3 A.M.

The tattered notebook
by my bed
becomes a net
to catch the words
that play in my head
as I try to sleep or not.

A poet’s muse
is a strange thing,
easily scared or
broken
into wings
that take flight
on the breeze,
fragile as a kite
ripped by trees,
persistent
as the gales that
whip up the seas.

I listen to my muse,
grab a pen
and spin a tale,
weave a fable,
writing ’til
my heart’s content.

—Karen Wagner

“It is myself that I remake.”

William Butler Yeats on Revision

It is with great delight that we dedicate the 2017-2018 BOLLI Journal to the creative spirit in us all. Some of us discovered that spirit in elementary school, when we were fascinated by poetry and paint. Others were late-comers to the pleasures of writing and the visual arts, developing our creativity during our middle years. And some of us said “Ah!” long after receiving that first Social Security check.

Well, welcome all. Now. Now is our moment. Poets, storytellers, visual artists all. You have shown us who you are and, through that work, who we are. Thank you.

There are so many more thanks to be shared. To the members of the Journal Committee and our guest jurors for their hours of input, care, and interest. To Avi Bernstein, supportively standing behind us during the past two years. But most of all to our contributors without whom there would be no Journal. May the muse always be with you, and may your creative forces never wane.

Maxine Weintraub
Editor
Dear BOLLI Community:

I am thrilled to welcome readers to the 2017-2018 biennial BOLLI Journal. I see this volume—an expression of the creativity of its authors and artists and an emblem of the creativity of our entire community—as both process and product.

Only the Journal Committee can fully comprehend their undertaking with regard to the creative process—deliberations about each submission’s merits, hard choices about expenses, and anxieties about deadlines. Of this, however, I am certain: there have been friendships forged and smiles shared as the poetry, prose, and art of this Journal made their first route through the Committee review. Of this I am also sure: the “product” will speak for itself, or better yet, I invite you to conjure its voice in your reading of it, as I surely will. Join me!

Best wishes,
Avi Bernstein
Director

Editorial Committee

Maxine Weintraub, Editor
Beverly Bernson, Art/Graphics Editor
Sue Wurster, Production Editor
Marjorie Arons-Barron
Betsy Campbell
Jane Kays
Joan Kleinman
Marjorie Roemer
Larry Schwirian

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Visual Arts

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Ruth Baden
Charlie Marz
Abby Pinard
Jan Schreiber

Tamara Chernow
Elaine Dohan
Joanne Fortunato
Suzanne Hodes
Arthur Sharenow
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Title Page Photograph, “Stairs 2” - Rickey Ezrin is relatively new to photography and never had a camera until she was 80. She thanks Arthur Sharenow for five years of instruction and encouragement.

Frontispiece Poem, “3 A.M.” - Karen E. Wagner has been writing for several years. She has been published in both the 2016 and 2017 volumes of “The Goose River Anthology” as well as the last three editions of “The BOLLI Journal.”
Finally, he comes out of the pool. He has done enough, or no more can be accomplished. Maybe something or someone tells him that he is released. He will not shower before changing into his clothes, wanting to keep the water with him as a final reminder, tribute, or maybe protection.

This 12-year old, soon to have his bar mitzvah without his grandfather, has swum with death and now wants to keep his understanding of diving and dying as long as possible.

Daniel’s Bar Mitzvah Swim
Sandy Sherizen

Sandy has been a BOLLI member for six years and has taught five different courses. He was a sociologist, criminologist, and cyber security consultant who is enjoying “flunking” retirement.

The voice on the telephone tells us that our lives will no longer be the same. My father-in-law Herb has had a heart attack in the swimming pool where he exercised twice a week.

My 12-year old son Daniel, his only grandchild, comes home from school to hear that he has lost something precious. I tell him as gently as I can that his world has been irretrievably changed.

He says, “It can’t be. Sometimes people come alive at the undertaker’s. I’ll show you when we get to Chicago. I won’t believe it until I see him.” He clings to magical wishes, trying desperately to repair the tear that has been opened.

In Chicago, he immediately wants to go to the swimming pool where his Gramps died. He needs to be there.

Sadly, we remember that, ten years earlier, when his grandmother died, Daniel told us that she had swum away. Puzzled about where this young boy got such an idea about death, we find out that he had confused the word dying with diving. Once again, water and death are mixed together. But, now, the words are clearer and deeper in his mind and soul.

At the pool, he changes at his grandfather’s locker. Then, with a determined look that chills me, he dives into the water. For two hours, he swims from end to end. He is silent, but he talks to his gramps. The intensity of this swim for life stuns me. He is facing death in such a direct way, nothing between him and his dread but drops of water. Tears are absorbed as if the pool itself is tearful, with all of the drops merging into a tribute to the fallen swimmer.

When I gently try to get him to come out, he refuses. “I lost my Gramps,” he shouts at me. What could possibly be important enough to take him away from this memorial? Back and forth he swims, trying to cover all of his skin and his memories with Gramps’ water.

Sandy has been a BOLLI member for six years and has taught five different courses. He was a sociologist, criminologist, and cyber security consultant who is enjoying “flunking” retirement.
Dennis Greene

An Old Geezer Visits Azeroth

Dennis was an Eagle Scout, bookworm, and basketball player in Dartmouth, Massachusetts, and then a husband, father, engineer, lawyer, and life-long pop culture devotee. He lives in Wellesley where he is writing his memoir, trying to improve his golf game, and taking frequent naps.

Barlonis, my rogue assassin alter ego, stands dormant in Azeroth. My thoughts still turn to him daily. But it has been more than a year since I have vanquished an orc or slain a yeti. I have put World of Warcraft behind me.

When he noticed that I showed some interest in the "massively multiplayer online video games" or MMOG's, his eyes seemed to brighten, and he stood up straighter. "World of Warcraft is just what you are looking for," he said. Obviously, he was a gamer, and his enthusiasm was contagious. For $59.95, I purchased a World of Warcraft Battle Chest and Cataclysm expansion package which, together, offered 90 levels of action and adventure, and, for the first 20 levels, playing time was free. My new mentor suggested I subscribe for several additional months of time to be able to play at the higher levels, because, he told me, I would "blow through" the free levels, and, each day, I was spending more time at the computer. I promised myself I would quit as soon as I reached level 20, or certainly when my free time expired. But the game was too much fun. It combined action and traditional fantasy with whimsy and pop culture. How can you not get a lift going on quests like "The Unspeakable Atrocities" or "The Paths of Anguish" accompanied by characters like Harrison Jones, the archeology teacher, Hemit Nestingsway, the big game hunter or Haris Pilton, the socialite? And let's not forget flying into battle in a biplane piloted by Iggy "Tailspin" Cogtoggle.

One Sunday evening, during my tenth week in Azeroth, I set out to kill Vulgar Vul'Gor, an evil ogre who lived in a cave deep under the Ogre Mound in Dustwood. When we finally located his cave, we discovered that twenty other players were already there trying to complete the same quest. Each time Barlonis moved to attack, one of the others, who each seemed controlled by someone much more adept than I, beat him to the punch. This was especially demoralizing to me because I suspected that my adversaries were a bunch of eleven-year-old kids from Tokyo and Minsk. After several hours, I gave up in frustration and went to bed.

At 2:00 a.m., with the prior evening's failure tormenting me, I awoke, went quietly downstairs, and returned to Azeroth. Barlonis was now alone in the realms of Azeroth.

First, I had to select my avatar. I picked a tall, formidable looking “Night Elf,” named him Barlonis, and then designated his profession as “rogue assassin.” Barlonis and I then set out to make our mark in the realms of Azeroth.

The kid at Best Buy greatly overestimated my ability to master the game. After dozens of failures, Barlonis and I managed to overcome the first few easy obstacles, but after a month of play, we had only reached level 7. I wasn't exactly "blowing through" the free levels, and, each day, I was spending more time at the computer. I promised myself I would quit as soon as I reached level 20, or certainly when my free time expired. But the game was too much fun. It combined action and traditional fantasy with whimsy and pop culture. How can you not get a lift going on quests like “The Unspeakable Atrocities” or “The Paths of Anguish” accompanied by characters like Harrison Jones, the archeology teacher, Hemit Nestingsway, the big game hunter or Haris Pilton, the socialite? And let's not forget flying into battle in a biplane piloted by Iggy “Tailspin” Cogtoggle.

Barlonis, my rogue assassin alter ego, stands dormant in Azeroth. My thoughts still turn to him daily. But it has been more than a year since I have vanquished an orc or slain a yeti. I have put World of Warcraft behind me.

After installing the software and logging in, I pressed “Play” and stared into the icy blue eyes of a powerful looking dwarf trudging through a snow-covered mountain pass accompanied by a salivating, growling bear. The animation was rich, compelling. The scene quickly faded to a scantily clad elf girl leaping through a lush jungle. She was breathtaking until, after several strides, in mid-leap, she transformed into a snarling black panther. Scenes with a club wielding troll and then a repulsive undead creature followed in quick succession. I was hooked at the dwarf.

At 2:00 a.m., with the prior evening's failure tormenting me, I awoke, went quietly downstairs, and returned to Azeroth. Barlonis was now alone in the cave with Vulgar. Perhaps it was past the other players' bedtimes. We managed to defeat the ogre after a short but furious battle, and I experienced such a rush from this victory that I decided to complete a few more quests before returning to bed. The next thing I knew, I was startled by my wife's voice, informing me that it was time to get dressed and go to work. I had been sitting at my computer, rigid, immersed in Azeroth, for six straight hours. I began to sense that I had a problem.
An Old Geezer Visits Azeroth

Continued

As Barlonis galloped through wild countryside, past ancient ruins, and across rickety suspension bridges, I found myself leaning from side to side with him as if I were also on horseback. When he soared through the air on his flying gryphon, I could feel the rush of air on my face. Through Barlonis, I felt fearless, agile, powerful, resourceful, and dangerous. It was more seductive than crack.

I didn’t quit at level 20 or level 40 or level 60, as I had vowed I would. I gave up working out, stopped writing, and passed up weekend golf games. Soon, I was skipping meals. I spent no time with my family or friends, and I began missing work. My virtual life was ruining my real one.

I was obsessed with guiding my alter ego to Level 90. Barlonis slaughtered thousands of men, women, monsters, wild animals and assorted other creatures, and often exterminated whole herds of wildlife just to sell their skins. If a quest required it, Barlonis would take lives without hesitation or remorse. Happily, he was never called upon to kill human children, but a number of baby animals met death at his hands. Perpetrating so much virtual carnage was troubling.

Barlonis reached level 90 shortly before my paid time expired, and I went inactive for about six months. But then, another expansion package offered extended play to level 100. I paid another $39.95 for the software and another six months of time—and was hooked again. This time, it took only a few weeks to get to level 100. Advancing in levels involved defeating hundreds of computer-generated opponents known as “Non-Player Characters” or NPCs. Their armament, endurance, and skills were defined and limited, and now, as an experienced Level 100 rogue assassin, I could defeat most of them quite easily.

With no more levels to achieve, the next step was to enter the “Player vs Player” realms, where I would have to face skillful human players instead of NPCs. Among them, I was still a novice. Every time I faced a “Player v. Player” adversary, I was instantly slain. These computer-savvy young players had phenomenal keyboard skills as well as an arsenal of maneuvers and magic spells which quickly overwhelmed my power of invisibility and two poison daggers. I would have to vastly improve my skills to compete in these realms. Instead, I quit playing.

I tell myself that, by the exercise of strong willpower, I wisely kicked the habit in order to resume my sensible and sane life. I want to believe that I was no longer willing to forgo the thrill of sinking a birdie putt on the eighth hole. That

I wasn’t willing to miss another meal with family or friends in order to experience artificial victories in an imaginary world. But I secretly wonder if I really quit because I knew I could never be good enough to compete with the kids who dominate the game.

The developers of World of Warcraft recently released a full-length motion picture based on the game. After seeing the trailers on TV and then sneaking out alone to see the movie, I have had a strong urge to return to Azeroth, just for a few more quests or battles. But I know it wouldn’t stop there. So, I won’t go back today, and I will wait to confront the urge again tomorrow. And then again, and again, one day at a time, until Azeroth no longer beckons to me.
Often, we centered our attention on the once abundant bathhouses decked out in their beautiful beach colors of pink, yellow, and blue. Large, menacing gargoyles sat atop the buildings. I didn't understand the purpose of the grotesque gargoyles, but I accepted them as part of the otherworldliness of Coney Island. During those years, fire would often destroy a bathhouse. I didn't know the reason for the bathhouses' demise, but, regardless, they were a great loss to the beauty of Coney Island. Each time, we would stop and mourn the passing of yet another monument to the once great amusement park. Each member would say something of a prayer to express his great disappointment.

The men amazed me by asking me to say a few words too. I'm sure I didn't say anything profound except to express my deep sense of hurt and loss for the downing of another great monument. What was momentous to me was that these gentlest of all gentlemen not only waited for me to begin their walk, but that they also took me in as a part of their group. They asked for my thoughts, despite my young age. I had never experienced such behavior. I liked it. How generous and different from my home life. I unconsciously knew this was the feeling I wanted and needed in my life—to belong.
But, Oh! More Horrible Than That...

Marjorie Roemer

Marjorie has been at BOLLI for nine years—taking classes, teaching classes, and serving on committees. Writing has, all the while, helped her to frame and deepen her experience.

My father used to declaim. Especially when he was shaving. I could hear his voice booming from the bathroom, “But oh! more horrible than that is the curse in a dead man’s eye.” He had amazing recall, most especially for the poems he had learned as a young child. So he could go on, not just with Coleridge but with other odd excerpts from The McGuffey Reader he learned to read in a one-room schoolhouse in Woodbourne, NY early in the twentieth century: “I slip, I slide, I gloom, I glide; I join the brimming river; for men may come and men may go, but I go on forever.” That’s what I remember.

What did I make of it then? What on earth was a curse in a dead man’s eye? How did my three-year-old self hear that? I think I heard the music. I heard the power of my father’s voice and the magic of metrical lines carried in the mind, evoking strange, incomprehensible worlds.

But my memory is faulty. Maybe his was too. The poem that sounded kind of jingly and silly to me about a brook was actually by Alfred Lord Tennyson, and the lines, in my memory at least, have been compressed. The poem actually goes like this:

I slip, I slide, I gloom, I glance,
Among my skimming swallows;
I make the netted sunbeam dance
Against my sandy shallows.

I murmur under moon and star
In brambly wildernesses;
I linger by my shingly bars;
I loiter round my cresses;

And out again I curve and flow
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever.

And that’s not even all of it. Do I misremember, or did he?

And about those McGuffey Readers. I don’t know much about them. I know they first were published in about 1837 or so and that they are still used by some homeschoolers and Presbyterian schools. McGuffey himself was a Presbyterian Calvinist, and the books were intended to instill moral values as well as to teach phonics. I picture my father, a small Jewish boy recently emigrated to a rural Christian world, learning and forever retaining some vestige of those teachings. What did he make of them? They continued to echo in his mind, maybe compressed, maybe transposed, maybe re-interpreted.

For me, there is always a sense of a stereophonic world, voices super-imposed upon voices, like laying down several tracks on a recording. My father’s voice, the voices that shaped his. The ways we all remember and misremember.
Hausdurchsuchung
Sophie Freud

Sophie grew up in Vienna, left for France at age 14, and after many adventures, came to the United States at age 18. She was first a social worker and then taught for 30 years at Simmons College School for Social Work while also giving workshops all over the U.S. and Europe. Books have been her cherished companions all of her life— as a reader, book reviewer, and writer. Inventing and teaching new courses at BOLI has become her old-age pastime.

I was haunted by a number of fears as a girl growing up in Vienna. Most of them came to pass. “Vienna is on a fault line, which means earthquakes might erupt,” my older brother assured me repeatedly. He enjoyed frightening me. I feared that my mother would get run over by a car, and indeed, at some point, she was in quite a serious accident. Ever since seeing a picture in a pharmacy window of a huge, rotting tumor placed on a hand, a condition I assumed was leprosy, I had become uneasy. When I then read an article claiming that leprosy started with a white patch inside your hand, I often looked at my hand with some dread. It would be seventy years before I had a tumor on my brain, so perhaps that does not count. Finally, I was afraid of burglaries, which the adults assured me was a silly thought. And yet, that too did happen.

My brother and I were at home playing chess, a joy and great privilege for me. Perhaps my brother had become kinder towards me because I had turned thirteen. My mother was at home as well, which was unusual, but these were unusual days. Hitler and his German army had just arrived in Vienna, and we were not prepared for this assault. Suddenly, four armed men stormed into our third floor flat shouting, “Hausdurchsuchung!” Not from the German army, they were only Viennese hoodlums who were taking matters into their own hands. I later learned that similar troops had invaded my father’s office and my grandfather’s home. My mother, who threw hysterical fits after fights with her husband, was cold-blooded in this situation. She addressed the men politely, offered them coffee, in vain, furnished them with keys, and assured them there was nothing hidden in the house. No money, no weapons.

They stormed around, emptying drawers and closets. It seems to have been the custom, at that time in Vienna with its potential revolutions, to have stored bags of dry food for emergencies. We thus had linen bags of rice, lentils, tea, flour, and coffee stored in the lower half of the dining room sideboard. The men stuck bayonets into all of them, sending hundreds of pieces of food to clutter the floor. Finally, they located the little box of gold coins father had collected for us children. They had found something of what they must have been looking for.

And then, they left. So much wasted food! It took several hours to clean up the house, in silence. Nobody had been hurt. Some weeks later, there was a second Hausdurchsuchung which I do not remember, although I was home at the time. A few months later, Father and my brother left for London, Mother and I for Paris. We were able to leave Vienna alive.
The Pink Pajamas
Barbara Jordan

Barbara founded the music publishing company, “Heavy Hitters,” and her songs have graced the soundtracks of hundreds of television shows and films. She is also the author of the book, “Songwriters Playground.”

It wasn’t the first time he’d overestimated me. Only a month into our relationship, my future husband presented me with a frightening gift. He’d seen me painting at the kitchen table, the canvas leaning against a cookbook holder, and decided I needed a proper easel. Not a cheap, craft store thing, but a serious, art studio easel of solid wood, with legs.

I was furious. It was Christmas, not my holiday, but his—and I hadn’t anticipated how bloated the gift-giving would be on Christmas morning at his family’s upscale Southern California home. What’s with these people? I thought, giving their loved ones a Macy’s store worth of gizmos and gadgets and socks and sweaters and easels?

I was sick to my stomach, certain I’d chosen the wrong man. What made him think I could live up to this easel? It took less than a minute for me to say, “Take it back! This is too grand. I’m not a painter, I’m a…” I didn’t even know what I was…but I knew I wasn’t good enough for this.

He took it back, and thus began a long tradition of dysfunctional communication.

Would we ever get over it? What therapists call “maladaptive couple behavior.” Hardly. But John kept giving me those sorts of things, regardless. Some I used, but the majority of his gifts were so imposing I just didn’t know what to do with them.

So when John returned last summer from a solo trip to Italy, he presented me with yet another beautifully wrapped thing. “I just want to say I know you probably won’t like what I brought you,” he announced. “No pressure. I found it in the most wonderful shop. It’s made so well and would look so lovely on you, if you ever choose to wear it.” I dreaded opening it, but when I saw the pale pink striped pajamas, I knew we had a museum piece here.

It was the kind of thing Hepburn wore in The Philadelphia Story. Elegantly androgynous—perfect for my body—with a discreet label in Italian: “100% Seta.” Silk. No brand name, of course. These had been hand-crafted by artisans for the elite.

John knew I would never relinquish my comfy men’s medium pajamas, the torn schmatte that defined me as the granddaughter of Russian rag traders. The riff-raff, not the royalty. “Oh, John,” I said. “These are amazing. I will wear them, someday. I promise.”

I tried them on the night before he was to leave for New York. Yes, they fit perfectly, and I must have looked, to John, like the perfect vision of the savvy, sophisticated, and confident woman who had it all. The woman he knew I could be. But what I saw was a little match girl playing dress-up. I quickly hung them on a padded hanger. It would have been impossible for me to ever fold them back up correctly, so why even try?

John doesn’t pressure me about them. He understands, and that’s why I love him. Every time I open my closet, I see what could have been but is not yet. Like the ballet slippers of my youth, this soft pink gift haunts me and gives me hope that I might dance again someday.
looked at him as if giving it a thought, smiled coyly, and put her hand on the door. “No thank you.”

“30%!” suggested the jeweler with his little magnifying glass looped around his neck.

My grandmother simply smiled, shook her head, and opened the glass front door. “It’s someone else’s initials,” she stated, as a matter of fact. “Who’s F.B.?”

Gog extended her right foot out onto the busy sidewalk and then heard: “OK!” the frustrated little man called out, knowing she had beaten him once again.

They agreed to 50% off. She had convinced him that no one would ever purchase a pocket watch with someone else’s initials permanently decorating its front. Who would be so stupid? He would be stuck with that watch forever. It would never sell!

Other times, she paid in cash—but not that day. Gog wrote the man a check on which her name was printed: Frieda Breslow.

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Laurel Brody

_The Watch_

_It was Gog who started this family tradition. Well, it was Gog who started all of the jewelry traditions. Gog. I know the name is strange, but that’s what we all called my mother’s mother, my grandmother. Gog. Each of the women in my family, five in all, have antique pocket watches at the end of antique chains that hang around our necks. It was the family icon, our go-to piece of jewelry. The proud and visible symbol that these five women—my grandmother, her two daughters, and two granddaughters—belonged together. I cherished that idea and the sense of belonging. The watches were acquired over periods of time as each of these women came of age. Knowing his life was ending, my grandfather wanted me to have mine as a five-month early birthday present. But it all started with Gog._

Gog had her “little men,” as she called them. They existed in New York City, in the bedding district, the furniture district, the luggage district, the men’s clothing district, and so on. She would spend a day playing one against the other, underpricing them all. She knew the art of the deal and always got the lowest prices. But her favorite “little men” were on jewelry row.

Gog knew what she was after before embarking on her excursion and would tease the little men as she kibitzed and flirted with them. She would giggle and bat her eyelashes. They loved her and loved the art of the game, and she was as good as any who played. On this particular day, Gog was after a man’s antique pocket watch.

A sweet one was found early in the day in a shop she had frequented many a time. But it bore the initials “F.B.” in the most beautifully inlaid turquoise enameled script. “What am I going to do with someone else’s initials on this watch?” complained my grandmother to her little man. “F.B. Now, why would I purchase that?” She deftly pushed it aside and turned to peruse other items.

After taking up considerable time, she shook her head and turned toward the shop door, thanking her little man. “Wait!” the shopkeeper called. “What if I take off 20%?” The calculator in Gog’s head was faster than any of the day. She

Laurel is one of the millions who have had little Jewish grandmothers. Telling the stories of their antics helps to create family histories that offer insights into culture and history. Laurel has long been a teacher of stories.
Jane’s writing life presents snapshots of where she’s been and how she came to be the person that she is today. When carving personality-shaping moments, it is with a desire to cut deeper each time around and to reveal a bit more heart than the time before.

In my neighborhood, kids’ secrets spread faster than joy turned to tears when a skinned knee drew blood. One set of whispers was about making babies. Boys said that the father put his thing into the mother’s hole, and we girls said “nuh-uh. Babies come from spit.”

Other secrets birthed into truth, and the one we shared about Mr. Gomberg and the numbers created a clique, making us feel close to one another. Only those of us in the clique understood the reference when we whispered about the “Numbers.”

Five blocks in a straight line from my house was a string of Jewish shops. Anything that could be Kosher was there—bread from the bakeries, all kinds of food from the small grocery, soap, and meat from Puzel, the butcher. The last shop and the smallest was the cleaner’s.

We would visit Mr. Gomberg, the owner, but not to bring business to him—no slacks to dry clean and press, no shirts to wash and starch. In my friends’ families, men wore navy, tan, or green work clothes. Nothing that needed professional cleaning. Besides, families had no money to spare on frivolities.

We often whispered about Mr. Gomberg, and that’s why we would stop in to talk to him. His shop was hot. We’d say it was 300 degrees because we knew that water boils at 212 degrees. He always wore an undershirt while he worked, the kind with no sleeves where smile shapes stained the part under his arms.

“Hi, Mr. Gomberg,” was our ticket. We didn’t have much more to talk about while he pressed slacks and skirts and shirts while steam baked his face and where sweat poured onto his chest like he’d just come from swimming at Revere Beach. He let us hang around the tiny entrance while we waited for him to write a slip for a customer.

When we’d bring a new kid who didn’t believe the numbers secret, we’d wait for Mr. Gomberg to pluck the nub of a pencil away from its perch on his ear in order to write a customer’s name on a slip of paper. Now was the moment. Maybe, this time, I would be the one to nudge my foot against the new kid’s toe, the attention command.

Our trained eyes knew where to look before the moment evaporated. And then we saw him, his fingernails, hardly any bits left. Also, stained from cigarettes, but that was nothing because lots of other moms and dads smoked so much that their fingers turned mahogany, like the color name written on the paper of one of my crayons. This was about what had happened to his nails. They pushed pieces of straw under them, and they lit them on fire.

When he handed over the slip to the customer, we watched as he extended his arm. That was why we really came to the shop. We always needed one more look. There they were, the string of numbers lying down in the hair on his arm like they were lying in grass.

Maybe Mr. Gomberg knew why we hung around. He let us stay as long as we wanted.

And when we left, we would only whisper our code word to each other, “Numbers,” so no one else would know what we knew.
Angels in the Snow
Sue Wurster

Sue has been a “word nerd” forever—reading them, writing them, playing with them, and performing them all along the way. For over forty years, she enjoyed teaching and coaching middle school, high school, and college students to do the same. Now, at BOLLI—more of the same!

It was a snowy morning in 1956 when I was picked up by the police.

It was the first big snowfall of the year, and I couldn’t wait to get out into it. In double-time, I downed my Cream of Wheat, pulled on my puffy lime-green leggings, snapped my mittens into the teeth of those little metal clamps in the sleeves of the matching jacket, looped the elastic holders around the buttons on my white vinyl boots, and hurled myself into the elements.

I have always suspected that NASA’s fashion coordinators grew up in the great Midwestern “Snow Belt” of the 1950’s because film footage of astronauts in those thick silver suits, floating in space or bouncing from crater to crater always brings that lime-green snowsuit to mind. And for this five-year old, the trek to Miss Chafee’s Kindergarten on Jackson Street, five blocks away, would be no less challenging than that first walk on the moon would be to Wapakoneta, Ohio’s own Neil Armstrong thirteen years later.

Slogging my way through spectacular drifts, I finally made it to the corner of Maple Street and Mentor Avenue where I stopped to wait, as always, for the rest of the neighborhood. That clean, white comforter of snow stretching across the small parking lot at Don’s Dairy DeLite drew me, like one of Ming’s tractor beams on Flash Gordon. I just had to drop myself onto Don’s closed-for-the-season lot, making one crisp-edged angel print after another until it looked like the heavenly host had stopped by for dip cones. As I admired my work, I realized that the neighborhood hadn’t arrived, and it dawned on me that they must not be coming at all. I must be late. Very late. And that meant I would have to walk to school—by myself. I would have to cross streets—by myself. For the first time in my entire life. But I could do it—by myself. Right?

Why only last Sunday night, Lassie had plowed through a total blizzard to rescue Timmy from a snowbound cabin in the Yukon. Of course, in that great Midwestern Snow Belt of the 1950’s, we didn’t stop to think about how Timmy had managed to get himself stranded in a snowbound cabin in the Yukon, but however he had managed to get there, the important thing was that Lassie had, naturally, saved him. And I was not about to be undone by a dog. Not even if that dog were Lassie herself.

So, for five blocks, I challenged the elements. Rolling, laughing, dipping, and sliding through the snow, I downed one Abominable Snowman after another with hard-packed, well-placed balls of the stuff and left a trail of angel prints in the drifts along Mentor Avenue that was not soon to be rivaled. So, when I finally arrived—triumphant, ecstatic, proudly secure in the knowledge that I had done Something Big, I made the final push to get to the door of that small brick building and found it...locked.

Locked.

I pulled at the ice-encrusted handle again and again, but it simply would not budge. For the first time that morning, I turned and took a good, hard look around me—at the great, clean sheet of cotton flannel which lay between Miss Chafee’s door and Jackson Street. The only marks in that shimmering spread had come from my vinyl boots, and they were disappearing before my very eyes as the snow continued to fall. I was completely alone—probably for the first time in my life. Suddenly, my wet jacket, leggings, and mittens felt cold and heavy...miserable. Exhilaration gave way to exhaustion, and triumph turned to tears as I plopped down on the building’s top step and began to cry.

Pretty soon, a single sound sifted through the bell jar silence of that quietly enveloping snow. From somewhere beyond the echo of my snuffling, sneaking its way through the gulp of my hiccoughing, was the honk of a car horn. There, on Jackson Street, in front of Miss Chafee’s Kindergarten, sat a black and white squad car. And soon, a big, burly man in blue was plowing his way through the snow toward the steps.

“Didn’t anybody turn on the radio in your house this morning?” he asked, not unkindly. “It’s a snow day.” He winked and held out his hand, a look of understanding—perhaps even respect—in his eyes. “In snow like this,” he winked, “the little kids wouldn’t be able to get there.” He bundled me into the car and took me home.

And, yes, I got to work the siren.

That big, burly man in blue who picked me up at Miss Chafee’s could have simply ushered me into his car, put it in gear, and deposited me at home.
Up Close and Personal

Arthur Sharenow

This week-long photo tour in Colorado was my first with a professional photographer. On the last day, after a long ride along miles of flat, dirt roads, our leader Weldon announced, “Here we are,” and pulled the car into the Lone Prairie Animal Shelter where two tigers were running around in the field.

Weldon told us that the animals were only six months old and were, presumably, used to people. Still, the idea of joining them in the field with nothing between us but my tripod and camera was more than a little intimidating. Each of these babies weighed about three hundred pounds and was already about seven feet long. This was very different from taking animal shots in Africa where I was protected by a safari vehicle and an armed guide.

Weldon noticed that I was nervous. “They’re very playful,” he said. “If one of them comes rushing at you, don’t panic. Just stand your ground and say ‘NO’ in a firm voice. They usually just back off. But if they keep coming toward you, Brian will distract them so you can move backwards—slowly.”

What was I thinking? I said to myself. This is crazy! But when I saw those tigers playing in the field like puppies, my nerves began to settle. They jumped into the air. They wrestled. They raced around in their own tiger version of tag. And when they did come running toward me, their handler Brian was able to distract them with ease.

It was an absolutely amazing time. I was so absorbed in taking pictures that, eventually, I even found myself easing in, closer and closer, for better angles. I had two cameras. The one with the big 400 mm lens was on my tripod, and the other, with the 24-120 mm lens, was around my neck. Shooting constantly with both, I took over 300 shots in one hour—ten rolls of film…and not the cost-free digital shots we take today. When my hour with the tigers was up and they were taken back to their cages, I was ready to drop, exhausted from both the physical effort and the tension which, I realized, had never entirely left me during the session.

Angels in the Snow

Continued

that day. He could have reproached my mother for not turning on the radio that morning while making Cream of Wheat. He could have shaken a reprimanding finger at my wet and now freezing lime-green snowsuit, or even at me. He could have said…or done…nothing at all.

But instead, after handing me back to my mom and heading toward his car, he stopped, turned, and grinned. Tipping himself over into a virgin pile of waiting snow, he pumped his long arms and legs for all he was worth. When he got up and brushed himself off, he sent a hearty “Bye, now” into the falling flakes—and was gone.

He left a perfect angel print in the snow and thanks in my young heart.

Arthur, a graduate of The Cambridge School of Weston, Brandeis University, and Harvard Law School, practiced law in Boston briefly. Then, with wife Judy, he owned and directed a children’s summer camp for the rest of his working life. After retiring, he renewed his childhood hobby, photography, which he has pursued seriously since.

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At our lunch break, the man who ran the shelter gave us a little history of the tigers and other animals we would meet that day. The tigers had been bought from an exotic animal dealer by a family who apparently thought they would be spectacular pets for their boys. When the cats began to grow, though, reality hit home. Tigers do not make very good house pets. The family’s solution was to have them destroyed, but when the people from the shelter heard about their plan, they stepped in to rescue them. The bear I would meet that afternoon had been wounded as a baby and brought to the shelter by the ranger who saved her life. She had a prominent scar on her right side. The wolf who would be my late afternoon photo treat had just wandered into the shelter during a blizzard about a month earlier. Half-starved, he had been looking for food and willingly surrendered his freedom in exchange for regular meals.

The bear didn’t look as big or ferocious as the tigers. I watched as the head man and his assistant had to practically push her out of her cage. As soon as she got out, though, she ran, and we all joined in trying to lead her to an area where we could get some decent images of her in her “natural habitat.” In the process, I forgot about the nature of the beast we were trying to manipulate. When she came running toward me, pinning me into a corner, all I could think of was that she was too close for my focal length. I literally pushed her away so I could get my shot. She was finally maneuvered into a hollow that was lined on both sides by trees and bushes where we were able to get some wonderful pictures.

The wolf was less civilized than either the tigers or the bear, and we had a merry chase over the four-hundred acre property in our efforts to get close enough for good pictures. The handlers kept intercepting him and heading him back our way, so we did get our shots, but at no point did that wolf ever get close enough for me to worry about my safety. Happily, my big lens made it possible to get some really nice images despite the distance.

What a day! It was just about the most exciting day of up close and personal picture taking I could ever hope to have—and the culmination of an extraordinary week of photography.
Helen enjoys theatre, horticulture, reading the classics, photography, and travel. She is looking forward to a Road Scholar trip to see the Northern Lights on a ship in Norway above the Arctic Circle.
“Cottage on Inis Mor Island,” located in the Aran Islands off Galway, Ireland, is typical of the desolate landscape that meets the eye of arriving tourists.

Arthur says that “Street Scene in Tucson” was taken in the oldest 'adobe' section of the city. It is dwarfed by the modern city that has arisen around it.
Carole joined BOLLI in the spring of 2001 after careers in elementary school teaching and financial management. Photography soon became a major interest. “In Berlin,” she says, “it was wonderful to see this serious little boy so fully absorbed in moving the pawn on this giant chessboard, especially on ground wet with rain.” She adds that “More often, I take photos of beauty in nature as well as the beauty and joy of my family members!”

Harris, a native Bostonian, graduated from Northeastern University with a BS in mechanical engineering and an MBA. He spent his professional life at General Electric Aircraft Engines and in Israel. His photography initially involved the two Traiger children and the family’s stay in Israel during the 1970s. Following retirement, his interest became more serious when he joined BOLLI and had the opportunity to improve his skills in classes led by very talented SGLs.
Kayaks on Lake Louise
Maike Bird

Maike grew up in Germany. After coming to the United States, she worked as a German language teacher and translator/editor. At BOLLI, Maike discovered the joy of photography.

Richard Glantz
End of the Season

Richard received degrees from M.I.T. and Harvard before spending most of his career as a senior engineering manager at Digital Equipment. For his 50th birthday, his brother gave him a “fancy camera” and encouraged him to unleash what Richard refers to as “the under-utilized right hemisphere of my brain.” Now, his Kodak moments focus on reflections, shadows, patterns, and silhouettes.
Brookgreen Moss
Lydia Bogar

Lydia says she was “born and raised in Woonas and educated at BOLLI.” She loves to laugh and learn, spend time with her daughter and her rescue dogs, and her two wonderful grandsons.

Bracken Mushroom
Allan Kleinman

Allan retired as an engineer and is now able to read and learn about things he never had the time for—to teach, travel, and go for long walks...usually with a camera in his pocket. “I love to photograph things I see in nature,” he says, “because of the intricate and beautiful patterns to be found there—as in this bracken mushroom.”
Tranquility

Joanne Fortunato

Joanne spent her entire career in science and technology and made little time for hobbies—until she was given a point-and-shoot camera. This immediately resulted in her finding a new passion...photography! She now enjoys coordinating the BOLLI Photo Club activities while trying to improve her own photographic skills. "Tranquility" was taken at dawn at Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, a spot that inspires quiet meditation.

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Jennifer White liked to leave her ocean front condominium in Santa Monica early to avoid the rush. It was her habit to get up early, have a quick shower, and feed the cat. If she had time, she gulped down a cup of coffee and checked her computer for emails before heading to the freeway. There was never a good time, but at 6:45 a.m., she missed the worst congestion.

Weaving in and out of traffic, Jennifer turned on the radio and tuned into NPR. “Alps…drones,” she heard the announcer say. She turned up the volume. “A drone carrying a defibrillator has been used to save the life of a man attempting to climb Mt Blanc, the highest peak in the Alps, in all of Europe.” How interesting, Jennifer thought. She continued putting on her eyeliner.

A man in his forties with an allergy to peanuts had eaten a candy bar containing peanut oil. Suddenly, he turned blue and fell to the ground. Although the leader of the French hiking party felt no pulse in the victim, he called emergency rescue services. Within one minute, rescue services had mounted a defibrillator onto a drone and launched it toward the mountain. Two minutes later, the drone landed on the snow-covered slope a few yards from the fallen man. The group leader applied the paddles and turned on the power.

The man not only survived, but he was expected to make a full recovery.

The NPR reporter went on to talk about other recent drone experiences: an Iranian team using drones as lifeguards along the Caspian Sea coast where over a thousand people drowned every year; humanitarian drones delivering medical supplies and lab test specimens in Africa; a NASA engineer using drones to report tiny wildfires in Virginia.

As Jennifer looked into the rear-view mirror to finish putting on her makeup, she thought about how amazing the news story had been. She picked up her cell phone and texted a girlfriend. As she put the phone back on her lap, there was a sudden whirring motion on the hood of her SUV. Was it a hummingbird? At 60 mph? The ‘birds’ wings were really flapping, and it had a tiny blueish lens in place of a beak.

Jennifer spent a full day at work, responding to no less than one hundred work-related emails. By 3 p.m., she was exhausted and ready for a glass of wine. She left early. At home, she shook off her shoes and opened her personal email. One stood out, an official notice from the CDB (California Drone Bureau):

Dear Ms. White:

The drone which landed on your car this morning recorded you texting at 7:02 a.m. as you were driving east on the freeway. The basic fine for texting is $40. There is an additional surcharge of $8. You can pay the ticket on line, or you may contest it.

Jennifer quickly deleted the email and turned on the radio to NPR. The man with the peanut allergy had made a complete recovery and was expected to make a second attempt at summiting Mt Blanc the following morning. Jennifer had a second glass of wine and went to bed early.
Strange Encounter
Judy Blatt

Judy has been taking writing classes at BOLLI since 2002. She comes up with ideas for stories while she swims laps in the Sudbury town pool.

Only five blocks between the bus stop and her apartment, but it was a dark night and a lonely walk. The woman's footsteps echoed on the cobblestones—step, thud, step, thud. Ever since she fell two weeks earlier, her movements had been impeded by the boot on her damaged right foot. Now, eyes on the ground, she watched each step, afraid of another fall on the ice, so busy being careful, unaware of the shadowy figure behind her.

The young man, clad in a black jacket and hat, followed the woman until she arrived at her apartment. He waited while she unlocked the door and then followed her inside. He pointed a small revolver at her and said, “Don’t try anything funny, lady, or I’ll put a bullet through your head.”

The woman put a hand to her chest and, in a tremulous voice said, “Oh, my heart! I need my medicine right now. It’s on the shelf above the sink. Please get it, or I’ll die.”

As the intruder turned, the woman stuck out her boot. He tripped, dropping his gun on the tile floor. The woman, who seemed to have made a miraculous recovery, dived quickly to retrieve it and point it at the young man. “Take off your hat and coat so I can get a good look at you, you villain,” she said.

The intruder followed the woman’s instructions and then sat down on the nearest chair. “No, no, you lazy-good-for-nothing. Get up off your behind. There’s no sitting around here for you. See all those dishes in the sink? Start washing.”

“I don’t want to wash your dirty dishes.”

“I don’t like this ‘Lady’ business. My name is Mrs. Sanders. Got that, bust er? And you better start on those dishes before I shoot you,” she said, brandishing the gun.

When the young man finished the dishes, he turned toward the chair and was about to sit when Mrs. Sanders barked, “No rest for you, young man. What do they call you? Shifty? Lefty? Killer?”

“My name is Kevin.”

“Okay, Kevin, I want a cup of tea, so put on the kettle. The tea bags are on the stove. Make me a nice cup with a spoonful of sugar.”

Mrs. Sanders took a sip and said, “The vacuum is in the hall closet. The whole house needs a good vacuuming, and if I don’t hear the machine, I’ll know you’re not doing the job and I’ll be coming after you, Kevin. And I’m a really good shot, so be careful.”

When Kevin finished vacuuming, he went into the kitchen and found Mrs. Sanders sitting in front of a chocolate cake. “Here, Kevin. Give this to your mother. A friend brought it yesterday, but I want your mother to have it. She’s a dear for sending you to help me. Ever since I fell, I’ve been having so much trouble doing anything at all.” She handed an envelope to the boy and said, “Kevin, thank you ever so much. You’re such a good kid. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“I hate to take your money, Mrs. Sanders. I have such a blast when I come here. When I help at home, it’s really boring. This is so much more fun.”

“You can have your gun back, Kevin. I would shoot you, but I don’t want you to get soaked. It’s too cold outside.”

Kevin waved as he walked down the front steps and called, “See you tomorrow, Mrs. Sanders.” Then, as an afterthought he added, “And you can call me Killer.”
The Existentialist and the Skunk, a Fable

Larry Schwirian

Larry, an architect, has been honing his writing skills at BOLLI by taking writing courses and participating in the Writers Guild since the fall of 2015.

The existentialist philosopher decided to take a walk in the woods one day to continue to ponder the meaning of his existence. Being a man of superior intellect but little common sense, he was so deeply absorbed in his thoughts that he failed, until it was too late, to notice a skunk crossing his path. Recovering from his ordeal, he looked down and saw the skunk standing his ground and observing him with apparent disdain.

After a pregnant pause, the skunk puffed himself up and proclaimed with great solemnity, “I stink; therefore I am. And you stink; therefore you are.”

The philosopher, astounded at a talking skunk, responded, “I concede that I exist, but what does it mean?”

“It means,” said the irritated skunk, “that perhaps you should pay less attention to the why of your existence and more attention to the mundane particulars of your existence, lest the mere topic of your existence soon becomes irrelevant.”

A Late Romance

Phil Radoff

Phil started off in physics but switched to law and then practiced at a large DC firm. He also served as U.S. Air Force deputy general counsel and retired as vice president of a Raytheon business unit. He has led numerous opera courses and contributed short stories to the past five issues of the BOLLI Journal.

“I remember you,” he said. “Second year French.”

“I remember you, too,” she replied as each glanced surreptitiously at the other’s nametag.

“Jessica. Of course,” he said. “I’m Harold. Used to be Harry, but now I prefer Harold.” He took a sip of wine and continued. “I don’t recognize anyone else here. I certainly haven’t kept up with our classmates.”

“Nor I,” responded Jessica. “I guess most of us went our separate ways after graduation.”

Harold hesitated a moment and then blurted out, “I probably shouldn’t be saying this, but I remember thinking about asking you to have coffee with me.”

“I don’t recall that you did, though,” said Jessica. “Somehow, you were able to resist my charms,” she added, and both laughed.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to be flip,” he said.

“Yes to the grown children, but I’ve been a widow for almost four years.”

“You must be married now, with grown children,” Harold continued.

“Not at all. You couldn’t have known. Have you come to other reunions?” Jessica asked, adding, “This is a first for me.”

“This is my first as well.” He hesitated a moment. “Pardon my asking, but do you ever get past the loss of a spouse?”
A Late Romance  
Continued


“This may seem bizarre, but the fact is that my wife passed away last year, so it wasn’t exactly an academic question.”

Both were silent for a moment. Then, summoning up the courage that had failed him forty-odd years earlier, he asked, “Is it too late to invite you to have coffee with me?”

* * *

Megan’s older sister sounded uncharacteristically alarmed. “Have you heard from Dad?”

“No, what is it?”

“He just called,” replied Patricia. “He wants to come for Thanksgiving… and he wants to bring someone—a woman.”

“What woman? What are you talking about?”

“Apparently, he met someone at his reunion. He just said that there’s someone new in his life, and he wants us to meet her.”

“But it’s been less than a year since Mom died. How can he be doing this?” demanded Megan.

“That’s what I’d like to know. He said maybe you could also come. He knows we have room since our kids won’t be here this year.”

“Well, the last thing I want to do is meet some gold-digging bimbo that Dad has taken up with!”

Both women were silent as they contemplated the turn of events. Then Megan spoke up. “Why do you suppose he called you and not me?”

Returning from work, Jack noticed the blinking message light on his answering machine.

“Hi, Jack. Please call me back tonight. I want to talk about Thanksgiving. Don’t be alarmed. I’m fine. But do call me back.”

Frowning, he called his mother’s landline and was relieved when she answered. “Mom, what is it?”

“Well, I have some good news. At least, I think so, and I hope you will as well. You remember that I went to my college reunion a few months ago?”

Patricia, three years her senior, replied with just a hint of the smugness that had characterized the sisters’ relationship for nearly four decades. “Perhaps because I’m older and less likely to fly off the handle. Anyway, I’m sure you’ll be hearing from him very soon. He obviously wants both of us to meet this person.”

“Does she have a name?” asked Megan.

“I guess I forgot to ask. Why don’t you ask him? And then get back to me so we can decide how we’re going to deal with this. I’ll talk to Frank. I don’t suppose there’s any reason to tell your ex.”

“None whatsoever,” Megan replied frostily. Then another thought struck her. “How old is Dad anyway? He must be getting close to 70.”

“Sixty-eight on his last birthday. How could you not know that?”

“Well, why the hell is he taking up with another woman at that age?” demanded Megan, ignoring her question, “and so soon after Mom…”

“I don’t know. Calm down. We’ll find out.”

“And since when does he go to his college reunions?” Megan continued. “I thought he considered them a waste of time.”

“Well, he certainly went to this one,” replied Patricia, “and it certainly doesn’t seem to have been a waste of time.”

* * *

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* * *
A Late Romance

Continued

She rushed to continue before her son could answer. “Well, I met someone there—or I re-met someone. It turns out he was widowed last year, so we had a lot to talk about. He’s been living right here in DC, but we never ran into each other. The long and short of it is that we’ve seen a lot of each other and—we’re thinking of marrying—that is, we’re actually planning to get married. He wants me to meet his children, two daughters, during the holidays. Please say something, Jack,” she pleaded.

“Wow. That’s a shocker…but it’s great!” he added. “I think it’s wonderful that you’ve met someone. Dad’s been gone for a lot of years, and you deserve another chance. When do I get to meet him?”

“Oh, Jack. I’m so pleased to hear that you approve,” said his mother with evident relief. “You’ll meet him soon enough.”

“Well, I haven’t exactly said I approve of him. Look, why not bring him here first—say, next weekend? We can check each other out. By the way, have you told him your son is gay?”

“Oh, no. I don’t think I mentioned it. We haven’t known each other all that long, and there just didn’t seem to be the right opportunity,” she added a bit defensively.

“When you bring him, it’ll just be the three of us. I’ll ask Roger to stay at his place. We can break your beau in gradually. Don’t you just love that word—beau?”

“I’ll check with him about the weekend and call you back. And, no,” she added firmly. “I prefer fiancé. Beau is too old-fashioned.”

“And you’re such a modern lady!” he teased affectionately. “See you soon—with your fiancé.”

* * *

“Well, what did you think of her?” Patricia asked. Thanksgiving had come and gone, as had their father and his…fiancée.

Megan frowned and thought a moment. “I have to admit she’s better than I feared.”

“Not exactly a—what did you call her—a gold-digging bimbo?”

“No,” admitted Megan reluctantly. “I guess we can’t say that—whatever else we can say,” she added aggressively.

“No, indeed,” replied Patricia. “She certainly dresses well, and did you see that bracelet? Her late husband must have left her pretty well off. I understand he was an investment banker, or a lawyer, or something like that,” she said, dismissing an entire cadre of professionals with a disdainful sniff. “Died of a heart attack at 64. Probably too much food and not enough exercise. Anyway, I don’t think she’s marrying Dad for his money.”

“I still can’t get over the fact that he’s marrying so soon after Mom died. It seems like an affront to her memory,” insisted Megan. “Couldn’t he have waited a decent amount of time before jumping back into the meat market?”

“I don’t disagree with you, at least not entirely.” Patricia responded tactfully. “Still, I don’t think he was expecting to start dating again when he went to his reunion.”

“How do you know?” asked Megan suspiciously.

“Frankly, I don’t care what he had in mind. He’s entitled to make his own choices.” She added, “I don’t think you need to worry any longer about what will happen to Mom’s jewelry. Dad told me that his…fiancée insisted that he give it to us now—or at least make provision for it in his will.”

“Is he really going to do that?” asked Megan. “What about his coin and stamp collections? What will happen to them?”

“He’s already provided for them to go to your kids. You know that. Nothing’s changed in that regard.”

“Well,” said Megan half-heartedly, “he can always change his will.”

“Yes,” replied Patricia gently. “That is certainly possible, but it doesn’t seem very likely. Let’s be fair about this, Megan. I can’t say I’m thrilled that Dad
As they waited for the ceremony to begin, the family members separated as if by prior arrangement and glanced appraisingly at one another while trying to remain unobserved.

“So, Jack,” whispered his partner, “I assume those women are part of your new family?”

“Yes, Roger,” Jack replied. “The older one with the teenagers is Patricia; the other one’s Megan. She’s divorced. Kids currently with her ex. Shared custody, I understand.”

“Hmm. Very attractive,” observed Roger, “and her clothes are to die for. How long has she been divorced?”

“I don’t know, but I’m sure I can arrange an introduction if you like.”

“No need,” said Roger with a smirk. “She’s not my type.”

* * *

After the ceremony, Patricia took her sister aside. “I don’t know about you, Megan, but the more I see of that woman, the happier I am that Dad found her.”

“Hmph,” sniffed Megan. “I’ll reserve judgment. Who are those two good-looking guys standing next to her? Is one of them Jack?”

“That’s Jack on the left,” said Patricia, then added gently, “the other one is Roger, his partner.”

“Damn! I knew it!”

* * *

The newly married couple stood apart, watching their children make small talk. “Do you think they’ll become friends?” asked the bride.

“Oh, they may not become great pals,” replied her husband, “but I think they’ll get along well enough if we don’t push them. Now…can I just take you home?”

“What a good idea,” she smiled, “but please don’t strain your back trying to carry me across the threshold. You’re not as young as you used to be.”
Is This the Line For...?

Marjorie Arons-Barron

Is this really the line for long life? Elizabeth wondered, gazing at the palm of her hand. Wouldn’t it be helpful to know? If, that is, you could believe what the palm reader had said. She didn’t know what had possessed her to go into that tiny shop in the small Maine town and plunk down $45 for a half-hour’s reading. A full hour would cost $80, a ten-dollar saving, but what was the point? What more could she learn than what she got in half an hour? She hadn’t totally suspended disbelief.

Still, she’d always been curious about palm reading. She was generally healthy, occasional arthritis in various inconvenient places, a legacy from her mother, for sure. Her mother and sister were also breast cancer survivors. Elizabeth hadn’t been touched. Everyone else in the family had high blood pressure. Elizabeth was a steady 120 over 60, sometimes 70. She was convinced she would live well into her 90’s. Maybe longer, given the miracles of modern medicine. The palmist was optimistic.

Elizabeth was actually more interested in the line for financial health. The lines for money run straight down from the base of the little finger. If there are many of them and they’re deep and straight, you’re supposed to be smart at investing and could make a fortune. If the lines are wavy, your finances won’t be stable. The palmist said Elizabeth should be financially secure. Problem was that Elizabeth couldn’t see the money lines at all. All she knew was that she was out 45 bucks, and the palmist had pocketed the cash.

Elizabeth’s husband had died six months earlier. They had done everything together. Everything, that is, except make it big. Christopher had always pursued his muse, undertaking creative initiatives, deriving tremendous intellectual satisfaction, making an impact on the community, growing everything except the bottom line. Still, they had managed to put together a nest egg. Their house was paid off. They had long-term care insurance. And they had investments their financial advisors said would never run out, if they didn’t go overboard in their lifestyle decisions.

But how overboard was leaning over the gunwales of the boat, smelling the fresh air and feeling the spray of the water? How far could she lean before falling out? Was it more overboard to buy wood gunwales or settle for aluminum or vinyl? Was it more prudent never to go out on the boat at all? Life was full of decisions she wasn’t used to making alone.

Twenty minutes into the session, Elizabeth had had it. This is bullshit, she said to herself. She bit the inside of her lip, trying hard not to express her impatience or, worse, laugh at the absurdity of the whole thing. Finally, time was up. The palm reader urged her to return later in the week to explore her prospects further.

Elizabeth pushed open the screen door of the shop, went down the rickety steps to the brick sidewalk, and stepped into the street, heading for the tea shop across the way. Suddenly there came the roar of an unseen motorcycle as a leather-jacketed, helmeted man on a Harley rounded the corner, bearing down on Elizabeth, unable to swerve away. It was the last thing she heard before the screams of bystanders.

She lingered for 48 hours in a coma. And then it was over. Her financial advisors were right. She had had more than enough money for the rest of her life.
Traditions
Lois Sockol

“As college loomed, my Dad made it clear that I either prepare for a profession or step into the work force,” Lois says. “I became a teacher, which fit like a glove and brought me much joy. Sixty-three years ago, I married my true love, and we raised our four sons who blessed us with nine grandchildren. We’ve shared a joyous journey. Now, BOLLI adds its own touch of sweetness.”

She’ll start with a list. Doesn’t she always start with a list? Once, in the time before lists, she served carrot tzimmes, sweet potatoes, and butternut squash during the same meal. “Everything’s so orange, like Halloween,” someone joked. Who was it?

In his picture on the dresser near her bed, Bill’s face is smiling. The blue eyes beneath his dark brows are clear and steady, and that’s how she sees him. All three of their daughters favor him—his narrow nose, high cheekbones, and strong chin. Only their hair, auburn and thick as wool, is hers. Their grandchildren, too, carry Bill’s laughing eyes.

She catches sight of herself in the wall mirror, in a faded blue flowery dress that hangs loosely, as if she’d dieted too long. She frowns, folding her face into crevices like the prunes for the tzimmes. She must find something different to wear, put a touch of color on her cheeks and mouth, a string of pearls around her neck. Yes, her mother’s pearls.

She remembers single moments from another time: a large two-story house near a high school, a fenced-in yard with her daughters running about, and a garden she planted with tulips, poppies, and blue hydrangeas. Out front was a crab apple tree that, each April, turned crimson like a burning bush.

She doesn’t like this small room with its vinyl floors, colorless walls, and shaded lamp that gives off but a slice of light. Why is she here? She will ask her eldest daughter. She sighs and walks across the room in search of a cookbook on a shelf crammed with unfamiliar volumes. Whose books are they? she wonders.

Carefully, she places Too Good to Passover on the bed cover, then removes a pad and a pencil from the night table drawer, and begins thumbing through the book. Accidentally, the top half of a page rips. The page is worn thin with greasy prints, and her hands are not as steady as they once were. She fumbles through the drawer for a paper clip to reattach it, so that her favorite sponge cake will have the right amount of cocoa and cake meal. Thoughts of today excite her. She went to bed early last night, but plans kept interrupting her sleep. She dozed off, then woke, her mind filled with what needed to be done.

At the Temple, she’ll buy two quarts of sweet blackberry wine and white tapered candles. On the shelf are the Haggadahs—the shortened edition that the younger children have the patience to listen to, to hear the story of redemption, to feel the renewed hope, to understand the day will come when all will be good. Beside the Haggadahs sits Elijah’s cup. She smiles with the thought of the miracle, the Prophet announcing the Messiah’s coming.

The china Seder plate is in her top drawer, wrapped in a soft white cloth. It’s lovely, the plate is, and running her fingers along it gives her a soothing sensation, like the feel of her own mother’s hand. She begins to write down the names of the foods she needs to fill the platter. A roasted shank bone, an egg—hard boiled and roasted too—bitter herbs, salt water, and parsnips. She’ll need apples to chop. Nuts, raisins, and cinnamon to bind them, like the mortar the Hebrews toiled with, she always tells the little ones. And wine enough to pour four glasses for everyone around the table. Everything dictated by tradition.

At nineteen she’d married Bill. They raised three daughters, each sweet as honey with promise. She had tasted their tears, been buoyed by their joys, and smelled their sweat. Wasn’t the feel of them imprinted in her arms?

Lately, they don’t visit as often. Sometimes a week passes before they call. This morning, she thought the sun shining through her window was a good omen. But now, outside, the air is gray under a sudden cover of clouds. She goes to the window, raises the blind, and rests her hands on the clean white casing. She stares for a long time at the courtyard below, at the men and women, some sitting on the benches, some with their backs against the towering spruce that reaches up from the center of the yard. There are no flowers in sight, no stretch of green, no rows of colorful bushes.

A young man carrying a chair appears on the landing and walks down the few steps to join the others. No sooner does he set down his burden than four or five leave the comfort of the tree and swarm toward the chair. She shrugs. In the feeble light, it is hard for her to distinguish among them.

They remind her of pigeons in the park.
She snatches back a napkin and tucks an afikoman under her pillow, tugging awkwardly at the cloth so it hangs free.

Suddenly, Bessie's lids grow heavy. She feels unsure, so when the woman reaches out her steady strong hand, Bessie takes hold of it, and walks with her down the hall.

What has she forgotten? She clenches her hands and presses her hard, swollen knuckles against her chin. Her grandchildren's voices call out to her. “Grandma, Grandma,” they plead, “did you hide the afikoman? Can we search now?”

Smiling, she walks to the small closet and takes out a box of matzo from the brown paper bag resting on the floor, then goes to the dresser and removes three paper napkins. They should be cloth, she thinks. Deftly, she breaks two matzo pieces in half, wrapping each in the folds of a napkin. She opens the night table drawer, making certain there's a dollar bill for each reward, then hides the afikoman: beneath the chair, behind Bill's picture, on the windowsill between the pane and the curtain.

Who else is the matriarch, the preserver of tradition, the teacher for the grandchildren? Why then, does uncertainty sometimes sink into her bones? Sometimes she even forgets what it was like when her own girls were young, or she lies awake, unable to remember the names of all her grandchildren. Sometimes Bill appears in her dreams, dressed in his wedding suit. She sees herself spinning round him like a ballerina. He reaches out and catches her; they embrace and kiss. Then she wakes, her bladder full, needing to go to the bathroom, not sure for the moment which world she's in.

From down the hall come voices. Her children! There is a quick, soft knock.

“Bessie, time for dinner,” says the woman in the doorway whose bright blue eyes shine at her with recognition.

The woman walks into the room. She goes to the window and removes the white napkin hidden behind the curtain, then bends down and reaches under the chair.

“We'll put these away again. Bessie,” she says. “The children aren't coming tonight.”

She stares at the woman whose face is neither old nor wrinkled, whose words float in and out of her mind. “Of course the children will come,” she tells her sharply.
“Got it.” His eyes went steely.

Today, on the mend after a short-lived stomach bug, Gloria needed a few things at the market, but mundane grocery runs were not in Mark Esposito’s script. She had long ago mastered her role in Mark’s delusional cops and mobsters mini-series, a creative challenge that she actually relished. “It’s like this—” she began conspiratorially. But suddenly, Mark dropped into a defensive crouch, his narrowed eyes darting from the hall to the living room and back again.

“Where is he?” he rasped. The “he” in question was Thor, Gloria’s Norwegian Forest male, who had learned, as a kitten, that he could induce apoplexy by pouncing on Mark unexpectedly. Now, with a mew, the cat was eyeing the intricate pattern of Mark’s hair weave from atop the hallway’s corner cupboard. When Gloria slipped into the kitchen and slid a can of high-priced tuna into the electric can opener, the grown-up medicine ball of fur thudded to the floor, advancing to the food mat instead of the man’s head. Mark rose, brushed his pant legs, and swaggered slightly, as if he had just fended off a hulking would-be brass knuckler.

“You remember my upstairs neighbor K.C., right? Well, she says that, every time she goes to Fairway on 86th Street, this guy ends up next to her in the pet food aisle, and then, when she goes to the meat counter, this woman ends up beside her. The same two every time. She thinks they’re following her, and she’s freaking.”

Mark dived for the bait. “And you want I should check ’em out. No problem.” He was already heading for the door. “You give me descriptions, and one of my friends downtown can get me—”

“THERE AREN’T ANY, MARK.” Gloria picked up Bogart, her yelping black Maine coon cat, and stroked his bushy tummy.

“Whoa—?” Even Mark’s pin stripes stood at defensive attention. “I got lotsa friends downtown.”

“I MEAN THERE AREN’T ANY DESCRIPTIONS.”

“What—? You saying these people got no looks? You want I should just tail everybody in the store?”

“I WANT YOU TO TAIL K.C. WITHOUT HER KNOWING,” Gloria said darkly as she reacquainted the now mollified Bogart with the hardwood floor below. “Find out

Singing Soprano
Sue Wurster

“In the summer of 1999, I was enrolled in a ‘Teachers as Scholars Institute’ in fiction writing. On day one, the task was to create character sketches based on people we had known in real life. I’ve never looked at people in quite the same way since!”

“Oh, Gloria got her cousin’s meaning all right. But she also knew that Mark’s ominous sounding ‘meeting’ probably involved picking up dry cleaning or diced tomatoes and that ‘these people’ were his appropriately named wife Angel and their toddler twins, Matthew and Marlon—he was watching Broderick and Brando in The Freshman when his young wife’s water broke.

For Mark Esposito, life was a study in thug fiction. A modern-day, mob version of Walter Mitty, he draped his everyday activities and his short, broad frame in gray pin-stripe, black shirt, and tie. He assured everyone he met that Toys R Us was “an absolutely legitimate business” and that his role as floorwalker and plainclothes security guard at their King’s Plaza store in Brooklyn was merely a cover for his real role—keeping The Management safe.

“How do they deal with him?” new acquaintances would ask Gloria about the Toys R Us management team. “And Angel…? How does she put up with it?” others would wonder.

“Just ask her,” Gloria would answer with a knowing smile.

When asked, Angel would lift her thick eyelashes, gaze dreamily at something only she could see, and, with the vocal equivalent of a candle being lit at St. Ignatius, sigh, “Whenever he leaves the house, he says good-bye like he won’t be back alive.” The entrance ramp to Mark Esposito’s fantasy freeway was clearly built of earth-moving Passion.

“What’s up, Glo? Blind date gone sour? Want I should rub him out?”

“No, nothing like that.” Pulling her significantly shorter cousin into her apartment, she kicked the police lock into place behind him. “I need you to do something, and this is strictly between you and me.”

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“Okay, Glo, I got an hour before my downtown...uh...meeting.” Mark Esposito plucked at his well-blocked fedora and checked the elevator door. “And these people value punctuality,” he added. “If you get my meaning.”

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Singing Soprano

Continued

if she’s being followed, and then, we’ll take it from there.” Gloria winced inwardly, adding hastily, “But be subtle. Don’t let her see you.”

“I’m a professional,” Mark announced in high dudgeon. “I blend.” Gloria managed to stifle a full-throated guffaw at the thought of Mark Esposito, in full Sopranos mode, “blending” at her trendy uptown neighborhood market. “So, she sees ‘em at the cat food aisle and the meat counter? You want I should pick up a steak while I’m there?”

“Rib eye--well marbled,” Gloria cooed as she smoothed his tie. “Oh, Mark-E, posing as a shopper is genius! How about I give you a list of stuff you can get while you’re there? You know, as a cover.” Moving to the note pad by the phone on the kitchen pass-through, she continued, “Now, K.C. left just before you got here, so you if you get moving, you’ll find her--first, try the dairy section.” Whisking away a glimmer of guilt, she added a sixteen-pound bag of dry Purina Cat Chow to the list. Mark might be short and fastidious, but he could lift and carry just about anything.

“Add treats for the twins and that lilac-scented soap Angel likes. On me.”

Like a tennis player heading for a Wimbledon drop-shot, Mark lunged for the elevator’s down button before turning to Gloria. “Okay. Let’s make sure I got this straight. You want me to follow K.C., check out two people in pet food and meat that got no descriptors--and I do it without her knowing.”

Gloria nodded, wondering if, maybe, her cousin was finally seeing through her masquerade. She scrambled through her imagination, looking for a way to regroup, just in case. But Mark tipped his fedora and solemnly announced, “It’s Operation Manx underway.”

“Operation Manx?”

“Manx. No tail.”

“Of course,” Gloria purred as she patted his lapel gratefully. “Operation Manx. Thank you, Cousin.”

“Anything for you, Glo-Worm,” he beamed. “You just say the word.”
Brenda is an author, editor, and needlework artist. She was a member of the Brandeis staff in Undergraduate Admissions, the Hornstein Program, and the National Women’s Committee.

Brenda says that this haunting piece was inspired by a 1919 painting by Jacob Kramer.
Blue Leaves  
Print - Ellen Moskowitz  

Ellen has found more time to pursue her own art interests since her retirement several years ago as a visual arts teacher in the Boston Public Schools. She has worked in various media, including collage and watercolors, but she has consistently enjoyed and explored various types of monotype printmaking, often focusing on motifs from nature.

Two Fish  
Mosaic - Amy Marks  

Amy's mixed media mosaics have been juried into exhibitions and are featured in museum galleries. She teaches mixed media mosaic workshops in art centers throughout New England, including Snowfarm, the New England Craft Program's studio in Williamsburg, Massachusetts.
Ellen says that “Quite a bit of my printmaking is influenced by the landscape of the Berkshires. ‘Birches’ is inspired by the many beautiful trees on Stone Hill behind the Clark Art Museum in Williamstown.”
Two Poems
Marjorie Roemer

“These poems come from very different times in my life. ‘Eucalyptus’ was written over thirty years ago when I taught in Santa Barbara and often parked my car in a eucalyptus grove. ‘Entertaining Grief’ is much more recent, the aftermath of my husband’s death.

Eucalyptus

These trees shed bark
Sheaves of paper fall at their sides
Pink flesh twists free
Like squirming, naked children in the sun.
Sloughing off old skins
They keep a supple shape
Soft in the lambent curves
Of age made new by sacrifice.

Entertaining Grief

My grief has overstayed its welcome
Like a clueless guest, it sits here
While I furtively yawn and eye the clock.

When will it leave, so I can sleep
Or get on with things,
Have the freedom of my house again?

Just one more nightcap it says,
I really have to go, it’s late
But you are such a good hostess.

I Wake Early
Karen Wagner

“For me, the most effective way to touch nature is through the carefully chosen word. Poetry gives me the power to transcend the barrier between daily life and the magic of another realm almost beyond my imagination.”

to feel the stillness
of night,
to savor wisps
of air blown
through curtains,
to greet the
earliest of birds,
who tease my
existence
into another day
while haze of
night lingers in
crevasses of my mind,
and I remain a
creature of darkness,
so reluctantly tugged
toward dawn.
My spirit remains
where daylight
animals spend their
private time,
to catch those last
precious moments
of perfect awareness.

Eucalyptus

Entertaining Grief
At the Periodontist
Steve Goldfinger

Steve, a native of Brooklyn and resident of Newton, is a retired professor of medicine of Harvard Medical School, but he majored in philosophy during his Princeton years. Here, he considers "our little sins. If only they could be scraped away and forgotten."

As that gritty speck adhered,
Unwanted, and yet part of me,
So did the moment I succumbed,
Moved my ball from rocks to grass
And hit my next shot on the green
To win the match but lose much more.
Three scrapes, and it was gone.

Concretion on that upper molar,
Stark detritus, there for months.
The time I poured the Gallo red
And not the Guigal Cotes-du-Rhone
To match the gorgeous rack of lamb
And save eleven bucks.
She swipes but once—goodbye.

The calcium seed cemented near
My chaste incisor’s tender root.
I snagged two extra blues that night
As we split the sea of chips.
I won low, and he won high.
No one ever noticed.
Scratch scratch...no more.

The mini-pebble stuck in place
Defying brush and pick and floss.
That college weekend long ago,
I tried to go much further
Than I knew she would allow.

T’was I who was exposed, not she
Her bra remained intact.
Three jabs is all it took

Then the quick polish.
I spit out the remains
To ensure a guiltless smile.
On the Road to Asbury Park
Sue Wurster

Sue muses on a late-night trek through the strip-mined hills of West Virginia...and the faces of the angry young men there whose prospects were ravaged in the process.

A Refrain

“You’re so vainnnnn…..”

Alone on the interstate, late,
I belt it out with Carly as bass notes pound against the plastic shell of the dashboard, the band trying to break free from its Ford Focus prison.

The music presses me back into another time and the back seat of a Ford Fairlane, our team’s aging green station wagon, University seal in gold on the front doors, “Property of the State of Ohio.”

Six of us roar at each other,
“You prob’ly think this song is about you…”

It is 1972, and it is midnight.

There seems to be no room for twelve elbows in this vacuum-packed beetle green charger broaching the Belpre Bridge, threading mine-ravaged West Virginia hills, kneading deep red Pennsylvania clay, eating up multi-colored map lines like Pac-Man characters gorging on computer ghosts yet to come.

Now, in 1972, it is midnight.

And we all see them...

Untouched
Steve Goldfinger

There are those ten or twelve albums
Thick with photographs...
Me before Firenze’s duomo,
She at the Sydney opera house
And atop a pony in Montana.
The kids at every age and milestone,
Always laughing,
She always smiling.

And the packed memento drawer,
That seventy-year-old report card
With its column of A’s above “good behavior”...
The score card documenting the seventy-four,
Letters from mentors, trainees,
Friends long gone,
Telling me how good...or generous...or even...exemplary
I had been
At one time or another.

Bergson’s Alliance With Mysticism,
My senior thesis,
Upright on the shelf.
Half-read twenty years ago,
It became incomprehensible at page thirty-seven.
Next to it, the dozen cherished books
That must be read once more.

These last years will be past years,
Glistening with energy,
Once I place that trove of my life
Upon my lap.
Still, they sit there, all untouched.

Here, Steve provides a reflection—passing on remembering things past.
On the Road to Asbury Park

Continued

the Pinto with the iridescent, air-brushed hood eagle,
the jacked-up silver Corvair with antenna-bound Confederate flag,
the bad-guy black Dodge pick-up with cab-fitted rifle rack
loaded for goddamn hippies.
After all, there are few bears left in these hills
along the Pennsylvania Turnpike's loneliest peaks
seventy-five miles from the Delaware Water Gap.

Midnight.

We see them see us…
long-haired, Wrangler-clad, flak-jacketed college students—
Stinkin’ radicals, the prey of choice.
We will not stop to use the facilities,
fill our tank, or ourselves, for seventy-five miles
until we reach the Delaware Water Gap.

It is 1972, and it is midnight,
and this song is about us.

Bell-bottomed and dashiki-ed,
we may look like agitators from the left,
but we are champion orators,
heading to New Jersey to declaim.
But at midnight, in the dark bleakness
of these Pennsylvania hills,
we have nothing to say.

In 1972, we do not know
about the North’s Jim Crow,
or the Travel Bureau’s Green Book designed to show
where lights are green and blacks can go.
But as we hold tight in that cramped Ford Fairlane wagon,
anxious for relief, the hardened jaws and narrowed eyes
locking on our State of Ohio seals
teach us well.
Ode to the Onion
Ruth Kramer Baden

The odor of the onion
bounds down the stairs
streams onto landings
insinuates into kitchens
tiillates my nostrils
with oniony pungency

the round creamy white ones
their little cousins, the shallots,
the maroons from Bermuda
the Georgia vidalias
and, yes, the precious pearls

ah, your seductiveness
when you toss your fleshy parts
shimmy your thin layers
in perfect concentricity
onto countertops and boards

where I slice you into rings
to be battered bathed and fried
in soft green virgin olive oil
ah, the sheer sauté of it!
or grate you with potatoes
and transmute the happy coupling
into pancakes

or I lay you on a bed
of lettuce, undressed,
where you wait
exuding your perfume
to seduce the tomatoes
in flagrante delicto

O sweet orb, believe me when I say
while I slice and dice and flay you
tears stream down my face
as I adore your pure innocence
your many-layered moonness.

She is completing a new book about women and aging.
I praise that teacher’s praise of me when I was no one.
I praise the solace of the rain for my griefs of living and dyng.
I praise the twilight for its forgiveness.
I praise children and grandchildren who will bring me beyond my ashes.

A Litany
Ruth Kramer Baden

After Mark Strand

I praise the elephant seal that has a nose three feet long and a harem.
I praise the unassuming caterpillar that patiently loops into its next life
and the cheetah’s passionate speed as it locks its prey into its gaze.
I praise the mourning dove who is beyond consolation and consoles me.
I praise the hard-shelled lobster for achieving copulation.
I praise the golden pumpkins of Massachusetts that grow mostly in the night,
and the pearled clams in our chowder.
I praise grandparents who fled tsars and famine with their goosedown
pillows and battered candlesticks.
I praise the moon’s ebb and flow for filling me with grandchildren.
I praise children who grow but leave empty bedrooms.
I praise one-year-old grandsons who defy gravity, heave up on their hind legs,
take four steps and crow.
I praise my lover who makes my body a harp.
I praise the bloodmill heart, its pumps, pistons and valves.
I praise my body that still rises from its bed and walks erectly through the day.
I praise the black brassbound trunk in the cellar where my anger hides.
Loving Pair
Joanne Fortunato

Joanne describes this photo of grandmother and child, “Loving Pair,” as having been taken at Plimoth Plantation. The child had been upset and crying, but once she was in Grandma’s arms, she found love and comfort.
“Through my lens, I look for something unusual, something that makes me think,” Carole says. “What is the relationship between a church and an intense man with his mouth taped shut? What did the person think who put the billboard in that place?”

Marty Kafka

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Walden
Linda Brooks

Celebrating Thoreau’s birthday, Linda went to the woods to live life deliberately. She hiked the path to his cabin, originally built from birches. She was grateful that the two birches in her photo were untouched.

Concord Bridge
Sandy Miller-Jacobs

Sandy joined BOLLI to start the next chapter of her life—finding a new interest. She found it through writing and photography classes, and thanks Marjorie, Arthur, and her classmates.
Ice Caps
Jane Grignietti

Jane finds photography to be a continuation of her practice as a psychotherapist and analyst. She strives to involve her senses and sensibility in creating images that evoke experiences beyond the surface of things. These photos were taken when she and her husband took a cruise from Buenos Aires to the Antarctic in 2017.

Penguins
Jane Grignietti

The ice caps were found inside the very beautiful and very narrow Lemaire Channel. “As I looked around me, I saw fantastic forms that had been sculpted by wind and melting. They seemed to belong to another world.” The penguins in this image are called ‘chinstraps.’ Here they are in their rookery with their three-month old brood. “I loved their sense of pride and concern for their young.”
Ship Harbor Fog
Allan Kleinman

“We spend our summers on the border of Acadia National Park and take daily walks in the forest or along the seashore,” Allan says. “On the seashore, I think about all the life that has existed in the vast ocean, from primordial times until today.”

New Zealand Sunset
Emily Ostrower

Emily is a retired school principal who enjoys being able to indulge her love of international travel. Capturing special moments like this one on her “little camera” is part of the fun.
The Lost Word
Sam Ansell

When the first European arrived in America, the skies were frequently obscured by enormous flocks of passenger pigeons, probably the most abundant bird in the world. Yet, by 1914, due to both hunting and destruction of the trees that were the birds' natural habitat, the passenger pigeon was extinct.

When I was a kid, back in the 1920's, the atmosphere, vocally speaking, was darkened by flocks of the word "ain't." It was used to excess: by kids, by adults, by everyone except the desperate school teachers who worked valiantly, with little success, to drive it to extinction. It was just too easy to use – no complex declensions: simply "I ain't," "you ain't," "we ain't." No past participle either: simply "I ain't done it" or "you ain't done it either."

It was a sort of linguistic slumming that proved that you weren't a snob but just one of the guys or gals. You also heard it in the popular songs of the day: "Ain't we got fun?" "It ain't necessarily so," and "I ain't got nobody." Then, perhaps 20 or 30 years ago, just as quickly as the passenger pigeon disappeared, "ain't" dropped out of common usage. No longer did kids use "ain't." No longer was it heard in boardrooms, schoolrooms, or at BOLLI lectures. No longer did it emerge from the movies or from your TV set. If "ain't" wasn't obsolete, at least it was moribund.

What caused this word to die out? I don't think it was the efforts of beleaguered school teachers or prissy parents or even the destruction of its native habitat. I suspect it was social standing–the "taint" of "ain't." Using it, these days, marks you as a slob or lowlife. But whatever it was, today's young people are sadly deprived of the magic word that they could deploy to annoy teachers and irritate parents.

Life ain't fair.
impossible places, I went to my audiologist. “Keep looking,” he recommended. “We can lend you some hearing aids for a few days, but people find them so often.”

And so, I learned that Heinzelmännchen plague other folks as well. “But if permanently lost,” he continued, “they were insured, and you only have to pay $600, which is better than the $6,000 of the hearing aids’ cost.”

I am the kind of person who compares prices at the supermarket, finds eating out a useless luxury, and never takes a cab, so the expense stung me. But he was right. It was a reassuring deal, and my heart finally stopped beating so fast. I won’t tell you where the Heinzelmännchen had hidden them, but there they were, at home.

Having saved so much money by finding the hearing aids, I was going to order a new dress I had been admiring on the internet…but where was my credit card?

When I was growing up in Vienna, Heinzelmännchen teased me. Gnomes who come during the night to hide something precious and then usually, but not always, to return it in a few days, weeks, months, or even years. My beloved coloring pencils, favorite books, my precious fountain pen all disappeared and reappeared. I was scolded for being a careless girl, and my brother laughed maliciously.

They followed me in my travels through Europe all the way to America, or perhaps each country has their own Heinzelmännchen. Possibly, they are related to each other. But in this country these days, they do not only work at night. Some must be daytime Heinzelmännchen that hide in my winter coat. How else could I have lost a CD firmly encased in my pocket as I walked around Walden Pond, later to be found, to my relief, by another hiker?

I concentrate on my ongoing battle to outwit them. Their special liking for keys of all kinds has locked me out, so these days, I never lock the house, even when I go on vacation. You will think I have Alzheimer’s, but I don’t put my toothbrush into the refrigerator, as those folks are said to do. I found Heizelmännchen on the internet, which definitely proves their existence.

I also don’t lock my car and keep the key inside. But, recently, I proudly welcomed friends at the airport, and after I parked, I decided to take the car key with me for extra safety. Returning to the car with my friends, after finally finding it in the huge garage, my pocketbook had no key in it, no matter how often we dug into it. The situation was becoming desperate until I found the key lying on the cement floor next to the car, a very malicious trick by my Heinzelmännchen and worse than mere mischief.

I will spare you the story of the disappearance of my favorite nail scissors which, of course, never leave the house, or of my warmest woolly cap, or my checkbook. But even though I have learned to always put my hearing aids meticulously in the same place, they were suddenly gone. After hours of searching in
Einstein Encounters
Steve Goldfinger


When Eddie Bell and Murray Gross stood up on the bench to expound their dogma after classes broke, they commanded a certain amount of respect. After all, these two hyper-mature guys were said to rent an apartment on Avenue N where they kept mistresses. Who knew? Who cared? Everyone!

So we were, clustered around the bench behind James Madison High School, looking up and listening once again to their diatribe. Its central theme was that God was the same as in the central cores of the philosophies of John Locke, David Hume, and Bishop Berkeley, as well as in Einstein’s theory of relativity. Whenever I tried to speak out to challenge this idea, one or the other would cut me off in a voice much deeper than my own.

I had but one quixotic recourse, to write a letter to Einstein himself to get his angle on the subject. To my utter disbelief, it got a response! (Years later, I learned that the great man wrote lots and lots of letters. Mine was hardly that special, though it surely was—and is—to me.) In his small and slightly shaky penmanship, it reads:

Dear Mr. Goldfinger,

My theories have nothing to do with God and only indirectly to the epistemological problems which were treated so lucidly by Locke, Hume and Berkeley. I am not able to go into those rather subtle questions in a letter.

Sincerely yours,
Albert Einstein

Who needed amplification?

At the next bench-top oration, I shoved a few classmates aside and waved the letter at Murray, my hand shaking.

“Read this!”

He did, and without batting the proverbial eyelash, gave his response.

“Huh. What does he know?”

II

As a sophomore at Princeton, listening to George Gamow lecture on the the Big Bang theory, I do not understand much of it. I wheel my head around to look at the man who is sitting three rows back. There he is. Among eight or ten nondescript faces, the unmistakable one of Albert Einstein. I am thinking this is unreal, something out of a Charles Addams cartoon. But, no, there he is.

Years later a roommate assures me that, at the reception after the lecture, I sidled up and actually touched Einstein’s jacket. Why do I not remember this?

III

On April 18, 1955, I am still at Princeton, and I am on the ninth tee of Springdale Golf Course.

My 2-iron, undoubtedly touched by a Greek god, strikes my Spalding Dot and sends it 192 yards on exactly the right line. I see it lean against the flag stick and then drop into the hole! Great acclaim from my playing partners—but not a mention in the next day’s Daily Princetonian, a faithful chronicle of all holes-in-one. All, that is, preceding mine. Why had my feat not been included? Ah...

Albert Einstein’s leaking aortic aneurysm had leaked its last that day.

He got all six of the Princetonian’s pages.
Olfactory Recollections
Dennis Greene

“Nothing revives the past so completely as the smell that was associated with it.”
--Vladimir Nabokov

“Incoming smells pass through the human brain differently than visual, auditory, or tactile information. Only smells are processed through the olfactory bulb, which starts inside the nose and runs along the bottom of the brain. This unique receptor has direct connections to two brain areas that are strongly implicated in emotion and memory: the amygdala and hippocampus.” This is Wikipedia’s explanation of why our sense of smell, more than any other, can trigger vivid and powerful emotions and memories. I don’t know anything about olfactory bulbs or the amygdala or hippocampus, but I do know that all it takes is a hint of certain odors to transport me back through the decades to relive, in startling detail, events that once touched me.

Fresh coffee beans on the Hoboken waterfront as I walked with Poppy past giant coffee warehouses. The smell of macaroni and cheese which made me gag and throw up at a nursery school lunch in Lauralton. The witch hazel that Poppy splashed on his face and neck after shaving with his scary straight razor. The salt and fish smell of New Bedford Harbor when we arrived there in 1952. The sweet smell of pink bubble gum slabs when I opened a package of Topps baseball cards. The pungent sulfur dioxide fumes when Mike Jennings and I played with my Gilbert Chemistry Set. The smell of the hay we slept on in the hayloft at Bobby Howard’s farm. The stringent disinfectant used in the wide hallways at the Harrington School. The hundreds of rotting squid on east Sandwich Beach during our 1953 family vacation. The Aunt Jemima Syrup we poured on the pancakes my dad cooked on Sunday mornings. The plastic glue I used to assemble model planes and ships.

The moist salt air from the ocean when we stood on the sand dunes at Horse Neck Beach. The musty pocket billiards room in the deep basement at the New Bedford Jewish Community Center. The smell of old books and mildew in the glass-floored stacks at the New Bedford Public Library. The powerful, but surprisingly inoffensive odor of Dragnet, our young beagle, after his unpleasant encounter with a skunk. The icy anesthetic my dad had to spray on my boil before Dr. Mindus lanced it.

The smell of crackling campfires on Boy Scout overnight hikes. The rancid feces in the old monkey house at the Buttonwood Park Zoo. The ozone in the air just before the 1954 and 1955 hurricanes--Carol, Connie, Diane, and Edna. The stench of the open pit latrines at Camp Cachalot, and the sweet smell of the pine trees surrounding our tents. The murky green water in the YMCA swimming pool where we swam naked in Al Sylvia’s swimming classes. The overpowering smell of the Chicago Stockyards when David and I changed buses there on our way to Philmont. The smoke from a can of purloined link sausages cooking on an open fire during our three-day survival hike.

The buttered popcorn at the Olympia theatre on those first movie dates. The inviting odor of grilled linguica at the Portuguese Feast of the Blessed Sacrament in New Bedford’s north end. The hopeful smell of my Canoe aftershave before going to Friday night dances at the Y. The stale sweat smell of the boy’s locker room after high school basketball games. The apple crisp in the Dartmouth High cafeteria. The lingering odor of cheap cigars inside my very used 1951 Chevy. The puff of air when I opened a new can of tennis balls. The smell of roasting nuts in the Planter’s Peanuts store on Purchase Street in downtown New Bedford. The mixture of cotton candy, lubricating oil, and fear as we began the ride up the first incline in the old wooden roller coaster at Lincoln Park. The seductive odor of Bain de Soleil lotion glistening on the smooth, tanning bodies of the Jewish ninth grade girls at Anthony Beach. Shalimar perfume and plum brandy the first time I got Sandy’s panties off. The exotic smell of marijuana that first time at the penthouse of the Concord Hotel. The stale beer odor of the Pi Lambda Phi fraternity house the morning after a party. The inside of the new 1965 Mustang I bought to begin my first job as an engineer. The slightly disgusting combination of cigarette smoke and cheap liquor on the breath of several ladies of passing acquaintance. The blast furnaces along the Monongahela River in Pittsburgh. The musky woman’s scent that lingered as I drove home from my last visit to Elise in New York.

The combination of blood and antiseptic, combined with sweat and fear, during Eileen’s problematic Caesarean when my daughter Beth was born. The fresh, clean, powdered smell of Alex and Bethy after baths when they were little. The smell of Eileen’s tasty cheese and jalapeño appetizers when they come out of the oven. The scent of the banyan and palm trees on our family beach vacations in
Sanibel. The garlic and onion odor that fills the kitchen when I cook spaghetti sauce. The cool air filling the passageway as we stood in line to go on Splash Mountain in Disneyworld. The fresh mown grass during an early morning round of golf at Nehoiden.

And the familiar smell of Crest mouthwash, which I must use daily to stave off gingivitis and the non-memorable odors of old age.

Boom. Smash. Crash. Paper and plastic shower Manhattan streets. Windows blow out. People scream and run. Flying debris injures twenty-nine. They are lucky. Three years before, pressure cookers killed three people at the Boston Marathon. Two hundred twenty-four injured, many losing limbs, still learning to walk again, lives forever altered. So much evil from an everyday utensil.

Bombs from pressure cookers. Simple aluminum pots filled with nails, ball bearings, explosive powder, triggered by a cellphone or some mother’s kitchen timer.

The pressure cooker in my mother’s kitchen held its own kind of horror for this five-year-old. A little water added to carrots; the top locked. The gas jet set on high. Trapped steam builds up, and up, and up—until it finally whooshes through the vent. A regulator is placed on top, and, as I warily watch, the valve starts to jiggle from the pressure. More and more. Finally, my mother lowers the flame. The valve settles into a softer hiss, like a caged animal, cornered, its power held in check. Explosion seems inevitable. As does the condition of what comes out of the pressure cooker. Vegetables pummeled into submission.

I was an adult before I knew that broccoli was supposed to be green. So, too, with string beans, always grey when placed, so lovingly, on the dinner plate. Every vegetable known to humanity came out the same way. Overcooked. Tasteless. Yet, no dinner without them. Weekends or parties, there were other specialties of the house. Jello molds in colors existing nowhere in the natural world. Meatballs mixed mushy-kushy with mashed potatoes.

Bean casserole with cream of mushroom soup and a can of French’s Crispy Fried Onions on top. Tuna noodle casserole that could serve as mortar for the cracks in the front walk.
I kept my mother's pressure cooker after she died. Sealed within, it held the spirit of her cooking. Just as I kept my grandmother's wooden chopping bowl, lovingly marred by the gashes of hundreds of strokes of the chopper with the red wood handle and two curved blades that precisely fit the bowl. I use it every Passover to chop the charoset, silently communing with her. Even use it to make chopped liver, with green beans and walnuts, no liver. Nana probably wouldn't accept the notion of vegetarian chopped liver. But she would, I think, be very pleased that I am using her wooden bowl.

Once, in the Ayelet Hashahar kibbutz, we were offered an opportunity to buy a three-inch clay pot that sat on its own wrought iron stand. The seller even provided a certificate to authenticate that it came from the pre-Chalcolithic era. Really? A six thousand-year-old relic, and they were letting it leave the country? For a hundred dollars? Setting aside our much-warranted skepticism, we bought it. It sits on a shelf in our den. We call it Old Pot. We run our hands over its ruddy surface and imagine the gnarled, callused hands that fashioned it to hold olive oil for someone's meal. Our spirits are joined, not unlike the connection with my grandmother's spirit in the wooden bowl.

My mother's pressure cooker is a different story. It went out in the trash. Our world is safer without it.

Joy Ride
Barbara Jordan

“I did my ‘Joy Ride’ painting when I was asked to contribute a piece to an art center benefit in Yarmouth, Maine. When doing the piece, I actually broke through a creative block to make a colorful and joyous mess! (In my better moments, I am as exhilarated as that dog on his ‘Joy Ride.’)"

My painting was shaping up nicely. An excited dog in aviator goggles leaned out the passenger side window of a shiny vintage Chevy. Joy Ride, I'd call it. It would be my contribution to the silent auction at the Yarmouth Arts Center benefit that year.

My tenant had put me up to it. Last summer, he'd slept on the bed underneath my amateurish “Seagull on the Beach” painting and had fallen in love with it. And others, apparently. “Your work KILLS me,” he texted in the middle of his first night there. “Absolutely KILLS me.” Odd, I thought, relieved he wasn't texting about something breaking down in the house.

Paul and I, landlady and occasional renter, remained in contact after the summer, and one night in the fall, he texted, “I have an opportunity for you. I know you don’t think you’re a real artist, but I’m on the board of the Yarmouth Art Center, and I know if you do a painting for our annual benefit, it will sell. We need renderings of old cars and trucks. What do you say, Babs?”

“When do you need it?” I said and dived right in. Wow. Me, being asked to exhibit alongside real Maine artists, some I actually knew of and admired!

Everything was done now except for the trees. The car was on a dirt road in the country, and there had to be trees. I had to learn to do trees. I went on YouTube and watched artists demonstrating tree techniques. I practiced for hours, but no matter how hard I worked, my branches looked like elephant trunks, and my leaves looked like hands. Everybody was going to know I was a fraud. The trees would break me, do me in.

I tried again, failed, painted over, tried again, failed, and painted over again. I knew this cycle would not end on its own. I would have to pull the plug. So what if there weren't any trees on the sides of this particular country road? My car was out of proportion, my dog was practically neon, so why couldn't I place this damned road in the desert, or on Mars even? I could do anything I wanted. I was an artist!
Joy Ride

I spread teal and titanium white over a third of the canvas like cream cheese, leaving the whacked-out dog and distorted Chevy center stage, both grinning at me. No trees, no dappled light—just stark dog and car.

It was done.

I wondered if maybe I needed to retile it. Perhaps *Speed Freak*, or *Bitchin’ Ride* or maybe, if I wanted to shock them, *Doggy Style*. Nah—it didn’t matter. It wasn’t really about the painting any more; it was about freedom. My freedom to be who I was, warts and all.
“This watercolor was done during an art class given by BOLLI in the summer of 2016. Our class walked down a path near the Brandeis art studio and encountered a little sitting area. Painting plein air, I tried my hand at these trees and beautiful grasses.”

Caroline says that, “Life centered on the visual throughout my years as an architect, but personal drawing time was scarce. Recently, my interest in drawing has re-emerged. I am particularly interested in detail and representing realistic images.”
Nancy says, “In 1979, a friend encouraged me to start drawing after hearing a story about an elementary school project. That conversation changed my life in which art now plays a central role. I especially love painting outside. I look to capture the essence of a place and convey my emotions, especially through color.”

Quinn says, “I am most satisfied when I have allowed watercolor to demonstrate what it can do. That means I have achieved spontaneity, the natural flow of pigment and water onto the paper. The result is vibrancy and intensity, an image which is strong and compelling. The title of this painting, “Janus,” was my spontaneous reaction to what I saw. You may see something else. For me, the watercolor felt complete, balanced, and powerful.”
“Creativity is intelligence having fun.”

--Albert Einstein