Selected works of poetry, prose and photography
by members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Brandeis

*Leafy Sea Dragon* by Allan Kleinman
BOLLI Journal
Volume Five
2009-2010

Editorial Committee
Editor: Joan Kleinman
Elaine Adler
Dianne Hoaglin
Doris Jafferian
Miriam Sachs

With special thanks to Sharon Sokoloff, Director of BOLLI, and Carol Allman-Morton and Mary Ann Sliwa, Assistant Directors, for their invaluable support

Cover Photo *Tulips* by Arthur Sharenow
From the Director

The BOLLI Journal is special. One reason - we only publish it every other year. So, while we are celebrating our 10th anniversary in a matter of weeks, this is only our fifth edition of The BOLLI Journal. But the real reason the Journal is so special is because it is an expression and visual symbol of our members’ creativity, as individuals and a collective.

In the decade that BALI, now BOLLI, has existed, a growing body of seminal, scholarly work has been done about creativity in the second half of life. The work on this topic was led by Gene D. Cohen, M.D. (psychiatry) and Ph.D. (gerontology). Gene was a student of Erik Erikson’s at Harvard Medical School; he continued Erikson’s work of advancing theory about adult development. You can read about his other passion, The Creative Age: Awakening Human Potential in the Second Half of Life, was published in 2001. Research by Gene and others strongly suggests that participation in the arts [and learning] promote physical health, a sense of well-being, improved quality of life – even for those with health problems, and a reduction of risk factors that lead to functional decline, deteriorating health and the need for long-term care. Creative expression is good for your health. Gene died in September 2009 at only 64.

And so, with a nod toward Gene Cohen and all of the creative individuals who made this Journal possible, thank you for inspiring and guiding us. I wish you an enriching experience as you read and re-read this excellent piece of work. …A wholehearted thanks to Joan Kleiman, Editor, and the entire committee who worked on this lasting legacy.

Finally – one BOLLI member “accidentally” discovered a talent for poetry at age 80 and has been soaring since. We are all creative beings – try your wings.

With open arms,

Sharon Sokoloff, ’91, Director
From the Editor

I am pleased and proud to present Volume 5 of the BOLLI Journal. While the format has changed from print to electronic, the excellent quality of the photography and writing remains the same. Through their memories and imaginations and through their travels and close-to-home experiences, our contributors enrich us with insightful reflections on our world and on our relationships.

I extend my deep appreciation to members of the Journal Committee – Elaine Adler, Dianne Hoaglin, Doris Jafferian, and Miriam Sachs - for their careful selection and editing. This volume would not be possible without the patient steadfastness and technical expertise of Carol Allman-Morton. I cannot overstate my thanks to her.

Joan Kleinman
Editor
Contributors
Ruth Kramer Baden
Ruth Kramer Baden’s mother recited poetry to her when she was a tot. A high school English teacher inspired her to write it. She still does. Teaching it at BOLLI is a joy.

Judy Blatt
I thought when I retired I would relax and just eat chocolates. But thanks to the encouragement of wonderful writing teachers at BOLLI I started writing fiction. Now I have my own writing group of eleven incredible women who meet once a month to share their stories. I eat chocolate too.

Clarice Cohen
I have always enjoyed reading, writing and exploring new avenues of insight. BOLLI continues to provide motivation and inspiration with the excellent study group leaders. Many thanks to all of them.

Judith Cohen
I have a very strong connection to Brandeis: first as a student in Brandeis’ early years, then as a parent of a student in Brandeis’ middle years, and now back again as a student at BOLLI. My life is enriched by family and friends and the students at the Heller School who call me “MOM”.

Stan M. Davis
Stan Davis is the author of fourteen books, and since retiring he has turned his writing skills to narratives and social commentary. Before that he was a Brandeis undergraduate, then a professor during the first half of his career, mainly at Harvard, and a consultant and worldwide public speaker during the second half.

Bunny Duhl
I am still practicing individual, marital and family therapy. While I have written much professionally, it is only at BOLLI that I started to write personal stories in the Memoir Writing courses. I am very excited about mining this very rich field of experiences.

John Fiske
I have been taking pictures since I was given my first Baby Brownie in about 1937. My own dark room - 1944, black and white, contact prints. An enlarger followed. First "good" camera was an early 1930's Foth Derby, 127 roll film, 16 shots per roll, about 1948. Since then, various cameras, mostly German, 35mm and medium format, to my present Panasonic Lumix DMC FZ30 with 12X zoom Leica lens.

Irwin Garfinkle
As a patent and trademark attorney, I have written hundreds of technical papers. I credit BOLLI and Ruth Jacobs for whatever poetry skills I may have developed. Thanks BOLLI. Thanks Ruth and get well soon. Your students miss you.
Gillian Geffin
Gillian was a physician/physiologist. Now retired, she enjoys her grandchildren, family, friends, travel, and BOLLI, where Richard Glantz and Bud Eliot rekindled her interest in photography.

Ruth Housman
Ruth Housman is passionate about all forms of writing. She is part of an ongoing, weekly poetry group, led by Ottone Riccio. She has an enduring fascination with words. Her focus on "story" is probably why she loves social work, her chosen profession. Ruth has been a BOLLI study group leader, teaching about Jewish Mysticism and Sufism. She is proud grandmother of Madeline and Zachary.

Ellen Huber
My parents gave me a Kodak Retina IIIC for a college graduation present lots of years ago. Photos have helped me remember people, places and events ever since.

Jane Kays
Jane Kays is a newer member of BOLLI. She formerly taught elementary school and was a literacy consultant for the Boston Public Schools. This piece, “The Christmas Table,” is from the memoir collection she is writing for her two daughters.

Allan Kleinman
I recently retired as an engineer and am now able to read and learn about things I never had the time for, travel and go for long walks – usually with a camera in my pocket. I like taking pictures of interesting scenery, events, and patterns in nature.

Jaclyn Korb
I taught kindergarten for several years in Brookline at the Driscoll School and I worked in the after school program at the Cabot School in Newton. Now I am connected with the Edna Kranz Prudential Real Estate firm. I have taken piano lessons for several years - my main love is music.

Jerome Kornreich
I have a Ph.D. from Yale in industrial psychology and worked for an electronics company as vice-president of human resources. I took up writing short stories as a hobby.

Gene Kupferschmid
I am a member of BOLLI, a former academic, and an inveterate traveler.

Ron Levy
Ron Levy has been a BOLLI member for six years and has frequently led courses touching on current events, politics and history. Having lived in five countries on three continents, Ron has traveled extensively to about 55 countries. He has a passion as an amateur photographer to record his memories and share them with others.
Joseph More
For the last 15 years of practicing psychiatry, I evaluated and treated people charged with crimes and committed to the hospital by the court. I got to know several men and a few women who had committed homicides of passion. *Monster* is not the story of any one of them; rather it draws on my experience with all of them, and on my imagination.

Margaret Newhouse
Margaret (Meg) Newhouse, Ph.D., CPCC, is an independent educator, consultant, speaker and author, specializing in vision and values-based life planning for the post-midlife “bonus years.” The current focus of her workshops and writing is on the subject of legacy. She has thoroughly enjoyed her various BOLLI experiences, including writing this piece in Ruth Jacobs’ class.

Robert E. Pill
I am a retired businessman who has always had a penchant for finding opportunities to take unique photographs. Cynthia and I have been fortunate in being able to travel extensively, offering me many occasions to catch the right composition at just the right time.

Phillip L. Radoff
Phillip Radoff has been a BOLLI member for about five years. He will be leading his sixth BOLLI opera course in the spring. Phil has a Ph.D. in physics and worked for a few years as a physicist before switching to law. He remained a lawyer for most of his professional career and retired as group vice president and general counsel at Raytheon. His submission to the Journal, *In Memoriam*, is a work of fiction.

Katherine Raskin
Katherine Raskin has been a member of the BOLLI community for ten years. She takes many courses at BOLLI and serves on the BOLLI Banner Committee. She received her MMHS Degree at the Heller School in 1985.

Pete Reider
In the Winter of 2009 I took courses at the Fromm Institute, our Osher counterpart (and older sibling) in San Francisco. The folks were very much the same - welcoming, full of interest and fun to be with - but the classes were larger and there wasn't the intimate classroom interaction that we have at BOLLI. And no New Yorker group. Lucky for me that Carole Grossman and Ken Rosenfield raved about BOLLI several years ago – I might never have joined. BOLLI approaches the Utopian community.

Susan Ritter
A serious bio-science major and a conscientious science professional. All the while a lurking love for the arts. Finally, time for voracious reading and fun with digital photography. Creative longing set free by retirement --- and role models at BOLLI.

Kenneth Rosenfield
My first BOLLI course was in poetry. It motivated me to take classes with Ruth Jacobs; she guided me in improving my writing, leading to acceptance in outside publications. Writing poetry has become a great source of pleasure. It teaches me to be observant of all aspects of life.
Claire Rourke
Of the special group of "long-lived" scholars at BOLLI, I may be one of the "longest-livers." BOLLI makes life interesting for me, and makes me interesting to my family and friends. Long live BOLLI!

Miriam B. Sachs
In my charmed childhood, on summer vacations in the 1930s, trying to escape the hay fever season, we traveled back and forth across the USA visiting the newly established national parks and seeing what my younger sister called the Sapific Ocean. And later, as a still charmed grown-up, I found Murray at Brandeis, and then BOLLI, and a new kind of “charm”: writing.

Gul Shamin
I came to the USA in 2005 from a tiny valley from the Northern Areas of Pakistan. I graduated from the Heller school, Brandeis University in 2007 and am still associated with my host family since meeting them in 2005. I have learned a lot about American culture and people through my connection with the wonderful BOLLI program.

Arthur Sharenow
I spent most of my working life as a Camp Director at Camps Kenwood and Evergreen in New Hampshire. My wife, Judy, and I have two wonderful children and four even more wonderful grandchildren. Since retiring, I have been fortunate to find a major interest in photography and have spent an enormous amount of time improving my image-making ability.

Gertrude Silverstein
I have been a BOLLI student for nine and a half years, married to Jerry for 53 years, have three sons and five grandchildren, and enjoyed a career in public relations and writing for a trade publication. In 1978, with two of our children, we bicycled from California to Needham - a personal journey that still reflects its value in everyday life.

Brenda Sloane
I own a small farm in Boxford, MA. My indoor animals (cats and dogs), my barn animals (goats, sheep, chickens, rabbits, and one guinea hen), and my outdoor water koi fish provide me with unlimited insights for creative writing.

Carol White
I live in Lincoln with my husband, Jim. After many years as a freelance editor, I now manage commercial real estate. I am an enthusiastic BOLLI member and periodic community volunteer. And, of course, I cook.
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Sheldon Glazer and Peggy Jessup were never more than friends, not even particularly close friends, but it was not a large college, and there was always a little something that passed between them whenever they were together. It wasn’t exactly mutual, but neither was it one-sided. Sheldon always had a crush on Peggy. On her part, she enjoyed flirting and giving mixed messages, perhaps without understanding her own conflicted motives until much later in life, when she was well into her 60’s. Neither one of them could ever figure out what the something was; it seemed to be a mutual attraction, but one never to be realized or fulfilled. As far as anyone knew, they never slept together.

Since graduating in the 1950s, they only saw each other at their class reunions, which occurred every five years. Each time, when they said goodbye, a single meaningful sentence passed between them, one comment and one response. Sheldon never knew if she thought about him, though her remarks led him to believe that she did. Their brief exchanges every five years kept their non-relationship relationship on a lukewarm simmer for half a century before there was complete clarity.

It began at their small liberal arts college in the Northeast. They were both from NYC and they had the same birthday, though they never sent cards or presents to each other. Peggy was politically involved and her friends were the intellectuals on campus. Sheldon was always somewhat introverted and, while a bit brainy, was no genius.

The two of them sat together when they were in the same classes. Peggy was always knitting during class. In their freshman year, Sheldon asked for a pair of argyle socks. Of course, she knitted them for him. He kept them for decades, long after they went out of style and he no longer wore them. If he’d been honest with himself, he might have realized that he did this because it meant that every time he opened his sock drawer, her gift was still tucked in there, reminding him of Peggy. But that kind of self-insight eluded him. Instead, he rarely thought about what they meant, beyond his sense that you shouldn’t throw out anything someone spent so much time custom-making for you.

In a psychology course during their sophomore year, Peggy’s professor once pointed out to her in front of the entire class that, according to Freud, “knitting was a repressed form of masturbation.” She didn’t say anything, but later she said to Sheldon, “The nerve of that jerk. I should have told him ‘When I knit I knit, when I masturbate I masturbate.’” “Why didn’t you?” he asked her. Of course, she could never speak so openly about self-arousal. All she could do was repeat, “I should have.”

In their junior year, Peggy’s marriage gene switched on. This was two decades before the age of women’s lib and dual careers. She and Sheldon had two friendly dates. Sheldon was finally moving beyond the unrequited love phase in their relationship. On the second date he caressed her breast. She stopped him, saying, “You’re the kind of boy I’d have an affair with but not the kind I’d marry.” Then she told him she’d never had an affair and
that she was in marriage mode and not looking to fool around. Later, talking with his roommate, Sheldon said he didn’t know whether to feel complimented or hurt by her remark. Maybe both.

Then Peggy started dating someone a year older, and, by the end of the year, she was engaged to a “big man on campus.” The graduating BMOC drove a red convertible with Vermont license plate “16,” and nineteen-years-old Sheldon, in his big-city naiveté, thought, “Wow, there really aren’t many people in Vermont, are there?”

Sheldon saw very little of Peggy in their senior year. At graduation, when everyone said goodbye, Peggy told Sheldon he should have tried harder. It wasn’t her words that stuck with him, but the flirting smile and the twinkling eyes. What did she mean? Try harder with her? Sexually? Or, did he have it completely wrong and did she mean try harder in his schoolwork? He went through all the possible interpretations of that one vague sentence, then said ruefully, “I should have said something like, ‘If you and he don’t work out, give me a call,’ but of course I only said, ‘Yeah, you too.’” Peggy murmured, “Oh, well,” and walked away. She married Mr. BMOC less than a month later.

Sheldon wanted to be a writer and went to graduate school in the creative writing department at the University of Iowa. He had never lived in the Midwest and in many ways he felt like it was a foreign culture. While hitchhiking in the middle of the night in northeast Kansas, for example, during an extended weekend exploring the heartland, he was picked up by a bush league baseball player who looked like Mickey Mantle. The ballplayer drove Sheldon to his parents’ farmhouse where they gave him a bed for the night. The next morning Sheldon woke up to the smell of country bacon and eggs, a dog chasing chickens in the yard, and a banging screen door. Years later he still recalled miles and miles of cornfields and hot plains and wrote about them in his stories. In a reversal of the famous line from “The Wizard of Oz” Sheldon said he knew he wasn’t in the Northeast any more, he really was in Kansas.

Peggy had two children within five years of graduation. She lived in Queens NYC, and her husband was a banker with Manufacturer’s Hanover. She left the kids with their father and came to the reunion by herself. Sheldon, still single, was writing his first novel, which turned out to be a coming of age piece about an Easterner finding himself while living in the Midwest.

They were both locked into the lives they thought they should be leading, blocking any meaningful probing of their feelings for each other. His impression was that Peggy seemed happy and settled; she thought Sheldon seemed earnest and searching. She told him she thought it was marvelous that he was “actually writing a novel.” He wondered out loud if it would ever get finished, let alone published. When they said goodbye, she gave him that teasing, bubbly look he always associated with her and said simply, “Keep in touch.” Sheldon, true to form, repeated his brilliant bon mot from five years earlier, “Yeah, you too.”

During the next five years, Sheldon finished his novel, which was enough of a success to get him a modest advance on a second novel and a teaching stipend at the university. He also got married.
His wife, Stephanie, was from St. Joseph, Missouri. She was beautiful, with an upper class, Midwestern, Protestant pedigree. She looked like Candice Bergen, with long honey-colored hair. She was the kind of girl who played Chopin effortlessly and did graceful figure eights at the local ice rink. In contrast with Peggy, Stephanie was certainly neither the bagels and lox nor the local Chinese restaurant-type. One evening they went out for a snack and she ordered milk with her pizza. Sheldon worried, “I’m definitely in unfamiliar territory.”

Stephanie’s extended clan had a family retreat on a lake in Wisconsin, and she invited Sheldon to visit for a week in the summer. The compound had a stable for the row of boats, a parallel stable for the row of Cadillacs, and a rustic two story clubhouse where family members ordered lunch and played cards. He arrived inappropriately early and immediately felt out of place.

A few days into the visit, directly after making love, during which she had her first orgasm, Stephanie told Sheldon she was very upset because her family told her that he was the wrong boy for her, and he would have to leave. Of course it was true. He was the wrong guy for her — a middle class, Jewish New Yorker with horn-rimmed glasses, unmonied, a fiction writer, and an American lit professor.

Someone else might have found it curious that she picked that particular instance of lovemaking to become sexually liberated, when she already knew her family’s verdict about Sheldon. But Sheldon would always have greater insight into his fictional characters than into himself.

The twist is that Stephanie wanted to rebel against her family, and she married Sheldon the following year. He really didn’t know if he was doing the right thing and thought that only time would tell. The socks from Peggy remained in his dresser drawer.

During those years, Sheldon wasn’t sure if the life he was leading gave him material for his writing or whether his writing was telling him how to live. The people in his books always revealed more intimate details about their feelings than Sheldon ever revealed to himself about the real women in his own life.

The next time they were to meet, Sheldon was excited to introduce Stephanie to what started to seem like his ‘childhood’ friends. He was looking forward to showing her off to Peggy, as if to say, “See what I did!” It wasn’t clear whether he was eager for her approval or her jealousy. But Peggy had just given birth to a third child, and she didn’t come to the reunion. Sheldon was forlorn and wondered if Peggy ever thought of him. His deepest insight was, “I dunno. She’s probably pretty busy with a lot of diapers.”

He called Peggy a few months later to congratulate her on her new baby. Over the telephone, she told him, “I’m very proud of you. You really followed your dream to be a writer.” Later he thought she sounded too maternal to be satisfying. After all, that was the first call she had gotten from him in more than a decade. The least she could’ve mustered was … what? Jealousy? Jealous of what? Envy? No, not her style. Perhaps surprise that he’d finally made it in love as well as in writing.
By their 15th reunion, it was clear that Camelot was over. It was the ‘70s, and there was a tension underlying their attempts to celebrate. Everyone was waiting for a peace treaty to finally end the war in Vietnam. Sheldon delivered a short, impassioned plea at commencement, urging his classmates to stay involved with the world and to make their voices heard.

Sheldon and Peggy also had their own cause for underlying tension. Shortly before the reunion, he’d sent Peggy a copy of his third novel and she was clearly miffed. When he asked if she’d read it, she said she had, but he didn’t believe her. She wouldn’t say anything about its contents and he couldn’t prompt anything out of her. When they said goodbye, he lamely offered, “Maybe I’ll include you in my next novel,” and she answered in a noncommittal way, “That would be nice.”

Sheldon’s fourth novel was very dark but also a big hit. The book sold around 200,000 copies and made Sheldon’s reputation. The main character was obviously Peggy, even though he called her ‘Kimi,’ but Kimi was not a very happy person. She was always unfulfilled. At their next encounter, the real Peggy was angry with Sheldon. The character was nothing like her, she told friends, yet “he used my middle name and physical characteristics.” Truth to tell, the Kimi character was less an astute dissection of Peggy than a projection of Sheldon’s feelings about her unavailability to him.

He tried to explain this to Peggy but she was skeptical. It was apparent in their gestures: he placating with his hands out and palms up, she with her arms folded on her chest and one leg forward, as if to say ‘I’m not budging.’ They departed after a short but intense exchange.

After he turned away, she called out, “You kept me out of your life quite successfully; you shouldn’t have changed things now!” He came back with, “Me? You’re the one who always kept me distant.” Then, at the same time, they both quickly agreed, “Let’s not argue,” and they parted with looks that lingered about three seconds longer than they would have between just good friends.

More years passed, and Sheldon and Peggy went once again to their alma mater. By then, Peggy led a prosperous life. Her husband had reached upper middle management. They were community pillars and substantial alumni contributors. Sheldon was divorced, no big surprise. He was teaching at Northwestern and working hard to keep his relationship with his teenage daughter from imploding. His star was still rising and he appeared in a respectable position on a few best seller lists at regular two- to three-year intervals.

He’d been asked to give the silver reunion address, and he was very droll. There were no major wars, and the Reagan years were at full tilt; capitalism and democracy were on the march around the globe. Those attending from their class were firmly middle-aged. Sheldon hit just the right, wry notes. “On the long uphill climb to the top, those already over the hill warn us that the view from the summit is all downhill. Hopefully we will all be able to cushion our descent with some wisdom, leaving behind the follies that slowed us down on the way here. ….” That sort of thing.

Peggy told Sheldon, “You get better with age,” and he answered, “Well, I work at it, but to you it comes naturally.” They were at it again, their dance of unspoken words, her teasing, flirty smile
and his flatfooted earnestness. When it was time to say goodbye yet again, Peggy looked over at him, surrounded now by alumni admiring his speech, and she mused to herself, “Maybe he is the kind of man to have an affair with, after all.”

By the time five more years rolled around, Sheldon was remarried. He and his wife, Liza, seemed quite compatible. She had a son from a previous marriage. His daughter and her son were each in college, living away from home, and Sheldon and Liza told friends that both kids seemed genuinely glad their parents had found each other. Sheldon was on his eighth novel and now supporting himself entirely from his writings. He worked out of his home, while Liza was an executive with the regional chapter of the American Cancer Society. By now, the five year exchanges between Sheldon and Peggy, were like bijous from some French movie director who makes subtle, if slightly boring art-house films.

This time when Peggy said goodbye, there was something wistful in her smile. They held each other’s gaze for a moment, and Peggy seemed to suddenly realize she’d married the wrong man all those years ago. “There was this kind of flash and we both knew,” she thought to herself. Sheldon looked at her and just said, “Oops.” But this time he knew. “At the same instant,” he told himself, “I realized that Peggy was unhappy in her marriage, and that I was content in mine. We’re never in sync.”

At their 35th reunion, it was immediately apparent that something was wrong with Peggy. Everyone had aged, but she seemed to have lost all of her luster. She had dyed her hair an unbecoming burnt orange, and she was no longer pretty. Her husband had left her for a younger woman the year before. She was obviously still shaken and putting up a brave front. She never saw it coming. They had parted amicably, or so she said, and still shared good feelings about their children, who were now coming into their own adult years. The split was permanent, she told people, but said no more.

Sheldon, on the other hand, was a no-show. He’d won some literary award and had to go to Wales that same weekend to receive it. Peggy was relieved that she didn’t have to meet Sheldon when she was feeling shaky and bruised.

When Sheldon heard the news about Peggy, he was disturbed, though he was concerned that he felt a grim satisfaction. Their failure to communicate when they were young could be ascribed to inexperience. Later, their missed opportunities could be blamed on the press of family and work commitments, as well as to a lingering embarrassment about their enduring mutual attraction. Now, late into their fifties, his mean feelings seemed harsh and unnecessary. Sheldon was happily married, so why the sourness about something that was never really much of anything in the first place?

The clock kept rolling, and at their next encounter, Peggy was divorced while Sheldon was still happily married. A physical reversal had also taken place. Peggy was the kind of woman who started off beautiful and gradually lost her looks as she aged. Sheldon was less than impressive when he was young and gained slowly in physical stature until he finally looked distinguished. Sheldon looked better for a man in his sixties than he did in his twenties, but he’d become less
compassionate; and Peggy, while she may have lost her looks, had regained her unique vitality and appeal.

Peggy took this all in, but wasn’t put off by it. It was obvious that she still had this certain feeling for Sheldon. She didn’t know if it was an imagined _je ne sais quoi_ or an acceptance of the person she had always seen but never honestly acknowledged. This time, when they said their goodbyes, she kissed him on the cheek, and he said airily into her ear, “You’ll do fine.” She smiled at him with understanding and a touch of yearning, but only replied, “I’m sure I will.”

And she sure did. Another five years, and Peggy was happy and bubbly again. She arrived with a male companion whom she’d been with for three years. Peggy and her partner were both quite pudgy. “When I was finally ready to date again,” she told friends, “all I was looking for was a toy, and I ended up with a partner. Go figure.” And there was that smile that Sheldon had known so long ago, with the same twinkle of the woman a third her age.

Sheldon was still trim and had his hair, which had turned more salt than pepper. Liza had died from cancer after seventeen years of marriage, around the same time that Peggy had met her new beau. Sheldon was glad to see Peggy so happy, though rueful about their missed rhythms.

When Sheldon and Peggy said goodbye, she said to him, “Where were you?” meaning all these years, and he answered, “I was always here, with my crush on you, but you were always beyond my reach. Woody Allen was right: seventy percent of success is just showing up on time.” Knowing what you feel and saying it, or not, can form your life. Relationships and friendships depend on timing, and Peggy’s and Sheldon’s clocks were always set a tad off.

Their graduating class’s golden anniversary finally arrived. Most class members were looking forward to attend the celebration, and even happier just to still be alive. Peggy’s partner had died of a coronary only a year after the previous reunion. She knew that Sheldon was still a widower, and out of the blue, she decided that she wanted to spend their last years together. She was finally ready to drop the dancing around and to declare herself to him.

Sheldon was going to deliver the commencement speech as their class representative. He’d been the voice of activism at their 10th reunion, and he was drolly amusing at their 25th. This time he wanted to hit a different note, something wiser, befitting an elder.

When Peggy got there she couldn’t find Sheldon, and she asked people where he was. Sheldon’s roommate said, “Didn’t you know?” Sheldon passed away three weeks ago.”

After a stunned moment, she asked if he had said anything about her before he died. “He e-mailed his speech to the university the week before he died. There’s a poem in it that Longfellow wrote for a speech he gave at his own class reunion. Sheldon said he put it in because it had something to do with the two of you as much as with our classmates.” He handed her the speech and silently she read the poem:

> But why, you ask me, should this tale be told  
> To one grown old, or who are growing old?
It is too late. Ah, nothing is too late
Till the heart shall cease to palpitate.
Cato learned Greek at 80;
Sophocles wrote his grand Oedipus, and Simonides
Bore off the prize of verse from his compeers,
When each had numbered more than fourscore years.
And Theophrastes, at fourscore and ten
Had but begun his Characters of Men.
Chaucer, at Woodstock with the nightingales,
At sixty wrote the Canterbury Tales;
Goethe at Weimar, toiling to the last,
Completed Faust when eighty years were past.
These are indeed exceptions, but they show
How far the gulf-stream of our youth may flow
Into the arctic region of our lives,
Where little else than life itself survives.

“Thank you,” she said quietly. “I look forward to hearing you read it in his place.” She turned, her tassel and gown swooshing slightly, and with great dignity she took her place in the processional line.
So this was the red light district. The sidewalks were crowded with families. Mothers and dads wheeled baby carriages and strollers while older children straggled along. Entwined couples sauntered, and there were tourists, many tourists. The neighborhood looked much like the rest of Amsterdam. It was not at all as May had imagined, but then, of course, it was 3:00 in the afternoon of a bright sunny day. The scene was undoubtedly different when the sun went down.

Well, here she was and determined to make the most of it. When the rest of her tour group set off for the botanical gardens, May had remained in the hotel. She complained of a severe migraine, and the others understood when she told them that she needed to rest. But as soon as the coast was clear, she set off, map in hand, and with only a few wrong turns, arrived at her destination.

May found it peculiar that the other women in her tour would rather look at flowers than whores, but what else would one expect from a ladies’ church group? She, on the other hand, could not possibly make a trip to Amsterdam without a visit to the famous red light district. She had lived eighty years, and to her knowledge, in all that time she had never met up with a prostitute. May wondered what they were like and decided that she owed it to herself to take this little jaunt and satisfy her curiosity. If there were prostitutes in Berry Plains, Indiana, her home town, she had never heard anyone mention it.

Before long, May came upon a window, a long and wide window at the front of a building. When May turned to look into the window, she found what she had been seeking. There, in full view of anyone who cared to look, was a woman in black underwear, reclining on a couch. Though her bra and bikini pants were made of lace, they didn’t reveal more than most swim suits worn by teenagers at beaches and pools. However, this woman was not a teenager. In fact, she was far from it.

Oh my, thought May, she looks just like my cousin Tina, only Tina is a few years younger. I wonder how old she is: late forties, early fifties? And Tina wouldn’t be caught dead sitting in a window in her underwear. Oh, how I wish my Frank were still alive and could be here with me to see this spectacle. But I know my Frank would never have been interested in this skinny Minny. He always liked big women, like me. As he used to say, “What could be better than a woman with some meat on her bones?”

Funny, Frank was a small man, but he sure was happy as a cow in clover with me. That woman looks like she could get blown away by a good wind. I wonder what men see in her? And she sure looks grumpy. Maybe if she smiled a little she would have more business. Poor soul! What a way to make a living, sitting in a window so that every Tom, Dick and Harry passing by gets to see you in your underwear.

Julianna
Why is that fat old lady staring at me? She’s probably green with envy, wishes she could have a figure like mine. And those clothes! It’s bad enough that she looks like a blimp, but those clothes don’t help either. That baseball hat may be keeping the sun off her face, but why bother? She already looks like a prune with all those wrinkles. The wrinkles on her face match the wrinkles in her clothes. Beige blouse, beige pants and white sneakers, how boring can you get? I bet she wishes she could fit into sexy underwear like mine instead of the bloomers she is sure to be wearing. I wonder if she ever had sex, probably not. Poor soul, I feel sorry for her, but I wish she would stop staring at me. She’s blocking the view, and she’ll scare away my customers.

May

Oh, Frank, how I miss you. We had so many good times together. The sixty years I spent with you went by too quickly. I would so much rather be traveling with you than with all those ladies. They are good people, but they’re not a whole lot of fun. I never sat in a window showing off my stuff, but we were together so long that I bet I’ve had just as much sex as Miss Love-for-Sale. Let’s see. We were married almost 60 years, and Frank did some traveling. Then there were four times out for giving birth, but there were many hot and heavy years and…. I can’t be too far off if I average twice a week, and 52 weeks in a year makes 104 times in a year. I better get out the calculator. 60 x 104 = 6240. Oh my word! Who would have believed it? And I’m sure I underestimated. Oh my!

Julianna

Now she’s using a calculator. What on earth is this woman up to? She is standing in front of my window adding up how much she spends on groceries, or maybe she’s trying to figure out whether she has enough money for dinner. And she’s doing it in front of my space. I would be happy to contribute some Euros just to get her to move. The nerve of her! If she doesn’t move in five minutes, I might as well go inside. No one is going to look at me if they see this woman blocking the view and busy on her calculator. Maybe they will think she is my agent, figuring out her cut. Lady, please go away.

May

I wonder how much each customer pays Miss Underwear. I have no idea what she charges, and I better not knock on her window to ask. She has such a sour expression on her face; I don’t think she would be pleased. I can’t think of a way for me to find out the going rate for the services of a prostitute.

Why didn’t I ever think of asking Frank to pay every time we had sex? Ten dollars seems like a reasonable amount. He could have spared $20 a week, and I would have saved the money for vacations. He was always too busy to take a vacation. Instead, poor Frank worked so hard he had a heart attack. I wonder how much money we would have saved. Let’s see, 20 x $6240 = $124,000. That would have paid for a whole lot of vacations! Oh, Frank, I wish I had thought of it before.
Julianna

I am so glad she is moving away from my window. That poor lost soul with her calculator was starting to depress me. I wonder if she ever had any love in her life? I doubt it. Poor woman!

LEGACY
by Ruth Kramer Baden

Because the poppies glow in my father’s bowl
and tonight is cold with a blizzard at my door
I will tell you about the glassblower from Prague.
It was 1939. I was only six
but I could read the headlines black as beetles: NAZIS
and I could read my parents’ eyes.

The glassblower sewed his tallith and his tools
into the lining of his long black overcoat
and he fled Prague, rising over the spires
of St. Vitus Cathedral like a bridegroom
in a Chagall painting. He crossed the Duña River
and flew east of the moon, the winds spreading
his coattails wide until he came to rest
one afternoon at our house, 642 East 8th Street,
Brooklyn, New York, America, the World.

My father’s office was the temple of our house.
Sometimes I’d slip inside, curiosity and fear
twined like snakes in my belly,
to stand before the locked glass cabinets
and study the steel scissors, the knives
sharp as fangs that he used to fix people,
or I'd press against the curtained doors
and listen to the rise and fall of voices,
one a violin, querying tremolo in a minor key,
my father’s answers a reassuring cello.
Could I hear their words?

*You must have an operation. I think there are cells*
*inside you that are growing too much, too fast.*

*Please. I fear knife.*

*You told me you climbed the Carpathians*
*to save your life. Now you must climb again.*

*I cannot pay.*

*Pay when you can.*

In the operating theater my father's knife
cut into the belly’s nave. The wound bloomed red
on his white-gloved hands. His fingers found
the death’s egg nesting in the glassblower’s body.
He snipped around the egg, cleaned, scooped,
then with a curved silver needle
he sewed together the seams of the man’s life.

When the glassblower grew strong
he took out his iron blowhose and from the oven
that burned at two thousand degrees
he removed a gather of glass.
He blew into the moving, untouchable liquid
unfurling it like molten music, wider, wider.
then he rolled currents of the Duña across it.

My father walked into our living room
carrying the large bowl in his arms
as though it were me.
It flared from its base like the bell
of a trumpet vine, then tapered in
toward the lip. I saw its rainbows.

*Look, Anna,* he said to my mother, *It’s beautiful.*
Where did you get that from?

My patient from Prague.

He made it to pay for his operation.

I saw that my mother was teasing.

The glass bowl stood on an oak side table
in all the living rooms of my father’s life.

After he died I never dared ask my mother for it--
I thought she treasured it, like his Bulova watch
that lay unticking in her top dresser drawer
for the next forty years.

When I moved her to the nursing home she asked,

You want that bowl?

(Daughter, do you want the moon?
Your father back?)

Don’t you want it?

No. She shook her head slowly,
as though the bowl, like her life,
had become a puzzle.

Packed and mailed, a bird in flight
it soared over the steel-pointed cities,
veered west above the dunes toward Boston
and alighted in the center of my living room.
I have filled the bowl with poppies,
poppies red as the glassblower's blood
red as my father's bursting heart
the Duña flowing toward its rim
my father’s arms embracing.

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UNTITLED
by Ruth Housman

I walk through fields of dead people
mouths open to wind, to stars
sand in their unseeing
I too, am dying a little each day
there are more ways of dying
than birth could have imagined

see how the light remains, bright as on that first day
when, waking with the first cry, somebody held us high
examined us, counted our hands, our toes
birds announced our coming, everything was rising
rising, but the song has changed
we throw coins at ourselves
the fountain is dry

once there were children
with newts in their pockets
awake to starfish
when moon closed their eyes
abundance was another day
another dance

I am missing you, missing you
love, how I am missing you!
UNCLE NATHAN’S GIFT
by Kenneth Rosenfield

He called me to his office, Uncle Nathan did,
his demeanor evidencing his excitement.
“Yearlings, pullets, Rhode Island Reds!
Grower just called from the White Mountains;

he needs space for his new flock.
We have to pick them up today.”
“How many?” “I’m not sure exactly. You’ll take the Brockway with two hundred coops.”

“I’m not sure exactly” meant “big load.”
“Time now? How long a trip?” “No matter.
You should be home by midnight.”
I was eighteen – new red Brockway truck!

The sun was well beyond its zenith
when I came upon my unexpected gift:
a stretch of leaf strewn New Hampshire road,
undisturbed for a bright blushing mile.

Maples embracing over me, sunlight
skittering its way through tangled branches.
Sunlight with so many temptations,
so many leaves to caress.

Oak, maple, birch lying
seductively about calling for attention.
Raw umber, yellow ochre,
competing in delicate tones.

Autumn’s energies enriching summer’s remains;
seductive maroons, answering golden smiles;
daytime honeyed warmth, cooled by an aloof moon –
all in disarray, all in heavenly harmony.

This, my uncle’s gift,
I have carried for seventy years.
It is with me always, ready to be unwrapped, when memory calls
an eighteen year old boy
to his big red Brockway truck.
I was born Enrico Giuseppe Muggia, in Turin, Italy, on 7 November 1935. My birth certificate, issued in 1939, indicates that I was “Di razza ebraica,” of Jewish race. (Decades later, following the trend in Israel, I had my name changed to the Hebrew Yosef More.)

In 1938 we lived in Ivrea, a town 35 miles north of Turin, where my father was the medical director for the Employee-Health-Services at the Olivetti Typewriter Company. I remember him returning from work on a bicycle.

Angela was my nanny, and I thought she was very beautiful. I remember the walkout-basement room where Angela and the maid slept. It had two beds covered in red-and-white-checkered bedspreads. The faucet for the garden hose was also in that room; it seemed strange to me that it was not in the garden. (Now I know it was indoors to keep it from freezing in winter.)

As I later learned from my mother, Angela was a widow. She had left her daughter with her parents so she could work. Then, in the summer of 1938, she had remarried and returned to her village. We visited her there. I remember going to the well, where the water was drawn in a bucket, and I drank from the dipper.

In July 1938, the Fascist party and the Italian State began promulgating a series of anti-Jewish, racial edicts, culminating in June 1939 with a decree that, amongst other things, barred the Jews from practicing medicine, law, journalism and other professions. My father had been laid off in about October 1938 because Olivetti was considered an enterprise of national importance and, therefore, could not have Jews in its employ. In May 1939, my parents went to Tel Aviv, preparing to emigrate from Italy; I stayed with my grandparents in Turin. In June, my mother returned to Turin, and in September 1939, my mother and I left Turin and joined my father in Tel Aviv.

In April of 1940, many believed that Italy would stay out of the war, and my mother had planned to visit her parents in Italy in the summer. Angela wrote a letter in Italian to my mother, which my mother eventually gave to me. Its grammar is imperfect, and it has almost no punctuation. Angela probably had only a fourth grade education. Her first language would have been the local Piedmontese dialect or perhaps French as spoken in her native region; Italian was probably a second language for her. Here are parts of her letter, in translation. I have tried to preserve the unsophisticated style. For clarity's sake, I have added punctuation.

Dear Madam
After a long silence. For a long time I have waited for news from you. Finally, yesterday I have received your dear letter. I have wept for joy at seeing your precious writing, which I hear good news, that you are all well, especially my precious Enrico (that is I)....

...Not even a single hour that you are out of my thought. I remember you, and ask God that He should help you as deserved, for you were so good, and did not deserve this (the racial laws)....
If this summer as you say that you'll come to Italy, either you'll come here, or I'll come to Torino, I'll be able to see Enrico...

...Now my news. In health we are all well, that's the most important thing. In every other aspect it is all in a very bad way. Since you were here, my husband then found work ... he was earning 20 lire a day, we were content. He worked 2 months and then he was called for military service... It has been about 8 months and there is no talk of his coming home. And I am here, with the two children, and receive an assistance of 10 lire a day (the Italian lira at that time was about the worth of a dollar today), six for me and 2 for each of the kids. But these days food is so expensive, everything is double what we used to pay... only the water that we drink I do not buy. I go hungry so that the children will not suffer. You cannot go on, you can not do otherwise... My poor husband also has deprived himself from smoking. He gets one and a half lire a day, and does what he can to pay for travel to come home at least once a month...These are truly ugly years for us in poverty. Because I have the children, I cannot in any way turn to work to manage to help myself. I apologize for the paper, it is what my husband brings home (The letter is written on the letterhead of the battalion.) And so it is. Some days I cry from morning to evening... Nobody knows when this affair will end, that my husband may return home and work...

Dear Madam, I hear that you work a lot. I cannot imagine how you can manage to do it all. We used to be the two of us (Angela and a maid), and now You are alone, I imagine that you should be tired...

...Dear Madam give many big big kisses to my Enrico, that I love him and remember all the little talks he was giving me when we were alone, I and he the darling...

Angela Gaggi  
Ceresa Tonengo in Canavese  
(Aosta Mail)

On June 18, 1940, with a poorly trained and ill equipped army, Italy invaded France. Italy’s chief of Staff, Badoglio, had remonstrated with Mussolini, “The army doesn’t even have shirts [on their backs]...” To which Mussolini retorted, “You don’t understand! I need a few thousand dead to enable me to sit at the peace [negotiations] table.” He got his wishes. By the end of the war Italy had over 300,000 of its military killed.
Concino 15-4-1960
Cara Signora

Dopo un lungo silenzio da molto che attendo di loro notizie finalmente ero riuscito a ricevere la sua cara lettera di gioia nel vedere un tuo caro scritto la quale sento buone notizie che stanno tutti bene specialmente Enrico il mio trovo se sono solitamente poco in che menti che sono così lontani che si devono almeno bene.

Cara Signora per me si saremmo indimenticati anche lontani ma un’ora solo non mi passano dalla mente di ricordare e di pregare sempre Dio che li aiuti in modo che loro siano tanto buoni e non si meritassero così Dio e la sua santa fortuna cara Signora tanto che sono arrivato alla fine, sosti, così e anche meglio per loro ariello di seguire bene il tempo.

First page of Angela’s letter

Angela and I at age 7 months
LET THEM EAT CAKE
Carol K. White

In our family, we love cake. No occasion is too grand or too small - a birthday, of course, but also the loss of a baby tooth, a hockey goal, a perfect spelling test.

In our family, we have rules. Cakes must be homemade, from scratch, never bought. The celebrant gets to choose. Chocolate lovers are indulged; coconut haters are considered, but not too much.

I thought of our family and cake during the workshop, Legacies of the Heart, led by my friend, and BOLLI member, Meg Newhouse. We were asked to visualize what we want to pass down to our children and grandchildren: stories, lessons, values. I wondered: Is this what my family will remember—she always made sure we had cake?

Then I saw that, through eating, we pass on so much more. In our family, we celebrate together the milestones of every one of us. We use food to talk about family members of previous generations. My granddaughter, Sophie, loves noodles, at any time of day. “But of course she does,” I can hear my Hungarian grandmother, Sophie, say. The coconut cake I bake is one my other grandmother made for every single birthday of every single child. I am confident that, when I am gone, noodles and coconut cake will make my children smile.

My family knows that we must be gracious and generous in feeding company, even if the guests are vegan, and we, most certainly, are not. They have a curious palate and an open mind. Using my own words, my grandson shamed me into eating my first—and last—oyster. “How do you know you don’t like something, Grandma, if you never try it?”

We bear great responsibility for our own health. The adults read labels and buy accordingly. The young ones catch their elders out whenever they can: “Why do you eat that fake butter, Grandma?” “That artificial sugar is no good for you.”

We’re uncomfortable to have so much when others have so little. We give food as gifts, we do not waste, and we all contribute to food pantries and hunger drives.

The politics of food have a place at our table. We talk about why family farms turn into subdivisions, how grain-based fuel disrupts food supplies, why we buy from countries with no environmental protection or human rights, global warming, Walmart. Everyone knows that, in our family, we don’t just talk—we ask questions, lobby, and vote. It has never been otherwise.

And that’s the legacy I believe that we pass down at our dinner table—a little family history, a little nutrition, a little morality, a little politics—then, for dessert, a lot of cake.
THE JUNIOR PROM
by Jerome Kornreich

I was desperate. No date, and the prom was only a week away. It was bad enough that Molly at Radcliffe had to fall and break her leg. But for Harriet to be laid up in New Rochelle’s infirmary, that was too much! How could I invite a girl to the Junior Prom with only six days to go?

I collapsed on my bed and beat my head in frustration. What to do now? I felt robbed, and angry. How could fate have been so cruel? Broken leg – diphtheria. This wasn’t bad luck. It was catastrophe! What girl would accept a prom invite so close to the prom date? Was this God’s revenge for my inviting two *shiksas* to the prom? Maybe I should have listened to my mother. She was always after me to date Jewish girls. She never accepted my argument that the Jewish girls in town weren’t as good looking as the Christian girls. I started to think about the Jewish girls who were part of my Temple social group. The Fidersky identical twins were both attractive. If I invited one of them, maybe she’d be so flattered she’d swallow her pride and accept an invitation. After all, it wasn’t every Jewish girl in Waterbury that got invited to a college prom – and a Yale prom at that! I tried to convince myself that she’d grab at the chance, but I wasn’t convinced. Still, I had to do something.

I decided to try, expecting a terse refusal and the end of my dream of a wonderful prom. I didn’t have the luxury of time on my side, so I decided to call Myrtle and tell her the truth – well, almost all the truth. I didn’t tell her she was third choice! I blurted out my tale of woe and waited for a response. After some hesitation, Myrtle said she could understand my predicament and would do me a favor by accepting my invitation. I thanked her profusely and told her I’d send her all the details.

I had a date. Hallelujah! That’s assuming nothing would happen in the next five days. Now I had to rush to prepare for the big weekend. First, to the Tux Shop, to rent a tuxedo. Little did I realize that meant renting a fancy white shirt, a black bow tie, cuff links, black socks and black patent shoes. The salesman didn’t seem aware of the fact that he was dealing with a self-supporting student. Then the corsage. Ten bucks for a single white orchid! But what the heck - there was only one Junior Prom! Thanks to the arrangement that Yale had made with some landladies, I only had to pay $25 for the room for Myrtle. Because it was so late, I had trouble signing up classmates to dance with Myrtle. Her prom program looked awfully empty with only two lines filled in. She’d get to dance with Stan Simmer and Milt Bram and the rest of the time with me. At least we’d be dancing to good music. Harry James was the orchestra picked for the prom.

Myrtle was planning to arrive by bus early Friday afternoon. My plan was to let her settle in, and then we could take in a piano recital at Sprague Hall. After that, we would have dinner at Calhoun. I’d send her back to her room by cab so she could get dressed and then pick her up later to go to the Glee Club Concert, and, finally, the prom.

Friday arrived and I met Myrtle at the bus station. She looked much as I remembered her – pretty but not beautiful. She was wearing a yellow, short-sleeved blouse over a brown skirt. The yellow made her curly brown hair stand out. I felt a sense of relief; the weekend might not be too bad. Luckily for me, there was a local bus that took us close to her room and I saved on cab fare.
I helped her carry her luggage into the house and waited for her while she freshened up. Men were not allowed beyond the living room!

It was a lovely day, so when Myrtle was ready, we strolled around the campus, giving her a chance to view Yale’s Gothic architecture. When it was time, we went to Sprague Hall for the piano recital and, afterwards, to Calhoun for dinner. Myrtle was impressed with the dining hall as I knew she would be. Unlike today’s buffet style dining, we had individual tables with paper doilies and printed menus. We had waitresses in uniforms who inquired as to our choice of entree. I was hoping some other prom couple would join us so I wouldn’t have to make conversation by myself. No such luck. Myrtle was not an extrovert, so conversation was sparse. Thanks to the beneficence of Calhoun’s Master, we went into the library after dinner to join other couples for a sip of sherry. Introductions were made and, after exhausting queries as to residences and birthplaces, we left. I called for a cab and instructed the driver to take Myrtle to her room. We agreed that I would pick her up at 8:30.

I returned to my room and started the struggle to fit myself into my rented equipment. Fitting the cuff links into the shirt gave me a little trouble, and I managed to squeeze my feet into the patent shoes, but I failed when it came to the bow tie. I found a fellow sufferer who agreed to tie my tie if I would do his. It worked! All dressed, I went into the bathroom to admire myself in the mirror. I confess that I liked the way I looked. I called a cab and went to pick up Myrtle. I had the driver wait for us. Myrtle was wearing a Yale-blue gown with long sleeves. It was tucked at the waist, giving her a quite shapely figure. Her shoes were matching blue sandals with high heels. I helped her pin on the white orchid I had brought, and we took the cab to Woolsley Hall for the Glee Club concert.

The cab pulled up in front of Woolsley Hall. I stepped out and turned to pay the driver. Myrtle helped herself out. As she put one foot on the curb, she looked up to admire Woolsley’s stately columns. Before I could catch her, she tripped on the running board. I started to apologize for not helping her when I spotted a look of anguish on her face. “Oh no!” she gasped. She reached down and pulled off her right shoe. The heel had snapped off!

I felt my blood pressure rising. I wanted to berate her for being so careless. I clenched my fists and clamped my teeth together. But Myrtle’s eyes were beginning to show tears and I decided to demonstrate my Yale gentlemanly qualities. “Don’t worry, Myrtle. We’ll find a way to fix it. Let’s get back in the cab and we’ll look for a shoemaker. I’m sure he’ll be able to put your heel back on.” I prayed I was right! It was almost 9 o’clock on a Saturday night. Where to find a shoemaker? We got back into the cab and I asked the driver to drive around the commercial district to see if we could find a shoemaker. We drove around and around without success. I stared at the meter. Tick, tick, tick. Each tick was adding 10 cents to the cost. This was going to be an expensive evening.

Knowing that many of the shoemakers were Italian, I instructed the driver to go to the Italian section of New Haven. We spotted a couple of shoemaker stores – all closed. The tick, tick, tick of the meter seemed faster and louder. In desperation, I had the driver stop in front of a pharmacy. I asked the pharmacist if he knew of any shoemakers, active or retired, who could put a heel back on a lady’s shoe. He said he knew a Mr. Fasiano who had been a shoemaker but was
retired now. “He might be able to help you and he lives on the next block.” The pharmacist gave me the man’s address. I rushed back to the cab, grabbed Myrtle’s shoe, asked the driver to wait, and ran to Mr. Fasiano’s address.

He lived in an old tenement, up on the third floor. I hurried up the three flights of stairs and knocked on the door. A kindly-looking, stooped, old man answered the door. I explained my predicament and showed him the shoe. “Sure,” Mr. Fasiano said, “I fix. Come in. I get tools.” I watched him limp out of the room. In a minute he returned with his tool box. It took only a few minutes for him to tack the heel back on. “Thank you so much,” I said. “You don’t know how much this means to me. How much do I owe you?” “No owe,” he replied. “Go have fun.” I insisted he take some money and thrust a couple of dollars into his hand. I rushed down the stairs and back to the cab.

I gave a relieved Myrtle her shoe and told the driver to drive us back to Woolsley Hall. As we entered the hall, the glee club was singing the last refrain of “Bright College Years,” the official Yale song. The concert was over! I thought of the money I had paid for tickets. Inwardly, I cursed my date. So far, the evening activities were draining my funds and I certainly didn’t have much to show for it. It was time for my luck to change. Maybe the rest of the evening would make up for the prior misfortunes.

We left the Hall and followed the crowd as it made its way to the Payne Whitney Gym for the big Prom. The gym was decorated with blue and white streamers and ‘39 banners. Floating against the high ceilings were blue and white balloons. The over-sized dance area was surrounded by chairs, providing a rest area for tired dancers. Considering the bareness of the gym, the room was reasonably attractive. Couples began to drift in and stroll about, chatting and comparing dance programs. The orchestra musicians started to unpack their instruments and tune up.

I sought out Stan Zimmer, who had signed for dance set #2 in Myrtle’s prom program, and Milt Barker, who had signed for #4. We made arrangements where to meet. The music started and Myrtle and I made our way to the dance floor for dance #1. I had forgotten what a good dancer she was, so it was a pleasant surprise to find myself enjoying the dance. The Harry James Orchestra was superb, a sixteen piece band of top musicians. Their first piece was Duke Ellington’s “Sophisticated Lady”, a tribute to the room full of pretty girls. When the first set ended, I transferred Myrtle to Stan and met his date, a Jill something, a sophomore at Columbia majoring in French. She talked better than she danced, but I survived. Back to Myrtle for set #3. We found Milt for the next set and I met Sue Cohen, a Mt. Holyoke junior. She was an interesting conversationalist and a smooth dancer. I regretted that I hadn’t signed Milt up for another dance with Myrtle. I consoled myself thinking that at least Myrtle was a good dancer.

At first, Myrtle and I danced holding ourselves politely apart, but it was easier dancing close together. Gradually, I put my arm around her waist and pulled her a little closer. She didn’t seem to object and I enjoyed feeling the pressure of her body. By the sixth dance, we were dancing cheek to cheek and obviously enjoying ourselves. To show off our skills, we twirled and did deep dips. I learned what was going on in Waterbury and discovered that Myrtle and her twin sister were enrolled in a nursing program. Myrtle seemed interested in life at Yale and I
entertained her with tales of hardship and glory. She was fascinated to learn that I was working part-time for a psychologist who was the head of Yale’s nursing program. She laughed to hear about my escapades as a tuba player in the Yale Band.

When the last strains of “The Ball Is Over” faded away, we joined Stan and Milt and their dates. We considered going to Louie’s for a steak sandwich and a cup of coffee, but Myrtle begged off, saying she was a bit tired and preferred to go back to her room to rest. After they left, I was going to hail a cab but Myrtle suggested that we walk. It was a warm, beautiful night with stars twinkling in the sky. Holding Myrtle’s hand, we strolled leisurely back to her rooming house. We sat in the living room and talked for a few minutes. I used the landlady’s phone to call a cab. When the cab honked outside, we both stood up. “It was a wonderful evening,” Myrtle said, “and I really enjoyed it, despite the horrible beginning.” “We still had a good time,” I replied gallantly. I reached for her, pulled her closer and gave her a short, gentle kiss, like a bride would kiss her mother-in-law for the first time. Myrtle did not pull away. We kissed again, this time a much longer, sexier kiss. I pulled her closer and felt the warmth of her body. I could feel my libido stirring. The cab driver honked again. “Darn it! I guess I have to go. I’ll be back tomorrow morning about 10. Good night, Myrtle. Sleep well.” I left, silently cursing the impatient driver.

The next morning I arrived at Myrtle’s promptly at 10. She had to check out by noon, so I waited while she packed. I took her suitcase and we walked to Calhoun. I showed her my room and then took her on a tour of the Sterling Library. She was impressed with its size and opulence. At noon, we returned to Calhoun for lunch. There were no planned activities in the afternoon, so Myrtle decided she might just as well catch the bus back to Waterbury. I called for a cab and accompanied her to the bus station. Just before she boarded the bus, she gave me a kiss and told me what a lovely time she had had. I waved goodbye as the bus pulled away.

The big weekend was over. It wasn’t what I had expected but it hadn’t turned out too badly. The unexpected cab expenses Saturday night had used up all my savings, and the waste of money really hurt. Even though I was on scholarship and had a part-time college job, there were expenses I had to pay. I wouldn’t have felt so upset about the cost of the weekend if so many things hadn’t gone wrong. Yet I felt proud of myself: I had overcome almost unbelievable obstacles.

Monday morning, a telephone call from my Mother woke me up. “How could you do this to us?” her anger exploded. I was dazed. “What? What did I do?” “What did you do? You made a fool out of us.” “Whoa, Mom. What are you talking about?” “The Waterbury paper this morning has a nice story about Molly Luchin going to the Prom as your date. Of course we told everybody how pleased we were that you were taking Myrtle Fidersky. How do you think that makes us feel? And how do you think Myrtle feels? How could you do such a thing?”

For a moment I was speechless. How could this have happened? Then it dawned upon me. “Mom, I never told the paper about the prom. It had to be Yale. Two months ago when I purchased the ticket for the prom, I had to fill out a form. There was a line on it asking for the name and town of the girl I was inviting. I never dreamed Yale would use that information for publicity purposes. Of course, at that time Molly Luchin was my date. It never occurred to me to
tell Yale I had made a change. Gee, I’m sorry. Poor Myrtle – she probably told all her girl friends and she must be crushed.”

“The least you could do,” counseled my Mother,” is to call her and apologize.” “That would make matters worse, Mother. Myrtle knows she was second fiddle only now she knows to whom she was second fiddle. And all her friends know she was second choice.” “Well, you got yourself into this mess. I hope you can figure out a way out.” She hung up.

The situation was hopeless. There was nothing I could do. Murphy’s law was validated again --- anything that can go wrong will go wrong. Did I say it was a pretty good weekend? Lord, have mercy on me!” I crawled back into bed, hoping I’d never have to face Myrtle again.
BUTTERFLY
by Arthur Sharenow
BEDOUIN GIRL
by Arthur Sharenow
FALL HARVEST
by Allan Kleinman
STUMP WITH BRACKET MUSHROOMS
by Allan Kleinman
Epiphany
by Ruth Housman

winter's cold clarity
untangles me
I am all jangle and tingle
awake to that slap of
icy wind redolent with pine
I am white bright
high stepping through snow banks
an angel child with crystal wings
I pull my sled up the hill
race it down
aware of falling
through veil after veil
of shimmering flakes
when the snow catches fire
in the sun
I know

there is a master key
that opens all doors
I am getting closer every day
I will find my way home
WHEN YOU ARE GONE
by Susan Ritter

When you are gone I shall wear your pajamas
So that I will sleep enfolded by a tiny piece of you.

I will rest my face upon your pillow in search of your scent.

I will watch the Red Sox games
And remember the finer points you tried to teach me as I yawned.
I will turn to query,
But you will not be there.

I will shop for food without an argument from you to buy enough for a family of six.

I will cook enough to have leftovers you never complained about,
And they will last me most of the week.

I will look for your laundry.

I will enter a silent house and not hear, “That you?”

I will save my funny anecdotes and offer them to you only along with prayers.

I will look at the aging lady in the mirror
And remember how you always told me I looked just as I did when we met.

In the misty time between sleeping and waking, I will find you in my dreams
And you will say,
”What in the world are you doing in my pajamas?”
sometimes it seems that forever is a real country
by Ruth Housman

I will stand in the marsh
with the herons on trembling legs
observing every sunset
I will sleep with rain and sun
tumbling through my ears
will feel the rush of violet
sweeping through the meadow
will gather toward me
every dawn every twilight
nothing I have loved
will ever die

I am so afraid
I will not have arms enough
nor strength enough
nor song enough
to thank you

SIMPLE THINGS
by Irwin Garfinkle

so long ago, and yet
I never will forget
the simple things
sharing spaces, loving embraces
reminiscing, bedtime kissing
together reflecting, always respecting
cocktail times, poetic rhymes
gentle caressing, love professing
clutching, touching
pleasing, teasing
simple things I remember
simple things I miss.
RICHARD
by Pete Reider

At prep school he was all the rage, certainly the most popular boy in our class at Wilberforce Academy. He was six feet when we entered the ninth grade. By graduation he was six four, a head taller than me. Being tall is a big help. Commands instant respect. Richard McConnell knew that and played it for all it was worth. He affected a formidable confidence, speaking in a basso profundo voice that was even lower than his natural deep voice. He developed early a big hooked nose, long chin and protruding Adam’s apple, giving him the appearance of maturity. We had gone to grammar school in Connecticut together and I knew he had his insecurities; however, by the ninth grade he was Mister Cool.

On top of this he was bright. He learned effortlessly. He didn’t have to struggle to commit to memory as I did. Latin phrases, lines of Lady Macbeth, limericks and lyrics embedded themselves gracefully in his memory – like falling leaves. The Wilberforce yearbook described him as debonair. The girls at our sister school, Northumberland, vied for his favor. He regaled them in groups from which one of the prettiest would peel off and try to draw him off from the pack. He resisted such seductions, preferring to entertain the masses. No one contested his place at the pinnacle of Mt. Ladies Man.

We were roommates for four years. Then he went to Princeton and I to Stanford and from then on we were out of touch. I had heard that he worked high up for I.B.M., became an alcoholic, and had two failed marriages before his successful marriage ended when his wife died of cancer. I had also heard he had the equivalent of Alzheimer’s and was attended by a caretaker at home. I was tremendously surprised to meet him after fifty plus years at the gathering before the Popof wedding in Toronto.

He looked good! His attractively chiseled features stood out above the crowd. He still had a full head of hair, now white, but combed back over the ears in a distinguished manner. His hands moved in his characteristic thespian style. Once again he was addressing a crowd of admiring young women. I could tell they were crazy about him.

Creating a path through the throng, I said, “Hi, Richard, I’m Preston Wildberg.” He looked blank so I furnished some Wilberforce background – the name of our room, Windswept 21, and of our favorite teacher, Mr. Saltonstall. His expression went from zero to an ingratiating and knowing smile. “Piglet Wildberg,” he exclaimed too loudly. I was unhappy at this choice of introduction to the assembly of wedding guests – I had never been fond of my prep school moniker – but also relieved that Richard could retrieve some memory of me.

I told him about my divorce from Ivory, my four children, the deaths of my parents (whom he had known) and my retirement from teaching English at Northwestern. He nodded but said nothing until I ventured, “What about you?”

“Oh, you know me. Making the best of an uneven polo field. You undoubtedly heard about the mishap I suffered with Wallis. Frightful thing. I loved her truly and it cost me the monarchy.” His face was deadpan. Then he raised his eyebrows as if to ask what do you have to say to that,
and I tumbled into his farcical act: he was King Edward VIII bemoaning his abdication because he had married Wallis Warfield Simpson. I remembered then his take-offs on Winston Churchill, Queen Elizabeth, F.D.R. and Truman. But where was the brain damaged Richard? Was the story about his drinking and subsequent dementia completely false? I tested him with what I measured to be a subtle rejoinder.

“Yes,” I said dryly, “I hear it was those damnable Dominions what done you in. Canada, for one, had no respect for the king’s prerogatives.”

He amazed me with his quick reply, “Quite so, old boy. The Canucks are a sorry lot aren’t they?”

“Better lower your voice,” I said, “Toronto is listening.”

I could tell he didn’t get that and winced inwardly at my overshooting the mark. “We are in Canada, of course,” I added as if he were well aware but had momentarily forgotten.

He looked genuinely bewildered. “We are?” he said incredulously.

“Where did you think we were?”

“Why, aren’t we at the Waldorf Astoria?”

So the rumors weren’t rumors. He didn’t know where he was. I changed the subject back to Wilberforce – skating on the pond, water bomb fights in the stairwell of the dorm, his winning the Latin oration prize. He was immediately on his feet again, recalling the unexpected appearance of the dorm proctor, coming from his room into the battle zone hallway, getting doused by a water balloon.

“Stubby. Right? How’re you doing?”

An ancient sense of shame surfaced as I heard Stubby – another handle I wished to forget, a reference to my pudginess and lack of any athletic prowess. I nodded. “It is I. I married Ivory. You remember her?”

“The swimmer? The one who looked like Esther Williams?”

“No, that was Mary, Mary Plimpton. Ivory was an ace at field hockey. She wielded a wicked stick,” I continued, somewhat surprised at myself, because I had no idea what Richard would comprehend. “After twenty three years she ran off with another man, someone younger and wealthier. Left me a note wishing me good times with Barney, the Red Setter. Nice gal.”

“Tough luck,” he said solemnly.
So he had at least gotten the drift of my story – perhaps cued by the tone of my voice. “I’d like to meet someone,” I confided, again wondering if I was being foolish to talk so intimately to him. “Weddings, you know – they say the wedding atmosphere kindles romance.”

“Ah romance.” He shifted into the public Richard, “It is springtime and ripe for romance.”

It was summer, but he was close. I had caught the eye of a charming, fiftyish dark haired woman standing just a few feet away. It occurred to me that she might have heard our conversation and might even be responding to my wishful thinking by looking my way. I managed to lead Richard over to her and sprang into chit chat. Her name was Eve Marie Schatzki. She received us graciously, explaining she was the mother of one of the bridesmaids as well as a friend of Morey and Lucy Popof. This information enabled me to talk about my longstanding relationship with the Popofs and my fond memories of the bride, Julie, as a youngster. With evident pride, she said she was an art historian and writer – a woman, I could see, of no mean stature. I noticed that she had no wedding ring and that she warmed and moved closer as I made clear my valid membership in the Popof circle. Her hair was pulled back. She wore a strapless black dress. Her sensuous shoulders commanded deference and I ached for a proper introduction so that I could kiss them – decorously. She smiled at tactful, well placed intervals. She was a winner. In the words once extant at Wilberforce Academy, I had lucked out.

I left Richard out of the conversation – both because I wanted no interference getting to know Eve Marie and because I feared his unpredictability. After a time, to be polite, I turned to him and made inclusive overtures in his direction.

Eve Marie turned to look up at him with obvious interest. “How do you find Canada?” she asked, bright eyes shining.

“I wouldn’t dream of going back to Massachusetts,” he said jauntily. “Not after being in a civilized country. It’s almost like Mother England.”

She laughed, all too cheerily, I thought. Looking at Richard – not at me – she said, “Helen Mirren deserved the Academy Award for The Queen, don’t you think? I thought she was more Elizabeth than Queen Elizabeth herself.” She mimicked Helen Mirren ordering her Corgies, “Walk on, walk on.”

Richard caught Eve Marie’s accent and ran with the role of the queen: “I do wish Prince Philip wouldn’t disturb the dogs in the bed at night. They need their sleep, you know,” he said in perfect falsetto.

I could hardly protect myself from my anguish as I witnessed the pleasure and adoration in Eve Marie’s eyes, scooping up Richard, finding him utterly enthralling. I wondered how a brain damaged human being could, on the spur of the moment, come up with such a comic rendition of the bedtime Queen Elizabeth, Prince Philip and her Corgies. Hopes for living out my old age with Eve Marie were dashed.
We three, femme in the middle, sat through the wedding ceremony – a blur of no consequence given my sorrowful state. At the end, Richard, Eve Marie and I filed out of the hotel ballroom. Richard’s caretaker, a buxom young woman whose manner was friendly and country-girlish, was waiting for him and fell in with us discretely. Eve Marie seemed to notice her only peripherally. In the hotel lobby, Eve Marie shook hands with me. And then, with a delicate flourish that severed from my head whatever remaining emotions I had, she stood on tip toes and kissed Richard, first on one cheek and then the other.

Said Richard, “My, my, it must be my birthday.”

To which she laughingly replied, “You are a dear!”

She must have intuitively sized up the keeper’s role. Before leaving, Eve Marie whispered in her ear, following which the obliging young woman wrote something on a business card extracted from her purse. I learned that her name was Shirley Asquith and that she had accompanied Richard from western Massachusetts and would return with him on Sunday after the festivities were over.

I was unable to sleep that night, and, in desperation, took a walk in the neighborhood of the hotel. The streets were empty and the walk failed to divert me. Upon returning to the hotel and approaching the desk, I was amazed to see Richard walking aimlessly in the lobby. I went up to him and said hello. He gave no sign of knowing me, but told me he was lost. The concierge had been watching us and came over. I explained that my friend had forgotten his room number. I asked if there was a woman named Asquith in an adjoining room. Indeed there was. I called Shirley’s room. She asked if I wanted her to come down. I said I thought I could manage Richard. He looked at me rather suspiciously as I started guiding him toward the elevator, but I brought up skating on the pond at Wilberforce and mentioned the dreadful name, Piglet, to which he quickly responded with a fraternal pat on my shoulder and made agreeable grunts of acceptance.

At the Sunday wedding brunch, Eve Marie doted upon Richard and seemed to form a bond with Shirley Asquith. They exchanged knowing glances of approval when Richard was entertaining, which was often.

Richard:

Lady Astor – Winston, if I were married to you I would’ve given you poison.
Churchill – Lady Astor, if I were married to you I would take it.

I asked Shirley for telephone numbers and addresses, both hers and Richard’s. I also had a brief talk with Eve Marie. Trying not to sound admonishing, I told her I had some concerns about Richard. She said she intended to see him – she lived in Massachusetts, in Cambridge, about an hour and a half drive and would let me know if there were any problems. She gave me her number, but the focus was on Richard and not on a relationship with me. After getting settled for several days at home in Chicago, trying unsuccessfully to free my mind of Eve Marie, I called Shirley.
“How is it working out?”

“Oh, fine.”

“That was scary – his wandering about in the hotel. Wouldn’t it be a good idea to have someone come and stay the night? You’re only there during the day.”

Shirley laughed, “Funny you should ask. Eve Marie has moved in.”

I couldn’t believe the words. “She has!”

“Yes, it’s wonderful. A big weight off my mind. It’s as if Providence…”

I cut her off. “When will Eve Marie be there?”

“About five.”

“Tell her I’ll call her after dinner – when would that be?”

“Seven should be fine.”

Eve Marie’s voice sounded as familiar as if I had known her all my life. She was upbeat. “It’s terrific!” she said after opening exchanges. “He’s a great Scrabble player.”

“Scrabble player!” I repeated, bleating out in pain. “He is?”

“Yes, he does the most creative things.”

“Isn’t it – staying there – holding you back in your normal life?” I regretted the outburst and the tainted word, normal, but it was too late now.

“Heavens no, the thought of the dumb guy I was seeing in Cambridge makes me cringe. And I can do my work here or in one of the college libraries.”

A terrible thought disturbed me. What if she is sleeping with him? “You’re not…” I began and abruptly stopped.

“I’m not what?”

“Nothing.”

“No really, I’m not what? I have to know what you started to say.”

“Forgive me. I just had the crazy idea…that you were sleeping with him.”
What occurred then was what I believe is termed a pregnant pause. I knew already that the worst was true. “I didn’t mean to sound judgmental,” I lamented. “I suppose I do sound judgmental.”

“No,” she said reassuringly. “It’s really all right to ask. You’re his oldest friend. And we do sleep together. It began when he wandered into my room. He was confused – didn’t know me. It seemed better to stay in the same room with him. And now we’re lovers. Isn’t that a hoot? I enjoy his company. Who would’ve imagined that? I consider myself a lucky woman. Shirley says he’s had a number of suitors. She understands his attractiveness – says she would be tempted herself if she weren’t married. He’s a great guy.”

“But he probably doesn’t remember you.”

“Oh he does. Not right off when I get home, but Shirley says, ‘Evie’s here’ and he clicks right in.”

“He calls you Evie?”

“Yes, it’s cute. I’ve never been called Evie before.”

I hated myself in anticipation of what I said next but it had to come out: “The man is demented.”

“Korsakoff’s, is the diagnosis. The memory palace, the hippocampus, is out of kilter. But he is in there and oodles does get through to him. He’s creative. He expresses emotions in funny asides and detours – a bit like an abstract artist.”

I was surprised she wasn’t angry at me – I had been so grossly intrusive. What she wanted was to take care of him; what I had said was simply irrelevant.

I felt envious of Richard, having a lady-friend so caring and devoted. I hated giving up the idea of Eve Marie as my be-all and end-all. In my distant view, she had seemed to be perfect – entertaining, alert, poised and dignified. And yet, Eve Marie had made a significant decision by choosing to care for Richard. Their relationship was uncommonly one-sided. I could only guess at the reasons she preferred the simplicity of Richard’s loyalty to the fullness of a complete person. Perhaps she had had painful disappointments and didn’t want to be rejected. But I do know myself. I’m too prickly a pear for her. I couldn’t endure a woman who says heavens. I would have become angry with her about subtleties beyond Richard’s grasp. Why did you say that at breakfast this morning? I know you didn’t mean it, but it hurts when you talk that way.

I felt an almost inexplicable relief. Thank you, Richard, for saving my ship.
MEMORABLE MEALS
by Gene S. Kupferschmid

I’ll eat anything that doesn’t bite me first, especially when I travel. At least that is what I say, although I have never had to prove it by eating a sheep’s eye, and have graciously turned down a glass of fermented mare’s milk offered by a nomad in Kyrgyzstan. After all, what better way to understand a people than to break bread the way they do? So when I am abroad I roam through grocery stores, wander through markets, purchase little packets of dried mushrooms (sold more cheaply at my local market back home) and small tins of saffron (usually straw tinted yellow) to bring home a bit of that foreign experience. And I do my best to avoid restaurants filled with tourists like myself. Indeed, some of my foreign dining experiences have been among my most memorable ones.

Everyone should eat a healthy breakfast, but few can rival the one served at the Hotel Aurora on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul in Kyrgyzstan. Fed by the streams and rivers pouring down from the snow-capped mountains that surround it, Lake Issyk-Kul is one of the world’s largest bodies of fresh water. It is so deep that it never freezes despite the high altitude, and rumor has it that during the Cold War era Russian nuclear submarines were tested in its waters. The Hotel Aurora was built on this scenic spot as a sanatorium where high-ranking Soviet bureaucrats could recuperate from excessive stress and vodka.

Today the hotel’s concrete façade is cracked and the parquet floors slope and ripple, but the crystal chandeliers in the elegant dining room still gleam and the white linens are impeccably starched. When our small party entered for breakfast, each place was set with a tall glass of fresh whole-milk yogurt, rich, tangy and delicious, obviously freshly-made. Each table featured a basket of breads, a platter of cheeses and sausages, warm hard-boiled eggs nestled in napkins, several pots of thick preserves, and fragrant coffee. We were watched by a small squad of dour waiters who were lined up against the wall as though anticipating the arrival of a firing squad. As we finished the second cup of coffee and contentedly pushed back our chairs, the waiters suddenly sprang into action. Clearing the tables with military precision, they disappeared into the kitchen and quickly emerged wheeling carts stacked with prepared plates. The hearty continental breakfast was merely the first course!

The area around Lake Issyk-Kul is famous for the smoked fish prepared with the local catch. And there it was, on each plate, a large grilled fillet accompanied by heaping portions of mashed potatoes and corn kernels. To further international understanding, we felt obliged to show our appreciation of the local delicacy. Finally, as we wearily put down our knives and forks, the tables were cleared and, before we could even consider making a break for the door, the rolling carts appeared again, this time bearing bowls of porridge with a puddle of honey in the center.

Didn’t I read somewhere that the Soviet Union collapsed under the weight of its own excesses?

And then there was that lunch in Chile. Four of us were on our way down the Pacific coast en route to Isla Negra, the home of the great Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda. Isla Negra, isn’t really an island at all, but a sandy promontory studded with large, black, shiny rocks, like sleek, wet seals sunning themselves on the beach. Shortly before reaching the home of the great poet, we
stopped for lunch at a roadside seafood restaurant, a cross between a diner and a New England fried clam shack. Having arrived in Santiago just the day before, I had not yet tried the many varieties of shellfish that Chile is famous for, but I certainly hoped to. Nor would I settle for something so prosaic as fried fish, as did two others in our little party. I asked my Chilean companion about some of the unfamiliar offerings written on a blackboard menu. And when he said “That one is a seafood stew, a Chilean specialty, and that’s what I’ll have,” I enthusiastically added “Make that two.”

A Chilean seafood stew. Surely it would be similar to bouillabaisse or cioppino, with a bright red lobster claw, and scrumptious pink shrimp, dark blue mussels, and fleshy clams swimming happily in a glistening saffron broth. But the large earthenware bowls that arrived at the table were brimming with a dark, murky liquid. My Chilean companion happily tucked into his, so I bravely plunged my spoon into the depths. The first creature that emerged resembled an extra from a science fiction film, the one in which strange creatures crawl forth from a primeval swamp. I plunged the spoon in again…and again…and again, ever more timidly because each time I dredged up another pre-evolutionary creature, an ocean denizen that had probably spent its existence clinging to the bottom of a ship, most likely an oil tanker.

“How do you like it?” beamed the Chilean. Not wishing to upset delicate Pan American relationships, I muttered a polite reply and warily stuck in my spoon once more. When it brought up another monster from the deep I asked him what it was called. “It’s a loco”, he informed me. “Loco like crazy?” I asked. He laughed, “Sí, sí!”

I couldn’t possibly offend our good natured Chilean companion by ordering something else, such as the appetizing fried fish that the others were eating. It was too late to discover a hitherto-hidden allergy to shellfish, and too soon to develop an incapacitating stomach virus. So I emptied the bread basket, took small sips of the broth, and murmured, “Delicioso!”

In his Odas elementales Neruda celebrated the ordinary: commonplace things and foodstuffs such as socks, lemons, and artichokes, but I couldn’t recall an ode to strange shellfish.

My cousin and I had dinner at the Chungking Restaurant in Jujuy (pronounced hoo-hooey) in the northern Argentine province of the same name, high in the foothills of the Andes. The restaurant was across the street from the Chungking Hotel, the only one in town. When the desk clerk recommended it, I asked if it was a Chinese restaurant. “No,” he replied laconically, “A Chinese man was here a long time ago, but now he is gone.”

Later that evening, we were seated in a cavernous space that could easily have accommodated 100 diners. But only one other table was occupied. The portly, middle-aged gentleman sitting alone was energetically digging into a celebrated Argentine dish: bife a caballo (steak on horseback), a thick slab of beef topped with two fried eggs. This cholesterol-laden delight was accompanied by a generous heap of French fries and a carafe of red wine. The tables were unadorned by so much as a flower, the walls were bare, and the menu listed the standard dishes of the Southern Cone: all the edible parts of the steer.
Shortly after our steaks were brought to the table, I looked up and saw four men quietly slip into the restaurant. They were wearing the colorful knitted caps with earflaps and the long woolen ponchos that are typical of the Andean region. Standing near the doorway, they began to play the instruments they had pulled out from under their ponchos. Suddenly the clear, crisp mountain air was filled with the plaintive, haunting sounds of Andean folk music played on the *quena* and the *charango*. “*Viva Jujuy, viva la sierra...*” they piped, plunked, and sang, an unexpected musical treat that enlivened our somber surroundings. Then the rhythm changed, and my cousin whispered—“Do you recognize what they are playing? It’s Bach!” Indeed it was! Bach played on a hollow reed and a string instrument fashioned from the shell of an armadillo! Bach played in a nearly empty restaurant high in the Andes with an intensity of feeling worthy of Carnegie Hall.

As we heartily applauded and the lone diner continued eating without once looking up from his *bife*, the impassive musicians moved on to their next number. This time it was I who said “Do you recognize what they are playing?” There, in the Chungking Restaurant, in the bracing night air of the Andes, four Indians in ponchos, playing native instruments, were giving a very credible, spirited rendition of *Hava Nagila*.

I wonder if they are the same group I heard playing “*Viva Jujuy*” on the sidewalks of Harvard Square the other day.
They flit, fly and flirt, under the umbrella of the old dogwood tree, through the laurels' maze, into the comforting arms of the purple rhododendrons.

On dusky, rainy days when shadows are deep and the garden shines oily shades of jade, they make slashes of shimmering color.

They fly to and from their treasure chest of black oiled sunflower seeds, seeds that offer themselves up to their fate and a chance to be reborn.

Saucy chickadees chirp and tip their caps as they pleasure past my window on their way to spar with brown sparrows for a seat at the plentiful table.

The brilliant cardinal sports sunshades. In his crested crimson coat he is ringmaster of our flying circus, assisted by his mate, elegant in buff with pouty orange beak.

A downy woodpecker in formal feathers and bright red cap lives in our dogwood. He makes frequent forays into the trove; then flies back to familiar limbs.

Red-winged blackbirds sweep in graceful arcs against the green, flaunting fiery epaulets as they invite themselves to share the bounty.

And I? I am the easel that holds the canvas on which these feathered brushes paint the pictures that I see when I shut my eyes.
AURUM LAUDATION
by Ruth Kramer Baden

For yellow yoke of my hatching
and lemon of the nipple fruit

For dandelions woven and worn
as crowns in Eden’s half-hour

For burnished coin of hair locked
fifty years in his wallet

And butter suns my children drew
spokes arrayed on kitchen wall

For *A host of golden daffodils*
blooming in never-ending lines
I still recite while memories wilt

For your body’s saffron and honey
filling every comb of me

And how we weave each other
straw into gold.
NOT SO LUCKY DUCKLINGS
by Robert Pill
MAN WITH MUSICAL INSTRUMENT - CHINA

by Ronald Levy
FOLLOW THE LEADER
by John Fiske
LEAF
by Arthur Sharenow
A monster lurked under his bed. When dark fell, it would slither out to gouge Little Jack’s eyes. Jack wanted the light to stay on, but his father said that there was no monster and not to be a sissy. Father’s words shamed him, but did not take away his fear.

Trembling, five-year-old Jack pulled the blanket over his head, holding tight. He now was less afraid, but not quite reassured, and it was stuffy under the blanket. Keeping his toy gun under the pillow held the monster at bay, and Jack could breathe freely. Still, he didn’t want his mother to find the gun there in the morning and start asking questions. Sometimes it was enough to pretend to have the gun, the harder he imagined the gun, the safer he felt.

Jack thought, “It is easy for fathers to pooh-pooh monsters. Monsters do not bother grownups. Besides, grownups don’t sleep alone in their dark bedroom.” Jack wondered if other boys had monsters under their beds but was too embarrassed to ask.

As Jack grew up, the monster seemed to fade away. Like cowards, monsters picked on little boys only. He no longer needed protection from monsters, yet Jack maintained a keen interest in guns and how they worked. A precocious reader, he read whatever came his way - cereal boxes, candy wrappers, his father’s magazines, anything. Reading about guns in the encyclopedia and in Popular Mechanics magazine really captivated him. Other machines were also interesting. It was awesome to figure out how and why machines worked, and how they were controlled. It was like being master of the world.

Twenty years later, Jack knew no insecurity. An engineer, he had a well-paying job with excellent advancement prospects. He had a beautiful wife, Susie, who made heads turn when they entered a restaurant, and a bright little boy, Junior. They lived in a new condominium, with a Jacuzzi in the master suite, a large-screen TV, and two late-model cars parked outside. He was proud of his achievements. At the office, he regaled his fellow workers with pictures of Junior and accounts of his precociousness. If anybody considered this tedious, they gave no sign of it.

Yet he wanted more. Before Junior entered preschool, he wanted to move from the condominium to a house in a good school district. His son deserved the good life. A recent promotion and pay raise helped. This promotion entailed frequent business travel, and while he missed his family, Jack was excited by the thought of what he was doing for them. It was disappointing that Susie was less enthusiastic and complained that she did not like being left alone night after night. He understood her fear of being alone. Intending to reassure her, he bought a handgun. Susie’s reaction was not as he expected, she was furious. She was not going to have a gun around the house! Certainly not with the inquisitive Junior around. The gun was stowed in a safe at the bottom of the closet.
One Friday afternoon, returning from a long business trip, Jack was surprised to find his home empty. Was he more worried or more annoyed? Then the answering machine bleeped. It was a message from Susie: “I have left. I am staying with Nate.”

He was stunned. Nate had been a coworker, a neighbor, and a friend. Nate was the uncouth bachelor that Jack had often invited over for a family dinner, or an afternoon barbecue on the porch to let him savor some of Jack's own good fortune, so different from Nate’s lonely bachelor existence. Jack had not expected Susie to be attracted to Nate, yet, somehow, was not totally surprised.

He called Suzy's cell phone. When she answered, his first question was, “Where is Junior?”
“Here, with me. He is safe.”
“Come home. Please.”
“No, I want a divorce, I am going to marry Nate.”
“Let us talk this over, we can resolve this.”
“It’s too late.”
“What is the matter, what’s the problem? I don’t understand.”
“That is the problem, that you do not understand.”

Susie hung up. Jack felt dizzy and cold. He did not know what to think. A gnawing feeling in his stomach reminded him that he had not eaten in a while. He walked to a nearby restaurant, ordered a martini, and had two beers with his dinner. Though usually not a heavy drinker, tonight it seemed to shroud him with a tough guy image. Besides, the alcohol eased his pain. The food left no taste in his mouth. It just seemed to slide into a void in his body, without filling it. He had an after-dinner brandy, and on his way home, he stopped at the package store to buy a couple of six-packs and a bottle of brandy.

Unsure what to do about Suzie and Junior, he decided to sleep on it.

Back home, he sat before the television, flipping channels, sipping beer and brandy. He didn’t remember what he’d watched, except that there were some kind of action movies - westerns, or perhaps crime. At midnight, he decided to go to bed. Alone in the king-size bed, he felt as if he was drowning, or perhaps lost in a desert. Turning off the light, he could not sleep. A sense of foreboding shrouded him, a long forgotten vulnerability. Without thinking, as if he were a puppet, whose strings were pulled by an unseen master, he got up and retrieved the gun from the safe. With the loaded gun under his pillow, he finally fell asleep.

When he woke up in the morning, his first thought was, "What a strange dream." Then, faced with the empty, silent home, and the empty beer bottles before the TV, he knew that it had not been a dream. In a daze, he got dressed. Almost unknowingly, he took the gun from under the pillow and stuck it in his belt. Now he felt more confident. In the kitchen, he had some cereal and milk. Replacing the milk bottle in the refrigerator, he saw the beer. He had one, and another one. He looked at his watch; it was 10 o’clock, time to sort things out.

He walked over to Nate's and knocked on the door. Susie opened it. He forced himself to speak calmly:
“Please,” he said, “come back home.”

“Too late, no.” Behind her he spied Junior.

“Then I am going to take Junior.”

“No, he will stay with me.”

“You are not going to take my son away from me!”

Jack raised his voice. Nate appeared and placed himself between Jack and Susie. Jack's blood rushed to his head, his ears rang, his whole body tightened. This monster was taking away his family. This monster was stealing from him of all he had worked for, stripping him of his manliness. His eyes dimmed. As if possessed of a will of its own, his hand took out the gun and pulled the trigger. He heard the first shot. Then he blanked out. When he came to, the empty gun was still in his hand, Nate was lying on the floor motionless in a pool of blood, and Susie was shrieking: “Murderer! You are a monster, monster!!!”

Jack threw down the gun, turned, and ran away. Running all the way to the police station, he turned himself in, still shaking with fear. Only when the holding-cell door closed on him, and he curled up on the cot, did he feel safe again.
THE UNEXPECTED GIFT
by Bunny S. Duhl

Standing at the kitchen stove, I was cooking dinner. Sara, aged 13½ came in, and asked: “Can I go to a movie with Pam on Friday night?”

I asked the usual mother questions – what movie, where was it playing, who else was going, what time, and so on. All her answers were benign, and I answered, “Yes, you can go.”

“I thought you’d say no,” she responded, as she walked out of the room.

I was very puzzled but did not say anything, though my thought was, “WHAT? You keep this up, young lady, and I WILL say NO!”

Sara was a timid child and I did not want to confront her. However, this had been going on for several weeks now, with her saying something negative after I agreed to a request of hers.

I rationalized that she was a new teenager, the oldest of our three children, and probably just getting into “teenage rebellion” and trying to pick a fight. A year ago I had said to her regarding some other muddle we were in, “Look– you’ve never been twelve before and I’ve never been the mother of a twelve-year-old before, so let’s sit down and figure out what’s going on!” As I remember, that hadn’t sorted out much but it had stopped the issue from continuing.

When you haven’t been there before, you also rely on stories of relatives and friends concerning raising kids. We had friends whose children had goaded their parents until the response was a fight. We even knew of one dad who did not bite until his then eighteen-year-old son said, “Dad. I need to rebel! Will you please stop letting me do everything I want and fight with me?” So, though truly perplexed and upset about what was happening, I didn’t say anything to Sara then, but shrugged and went on cooking supper.

Internally, I was also very preoccupied. My mother was dying of a slow-growing, non-cancerous, inoperable brain tumor. She had been put on steroids off and on, with varying results, to reduce the swelling in her brain cavity. My dad had died after back-to-back surgeries in the summer of 1972, and the following year my mother’s Jacksonian seizures got worse. They started in her right foot and traveled up her right side, triggered by a tumor on, or in, the left side of her brain. When the CAT scan was introduced at Mass General Hospital in 1973, the radiology staff there wanted to scan all types of conditions to see what this amazing new equipment could reveal. My husband had previously been a resident at MGH and obtained permission to bring my mother up from New York City to have the scan in the summer. Yes, she had a meningioma, a tumor sitting on the left brain, cause unknown, not cancerous, though growing slowly.

It was now the fall of 1974 and my mother was bedridden, taken care of by her wonderful housekeeper Ella, in Mother’s penthouse apartment on West 59th Street in Manhattan. We went to New York almost every other weekend to visit and knew that sometimes she would be “with it,” and other times, not at all, depending on what was happening with the steroids. Sara, Josh
and Dina knew what the situation was, and, on our trips to New York, we tried to include something special for them as well. We were already on a roller coaster and knew that we were in for more of the same.

Towards the end of the week following Sara’s negative comment to me, she came into the kitchen, as, once again, I was cooking supper. Out of the blue, she asked “Are you angry?” I was totally startled and said, “No, I’m not angry.”

“Well,” she said with emphasis, “You look angry!” – a most direct and unusual comment for her to make.

Both startled and curious, I said nothing, put the stirring spoon down, kept my face the way it was, and went into the hallway to look in the mirror by the entrance. What I saw shocked me. I saw someone I hardly recognized, with a deeply furrowed brow, sharp frown lines between my eyes, and a rather severe look in my eyes.

“Oh my God!” I gasped audibly.

Holding the expression, I immediately went back into the kitchen where Sara was still standing, and said to her, “Is this what you have been seeing on my face?”

She nodded “yes.”

“I just saw what you see and I understand why you thought I was angry. My face looks angry. But Sara,” I said as I relaxed my face and my tone of voice, “I am not angry. I am sad. Nana is dying and if I am angry with anyone, I am angry with God. I have been thinking about Nana a lot and I am very worried and upset. I am not angry at you at all.”

“Oh,” was all she said, and then a moment later, “So can I go with Pam to a movie Friday night?” Again, a sudden, unusual response from her. I took a deep breath, and momentarily switched gears. The tensions that had been building between us radically dropped away, as we went through our ritual about the movie.

She left the room, happy with her upcoming time out with Pam. For me, I had experienced a huge “ah-ha.” All I could think was “Thank goodness she asked me if I were angry.” How many other people thought I was angry at them? How often had I “gone unconscious,” focused deep inside with no idea what message my face was sending? How many other people had not had the courage to ask me what Sara had asked? I could hardly imagine what a horrendous teenager-mother escalation could have ensued between us if she had not confronted me. Having had no ill will toward her at all, I had been feeling attacked and the annoyance had started to build.

Since then I have tried to remain conscious of what my face is ‘saying’ while the rest of me is somewhere else. It is a difficult task, and I am hardly always successful. Yet, each time I think of that episode, I feel the same enormous relief and gratitude for the unexpected gift I received from Sara that day.
MONDAY MORNING SENIOR CENTER
by Ruth Housman

twelve chairs
three canes and a walker
the clock always too fast
forget about it

who wants to go first
we will help paddle your raft
we will be your school
we will plunge backwards with you

things that are remembered
glory of a spider’s web
on a Maine picket fence after the rains
prize-winning recipe
from homegrown apples
the dolls and teddy bears discarded
I’ll never know
how age adds and subtracts
the day his daughter drowned

we hear about famous people
how his father the inventor knew Einstein
a poem delivered with sonority
by a former professor
to our grand applause

I receive hasty notes
in my mailbox on Homer Street
_I just happened to be passing by_
calling all senors and senoritas
these stories are for
readying our wings

CANINE BELLY LAUGHS
Brenda B. Sloane

How fortunate I am to laugh every day
I owe it to my animals, all fears they allay.
Olivia, the Labradoodle, makes me giggle the most:
White teeth against black fur, she can always boast
Of the broadest smile in Boxford town
Her happy disposition for miles is renown.
She brings Bob her toys as he sleeps in bed
Insists he take them, under the covers instead
So she barks and she paws and she nudes on high
As I laugh at the sight like a pie in the sky.
Lowell, the Springer, looks on with disapproval;
He narrows his beady eyes waiting for her removal
But she persists in her mission to relinquish her gift
Her tail ferociously wagging to add dramatic lift.
In the midst of this comedy, add a third element
A chubby yellow Lab who is always content
She lies upside down, exposing her belly
She snorts and she shakes like a bowl full of jelly.
Chaos on the bed, poor Bob has no choice
But to yell and to scream in a high muffled voice
“Help me! Help me!” he begs and he pleads
As I behold this scene, my laughter succeeds
I take out my camera, for posterity to save
“WORLD: Look at how three dogs and Bob behave!”
TRANSITION
by Jaclyn Korb

My husband, Ken, unexpectedly passed away 6 years ago. A few months before he died, while I was working in an after-school program, I met a delightful man from Zimbabwe. Since my son had spent his junior year in Zimbabwe, I was immediately drawn to this individual. I invited Siza to dinner and found him to be warm and engaging, and my son and my husband also liked him. After my husband died, I asked Siza if he would like to live with me. I had never lived alone, and Siza said it would be fine with him. My son stayed with us for a month to make sure that everything was all right. He thought Siza was a remarkable person and said "don't let him get away."

Everyday Siza and I had tea together around 6 P.M. He helped me around the house. He shared stories about his family from Zimbabwe. He listened to my crying about my husband and was there as a friend and as a member of my family. Soon Siza mentioned that he was marrying a girl named Laura with whom he had done missionary work in Haiti. Could Laura join us? I met Laura and accepted her as another member of my household.

Two strangers I had never before known in my life became my dearest friends. I am a middle-aged, Jewish woman, originally from New York, and I had never been close to a black person. With Siza I never saw color; I saw an understanding, intelligent man who, at 32 years of age, was compassionate and joyful. Laura was white and very much in love with Siza. She came to Boston to marry Siza and study nursing. During the one year we lived together, we never argued. I saw the respect Laura and Siza had for each other. They taught me tolerance and understanding. They never tried to impose their religious beliefs on me, and vice versa, although Siza did want to learn Hebrew and more about the Jewish religion.

Six months after their marriage, Siza and Laura announced that they were going to move to New Hampshire. I cried and felt that my family was deserting me. Later on, I realized they needed to live their own lives and it was time for them to go.

I then moved to the Towers and, for the first time, I learned to live alone. I could never have made this transition without these two extraordinary people.

Siza has moved to England with Laura to attend school. They have recently told me they had a baby whom they named Raymond.

I will never forget these two wonderful people.
A LEGACY LOST AND FOUND
by Meg Newhouse

I’m in my kitchen peeling cucumbers for our dinner salad. Inexplicably, my thoughts turn to my
caretal grandmother, called Buddy after my father’s baby name for her. (“Mother-muddy-
buddy”?) Buddy was a diminutive, painfully introverted, and self-effacing woman who, despite
her faded elegance and discreetly dyed auburn hair, seemed to fade into the woodwork, or,
rather, the dark walls of the log cabin my grandfather had built on thirteen woodland acres
outside Dayton, Ohio. Although she lived within two miles of us through most of my
childhood, I felt less connected to her than to my maternal grandmother who lived near Los
Angeles and whom I saw perhaps half a dozen times, albeit for a couple of extended visits. In
my world, Buddy was a pale moon eclipsed by the sun of my beloved and revered Granddaddy,
hers husband.

In retrospect, I’m both amazed and saddened by the meagerness of her legacy to me, despite all
those years of Sunday dinners with “the folks” in the log cabin. My younger sister inherited
many of Buddy’s genes and, perhaps for that reason, felt more of a connection than I. I do have
some lovely, if unspecific, memories of her generous, tasteful gifts, her beautiful handwriting,
and her gentle ways, as well as some less lovely memories of her devastating migraine headaches
and her growing dementia – situational after my grandfather’s death and then chronic the last
few years of her life. Ironically, she outlived all my other grandparents by a decade, dying at 93,
around the time I married.

I’m wishing I had a tangible legacy in the form of letters or a memoir as in the case of my
grandfather. I didn’t have the maturity to inquire deeply about Buddy’s life while she lived
nearby, and she was not the least inclined to express her thoughts and feelings. This was in stark
contrast to her opinionated, cantankerous older sister who, along with her housekeeper, lived
with my grandparents for the last 35 years of her centenarian life.

So now I can only try to imagine Buddy’s story, wondering why she was so withdrawn and
apparently helpless and sickly – all this after teaching home economics at the University of
Nebraska and not marrying until age 35 after a seven-year courtship by my grandfather! What
were the effects of growing up the baby with two brilliant, high achieving older siblings and two
others who died in childhood? What was it like being reared by a mother who had the rare
strength to divorce her mathematician husband somewhere around 1885?

I catch myself in my reverie and set down the peeler – ancient, rusty, crooked, but unexpectedly
effective, an irreplaceable item in my kitchen drawer. It hits me suddenly: I do have a tangible
legacy from my sweet, undefined Buddy – her peeler! Plus a few other well-used kitchen items
such as her indestructible roasting pan and a Fanny Farmer cookbook, which were bequeathed to
me as a bride shortly after her death. Although during the time I knew her she had left the
cooking to the live-in house-keeper, I “know” that cooking was a buried passion and talent of
hers. I am strangely comforted to have this modest “legacy of her heart.”
THE CHRISTMAS TABLE
by Jane Kays

The competition was fierce. Chanukah was hardly a match against the ubiquitous Christmas.

I was ten and lived in a neighborhood that, over the years, had become less Jewish until there were no Jewish families with young children. Before I was born, the tenement I lived in was home to the Bluesteins, the Cubells, the Zeiglars and the Feldmans. By 1950, all these tenants had relocated, and our building became a melting pot of European nationalities. The Bluesteins moved out and the Pignatos moved in. Where the Feldmans lived, the Fajakowskis settled. Downstairs were the Browns, and upstairs were two families of Cassidys.

Christians and Christmas surrounded us, and the holiday beckoned me to enter its realm. Every window in every house had a small, yellow light glowing at night. Inside every window was a tree decorated with colored lights and silver threads. I wondered about Santa and my flat-roofed building with chimneys that shot down to a cellar where puffed up furnaces waited to feed on coal briquettes. We did not have a fireplace, and I wanted a visit on Christmas just as my friends would have.

My religious upbringing taught me differently, but my heart craved Christmas merriment. I wanted plastic candle holders in my windows and lights and bulbs on a tree in my living room. It never happened. At school, we sang Christmas songs, and the words lured me deeper into the season of giving and getting. Once, on the street, I offered a “Merry Christmas” greeting to a passerby and gloated at the connection I’d made with the upcoming holiday.

At times, I felt my world was an I-am-the-only-one existence. I was the only one without a father, or so it seemed. I was the only one with curly hair who could never wear floppy bangs on my forehead. I was the only one who ate chunky slices of Morrison and Schiff bologna between thick slices of challah while the others ate one gray piece of rubbery bologna on sandwich bread. Even my clothes were different. While my mother boasted they were one of a kind designer outfits, my classmates were clones of each other. I longed to be a clone.

Chanukah did not hold a candle (or eight) to the excitement of Christmas. Occasionally, the moon and the heavens aligned with my wishes to be part of the holiday spirit. I rejoiced when one of the days of Chanukah overlapped Christmas.

Our flat in the large tenement was elongated with nine rooms stretching from the front of the building to back. My grandmother’s room was at the far back, and the living room, that no one lived in, was in the front of the house. At one time the house had been crowded with nine siblings and their parents, my grandmother and grandfather. When I lived there, many of the siblings had moved out leaving odds and ends behind. These castoffs filled two spare rooms. When my curiosity led me there, I’d spend hours sorting through the past, stored away in trunks, boxes and dresser drawers. I visited these rooms often. I’d inch my way past old andirons, a small table, a trunk my aunt used on a cruise, until I’d examined every artifact. I knew the contents by heart, including the mysterious box filled with shabby Christmas ornaments.
The year the two holidays united, I felt closer to the spirit of the season. Everyone would share a holiday on the same day. A few days before the twenty-fifth, I retrieved the box of shabby decorations and brought them to the living room. There was a round French Provincial table between the two front windows. I began to decorate the table. I wound a scrawny, red garland around the legs and across the bottom band that connected each leg to one another. I hung broken ornaments from parts of the table where the carved leaf design left spaces. I finished it off with a raggedy, gold garland that I draped around the legs. Now I was a part of Christmas, too.

Each night we lit the Chanukah candles, and my brother and I sang the blessings. Still, Christmas tugged at me. I’d go in the living room and lie on the rug and gaze at my Christmas table. I do not remember my mother’s response to my unyielding desire to have a touch of Christmas in our house. Perhaps she felt that the table, with its decrepit display, was worth my slight venture into Christianity if it kept me quiet.

On the 24th, I went to bed, dwelling on the possibility that I might awaken to a surprise. I awoke early, went to the table, and found a pile of presents. I belonged and was not the “only one” any more.

High school was different. Four schools merged into one, bringing more Jews into my life. I had many Jewish friends. We synagogue-hopped on the Jewish holidays, visiting our respective shuls. We chastised each other on Yom Kippur for chewing gum and breaking the fast, and we shared matzoh sandwiches in school during Passover. Their mothers made chicken soup on Friday night, as did my mother, while Sabbath candles flickered in our homes, and I no longer needed to have Christmas in my life. It was short-lived. I did not marry a Jewish man, and our life was sprinkled with Judaism while honoring his Christian faith during the holidays.

Many Decemberes have passed since I made the Christmas table. In February of 2007, I came to BOLLI. I enrolled in a memoir writing class where I heard stories from people with Jewish roots and I identified strongly with their backgrounds. After only one day, I knew I was home.
INSURANCE COMPANY CLOCK TOWER – VIENNA
Susan Ritter
FLYING HIGH
by Ellen Huber
POTTER’S HANDS
by Gillian Geffin
An acorn lay on the moist river
bank, nurtured under the forest floor,
its tender root embedded in warm earth.

New sun and soft spring rains grew a sapling
which, when seasoned, would become a towering oak.

Native moccasined feet padded by to
fish the sweet waters. Mounted riders
came to quench thirsts and to find shade
under the charity of generous arms.

Large wagons pulled by muscled drays widened the
path anticipating the horseless carriages whose engines
spewing smoke and sound would change the world.

With increasing numbers of cars came people and houses.
Now the tree lived in our front yard.
The path had become a double laned road.
It followed faithfully the river’s whims.

In October on a warm sunny day a dark
clouded hand shrouded the sun. Threatening
skies delivered a passionate whirling
wind that took the tree to tango.

With a sharp crack the tree gave
itself to the wild embrace; it crashed
across the painted lines, shouting a long
withheld protest against man’s insatiable appetite.

Late summer had brought clustered
Mushrooms, highly valued for flavor,
called “Hen of the Woods.” We did not know
they thrive on old decaying roots.
It was our tree’s parting gift.
blindfolded

told to walk about in the park

large and accommodating
to dogs, children, the morning commute

I thought I knew this park

I was wrong

my world splintered

into shape and smell, a sensuous

sharpening, entering into all things ripe

and round, wide and narrow

the feel of tingling and peeling

yes, and shining, of light chinking through

the intoxication, the rough, rich bursts

aroma of grass mingling with coffee

smoke-filled chatter and bird chirp

a shattering of cries, bent limbs

so many murmurs, a Buddhist chant

this bittersweet squaring off

I was so filled, so steeped in knowing

the feel of children

warmth of smile and wind of their passage

these shifting dark balloons

the shadowing light

it fell into me, I fell into it all

I’m still learning to weave

to stumble with grace
They were starving--the woodcutter, the wife,
their blue-eyed brats, Hansel and Gretel.

Better two die than four said the woman
so they tossed their children into the forest
like offal on a dungheap.

There they wandered, their bellies swelling
until they spied the sweet confection
my house built of candy and death.
They sucked my sugared panes
gobbled the chocolate gables.

Come in, come in, I cooed,
(their hides are toughened now
but they’ll do, they’ll do for dinner.)
Then, Into this cage, Hansel,
Gretel, into the kitchen. I’ll teach you
to stew and brew.

No cunning tricks, missy.
I know you’re planning to shove me
into the oven. I may go up
my chimney now in a crackle of hagfat
but already I am planning how
and when to come down again.
No one will stop me.

The smoke from my chimneys will drift
like a shroud over the faces
of all the children
who cry in the wood
and are not heard.
The walls and statues atop the walls, quiver in the embrace of renown. Though cold, white and elegant, to the depths of their marble souls, they rejoice in the music.

This night, pre-performance, I walked the hall to the gentlemen’s necessities. Photographs of late great performers guided me to pristine white and chrome accommodations.

There were two unoccupied spaces, one tall which I chose, one short chosen by a gentleman of appropriate stature.

This man offered me a unique sight. In his right hand at eye height, he held a book in which he appeared deeply engrossed. My reaction to this was a question: could it be an instruction manual? His left hand was just waiting.

Exiting the room after washing, I looked back. He was still reading his book, as before, his left hand still unused. I assumed it was at the ready should the need arise.

In fairness, it is a common experience in older men that this process can be frequently delayed and the whole thing is rife with false starts in which case a good book makes sense.
"Please stop here for a moment," he said.

I pulled over to the side of the road at the very top of the Mohawk Trail, Massachusetts Route 2, heading West. I looked into the back seat at my Uncle Charlie, a polite and quiet man, my mother’s younger brother.

He looked reflective, a slight smile on his face, his eyes a bit more moist than usual, his shining white hair impeccably brushed and parted in the middle. The day before, he and my Aunt Flora had flown from Florida where they had retired a few years earlier. The purpose of their trip was to visit my mother who, though at the terminal stage of cancer, was still vital enough to look forward to and enjoy their visit. At 81, she was the oldest of the five siblings. Uncle Charlie was two years younger.

There at the official "top of the trail," as locals call it, we sat in the car in the parking lot between a motel and a monument tourists stop to see. With an awkward silence, we looked around at the beautiful sight of a perfect August day. The sky couldn't have been more blue, the lush tress were dressed in beautiful shades of green not yet turning to their famous flaming colors of fall. The blacktop of the road shone pristine with little traffic.

I commented on the spectacle around us. My husband added words of more delight at the beautiful sight we looked down upon. My aunt joined in too. My uncle sat quietly. I knew I shouldn't re-start the car until he said something, even, "thanks for stopping, let's continue on."

He finally spoke, his voice at a joyful pitch.

"When I was about 12 years old," he said, "I did something I knew I wasn't supposed to be doing. I pushed my bicycle all the way up here from our house in North Adams. It was just a dirt road then. When I reached the top, I got on my bike and coasted it all the way down to my house. I never told my mother where I had been or what I had done. I have always been happy I did it."

Today, the road is paved, guard-railed, and dotted with signs warning of steep hills, falling rocks and even bears. It has a vivid, double, yellow line down the center. There exists today, despite all the physical improvements to the road and the safety technology built into cars, some hesitation about taking this trip in the fog, the rain or the snow. Uncle Charlie's bicycle was probably a heavy, rusting affair with back-pedal brakes and no optional gears. Uncle Charlie only remembered the thrill of the ride of many miles down the gravel road. But I am sure, even though he didn't say it, his logical, reasonable adult mind might have suggested that he was also very thankful he survived.

I still drive over that road on regular visits to family. I never fail to think about Uncle Charlie's adventure when I go over "the top of the trail."
The flicking of his tail caught my eye. I saw him on the roof, right above the door leading to the back hall and stairs to our third floor offices. That hallway also accessed the kitchen and front of the house. The squirrel scolded me, while scooting over the wire mesh on the gutter, and flicking his tail once again, squeezed under it and disappeared into the wood gutter and house.

“Wow!” I thought. “That’s one inventive squirrel! He’s somehow eaten through the mesh and chewed a hole through the gutter into the house.”

Within the next few days, as your grandfather, Papi and I saw patients in our offices, we occasionally heard the squirrel running back and forth. I called the carpenter and he came to fix the gutter hole, banging and making noise on the roof first, while watching to see that the squirrel had left. Then, he put a patch of wood over the hole and a new piece of mesh over the gutter.

Not long after that, we heard scratching, squeaks and scurrying above the third floor, then quiet, then squealing and more scurrying. We heard a quiet tapping, dragging sound, as if wires were being pulled across the floor.

“Now what’s making that noise?” I worried aloud. “It’s not squirrels! Much too noisy and heavy for that. Too squeaky. And what’s that squealing?”

“Something else has gotten into the attic,” Papi replied.

This was scary. I was concerned that WHATEVER was up there could eat though wires, perhaps even start a fire.

“How did it or they get in? The carpenter closed that hole!” I exclaimed.

Papi didn’t answer. He didn’t know either.

The “attic” was actually a crawl space. A short person could stand up in the center, where the roof came to a peak. No one had gone up there since the pull-down ladder was installed in the third floor hallway of our Brookline home. The carpenter had placed a four-by-eight foot plywood sheet to act as flooring for storage – for suitcases and things we did not need right away. Lord knows, however, we truly did not need that storage space in this huge house, so we had never put anything up there.

I called the people at the Humane Society, who work with animals and can tell you what to do in cases like this. The woman on the other end of the phone said that she thought that raccoons had probably gotten into the attic, that they often followed squirrels.
“Raccoons in Brookline!” I exclaimed. “What are they doing in the city? They are wild animals!”

“Raccoons live all over,” replied the lady. “There are many raccoons in Brookline!”

She told me that I could get a “Have-a-Heart” trap and put it in the crawl space, with meat as bait. When the raccoon went into it, we could then take it down, open the trap outside and let it go. She also said that killing raccoons was against the law.

“But it sounds as if there are several of whatever-it-is up there,” I protested. “One trap is probably not going to do the job!”

“You may be right,” she agreed. “In that case, you need to put camphor moth balls up there. The smell will drive them out. Then you must have your carpenter put metal, not wood, over that hole, so they cannot chew their way back in.”

That very day, I went to the hardware store and bought two boxes of mothballs. I asked Papi to please take care of putting the mothballs up in the attic. He said he was going to ask Josh, your Dad, who was about 15 at that time, to help him.

Several weekdays went by. We kept hearing critters running back and forth, screeching, making all the sounds we’d heard before. I was getting impatient and concerned. I asked WHEN Papi and Josh were going to do this job.

“This weekend,” I was told.

Sunday, a beautiful sunny August day, I went out to do some errands early in the afternoon. When I came home, I heard talking upstairs, so went to investigate. What I saw remains forever etched in my mind!

There stood Papi, on the pull-down ladder, holding upright a six-foot African spear with blades at each end! Papi’s head and shoulders were above the ceiling in the attic, as he talked to Josh who was already up there. That spear, and a leather African shield, had been given to us by a photographer friend who had been to Africa, and were usually “on display” downstairs.

“What are you doing with that spear?” I shrieked.

“I’ve got it in case a raccoon comes after Josh,” was the reply.

“You’re going to try and throw a six foot spear at a raccoon?” I stammered with an incredulous tone. “You’d hit Josh!”

From up the stairs, I heard Josh’s voice saying, “Mom, I’m okay.”

“What are you doing now,” I asked.
“I’m balancing myself on the beams now, throwing moth balls around. I’m going to throw them down the walls behind the insulation too. I saw a raccoon go down in one place.”

A few moments later, Josh said he’d used up all the moth balls. Papi came down the ladder, spear in hand, and Josh after him. Together they closed the stairwell, and we went downstairs, talking about this “hunting” adventure, with me making comments about the spear, and telling Josh he was a hunting hero.

Downstairs, I noticed there were several people across the street, looking up at our roof. I went outside to find out what they were looking at, and then called to Papi and Josh to come out. With a baby raccoon held in her mouth like a mother cat holds a kitten, the mother raccoon made her way across the roof to the tree by the back of the house. Several minutes later, we saw her again as she scampered across to the hole and brought out another baby, carefully crossing the roof again and down the tree. She repeated this a third time and then disappeared.

However, now we had an attic space full of mothballs, which began evaporating and smelling awful in the August heat. The odor permeated down into the hallway and our offices. It was impossible to work upstairs.

I called the lady at the Humane Society, I told her that the raccoons were now gone, and asked her what to do about the mothballs.

“Oh,” she said. “You weren’t supposed to throw them around – just to put them in bowls that you could pick up after the raccoons left.”

“NOW you tell me,” I thought.

There was nothing we could do about the smell. No antidote. No air freshener. Just waiting.

Fortunately, the weather was good that week, so we took turns seeing our patients on the back deck, while the mothballs slowly evaporated. All the third floor windows were opened to allow fresh air in. I called the carpenter, and, this time, he fixed the hole with metal, making it totally squirrel, bird, chipmunk, skunk and raccoon proof. There would be no more animal invaders and no more hunting episodes!

To this day, I have no idea where the mother raccoon went with those babies. We never saw them again.
ABOUT GUL
by Judith Cohen
with Gul Shamin

Gul is my daughter, my daughter from Pakistan. Our relationship began in the fall of 2004. The Heller School at Brandeis asked if BOLLI members would act as host families to the graduate students at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management.

At first, I did not consider attending the reception where BOLLI members would meet the new students at Heller. My husband had died in March of 2004, and being a host parent invited responsibilities I wasn’t sure I could handle on my own. At the last minute, I changed my mind and attended the reception.

At the gathering in Gosman, I walked around and introduced myself with small talk to many of the students. Then I saw a young woman, just standing in a corner, looking very hesitant and unsure. This is how I met Gul Shamin. Gul had been in the United States only five days. She told me it was a happy moment for her arriving at Logan Airport and seeing someone from Brandeis holding a sign with her name.

This was a difficult time for Gul. She was not sure of her English skills. She was uncertain what was expected of her, or who these people at the reception were. Her first four days were spent looking for a place to live. She needed to select courses; she needed to find her way around Waltham; she needed to make friends.

Somehow, almost unconsciously, I realized that, just as Gul might need me, I needed her. In a very short time, she became very dear to me. I told her about life in the United States, and I asked her to tell me about her family. I wanted to learn about life in Pakistan. This is Gul’s story.

“I come from the Northern region of Pakistan. The Northern area is situated in the extreme north of Pakistan bordering with China, Afghanistan, Indian-held Kashmir, and Azad Kashmir. It consists of six districts: Gilgit, Baltistan, Ghizer, Ghanche, and Diamir. The region covers an area of 72,971 km (28,174 mi.) and has an estimated population approaching 1,000,000.

“My home area, Gilgit, is known as “paradise” for mountaineers and climbers. This place inspired people like Greg Mortenson, author of Three Cups of Tea. The mesmerizing high peak mountains, glaciers and waterfalls, lush green valleys and melodious streams present unimaginable beauty and witness the omnipresence of G_d.

“My family always supported an education for girls. I have six sisters and one brother. My father was a teacher. He started his girls’ education through home-based schools in the late 1970s. My father speaks English. It was his influence that taught us the value of an education. I am the first foreign qualified woman and my sister is the first woman doctor in the region.

“My hometown is in a valley called Singal, near Gakuch, the district headquarters of district Ghizer. Village Singal is situated on the bank of the Ghizer River. It is encircled by two streams
flowing from the mountains to the river. The valley stretches out with green fields, thick, shady, fruit-bearing trees, running cold water in streams from the glacier, cattle grazing in the fields, and beautiful dwellings of the villagers.

“The people of this region have a rich culture. Some of the characteristic features of the culture are joint family systems, respect for elders and women, hospitality, and caring for each other. The people share their happiness as well as sorrow, and, on such events, everyone does their best to be up to the occasion. People love to celebrate their national, cultural, and religious holidays. There are also festivals related to the seasons. Marriages are very special occasions for the family. Relatives and friends get together and the festivities can last for at least two weeks. Marriages are mostly held in the winter season when there are no farming activities.

“In addition to special festivals and marriage ceremonies, there are other occasions which are given special importance. One of these occasions is the birth of a child, particularly the first child. In this case, all the villagers participate in the celebration; women bring traditional gifts such as specially cooked thick bread. In return, the family of the newborn gives a food which is traditional for this event. On sad occasions, like a death, the whole village attends the funeral. Relatives and neighbors provide the bereaved family with food for three days.

“Traditional houses are made of stone, bricks, and mud. The house is a big, square room with multipurpose use. The stove is in the center surrounded by sitting areas. The left and right sides of the sitting area are for sleeping, and the area behind the stove has a raised surface used for preparing food. On the right and left sides of the stove are big wooden box structures for storing grain and flour.

“People do not follow any formalities in visiting each other; they feel at ease to go to their relatives or neighbors at any time. Whenever a person goes to another’s house, it is obligatory for the host to serve tea with some food, and then proper lunch and dinner. When meeting other people, whether one knows them or not, one exchanges a compliment saying, “Assalam-u-Alaikum” (peace be upon you) and in return saying, “Waalaikum-u-Salam.”

“The majority of the population is associated with agriculture. Everyone in the region has their own piece of land which they use for farming. The crops cultivated are wheat and maize. The crops and fruits are used locally and shared. In spring and summer, people work very hard to store food for the winter. Most of the people own livestock. Traditionally, this hard work has been turned into a joyful activity. In every season there is a big welcoming celebration for the crops.

“The most fun is sowing and cutting the crops. The men do the sowing. Relatives and neighbors come together to help each other. Women are busy cooking food for everyone. The same thing begins again with the cutting of the crops. My region also has a lot of fruit trees such as apricots, grapes, apples, almonds, nuts, and peas. Sadly, due to the lack of infrastructure, it is not possible to transport the fruits to other parts of the country. The people in my village share everything.”

It has been a wonderful experience living and learning with Gul. She is part of my family, and I am very proud of her. Gul graduated from the SID program at the Heller School. Her Master’s
thesis has been published in a book entitled, *AT WHAT COST? HIV and Human Rights Consequences of the Global “War on Drugs”*. I loved it when Gul brought me the first copy "hot off the press." Now, Gul is working on her Doctorate at U. Mass Boston and her American family will celebrate with her when she graduates.

Since Gul and I met, we have found an appreciation and an understanding of each other’s cultures. It was not easy for Gul to travel so far from her home in Pakistan and begin her studies at Brandeis. I have learned much about Pakistan, about Gul, her family, and her community. Gul has been welcomed into our family and is loved by us. One thing we both realize is that people are the same wherever they live.
MUSHROOM
by John Fiske
QUARRY REFLECTIONS
by Arthur Sharenow
METEORE, GREECE
by Arthur Sharenow
Belief
by Ruth Housman

I am ardent and you, forest of leaves
you who wear garlands of white flowers
in winter and run naked as wind
into my ever open arms, fragrant with life.
Kiss me again, kiss me again!

I am losing words, they scatter like mice
around me. The empty cellar groans.
I woke in the morning to what's familiar,
aching again, for you who inhabit me.
Pour me another glass of wine, I need wine

This morning you pounced on me, taking me
by surprise. I saw you behind the mirror,
a shadow of a bird, your fleeting face.
How desperation churns me.
You will return.

We, who danced together through the pages
of this storybook imaged ourselves
inside a fairy tale where nothing can go wrong.
We would go together into that wood of ghosts
holding hands wreathed with promises,

me, with my dictionary, always searching
for the right definition, looking for answers
as if they could be pitchers filled with
miracle waters. Ruth, open the door!
All the caged birds are clamoring to be set free.
FEMININE WILES
by Kenneth Rosenfield

She came to me in a state of dishabille,
lovely in any state, enchanting in this.
For a too short moment
I held her in my arms.
She whispered in my ear, “I must make a call.”
Reluctantly I released my precious package.
She walked away, then turned and smiled,
in her hand triumphantly held aloft – my wallet!
She has always been able to easily distract me.

HANSEL
by Ruth Kramer Baden

In the wood
in the dark wood
when he was cold
and the wolves keened
Gretel told him,

It is only the wind, Hansel.

Come close.
She held him in the dim remembered branches
of their mother's arms
and told him tales until he slept.

Now in his cage of one
a chicken bone his umbilicus
Hansel unhinged from the sun
plunges through noons and midnights.

Here is his white ibis perched
on a pine. It dips a wing
beckons, *Hansel, fly away with me.*
He leaps to grasp the branch.
It snaps. The ibis flickers away.

Once he asked his mother,
*When was I born?*

*On the cusp of darkest night*
and early morning. That is when
*most babies come.*

*Where did I wait until I was born?*
*In a warm safe place.*

He must ask Gretel now:

Do the almost-born
and newly dead
wait in starless passages
to come into and leave life’s light?
Or is life the dark place,
the cage of one?
“Deceased?”

“Yes.”

Silence, as he tried to think of what to say next. Then, “When was she…when did it happen?”

“July. Her aunt called us.”

He paused as the words sank in. “You mean this past July?”

“Yes.”

“But that’s just three months ago,” he wanted to say. “That can’t be. I’ve waited 30 years to get in touch with her, talk to her, and you’re telling me I missed by three months?” Instead, he said, “I see.”

Hesitantly, sensing the anguish across a thousand miles of telephone links, “I’m sorry. Did you know her? Is there anything else?”

Indeed, was there anything else? What else did he care about? “Uh, yes. She had a sister who was also an alumna—a couple of years older, I think. Is she still living?”

“I believe so. Give me a minute to check.”

Pause. Muzak. He fretted while he waited. Why does this country assume that no one can tolerate silence? You can’t pick up a goddamn phone without being put on hold, and every goddamn time you’re put on hold they pipe in the same crap.

The music stopped and the disembodied voice of the functionary at the small private college came back on the line. “Yes, I’m happy to say her sister is still with us.”

“Look, could you let me have her sister’s current address and phone number? Oh, and her married name—if she’s married, that is. Is she?”

“Well, yes, but we’re not supposed to give that information out over the phone. Are you a relative?”

“No, but…I haven’t seen either of them in 30 years. I just happen to be visiting their home town and decided to…I’m sure she wouldn’t mind. Really. Couldn’t you make an exception in this case?”

“Well….”
“Please! It’s really important to me.”

Hesitantly, hearing the strain in his voice, “All right,” and he quickly jotted the information on a pad.

“Thank you. I really appreciate it. I assure you there won’t be any problem. Good-bye.”

He replaced the phone, stared at the pad and allowed his thoughts to torture him. When had he returned from that business trip? My God! Was it June? Could he have reached her before? No. He stopped the punishment momentarily. No. He remembered now. He had not left Boston until the first week in August. So even if he hadn’t delayed, dawdled, teased himself with the prospect of looking her up, wondered whether he’d have to tell his wife, rejected the whole idea as ridiculous and put it out of his mind until it suddenly popped back in—heaven knew why—five minutes ago. Even if he had called immediately upon his return, it wouldn’t have mattered. She was already dead. Deceased.

How had she died? He had forgotten to ask. After all, she was only…let’s see…just six months younger than he was, so that would make her, what, fifty-three? No, fifty-four. So why had she died so young? He could ask her sister when he called.

He thought again of that trip last August. When his client had asked—insisted, really—that he deliver an in-person briefing to the company’s board of directors, he had felt the first shiver of excitement. The trip had lasted just a few hours—in and out the same day with no time to act on memories of an earlier visit that had come rushing back across the space of thirty years.

He remembered that he had found himself expecting to see her at every turn. He recalled the taxi from the airport driving past the office complex where her father had spent his entire career. The son of Jewish immigrants from Russia, he had become a successful executive and a pillar of the small Jewish community in one of the wealthier suburbs. Her father had always been polite to him, very correct, but had never warmed to the prospect of having a goy in the family. Was he still alive?

Later, at the airport, as he had waited for his return flight to be called, could that be…? Was she coming along the corridor now, just emerging from the rest room? No, you idiot, he had told himself. That girl is barely out of her teens. The woman you’re looking for is almost your age. Would he even recognize her if he saw her? Would she recognize him? Thirty years! My God! He wouldn’t recognize himself after thirty years!

So he had flown home determined to do what casual curiosity had not led him to do since the day their relationship had ended. Until today, and now it was too late.

Abruptly the intercom on his desk brought him back to the present.

“Yes?”
“Your three o’clock called to say he’d be late. You had a free slot at 3:30, so I scheduled him then. OK?”

“Fine. Thank you. Hold my calls until then, please.”

He walked to the window, stared at the rush of people and cars that had become so familiar, and allowed long-suppressed thoughts to seep back into his consciousness.

They had met as teenagers that summer more than 35 years ago. Two out of 150 high schoolers from around the country, spending the summer at a music camp in the Berkshires. Why had he gone, anyway? A mediocre clarinet player at best, he had had second thoughts, but the non-refundable deposit had already been sent in, his parents had bought him a new used car in anticipation of college in the fall, and most of his friends were “doing Europe” that summer. So he went.

She was a serious music student. They had met on the first day of camp and were immediately captivated by each other. For the next two months they were together constantly and, by summer’s end, had declared undying love with absolute and unshakable conviction. He smiled, a bit embarrassed even now by the recollection of those first faint fumblings. They had been virgins when they met and had remained virgins throughout the summer. But, oh, the passionate kisses, the sighs, the longing.

The ardor of the summer had cooled, of course. Half a continent and the allure of others took their toll on undying (and unrequited) love. An occasional letter and a rare visit had kept the memories of that summer alive, but the passion soon faded. Still, they had managed to stay in touch through their college years.

As he prepared to attend business school, a casual letter revealed that she was thinking about a graduate degree at the same university. On impulse, unprompted by desire, he had encouraged her to enroll, and she had.

It was over in less than a year. At first, both of them had been enchanted by the memories of their summer. They again declared their love and, older now, more experienced, less inhibited, had consummated it. They spoke of marriage. Equally eager at first, she grew less enthusiastic, then uncertain, finally remote.

He had never really understood what had led to her disenchantment. Perhaps the disparity in their backgrounds and religions, or simply her attraction to someone else. Whatever the reason, the day came when she told him they could no longer be lovers but could remain friends. He, devastated, said no they couldn’t. She, surprised and hurt, had turned and walked away.

He sighed as he looked down at the traffic slowly circling the square twenty-six stories below. Twice more in the course of that year she had offered her friendship. Each time he had curtly rejected her, determined to return some of the pain she had caused him.
Finally, she had left the university, and he had not seen or heard from her again. Not in thirty years. Just as he had wished. Why then was he standing here ruminating instead of preparing for his next appointment? Why was the news of her death so unsettling? Why the overwhelming sense of loss? And what had he expected to accomplish by contacting her again?

Perhaps he had hoped to find her divorced, still attractive, available, living nearby and interested in seeing him again. How absurd! But, supposing all that to have been the case, however unlikely, would he have wanted to see her? To make love to her? To start a new life together?

He glanced at the photographs on his desk. His daughter wore the soccer uniform of her high school team. Hmm. He’d have to replace that photo with the more recent one of her graduation. Next to her photo was the one of his son in full naval regalia. They had both worked hard to win his admission to Annapolis, where he was now thriving. He looked at the third photo, the professionally posed image of himself and his wife on the occasion of their 25th wedding anniversary, both smiling, both genuinely content.

No. No chance that he would have tossed aside the past twenty-five fulfilling, if unremarkable, years for so fanciful and speculative a desire. How then explain the intensity of his emotions, the anguish he had felt a few moments earlier upon learning of her death, as though a part of him had also died? Except for that chance business trip, would he not have continued to live out his life with scarcely a thought of her or the time they had spent together? Why in the thirty years since their last meeting had he not tried to reach her before today? Or she him? Why should it matter that he could no longer make a contact that was inconsequential in any case? And why the feeling that an important part of his life was now, and would always be, incomplete and unresolved?

The intercom sounded again, interrupting his reverie and signaling the arrival of his client. “Yes, please ask him to come in.”

As he stood up, he glanced at the paper on which he had written her sister’s address and telephone number, and sighed deeply. There were so many questions he had wanted to ask. Had she been married? Did she have children? Where had she lived? How had she died?

He paused for a moment and thought once again of the slim, dark-haired boy and the tall, golden girl who had spent a summer together in the Berkshires so long ago. Then he caught sight of his rounded, slightly-stooped form reflected in the window, and ran his fingers through what remained of his once dark hair. With another sigh, he reached for the note pad, crumpled the paper, tossed it into the waste basket at the side of his desk, and stepped forward, ready for his next appointment.
I SEE A MISSPELLING
by Robert Pill
HUNGRY BABIES
by Arthur Sharenow
CHANTERELLES
by Allan Kleinman
MYSTERIOUS LINES OF CONNECTION
by Katherine Raskin

For the first eleven years of my life, our family lived in Brooklyn, New York. We had moved to a neighborhood where most of my great aunts and uncles lived within walking distance of our home. I attended Sunday school one day a week. My father served as President of Beth Shalom, a local reformed synagogue, and our family became very involved in the congregation.

When my father changed the location of his business, the family moved to Manhattan. I attended P.S. 89 for sixth grade, Joan of Ark Junior High School, Julia Richman High School and then graduated from Hunter College in 1954. I worked in Manhattan for several years after I graduated and met my future husband, Charlie, skiing in Canada. We married and moved to Boston. This was a major move for me as it meant leaving my entire family behind.

Charlie and I both had jobs in Boston, and we spent time making new friends and adjusting to a new city. During those early days, we were busy skiing on weekends and working weekdays. We did not join a synagogue because it was very expensive and, at that time, it wasn’t one of our priorities. In addition, though many of our friends invited us to visit their respective temples, none of them seemed suitable for us.

During our first year in Boston, I felt a strong need to attend High Holiday Services. Since we were unaffiliated with a specific temple, we attended High Holiday Services at Brandeis University. The services were led by Rabbi Albert Axelrad, then the Jewish Chaplain at Brandeis. We paid a small sum to participate in the services and attended both days of the holiday. During one of the services, I picked up a prayer book and looked at the inside front cover. The prayer book had been donated in honor of Morris Barash and signed by Naomi and Peter Schmidt.

I remembered living, during the 1930’s, in a three-family house in Bensonhurst, a small section in Brooklyn. Our family lived on the first floor of the house and the Barash and Sarnoff families lived on the second and third floors. I was five years old at the time and my best friend was named Beverly Barash. She had a younger sister, Naomi, who was eight years younger. When my family moved to Manhattan, we lost touch with the Barash and Sarnoff families and never saw them again.

During the late seventies, I worked at the Heller School at Brandeis University. I had access to the school’s faculty directory and looked through it to see whether it was possible to find a woman named Naomi Schmidt. Her name was listed as a professor in the computer department at Brandeis. I called her and asked if she knew a person named Morris Barash. Indeed she did! He was her father who had been a Cantor in Brooklyn, head of the same Barash family that had shared our house on Bay 26th St. It was such a random discovery to pick up a prayer book donated in memory of Naomi’s father – a family I knew so long ago.

When Naomi found out that my mother lived in a nursing home down the street from Brandeis, she visited her and they recounted old times. Naomi told her sister, Beverly, that we had reconnected. Beverly lived in Connecticut and we wrote to each other and exchanged
photographs of our respective families. Unfortunately, Beverly was sick with cancer at the time and died one year later.

Naomi and I did not meet again until she retired from Brandeis and joined BOLLI with her husband Peter Schmidt. We now see each other during classes, serve on the same committee, and remember our shared history. It has been quite a wonderful bond and we are grateful to rediscover this former relationship. It makes me marvel at the “mysterious lines of connection” in all of our lives.

MORT’S CIGARS
by Clarice Cohen

We were not only young but imbued with the invulnerability born of youth, optimism, and joie de vivre, in full denial of the dire predictions regarding smoking tobacco.

Mort, my husband, had his array of pipes, which he eventually gave up, probably because he wearied of running the pipe cleaners through the stems or found the effort of filling the bowl and tamping it down or burning his fingers with short matches not as gratifying as cuddling a cigar between his fingers. This elicited some rather snide remarks from friends and acquaintances, to which Mort’s response, paraphrased from Dr. Freud, was “sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.”

I, on the other hand, though I had been smoking cigarettes since I was seventeen, was not the image of the proverbial chain smoker. My image had more to do with the effect that a fourteen-inch long cigarette holder produced. I had decided to heed some medical advice to protect my health and innocently believed, as the makers of this instrument claimed, that it would, in fact, reduce dangerous tars and other deadly inhalations. So, although I was now trying to safeguard my own health, I was a menace at crowded cocktail parties. I did, however, cut an elegant and sophisticated figure.

Of course, our friends over the years were either very patient or intimidated, for they never breathed a word of reproach as Mort sat under a large cloud of smoke and I under a gray halo. That is not to say that they remained inarticulate.

One evening, after the children left the dinner table, Mort remarked that the number of cigars in his box was several fewer than the night before. Since a response was expected, I very sympathetically said “Oh.” Somehow, he needed to inform me of this phenomenon several times over the next few days. I assured him that no one had been around to take any of his cigars, and, if I had a lover, he certainly would not be spending his time in the study. That ended the discussion, though probably not to his satisfaction.

One morning, while flinging bed covers and emptying waste baskets in my usual, compulsive manner, I picked up a crumpled sheet of paper and wondered if it was meant to be discarded. I am still not sure. I read the note in my ten year-old son’s flawed handwriting. “Dear Diary, Today my friend Peter and I were in the woods, and I smoked the best cigar I ever had.” Oh! Yes, I was indeed surprised, perhaps even shocked.
That night after dinner, while our sons Andy and Danny were doing homework, I confessed to Mort that I owed him an apology. It was now his turn to say “Oh.” I was quite penitent as I said, “Yes, love, you were right and I was wrong, wrong, wrong. Someone has been taking your cigars. It was Danny.” I was unprepared for Mort’s response. My gentle husband drew a deep breath, squared his shoulders, and seemed to grow in width and height as he waved his forefinger in the air warning “I am going to tell that kid not to take the last cigar on a Sunday night when the stores are closed.”

We had a good laugh over this escapade. We then had a talk with Dan to discourage him from any further indulgence in his choice of recreation. I don’t remember the discussion, but it must have been effective. Unlike his delinquent parents, he never became habituated to either cigars or cigarettes.

HAIKU
by Claire Rourke

One day at a time
The sun rises and then sets.
Accomplish something!

Memoir writing is
A vacation from today
To fond or sad pasts.

Football season reigns.
The spouse lounges with remote.
She shops with plastic.

No time to be bored.
Good or bad or unsettled.
New England weather.

Skateboards and horses
A bicycle built for two
Leave no pollution.
Aria
by Ruth Housman

snow-melt
soft purple breeze
tender waving grasses hide
crocus

    hint of daffodil

this green tapestry

    hands must out stirr etch

we are gathering yellow

sun kisses

    time to unfurl
time to unwind
to b
e
    n
d ance

    s p r e a d

heart's expanding into
the new blue beat

from sshush to
shout

Spring!
21ST CENTURY ODE TO JOYCE KILMER
by Claire Rourke

I think that I shall never see
Leaves that won’t fall off a tree
Leaves whose sturdy stems are pressed
Into a tree bough’s burley chest
To foil the folks with noisy blowers
And all the riders on mulching mowers
Who’ll never know the pains and aches
Of fools like me, with silent rakes.

FEEDING THE BIRDS
by Miriam B. Sachs

The chickadee swoops flying to the feeder;
The redbird calmly looks for seeds below.
The squirrel-baffle rattles in the wind,
And I take pleasure in the show.

I like to cook for family and friends;
I mix and bake the berries, nuts, and cake;
And when they all have had their fill of food,
They swoop away,
. . . and then I rake.
I was eight when war broke out in Europe in 1939.

In that world before television, Lowell Thomas delivered the news every night at suppertime, and we were not allowed to talk while he conveyed the day’s events. An imposing piece of furniture, our big wooden radio stood on the floor in the living room, its woven gold cloth shining from behind the cutout design on the front, covering the speaker. Lowell Thomas’ booming voice told us every night what was happening, how Hitler was advancing in Europe, how cities were falling, and later, how Jews were sent to concentration camps.

Growing up in the country thirty-five miles from New York City, in a small year-round Jewish community of ten families with a large influx of summer Jewish folk nearby, I had a sense of belonging with Jews. There was no synagogue in the area. We learned Jewish history and culture from a young man who came on Sundays to one of the year-round homes. I thought he was a young rabbi and that he came up from New York City, but later I learned he was a law student who came from White Plains! High Holidays were celebrated in the auditorium at Pine Lake Park, the summer Jewish bungalow community a few miles away, with an imported rabbi. As children, we were expected to attend part of the service for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and then go outside and play to wait for the adults. We were given little bags of candy on Rosh Hashanah, and we always had a new outfit, which had also doubled as new clothes for the first day of school.

At the grade school and high school to which my sister, brother, a couple of neighborhood kids, and I were bused, there were only eight to ten Jewish kids at any one time so we were very much in the minority. The Ku Klux Klan was active in that area; anti-Semitism was overt.

I was four and a half when I started kindergarten in September 1935. On the very first day, getting on the bus, I was called “a dirty Jew” and “Christ killer.” I didn’t understand. I was hurt by the tone and anger, bewildered and upset. That evening, I asked my mother WHY they had called me a “dirty Jew” – explaining with four-year-old concreteness that I had taken a bath the night before. I remember my mother’s body becoming stiff and straight, her lips tight, her voice strident, her eyes fiery, saying, “You tell them you’re PROUD TO BE ONE!” I didn’t know what that meant either. She hadn’t explained the insult, yet I was grateful to have a retort to the taunting of the bus kids. I used it, with all the voice inflection and body language of defiance I could muster. These taunts and retorts went on for quite a while. I don’t remember why or when they finally drifted away. Perhaps because our tormentors got to know us and found that we really weren’t so different. Perhaps the Jewish children commanded a kind of respect because they were always among the best students.

So while I knew something about the persecution of Jews and differences, I certainly did not understand the full extent of what was to be called the Holocaust.
Later on, when I went to the movies, “The News of the Week in Review,” often narrated by Lowell Thomas, related the latest events in the war in stark black and white. I began to learn more about Hitler and “German atrocities.” In addition, LIFE magazine had pictures and articles. I remember seeing one of these and asking my mother what “rape” meant. It was summer and she was lying down on the couch on the screened porch. With a far-away look in her eye, she talked of “a flower losing its petals”. Obviously this was not what the article was about, so I asked a cousin later, who told me the truth, which increased my horror of Hitler and the Nazis.

From the beginning, it was easy to be patriotic. We knew who the enemy was. Hitler was the bad guy, and people felt united against him, even though we were not in the fray as yet.

Relatives were visiting the day Pearl Harbor was attacked, December 7, 1941, and everyone crowded around the radio, thunderstruck to learn of the surprise attack and the extent of the devastation that had occurred. Here was a new enemy – the Japs. That was a hard one for me, however. My mother and some of her brothers had lived in Japan, perhaps during, and certainly after World War I. Their experiences had been very positive. Hearing interesting and funny stories early on about Japan, I also had very positive feelings about that country and people. Now I had to separate those thoughts from my reactions to what was currently happening. These were “different” Japanese – hard, suicidal kamikaze pilots and fighters. The American losses were many. I remember in my naiveté asking, “What difference does it make who owns which piece of land as long as nobody gets killed?” I also remember no one in the house at that time had a decent answer.

We moved to New York City in 1942 when I was twelve and a half. Paul Fukui was in my eighth grade class, and we became as friendly as Paul would let happen. He’d been born in the USA and his family moved from the West Coast before the internment camps were created. He was bright and gentle, and I often asked him for help with math homework. I felt tenderness, respect and conflict and sensed the loneliness he must have felt being isolated as Japanese, an enemy, albeit born here American. He never talked to me about the war.

On the whole however, this was a Good War. I learned later there were isolationists who had never wanted to go to war, and that President Roosevelt had fiercely wanted to join the British in the fight against totalitarianism. As a child however, it seemed to me that every American was behind the war effort and that we were on the side of Right.

War Bonds and Stamps

War bonds were sold, often with great hype, at rallies manned by celebrities. In our grade school, we could bring in small change to buy Defense Stamps. For ten cents or twenty-five cents one could purchase stamps that were then pasted into a booklet. When the book was filled, it held $18.75 in stamps, to be exchanged for one Series E War Bond which would be worth $25.00 in ten years. That seemed like a lot of money then, and all my pennies were hoarded for these important Defense Stamps.
I particularly remember one incident. I was eleven. My parents and I were in the lobby of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, one of New York’s oldest and finest. The quiet lobby was huge, with magnificent chandeliers hanging from the two-stories-high ceiling, thick rugs on the floor, and dark, shiny mahogany wainscoting all around.

At one side of the room stood a long table with a red-white-and-blue banner above it announcing a special war bond drive. I felt pride that I had a war bond I’d saved for myself. I approached the table asking for 35 cents worth of Defense Stamps, only to be looked at with humor, and told condescendingly they only sold bonds. I remember my parents being both embarrassed and proud of me. I felt all mixed up inside, hot and blushing, yet feeling right about what I’d done.

That incident didn’t stop me, however. Almost all of my allowance, money presents, and earned monies went into savings bonds, which were cashed in years later when I went to college and after. I was very pleased with that.

The Impact of Rationing

Many everyday things that we took for granted began to be rationed in 1942: meat (primarily beef), sugar, butter, gasoline, and rubber tires are what I remember. Ration booklets, assigned to every individual, contained pages of narrow red or blue stamps. Gasoline and tire stamps were allocated according to how much a person needed a car for work. Parents combined the family’s stamps to purchase rationed food items. Red and blue tokens, smaller than a dime, were given as “change” from stamps. After the war, I saved ration books and tokens to show to my children some day. When I came back from working as a camp counselor some years later, they were no longer in my desk, and no one knew where they’d gone. It felt to me like a huge loss of a piece of my personal history.

Perhaps the biggest impact the war ultimately had on our Jewish identity was in the form of meat rationing. My mother had grown up in an Orthodox kosher home. Her mother, the only grandparent I ever knew, lived with us until she died just before I started kindergarten. Our kitchen contained two built-in, glass-fronted wood cabinets that served as dividers between the eating and cooking areas. These cabinets held the two sets of dishes necessary in a kosher home, for one did not eat milk and meat dishes on the same plates, nor at the same meal. Two sets of silverware resided in separate drawers in the cooking area. When I set the table for dinner, I would ask “What are we having tonight, “milketic” (milk dishes) or “fleishic” (meat dishes), taking dishes and silver from the appropriate cabinet and drawer.

While my mother kept a kosher house, we were by no means Orthodox. We ate non-kosher food outside the house. My father, who came to this country from Ukraine by himself when he was twelve, was completely irreligious in all respects, yet went along with my mother’s wishes. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, a day of fasting, my father slept until noon, got up, and saying he’d “already fasted for half the day,” proceeded to eat breakfast, sometimes joining the services in the afternoon. My mother always fasted all day though it gave her a wicked headache that put her in an awful mood.
We raised chickens – that is, Thomas, our gardener and jack-of-all trades, raised chickens for us. From time to time, mother asked Thomas to catch a chicken for her to take to the Jewish butcher in Peekskill. Thomas caught the chicken, tied its legs together and put it in an empty flour sack in the back of the car. My mother plunked the bagged chicken down at the butcher shop for the “shohut” (butcher) to say a ritual prayer, cut its head off with a razor sharp knife in one swipe, and hang it on a hook upside down for the blood to drain out of the neck into a bin filled with sawdust. This procedure made it kosher. Then the butcher would pluck the chicken’s feathers and chop off the chicken’s scaly legs and feet, putting them back in the bag to be used in making delicious chicken soup.

While this koshering event took place, we did the rest of the grocery shopping. We went to the dairy store, where we bought butter that was contained in large, round, slatted wooden tubs, and cream cheese that was sliced from “bricks” packed in long rectangular wooden boxes. Ration stamps covered beef, lamb and butter.

Once home, my mother would continue the koshering process by cleaning the chicken’s interior, sprinkling the chicken inside and out with rough grained kosher salt to draw out all remaining blood, fine-tuning the plucking, and singeing the scales off the feet. The non-fully-formed eggs still inside the hens were special treats when cooked.

Perhaps the tradition of two sets of dishes had begun to loosen in the years following my grandmother’s death. However, by 1942, shortly after the US entry into the war, meat was rationed, and all meat, including kosher meat, began to be very hard to get. Mother began to experiment.

The day my mother came home with Porterhouse steak was a milestone for her – a major step away from her upbringing and traditions. Porterhouse steak was not kosher, as it came from the hindquarters of cattle, but she couldn’t find kosher steak. In the summer, she bought T-bone steaks, also non-Kosher, and dad grilled them outside when relatives came from New York City.

Slowly also, butter or milk in the potatoes began to be served at the same time as roast beef. Cream for coffee was on the table with meat dishes. And the dishes themselves, like the food on them, began to blend. I no longer asked what we were having for dinner before setting the table. The day my mother, like a guilty child, brought sliced boiled ham into the house, was the day I thought the transition was complete. Although she still professed not to eat “pork”, spare ribs and other pork dishes at the Chinese restaurant as well as ham didn’t fit into that category. Real “pork,” like pork chops or loin, or pork sausage, would make her sick, she believed. However, by the end of the war, the two sets of dishes and silver had both become one, and keeping kosher was no longer discussed in any way. In later years, I never told her about the pork sausage in my Thanksgiving turkey stuffing, which she loved. If she’d known about it, I am sure she would have become deathly ill instantly!

Other Memories

There were dozens of things done for “The War Effort”: 
Women knitted woolen squares, often in groups, for the Red Cross to make blankets for wounded soldiers. People volunteered to roll bandages. I never knit squares, though some other girls did.

We saved aluminum foil from cigarette packs, chewing gum and anything else, rolled it into a ball, and left it at donation centers. All cigarettes were wrapped in aluminum or lead foil, which I learned later, was rolled flat, cut into strips and supposedly used as “chaff” dispensed by bombers over Germany to confuse German radar. Speaking of cigarettes, the slogan “Lucky Strike Green Has Gone To War!” screamed across billboards, as if the green dye formerly used for their packages, now white, topped all other war efforts combined! In fact, chromium and copper, used in the green and gold inks of the Lucky Strike packages, were in short supply as the war progressed. At the same time, the manufacturers of Lucky Strike wanted to appeal to women with their new white packaging, since their surveys had shown that women did not like the dark green. (In addition, their ads suggested that women should “have a Lucky instead of a candy”!) Women came out of the house and went into service in many ways – into the WACS, the WAVES, and defense factory jobs. “Rosie the Riveter”, the song that most clearly popularized the changed roles for women, no doubt helped plant seeds for the Women’s Liberation movement two decades later.

Pin-up girls were the bane of my existence. I could never measure up to Lana Turner, Dorothy Lamour and others. They may have been morale boosters for the servicemen, but they were morale destroyers for me!

Plane scanning: On a number of Sundays, my brother and I accompanied my father to the Montrose library, near Peekskill, where we were on duty for several hours to scan for enemy planes. We utilized small metal stencil sheets, about 5” by 8”, with cutouts of friendly and enemy plane shapes in different positions. When a plane flew overhead, we held up these stencils to measure the plane against the cutouts. If an enemy plane were to appear, we were to call the Civil Defense Board. I felt excited to be actively involved. I experienced a sense of tension between wanting to identify an enemy plane and being terrified of that possibility. Fortunately, no enemy plane every appeared.

Victory gardens, patches approximately 10’ square, were created in places that had never seen a vegetable before, like Central Park in New York City and the Fenway in Boston. We had a big vegetable garden “in the country”; yet these other small plots allowed people to help the war effort by growing their own vegetables. Most of these plots were public lands, costing $1.00 per family to till. Many still exist today in Boston’s Fenway area.

New York City

We moved to Manhattan in August of 1943, living there during the school year, spending summers and some weekends in Peekskill. I was twelve and a half. Gas was rationed. When we stayed in the country, my father drove to and from Harmon Station in Croton each morning and evening before taking the train to and from NYC to work. He had a radio and electronics parts manufacturing business, which at that time became involved in making metal chassis and radio tubes for the Signal Corps. His company earned the “Army-Navy E” several years in a row. It was a government award, honoring “Excellent” production of war materials.
We moved from a comfortable house in the country to a three large-room, (two bedrooms, and living room), two bathroom, kitchenette apartment in central Manhattan. Apartments were evidently hard to find in wartime New York City. My brother had seen the apartment with my mother before we moved in. He held his hands about a foot apart and said you had to put silverware in the tiny kitchen sink horizontally, that it wouldn’t fit any other way. Our move there squeezed our family, changing the dynamics markedly.

Gas rationing was only one reason we moved. Although my mother had been very active on a volunteer basis, helping to create the town library in Montrose as well as being involved in other community projects, she wanted to be more active in my father’s business. She said, “Good help was hard to get” during the war. She also said she wanted my sister, who had transferred from Oberlin Conservatory to Columbia School of General Studies, to have a home with us, “her own family,” and not a room with a professor and his wife. Further, my brother was being groomed to go into business with my father, and so was to go to Brooklyn Tech High School. For me, there was no reason, and I felt I went along for the ride, having no choice. With mother working and my sister staying at Columbia as long as possible each day, I was to do the grocery shopping, set the table, make a salad, and start the vegetables, before my mother would “be home to make dinner,” that is, to cook the meat in a floor broiler.

In New York we experienced air raid sirens and blackouts on a fairly regular basis. These were meant to keep us in a state of readiness in case of attack. When the sirens shrilled, all lights went off until the “all clear” sounded. Everybody got off the streets. Bomb shelters had been set up in a variety of places, like subways, though I doubt they would have done us much good if we had been bombed.

War Deaths

The summer I was thirteen and a half, I was away at Pioneer Youth Camp near Kingston, NY. It was there that I received a letter from my best junior high school friend, Lori, that her older brother Gene had been killed in the war in Europe. I remember being stunned, then frozen. What do you write to someone whose brother has died in the war? I’d never been in this position before. I went to my counselors, and fortunately, the head counselor of my group was a black woman school teacher. Though Millie’s tone was often sharp and clipped, her whole manner changed when I told her of my sad dilemma and she helped me write a warm and caring condolence letter to Lori. I remembered her help when a year later, a male cousin of mine was also killed in Europe. He’d been much older than I, and I did not know him well. Yet I was able to say something appropriate to his mother, my father’s cousin, whom I did know better, even though I felt very awkward.

The End of the War – The Atomic Legacy

Franklin D. Roosevelt, the only President of the United States that I had ever known, died on April 12, 1945 having served thirteen of his elected sixteen years. I felt as if my grandfather had died, and I cried. Our civics teacher at Joan of Arc Jr. High School in New York City had us make scrapbooks on Roosevelt immediately, saying there would never be as much information
about him in the papers as then. It was an overwhelming task, and our efforts were great though our results were paltry. I remember feeling so sad also that Roosevelt had not lived to see the end of the war, which, in Europe, looked as if it might be over soon. Indeed, within the next month, on May 8th, V-E Day was declared when the Germans signed the surrender agreements.

The war with Japan continued for several months. It was summer and we were up in Peekskill. I was fourteen and a half and a Counselor-in-Training at Pine Lake Park Camp. A group of us were walking back home from Pine Lake when we got word from someone in a passing car that the US had dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and that probably the war would be over. My friends were jumping up and down in the road. I remember feeling both excited with the news and chilled, with goose pimples and the sense of terror that the world would never be safe again. Three days later, another atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, and the war was over. For me, joy that the war was over was mixed with horror at the devastation created by the atomic bomb – dropped by the United States, my country, which I’d always believed was the ‘good’ and ‘kind’ country. I found it hard to read newspapers relating what we had caused – a holocaust of people melting on the spot, being immediately blinded though miles away, and wreckage for miles around. Later readings revealed that at Hiroshima, one minute after the explosion, 66,000 people were killed and 69,000 wounded. And of course there was the aftermath of contamination, about which we knew nothing then.

Later that year, cartoonist Ernie Bushmiller in one of his “Nancy” strips showed Nancy sitting at her desk, book opened. Aunt Fritzi asks her if she had done her homework. Nancy pictures the atomic bomb hitting the earth, from the sky. She comments to Aunt Fritzi, “Homework doesn’t seem very important anymore.” I remember cutting out that strip and keeping it and I may still have it somewhere. It spoke to me, not about homework, but about the genii of destruction loose in the world forevermore, no matter what we studied. I was aware, through reading, that if the US had not developed the bomb, chances are Germany might have, but that did not help me feel much better about the threat of nuclear holocaust.

There are many lasting legacies from WW II both positive and negative: the Nuremberg Trials marking the first time in history individuals were tried for war crimes, freeing the world from Hitler, dividing Germany, neutralization and democratization of Japan, numerous technological advances, and many more. Perhaps the most devastating legacies, however, were the creation of nuclear energy plants, which provide electricity and poison the earth with nuclear waste, and the atomic bomb. We live today with the threat of any nuclear plant failing, as Chernobyl failed, and with the threat of any country, including our own and North Korea, or of any terrorist group utilizing a nuclear bomb. That “Institutions carry within them the seeds of their own destruction” – albeit a quote from Karl Marx – is still true. Hopefully we will find a way through these legacies so that my grandson – should he survive - does not need to write his memoirs of WW III, or of a world totally scarred by nuclear holocaust.