful a creature for a wife.

Seeing that her arm was strapped to her chest, I banished such interesting contemplations and dispensing with the usual formalities one generally employs on first acquaintance, I found myself exclaiming "Oh my goodness, what have you done?"

"Oh," she said, "I was riding and fell off my horse and have dislocated my shoulder."

I felt it prudent to suggest that if my visit was inconvenient I could leave it for some other

time, adding, “Actually there is no urgency to buy your vacuum cleaner right now as I really should get rid of mine first.”

This remark seemed to puzzle her for a moment, and on reflection, I suppose it might have seemed strange to be disposing of one appliance yet intent on replacing it with an item that performed the same function. I began to explain but my “You see.....” was quickly cut short by her smiling response:-

“Oh no, no, that’s alright, do come in. I haven’t seen a soul for days and I am bored beyond belief. I ride every day as a rule and with my husband being away today it is just lovely to have a visitor. Why don’t you come into the garden for a while first and have something cold to drink?”

I accepted with alacrity not having much else to do and being quite captivated by the delightful combination of her foreign charm, her accent and the simple friendly manner of her invitation. She lead the way and as I followed, I couldn’t help muse inwardly on the Consul’s roving eye, but then, you never can tell with people can you? Outwardly I murmured the usual pleasantries and commented upon the nuisance of moving.

“Yes”, she replied, “it is quite an upheaval and the children especially will miss the garden.”

We sat and chatted about this and that and I particularly recall mentioning that with a bandaged arm, it must have considerably inconvenienced her in her busy social life.

“Oh yes” she answered, “In my husband’s position there is generally so much entertaining. I’m glad of the excuse of my arm to avoid these dull cocktail parties! I suppose that is how you met my husband?”

“No”, I replied quite truthfully, adding that I had met him in his office. The reflection of which brought guilty thoughts to my head, so I hastily seized the opportunity of asking if I might now take a look at the vacuum cleaner.

“Certainly”, she said.

We entered the dimness of the house and the vacuum cleaner was produced for inspection.

“Oh it’s exactly what I wanted”, I gushed. “The round canister type. This will give me no problem at all. Mine is an upright model and I can’t get the disposable bags nor replace one

of the broken attachments. The only thing, and if you're not in a hurry, could you give me a little time to sell mine before I buy yours?"

What may have seemed an odd request did not trouble her at all and with a smile of apparent understanding, she smiled her agreement saying,

"Of course, I know exactly how it is here. I'm no hurry whatsoever, and haven't spoken of moving to anyone yet. As a matter of fact, I'm rather surprised that my husband mentioned it to you at all."

Having settled the matter I started to leave, the thought of my chauffeur sitting in the car in the now approaching noon time heat, prickled my own warm satisfaction with the morning's events. I had arrived punctuality at ten thirty in the morning, but the time had gone by so pleasantly it had only seemed like five minutes.

The passage of time must have found a like illusionary impression on my hostess for she sought to detain me with a plea, "Must you go so soon? I've so enjoyed your company.

Why not let us have some coffee and biscuits?" A suggestion that fell on receptive ears and to which I readily weakened.

We returned to the garden and commiserated about the things we missed most of our native countries and the doings in general of the foreign communities here in Bogotá, Colombia.

At last, fully resolved to take my leave I rose, held out my hand and said,

"I really must go now, thank you so much, I will give you a call shortly and please do give my regards to George".

There was a moment of silence in which her face registered a complete blank. With a puzzled look, she said, "George? Who's George?"

I hastily swallowed at my lack of diplomacy in using her husband's first name so casually.

"Damn it", I thought, "he is after all the Consul and she and I have never met before, perhaps it was presumptuous of me to call him by his first name."

As this flashed through my mind, I stammered

“Do forgive me, your husband, Mr. Foster of course.”

The puzzled look became one of incredulity. “Mr. Foster - my husband? Good gracious, my husband’s name isn’t Foster. His name is Stahl. Wilhelm Stahl and I am Annake Stahl. I don’t understand.”

“What?” I gulped, “You’re not Mrs. Foster? but you are selling a vacuum cleaner and you are moving and I made an appointment with the maid to see you this morning!”

“No”, she said, “My maid never made any appointment with anyone, and when you mentioned the vacuum cleaner, I was a little surprised that anyone knew we were moving, as my husband’s next posting isn’t effective for another two months yet.”

“You mean you are moving as in leaving?” I weakly asked, “Not just moving house?”

“Yes”, she replied, “we are going back to Holland and I am selling most of my things.”

“But,” I stuttered on, desperately groping for some sort of explanation.

“This is Calle 109 -318, isn’t it? And you’re really not the Consul’s wife?”

There was a burst of laughter. “Oh my dear you’ve come to Calle 109 A 318. Now I realize why I sometimes get flowers by mistake. They are sent for the consul’s wife, which I am certainly thankful not to be.”

“Oh, this is terrible.” I gulped with dismay. “I’m more than an hour late. I really must go! Fool driver, brought me to the wrong street.”

I raced to the car, my earlier, charitable thoughts of my waiting, perspiring chauffeur, now were ones of less than kindly feelings. Fluent in Spanish, I controlled my anger to express the words and phrases used by native city-dwellers when situations call for apportioning blame.

“Same house, next street.” I barked at him. No sooner in the car than out of it, I hurled myself at the door and rang the bell, spitting out excuses before the door was fully opened to reveal a rather large woman that nature, or indulgent habits, had endowed with more than generous curves. Mrs. Foster received me in a distinctly aloof manner, mumbling

something about the British and their reputation for punctuality.

She was dressed in slacks which did not encase her ample proportions favorably. Her hair was curled up in rollers. Her face glistened from an oil-based cream. I followed her swaying haunches as she lead the way to the closet in which the vacuum cleaner was stored, and found myself now better understanding that errant gleam in the Consul's eye.

What Kind of Poet

Julia Brown, Holladay Park Plaza



If you were a poet, what kind would you be?
Would you sing of nature - its beauty, its bounty,
Magic of the mountain, shimmer of the sea,
Tumbleweed wheeling across the prairie,
Peace of the meadow, the forest's dark mystery,
And God's creatures in their amazing diversity?
About such wonders would you sing a symphony?
Is that the kind of poet you would be?

Or would you be a bard of a people's history ?
Speak of heroes and villains, recite us their odyssey
Through dark ages of terror and dire calamity,
Flood, famine and plague, war, exile and slavery.
Then through years of enlightenment and of discovery,
Art, music, literature, science, philosophy,
About this odyssey would you sing a rhapsody?
Is that the kind of poet you would be?

If I were a poet, what kind would I be?
I'd speak of plain people like you and like me
Of our hearts and souls, our common humanity,
Love and hate, faith and doubt, mercy and cruelty,
Joy, loss, hopes, fears, betrayal and loyalty.
My song not a symphony, nor yet a rhapsody,
Just a lilt, chant, a few notes of a melody.
Yes, if I were a poet, that's the kind I would be.

Which Pet Is Best?
(A poetic debate for 5 voices)

Alan Meyer, Friendsview Retirement Community



(First voice)

Oh, for the life of a cat
It'll nap at the drop of a hat
Anytime, anywhere,
In your lap, on a chair –
In Eugene or Racine. Or North Platte.

This is how you make friends with a cat:
It loves meat: it's as simple as that.
Feed it food, wet or dry
If you don't, by and by
It comes home with a mouse. Or a rat.

Then, once you are pals with your cat
It'll cuddle, wherever you're at –
It will snuggle and purr
While you're stroking its fur;
Life doesn't get better than that.

(Second voice) Wait a minute.

A dog makes a wonderful pet;
A better friend you cannot get.
With a pooch, you'll unwind

You'll find rare peace of mind.
No, a dog is the ultimate pet.

If fitness is one of your goals
You'll enjoy daily athletic strolls
Where you visit your neighbors
Outside at their labors
While your dog's checking telephone poles.

And he's nearly a trouble-free pet
Hardly ever have I had regret
I forgive that rare blunder
My canine's a wonder;
A dog's a phenomenal pet.
(No doubt about it: dogs make the very best pets.)

(Third voice) If I may:

I propose we add birds to this list
These are pets that are hard to resist
They are smart, they live long,
Entertain you with song
They deserve to be first on our list.

Birds need to be nurtured, it's true
And such nurturing benefits you
Even brief interaction
Provides satisfaction
Which is what this relation will do.

Birds do tricks, they can talk – even sing
Wave “Hello”, count to ten, use a swing

These multiple talents
Combine with their balance
To make birds the most popular thing.
(Birds should be first on the list.)

(Voice four) All this is OK, but

Trust me: Fish make the best pets of all.
They're no problem because they're so small.
No more trips to the vet
Or skin scratches to get
No, fish are the best pets of all.

Fish are graceful, lively and cute
They're low maintenance creatures to boot
They don't shed, they don't swear,
They cannot foul the air
Keeping fish, I have found, is a hoot.

There's no doubt in my mind – fish are best
Now I have some, I'm feeling less stressed
And I'm healthier too
With my aqueous zoo;
I'd choose fish over all of the rest.
(My vote is for fish.)

(Fifth voice)

As the judge of this “petty” debate
Which is frankly a task that I hate,
I'll announce my decision
With practiced precision.
(By the way: all your points were first-rate.)

THE DECISION:

I'm inclined to agree with you all
Every pet gets the number one call
Doesn't matter which one
When all's said and all's done
To have pets at all is a ball.

Now let's go home and take care of our friends.

The Wild Goose Chase

Cleve Boehi, Mary's Woods



When I was a challenging teenager, Mother had very strict rules for me, most of which I broke. 1) No dating on school nights. 2) No going out on school nights unless there was a meeting or school function. Of course, I made sure there were lots of meetings and school functions. 3) Be in bed by 10:00 pm. Any infractions to the rules would certainly mean “grounding” (Only we didn’t call it that when I was fifteen).

One night when my parents were out for the evening and I was home “studying”, my friend, Bob, stopped by the house. Bob was not a boyfriend, but he was a friend that was lots of fun to be with. He made me laugh all the time, and he did wild and crazy things. In fact, that night he had his pet goose in the back seat of his car, and he was on his way to a nearby park to take her for a walk. “Would you like to come with us?” “Of course,” I replied. “I would love to go, but I am supposed to stay home, and my parents will be back by 10:00.” Bob assured me that we would be back by 8:30, and, besides, he had a cigarette that he swiped from his Dad, and he would share it with me. “Sure. I’ll go, but you must promise to get me back.”

So, I climbed into the front of Bob’s car, and off we went. Matilda the goose started honking at the sight of me in the front seat. She was extremely jealous and protective of Bob, and, besides, she wanted to be in the front seat. As we drove to the park, Matilda pecked at my hair and my sweater until I started screaming. Bob told her to behave herself. I hated that goose! About a mile from my house, there was a nice city park. We parked the car, walked the goose on her leash, smoked our cigarette, and went back to the car. IT WOULDN’T START! PANIC! He tinkered under the hood the way guys do, and after about 15 minutes, he got the engine to turn over. But the old junker would only move in reverse! In REVERSE! Panic again!

Bob insisted we could make it even in reverse. He said it was only a mile to my house, and, if I could be the lookout for cars coming, we would take side roads and he could get me home in time. I got into the back seat with Matilda so I could look out the rear window,

which was now the front window. Matilda did not like it at all. . . not one little bit. So with Bob crawling along in reverse, stopping at intersections when I yelled “Car coming”, Matilda pecking at me, scooting across one main in-tersection as fast as the old jalopy could go, Matilda squawking at me, trying to watch for cars and avoiding goose droppings, we finally made it home at 9:45. Bob didn’t dare stop the car, so I jumped out and ran into the house, and he continued on in reverse to the nearest telephone booth to call his Dad.

When my parents came home, I was in bed, under the covers, pretending to be asleep. Somehow, Bob got to a public telephone and his father came to his rescue. I’m sure that his father was not too happy about having Matilda in HIS car. Who knows how many goose droppings were on the seat? I didn’t finish my homework that night, but I had a wild goose ride that I will never forget.

Wordless

Esther Elizabeth, Holladay Park Plaza



We had not said a word for over an hour
Just an occasional sigh

The woman and I
Sat holding hands
Two mothers staring
Out across the city park

This white woman told me her
Black son had been killed
For doing nothing
Just a random shooting

The world must be big enough
To hold silence between sighs
When there are no words to express
What I don't know how to say

I didn't even ask her name

In a world gone mad
A country gone crazy
Words are insufficient

Sitting and holding hands
Is right action

Young Man Goes West

Rufus S Day, III, Holladay Park Plaza



I was a senior undergraduate at dear old Eli Yale.
I wanted to go to grad school, but my grades were pretty pale!
I'd spent too much time at movies and going out with women!
But I wished to study Biophysics and I was feeling very driven!
So I went to my adviser, the Biophysics Department head,
And was asking him about grad school with just a little dread!
He said, "Your grades aren't great, but to grad school you can go!"
Then he leaned back and said as though he thought I ought to know,
"Do you want to go East or do you want to go West?" At least I had a choice!

"I've been East - I'll go West," I replied in a hesitating voice.
"Do you want to go North or do you want to go South?" - another option -
"I've been North - I'll go South," I replied with growing lack of caution.
He looked at me in a knowing way; my heart began to race!
He said, "You know, you're lucky. For you I have just the place!"
"It's a place down in New Mexico called Highlands University,"
"I think if you work hard you'll do well there," he kindly replied to me!
So there it was, in the fall I would head out to Las Vegas -
Same name as the one in Nevada, older but less famous,
A town of roughly sixteen thousand at six thousand four hundred feet,
Where I would go to Highlands University a PhD to complete!
So come mid-August I packed a trunk and took the train to Chicago,
Then switched to Santa Fe's El Capitan to head to the land of the Navajo!
I was dressed in an olive green evening suit, "After Six" it was called.
Anything less formal? My mother would have been appalled!
We sped on overnight through Kansas City and through Dodge - we really
were out West!

Then, after dawn, through La Junta, Trinidad, and Raton with just a little rest!
And as we came into Las Vegas and when I'd just stepped off the train,
All I could see was the train station and the flat empty high desert plain!
Was this in fact Las Vegas or was there some mistake?
The sign on the depot read "Las Vegas." Get a grip for heaven's sake!
And, when I looked back down the lengthy row of rail cars,
A porter was off-loading my trunk - back a bit, but not too far.
So I asked the station master to call for a taxi into town
"Son, we got no taxis here!" he relied with a knowing frown.
"But see those four fellas playin' cards at that table over there?"
"One of them'll drive you up if he's got some time to spare!"
"He's got that beat-up blue '39 Chevy pickup truck in the parkin' lot!"
So I walked over to the table, and trying not to look overwrought,
Asked who could drive me up to somewhere near the place!
And what I heard wasn't quite what I'd expected: "No hablo inglés!"
But I was ready with two years of college Spanish: "Bueno. Puede manejarme
a la universidad?"
The man was small and old and wrinkled, but with a strength I could applaud
Got my trunk and easily lifted it into the back end of the truck!
And I was standing awed and grateful; amazed at my good luck!
And when we got up to the university, he knew where I needed to be
He stopped at a building and told me to go in and get my dormitory key
And then drove on down the road to my dorm that was called Ford Hall
He got out, flipped the trunk down, took it to the door with no seeming effort at all!

So then we had to settle up, so I asked him "Cuanto es?", that is, "How much!"
And when he replied fifty cents, I thought, you know, while I'm no soft touch,
I owe this fellow so much more; what a pleasant welcome to Las Vegas!
I was hoping that his hospitality might even be contagious!
Because in New York City, that trip would have cost a whole lot more!
But finally I decided to give him a dollar to settle up the score!
Because we weren't in New York City; we really were out west -

In New York I never would have been treated like this - to that I can attest
And later after dinner and meeting other students, we all went to the football game,
And you know after that my life's really never been the same!