The BOLLI Journal 2019-2020

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When you have been standing at attention in the same damn spot for over a decade, staring at the same storefronts, collecting nickels, dimes, and quarters like a seasoned priest receiving confessions, you figure you’ve seen and heard it all. Let’s face it. In my rigidly fixed position here on Lincoln Street in Newton Highlands, I got tired pretty quickly of facing the bakery, the used clothing store, and the jewelry shop. Besides collecting coinage and recurrently being assaulted by the meter maid emptying my swollen belly, my life was pretty hum-drum.

To pass the time, my nearest neighbors and I developed a clever system of wagering. Based on the coinage inserted in our meters, how accurately could we predict which store the prospective customer would most likely patronize? No, you didn’t need advanced statistical skills to make these predictions. Our compacted brain size did not allow for such technical prowess. We relied on our gut instincts, and, overall, we were damn good at it.

So, imagine my surprise when, early on a busy Valentine’s Day in 1986, a young couple found me available, parked in my designated spot, deposited a single nickel into my slot, and then headed straight for the jewelry store! Nickels, only fifteen-minute tokens, usually meant the bakery with its fresh croissants and pastries. Pick ‘em up, pay, and then get home while coffee was still brewing. Dimes, half-hour reservations, most commonly heralded the used clothing store where racks were filled with dresses and blouses, and twice-loved...
kids’ toys. Quarters were saved for hour-long sojourns to the jewelry store for that special gift associated with equally special occasions, expressions of budding young love or a reward for dedicated years of singular devotion.

Now imagine my un-metered surprise, when this handsome young couple, clearly beaming love and holding hands, put a single nickel in my belly and then marched straight into the jewelry store. The jewelry store!

Well, let me be clear about this. He was the perpetrator of this remarkably bold action. I thought I caught a look of surprise, even concern, on that attractive young woman’s face. And, calling up my collected wisdom about human motivation, I realized that this could be just another example of the male of the species asserting his short-sighted prerogative and the female demonstrating her cautious reticence. Or maybe he was just acutely ambivalent, one of the cardinal symptoms of Male Shopping Aversion Disorder. Only fifteen minutes in a jewelry store? A moxy-moronic act at best. More moronic than moxy!

Once they were in the store, I whispered cautiously to my meter neighbors about the transaction I had just overheard. Bets were quickly wagered. Could this couple make it over the long term? Was he just a cheapskate? Can true love be maintained in the face of such outrageous parsimony? Could a hasty decision end up in buyer’s remorse? We shared a silent group shrug, the kind parking meters tender subliminally only once a day. Then we waited expectantly.

Fifteen long minutes passed. Inside Anthony Andrews Jewelers, racks of neatly ordered jewelry were placed on glass counters, rings tried on, diamonds glinted under fluorescent lighting, appreciative smiles cautiously exchanged, tiny price tags ignored.

But now, fifteen minutes were up. What would happen next?

Don’t hold your breath. That bold young man bounded out of the jewelry store and, lesson learned, reached into his pocket for more coinage. Another nickel! We meters nodded in shared resignation. Boy, he’s got a lot to learn about women.
The Kiss
Larry Schwirian

Since joining BOLLI in 2016, Larry has taken writing courses, been an active member/leader of the Writers Guild, and a Journal staff member. He and his wife Caroline have led BOLLI courses on architecture and architecture history.

On August 14, 1945, Greta was working as a dental assistant in Times Square when she heard a great commotion and went outside to investigate. The square was filled with people yelling and screaming, and when she stepped into the street, a young sailor grabbed her, bent her over, and kissed her. Little did she know that this event was being photographed by Alfred Eisenstaedt, a German born American photographer and photojournalist.

(Photo, Adobe Stock)

Grete Zimmer was born in Wiener Neustadt, Austria. In 1939, at the age of fifteen, she, along with three of her younger sisters, escaped from the Nazis and fled to America where she took on the American spelling of her name. Her older sister Lily also fled, making her way to Israel, but Max and Ida, their parents, weren’t so lucky. They died in a Nazi concentration camp.

The photo soon appeared on the cover of Life Magazine, but Eisenstaedt had not bothered to record the names of the couple, and Greta herself didn’t become aware of the photo until the 1960s. On that day, many women apparently found themselves in similar embraces, and Eisenstaedt was approached by a whole host of young females claiming to be the woman in the photo. Greta, though, wrote to Life, providing additional pictures to prove that she was the woman. In 1980, after research and analysis confirmed that she truly was the subject of that kiss, the editor finally responded.

By that time, the photo had become one of the most iconic in the history of American photojournalism. And, as is the case with good photojournalism, it conveys significant information. The smiling, uniformed sailors and people in the street make it clear that a wartime celebration is happening. The woman in the photo is not embracing the sailor and is bent over in a way that makes it clear that the kiss was not an expected one. In that light, the celebratory background makes the difference in how the encounter is interpreted.

In 2012, George Galdorisi and Lawrence Verria did an extensive background study and wrote a book titled The Kissing Sailor in which they identified the man in the photo as Navy Quartermaster 1st Class George Mendonsa. He was on a 30-day leave and was scheduled to soon board a train to the west coast to return to the war. His girlfriend, and later wife, was with him in Times Square that day. He said he grabbed the “nurse” to kiss because he was so grateful for all the work nurses did during the war.

Greta passed away on September 8, 2016 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery alongside her husband Dr. Mischa Friedman, a WWII veteran of the U. S. Army Corps and a scientific researcher for the Army at Fort Detrick. George died on February 17 in 2019 when was 95 years old. Rita, George’s wife of 66 years, said in an interview, “he never kissed me like that.”
The Cocoanut Grove
Wendy Richardson

Wendy comes from a family of eager storytellers, and many of those stories, she says, were based on the personal experiences of close family members set in factual historical backgrounds. Storytelling, for Wendy, was bound to happen.

Two years into the bloody burden of World War II, hellish tragedy, the kind that rivaled many battlefields, came to Bay Village, Boston. Determined to put away thoughts of the daily death tolls printed in the newspapers, locals flocked to dance halls and jazz clubs to dance to songs made popular by Ella, Cab, and Basie. A place and a time to push misery and worry aside.

In the interior of the Cocoanut Grove dance hall, six doors had been safely padlocked to keep the stage, dizzying dance floor, and smoky tables comfortably crowded. The hall was over its limit by a count of 36. No one cared. Pouring booze, making money, and Swing kept the Grove going. Laughter was big and loud; dancers bumped into each other on the heaving parquet floor; the bar and the band competed for attention.

At some point on the night of November 28, 1942, sparks from a light box spit out onto a table, smoldered on the decorative cloth cover, sprang to life with a sizzle, and roared into flame. Hot, red-yellow fingers clawed and stretched and reached for the holiday decorations hanging close by.

The fire didn’t kill them. The shouts of panic when realizing they were locked in, the black and gray clouds of smoke, and the electrical burnout that reduced the room to absolute darkness killed them. At the doors, they pounded and begged to be released, but no one came in time. They had been dance partners just moments before…

Out on the street and in the adjoining alleys, Boston PD and Fire arrived. Pick axes and crowbars ripped at the chain-bound doors. No sounds came from the inside anymore; no scraping, fist banging—no pleading. With a heavy snap, the chains were broken. An historic and horrific tide of mostly dead and some dying humanity coughed from the club to slide into the street.

Police and firefighters didn’t move for a few moments at the sight of the tumbling bodies. And then, they moved into desperate action, pulling the dead and dying out of the doorway…the count was 492. 166 were taken to local hospitals.

Truckers near the scene were commandeered to carry the dead to as many funeral homes as could take them. Their grisly transports lasted all of that night and into the dawn.

My father Arthur was one of those truckers.

In 2017, the 75th anniversary of the Coconut Grove tragedy was marked in Boston with a simple plaque.
Speaking of Shells
Barbara Jordan

“Heavy Hitters” music publishing company founder and author of “Songwriters Playground,” Barbara’s songs have graced the soundtracks of hundreds of television shows and films. “As we walked the beaches of my youth, my father and I gathered all manner of shells. Four and a half decades later, I’m still at it,” but now with her camera in hand.

Shells quicken my pulse. I mostly tower above them, unless I kneel to get a closer look at the cities inscribed on their chalky white surfaces. Often, life is still clinging to them, and if not, the absence of it is a reminder that I, too, will die. I find shells on my walks in Maine, either in the tidal pools behind my house, or on the coarse grains of Old Orchard Beach sand.

At times, a solitary shell seems to come with a caption on it: “I am broken but not unbowed.” Or, in a cluster of clamshells, maybe two large single ones are cracked, but a baby shell is whole and partly open. The child knows that its parents are flawed, perhaps even terminally ill, but it declares, “I am not you. I shall live my own life, not that of my imperfect creators.”

Clamshells are often surrounded by snails moving so slowly you might think they are already dead. These patient little souls are often in the direct path of my sneakers that can’t distinguish them from pebbles. Crushed, their short lives silenced. Nary a single tide to look forward to.

On some days, I can’t bear to see how many vacant shells lie strewn over the mud. Did a host of seagulls find their lunches just moments ago and drop these empty vessels for me? Have I happened on an ancient graveyard exposed, then covered, then exposed again for the amusement of poets, children, and solitary wanderers like myself?

Shells come in a multiplicity of shapes and textures, and depending on the season, weather, time of day, and angle of light, they’re poised to transform.

Shells on my beach are vastly different from shells at Old Orchard Beach. Mine are mostly petite, broken, and splashed with deep color and grit. Old Orchard’s are bowl-sized and nearly blanched. Mine have character. They’re feisty. Old Orchard’s are uniform and pedestrian.

All shells bewitch me. They make me call to them but refuse to answer. Still, I know they are listening. Sometimes when a pucker beneath the sand peers up at me, I am delighted to know that someone down there is breathing.

I wish I could make the acquaintance of a living clam. I would ask it, why did those tiny mollusks invade your back and never leave? Where did you travel to this week? Do you obsess over your children or regret never having had them? Do you believe in God, an afterlife? Would you rather have a soft shell or a hard one?

Stay still and pose with me for a selfie, won’t you? The light is perfect.

(Photo by Barbara)
Them Bones, Them Bones, Them...

Donna Johns

Donna worked at the Library of Congress and, most recently, Newton North High School. She has also worked in community theatre for many years and appeared in BOLLI productions as well. She is always looking for interesting stories to tell, on stage or in print. While she has retired as a librarian and teacher, she has not retired from being the mother of three and grandmother of two.

We must be on you but cannot see you. Gas running low. Unable to reach you by radio. Flying at 1,000 feet.

Amelia Earhart’s voice was calm. An experienced pilot, she was the face of modern aviation. Her determined smile, close-cropped hair, and long lean figure were the stuff of tabloid dreams. Newspaper headlines documented every step of this, her most ambitious project.

She intended to circumnavigate the globe. After stopping in South America, Africa, India, and Southeast Asia, Amelia and her navigator Fred Noonan landed in Lae, New Guinea, having completed about 22,000 miles of their nearly 30,000 mile journey. The flight’s next leg was a challenging one over the Pacific where they would have few land markers to guide them to Howland Island for refueling.

They never made it. Massive searches of the small islands that dot this area of the Pacific provided no trace of the plane or its occupants. Amelia Earhart’s disappearance and unknown fate became one of the great mysteries of the twentieth century.

Three years after the plane disappeared, surveyors working on the Pacific island of Nikumaroro made a strange discovery: a woman’s shoe, a sextant, and human bones. Could these be the remains of Amelia Earhart? British Dr. D.W. Hoodless, then working in Fiji, was called in to examine the skeletal remains. His conclusion was that the bones were those of a “stocky” man whose height was estimated at 5’5” tall.

Over the years, various theories were advanced. Amelia and her navigator were captured by the Japanese and imprisoned. The plane sank into the Pacific. A tribe of cannibals ate them. None of the conjectures proved true.

In the spring of 2018, Richard L. Jantz published a research article in the journal Forensic Anthropology challenging the work of Dr. Hoodless. Jantz entered Hoodless’s measurements into sophisticated new computer programs developed using data from thousands of skeleton samples. He determined that the Nikumaroro bones were those of a woman, approximately 5’8” tall, of northern European ancestry. Janz stated “Amelia Earhart is more similar to the Nikumaroro bones than 99% of individuals in a large reference sample.”

What about that 1% of doubt? DNA analysis would certainly provide the data needed to identify the remains. DNA samples from an Earhart relative exist, and DNA can be extracted from bones even after 75 years. But there’s a problem.

Nobody knows where the bones are. In the 1940’s, it was common practice to document and photograph skeletal remains and then either throw the bones into ramshackle storage units or simply discard them.

In August of 2019, National Geographic sent two expeditions to Nikumaroro to search for clues. Robert Ballard, who discovered the Titanic wreck, led the ocean search but has not yet located any wreckage. The land search did locate a fragment of human skull that has since been sent for DNA analysis. So, unless the DNA test on the skull is conclusive, Ballard locates the wreckage of the Lockheed Electra, or a shoebox full of labeled bones is discovered in someone’s attic, the mystery will remain.

Perhaps it’s fitting that this inspiring figure in aviation history left us with a puzzle as part of her legacy.
Building the Hoover Dam
Mark Seliber

After retiring from an actuarial career in 2017, Mark sought continued learning and travel. At BOLLI, he has enjoyed many courses as well as acting in both the CAST and Scene-iors groups. After reading Steinbeck’s “Travels with Charley,” Mark and his wife Rachel embarked on their own journey across America.

One of my favorite stops on our springtime twelve-week trip around the United States was the Hoover Dam. Completed in 1935, it spans the Colorado River on the border between Nevada and Arizona. I took a tour of the dam to see the generators and the tunnels located many levels down from the top. I was most interested in the politics behind the project and the cooperation it took to complete the dam, one of the greatest engineering works of the 20th century.

As the American Southwest grew more developed, the Colorado River was a potential source of irrigation water for farming. The lower Colorado was also a likely provider of hydroelectric power for the region. A canal was built, but it proved to be ineffective. So, the experts decided that the solution might be to build a dam.

In 1922, the Bureau of Reclamation of the United States Department of the Interior recommended Black Canyon as an ideal spot for building a dam. A railway could be laid from Las Vegas to bring in the workers, supplies, and machinery needed to do the work.

Next came the first key negotiation. The seven states within the river’s basin (Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming) argued about how much water each state would receive from the project. A Colorado attorney proposed an interstate compact, and Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover succeeded in helping the seven states reach consensus.

Two California representatives introduced legislation in Congress to authorize the dam, but it was initially rejected as the delegations of other states argued that the project would only benefit the west. In 1927, though, the Mississippi flood unified Congress, and Capitol Hill got on board. The dam was finally approved by both houses, and the legislation was signed by President Coolidge on December 21, 1928, shortly after Herbert Hoover was elected President.

When the project documents went out to bid in 1931, a group of six rival Western companies combined their expertise and resources and incorporated as “Six Companies, Inc.” Their bid of $48.9 million, with a completion time of seven years, was accepted, and the dam got underway.

The single biggest engineering challenge confronting Six Companies, Inc. was diverting the waters of the Colorado River around the site where the dam was being built. Inventing processes and equipment as they went along, Six Companies built two tunnels on each side of the dam area through which water flowed until the project was completed.

During the height of the Great Depression, the dam project employed between 3,000 and 5,250 workers. The work was hard and even dangerous. As many as 112 workers died during construction, and an additional 42 workers were reported to have died from pneumonia. It is possible, though, that some or all of those 42 workers died from carbon monoxide poisoning in the tunnels. Still, on March 1, 1936, Six Companies turned the dam over to the federal government--more than two years ahead of schedule.

Partisan politics came into play when naming the dam. Originally referred to as Black Canyon Dam, President Roosevelt dedicated what was called “Boulder Dam” on September 30, 1935. After the Republicans took control of Congress in 1947, though, both houses passed a joint resolution to rename it “Hoover Dam.”

Hoover Dam fulfilled its three main goals: controlling the flooding of the Colorado River; providing a reliable source of water to the entire
Southwestern United States; and generating the hydroelectricity needed to cover not only its construction but also its ongoing costs. Since that time, it has even provided a fourth major benefit: Lake Mead, the reservoir created by the dammed water that soon became a popular National Recreation Area.

A massive infrastructure project made possible by bipartisan cooperation between the federal government, seven states, and six companies came in on budget and ahead of schedule. Imagine that!

Perhaps it can serve as a lesson in these gridlocked times.

Photo, Adobe Stock
Shaker Cupboard
Howard Barnstone

As it involves using many of the most foundational skills needed for building any quality piece, creating this Shaker cupboard was a requirement at the North Bennett Street School where I took a 3-month intensive course. We were encouraged to modify certain details as we saw fit. I enjoy the clean lines of the Shaker style which has inspired several subsequent projects.

After spending 25 years in financial information technology, Howard used his skills in pro bono consulting for a variety of not-for-profit organizations, and he serves as a member of Newton's Economic Development Commission as well. Besides his family, his lifelong joy is wood working and furniture making. From playing with wooden blocks as a tot to more recently cutting boards on a table saw, wood working has been in his genetic makeup.

Fused Glass
Betty Brudnick

A native Bostonian who loves New England, Betty graduated from Boston University and soon became involved in politics, social and mental health issues, and Jewish education; she and her late husband Irv were among the founding members of BOLLI. A chance meeting with a glass artist led to her passion for this work.
Amy’s mixed media mosaics have been juried in exhibitions and are featured in museum galleries. She teaches mixed media mosaic workshops in art centers throughout New England, including Snowfarm, the New England Craft Program’s studio in Williamsburg, Massachusetts.
A Thank You to My Guardian Angel
Sophie Freud

At age 18, I learned English as fast as possible when I came to this country and kind relatives sent me to Radcliffe College. After getting a Ph.D. at Brandeis, I was a social work professor for 30 years at Simmons College. As a reader, book reviewer, and author, I find books to be cherished companions. I joined BOLLI in its early years, and inventing new courses has become my old age pastime.

I have just seen my 95th birthday and am constantly amazed that, as a European born Jew who was meant to be killed, I should have reached such an old age. I am not the least bit superstitious, and I dislike all religions, but it is hard for me not to believe that I have a guardian angel. Now and then, she took vacations, putting my life in danger, but she kept flying back at the right moments.

In my youth, Hitler invaded Austria, and my grandfather, who was politically blind, declared that he was too old to emigrate from the city that he hated and loved. But eventually, he changed his mind and took the whole family along. “Without him, you would have become a lampshade,” said my brother, years later, when I wrote essays that were critical of my grandfather’s ideas.

Living in Paris with my mother involved multiple losses for me, but I remember wandering alone in the streets of the city with immense relief. I had escaped my parents’ constant fights, supervision by my Fräulein, the obligation to become a proper lady. One day, I said to my mother, who constantly complained about her absent husband, that I was no longer interested in her marital problems. “You have inherited your Grandfather’s stony heart,” she said, and I have remained grateful to my stony heart which I believe has helped me to survive.

When the Germans invaded Paris, we went across the country by bicycle without being bombed or overtaken by the German army. In Nice, my guardian angel arranged my miraculous acceptance at the French Lycee at a time when Jews and foreigners were turned away. I decided to become the best student of my class, which must have kept my angel very busy. We were stuck in Casablanca due to a late Portuguese ship during one of her vacations, but she quickly returned. She was apologetic and helped me acquire a circle of friends, the best year of my adolescence.

The angel and rich relatives helped me to pursue the college education I had been determined to have and to find a husband who would treat me better than my father had treated my mother.

Life went along, but a time came when my guardian angel took a very long vacation and I developed a tumor on the skin of my brain, a meningioma. Many of my bodily systems broke down, reducing me to an unexpected old age. Oh, how I hated becoming an invalid. My whole left side became increasingly useless, which meant no more driving. That was the worst. I fought against the multiple invasions of my body. I continued to teach. But I yearned to die as soon as possible.

Then, my guardian angel finally came back. I decided, against my principles, to submit to an operation, and within a year, I recovered. No more tumor pressing on my brain. No more illnesses. My surgeon grins when he sees me for follow-up visits.

Today, I watch the glittering pond from my beautiful house. I swim or walk daily. I take and give courses. I drive to visit my 92-year old boyfriend who lives an hour away. Unlike my grandmother, who was killed at Auschwitz, I will die in a bed, surrounded by my children who have always treated me well. Dying, I will be relieved that I will not have to deal with the destruction of our world.
One picture is worth a thousand words...sometimes. These five hundred came to me while looking at a first-grade class photo that brought back a dreaded first day of school record-keeping ritual. While BOLLI embraces and inspires lifelong learning, I have become a lifelong writer.

I’ve been looking at the report cards I’ve saved since first grade. Check marks talk about me: effort--good; workmanship--good; behavior--fair to good; care of property--good. “Frequent praise has not met too favorably with Jane. She is capable of better work.”

That’s what Miss Schnide said about me in first grade. I thought that good was good, G.E., good enough. I didn’t know that excellent was a possibility until Miss Schnide wrote that I could do better. She also said that I talked incessantly.

In the class photo, I sat in the front row, smiling, banana curls around my ears. Me, just there, filling up a seat.

On the first days of school, when my mother would bring me, and the teacher would whisper, “Don’t call her Phyllis because we only call her Janey, and that’s Janey with a y.”

That first day, my stomach felt like it wasn’t a part of my body, and my hands felt sweaty as the alphabetical move from kid to kid wound its way to me. It was the information-gathering trip. Miss Schnide was verifying our parental information. Patricia Dembrowski was done, and now it was my turn.

“Janey, stand. Mother’s name?”

“Martha.”

“My blood raced around inside like when we played outside. “Race you,” we’d say. Pieces of my smile broke, chipped away. My tiny heart wanted out of its tiny chest, and now I wanted to pee, and maybe, once again, it might not stay inside. The silence in the classroom, thirty-four kids’ worth of silence, yelped like when I stepped on Skippy’s tail as he lay on the kitchen floor warming himself by the coal stove.

And the school, my school, the Williams School, the one that was the biggest east of the Mississippi, swallowed me up, right then.

The other kids, sitting upright, waited for me to speak my father’s name so that they could shout their parents’ names, like Sophie and Bill or Angie and Buster, like a whole family with two names.

That clock up there near the ceiling, the black one, big as my grandmother’s frying pan where she made potato pancakes, that clock ticked a “say it, say it,” waiting for me to answer.

The papers tacked on the walls showing neat work. The papers waited and didn’t know what I was about to say. If my paper were there, it would have known my answer, but my work was messy. Sometimes there were black marks on my papers, black as desk legs, black as dirt in a grave, all because I was a south paw. And I was. That’s what my uncle told me.

Then the teacher’s voice barged in, “Janey, mother’s name is Martha. And father’s name?”

“My all-grown-up word spilled out, leaving a stain.

“Deceased.”

“You can sit down now. Excellent.”
Reaching the Border
Steve Asen

Five years ago, Steve joined BOLLI after retiring from the Department of Conservation & Recreation where he did water resources planning. In addition to traveling and taking classes, he also proudly nurtures and babysits his 5 very young grandchildren, including a set of identical twin boys.

As the jitney barrels down the bumpy dirt road in eastern Iran, I realize that, the tighter I hold the sheep, the harder it nips at my ear. I’m not sure whether it is the sheep or I who is more scared. But given our reckless speed, in my hippie mind, I actually think we are consoling each other, even though we are really just comforting ourselves.

Through the opened windows of the ancient bus, constant sand blows into all my facial orifices. It exhausts me, tempering my excitement about reaching the western border. With my mouth full of grit and my nose encrusted, I try to come up with a better alternative. Of course, I could be back in Boston attending college, demonstrating against the Vietnam War, and experimenting with LSD, but how would that help me in my present situation on this crowded, bouncy, and sand-infested bus?

Although closing the windows would solve the sand and dust problem, it could also prove catastrophic. With the temperature close to 100 and a cloudless sky above, the potential consequences for both humans and sheep are dire.

With that, I exhale a slight, choking cough and snort that suddenly awakens my seating companion, Mohammed. It is Mohammed’s sheep that I have been awkwardly embracing because of the guilt I felt when he sat down next to me with his entourage of three lambs and infant son. As Mohammad cradles animals on each shoulder and his son on his stomach, he lifts up his ragged shirt where an antique, long-barreled pistol is tucked in his pajama-like pants. My heart skips a beat as I tighten my grip on the sheep, and I am heartened to see him bypass the pistol to pull out a long bandana-like white garment followed by a goathide water pouch. After sprinkling water on the white cotton material, he intricately wraps the “shemagh” around my face to cover my mouth and nose.

After a few minutes, my breathing is more relaxed and clear, and the lamb has fallen asleep on my shoulder. Mohammed gives me a nod and a paternal smile as his eyes slowly close and he returns to his own interrupted sleep.

Finally, we cross the border and pull into Herat, where the afternoon prayer reverberates from loud speakers through the town. The bus halts as the people outside all lower their heads and turn in the same direction. When the chanting ends, we begin the exit frenzy from the bus. I feel I’ve entered a time warp, landing in a dusty, Old West pioneering town, but the populace here bears no resemblance to the characters I saw on television as a child. And yet, I can actually relate to this place, at least in a minuscule way, having grown up on the bustling streets of New York City. Still, this world is visually so different.

As I step onto the creaky wooden sidewalk, I freeze. I have reached the first ancient civilization of my travels, the land of Alexander the Great, Marco Polo, the Buddhas of Bamiyan. For years, I have been transfixed by images of Kabul, Kandahar, the Kyber Pass, the Hindu Kush mountains, and ancient Middle East trading crossroads.

I have more miles to travel and just as many more experiences to encounter on my “trail” through Pakistan, India, and Nepal, but setting foot in the Kingdom of Afghanistan brings a feeling of deep contentment. I hope to live amongst these strong and proud people whose subsistence way of life is woven of devout piety. Immersing myself in this culture may help me in my future path in ways that I can’t yet understand.
First Tears
Kathy Kuhn

“After my career as a social worker, BOLLI classes have enabled me to return to my love of reading and writing. This piece was created for a memoir writing class on the prompt ‘write about first tears.’ For me, it reflects the pain and longing of adolescent desires in the face of family trauma.”

Slowly, she walked up the stairs, not sure what she was hearing. She had just returned home after her first day of Grade 8 at South Junior High where she still did not fit in. She was not sure whether it was her shyness or how different she felt. If only her parents weren’t so obviously different. Her father Laszlo, with his thick Hungarian accent, worked at the delicatessen where everyone called him “Lester.” She hated when he wore a short-sleeved shirt because everyone could see the blue numbers on his arm. The tattoos frightened her.

The other girls talked about clothes. They wore Villager sweaters in cherry red, cornflower blue, and oatmeal colors. Like the others, she looked through Seventeen, Girls Life, and Fashion News during lunch, dog-earring the pages featuring the sweaters she liked.

That morning, she had broached the subject of a birthday present—a pair of Bass Weejun loafers. She knew that, when she asked them for something, they got nervous about money. But she just had to have those shoes. She had to fit in.

Now, climbing the stairs, she heard a sound she had never heard before. Her father was crying. She heard him say that the stock he invested in had crashed. “Why did you do it?” her mother raged. He told his wife that he just had to take a chance, but now, their savings were gone.

None of that mattered to her. Her father’s head was buried in his hands when she walked in and yelled, “What about my Weejuns?”

An Unsung Hero
Dennis Greene

After 45 years as an engineer and lawyer, Dennis has moved to both writing and teaching classes at BOLLI. He loves family, travel, photography, golf, telling stories--and frequent naps.

Ralph was new to Dartmouth High School in 1958 when we began tenth grade. I had arrived in town three years earlier, so I knew what it felt like to be the new kid.

Dartmouth was a sprawling farming and fishing community, but overlooking picturesque Padanaram Harbor in South Dartmouth was an enclave of “upper class” descendants of the area’s early English settlers. Realtors didn’t bother showing homes in Padanaram Village to Jews.

We lived in far less exclusive North Dartmouth, and I was the only Jewish kid in the high school. Ralph Harold Faulkingham had just moved to the Village. Based on his name and neighborhood, I was inclined not to like him.

It turned out that Ralph and I were in all the same classes with the few other students taking college prep courses. We were also the only two boys who joined the Drama Club, and we both enjoyed playing one-on-one basketball. That fall, I was practicing to make the junior varsity basketball team and spent every afternoon shooting hoops; often, it was with Ralph on the Padanaram court.

When I failed to make the basketball team, I spent a weekend sulking and then started looking for other ways to fill up my time. Ralph and I both landed parts in the Drama Club play, Brother Goose, and we got jobs packing groceries at the Brockton Public Market. We became close friends. In the spring, we were both selected as Student Council representatives.
An Unsung Hero  
Continued

During eleventh grade, everything in my life began falling into place. I made the JV basketball team, and academic success brought me more confidence. I began dating, and my circle of friends expanded. Ralph and I remained friends, but we spent less time together. I was probably becoming pretty full of myself.

That spring, I was approached by Mimi DeMailly, the intimidatingly attractive president of the student council, who suggested I run to succeed her. I had never considered the idea, but this was Padanaram’s own Mimi DeMailly asking, so I said I was interested and tried to extend the conversation. But having delivered her message, she gracefully departed.

I told Ralph about Mimi’s suggestion and asked him if he would be willing to run my campaign. Ralph said he needed some time to think about it.

A few days later Ralph agreed to be my campaign manager. I don’t recall anything about the election, but I did serve as President of the Student Council, so we must have won.

That May, I got my driver’s license and bought a 1951 Chevy for $65. This led to a perfect summer: beaches, basketball, three jobs, and a steady girlfriend. As a senior, I made the varsity basketball team and was admitted to college. For the first time in my life, I experienced the rush of being “popular,” and I spent less and less time with Ralph. I was probably acting like a self-centered asshole. Popularity can have that effect. After graduation, Ralph and I went our separate ways.

At our 50th high school reunion in 2011, I sat with Ralph and his wife. We relived old times and laughed a lot before Ralph turned serious.

“Dennis, there is something I have been wanting to tell you for five decades.”

“I can’t imagine anything you couldn’t tell me.”

“Remember junior year, when you told me you were going to run for Student Council President? You asked if I would be your campaign manager, and I said I needed to think about it. Well, you see, I had been thinking of running for president myself. It was a dilemma, and I didn’t know how to handle it, so I went to Mr. D, Dickson, my advisor, for advice.”

“A strange choice. He was the worst teacher in the school and a pompous ass besides. Was he helpful?”

“Not in the way he intended. He encouraged me to run because he said, ‘this school does not need someone like Dennis Greene as its student council president. It needs someone with good Christian values.’ I was too stunned to say what I should have—I just left and told you I’d run your campaign.”

I was surprised, grateful, ashamed, and full of admiration all at the same time. Ralph had done me a great kindness by keeping this to himself. By letting me maintain my naïve belief that anti-Semitism didn’t exist at Dartmouth High, he let me enjoy my senior year. If our screwed-up world of identity politics had fewer jerks like Mr. Dickson and more unsung heroes like Ralph Falkingham, it would be a much better place.

George Carlin noted that “as soon as someone is identified as an unsung hero, they no longer are.” This story is intended to terminate Ralph’s extended tenure as an unsung hero. Now he is just a hero, and people should know it.
Harry
Steve Goldfinger

Steve majored in philosophy at Princeton before entering Columbia’s College of Physicians and Surgeons. At Harvard Medical School, his career included serving as Faculty Dean for Continuing Education and chairing the Harvard Health Letter. A lifetime of patient care can yield remarkable stories, some humorous and others heartbreaking. This one is both.

I was his doctor for over thirty years and his friend for nearly as long. Sometimes personal chemistry builds the kind of relationship with a patient that obliterates the professional distance needed to protect against undue favors. So, rightly or wrongly, I didn’t feel guilty that I was using Harry, or he me, when I accepted his yearly invitation to golf at his country club. Despite our difference in age, our wives got along famously when we dined out together on their tab. Helen, his wife, was also my patient. They were especially appreciative to see their physician, long on advice about healthy living, dig into a juicy steak.

Harry was modest in his demeanor, his dress, the cars he drove, and the home he lived in. He was especially respectful of my time. He never called to describe even those symptoms that might signal a serious problem. Fortunately, he experienced few of them as the years rolled along.

Following the sale of his business and Helen’s death, Harry led a quiet life. He lived alone, avidly playing tennis and golf well into his eighties. He was nearing ninety when he left a message with my secretary that he wanted to speak to me. Knowing it must be something important, I called immediately.

After the phone rang four times, he spoke, but his only words were, “What the hell’s going on here? What the hell’s going on here?” Nothing else came across. I tried again, and once more, all I heard was “What the hell’s going on here? What the hell’s going on here?” Shouting at him to tell me more didn’t help. The silence at the other end was chilling. My only thought was that he was suffering from a stroke, one so specific as to leave him only with echolalia, the explosive repetition of a word or phrase but no impairment in the ability to pick up a ringing phone.

His sons, both out of town, were alarmed when I reached them to describe what I had experienced and my diagnosis of a possible stroke. One of them contacted Harry’s local fire department to get over to his house to investigate. After a half hour or so, a call came in from a fireman. He told me that the front door was locked and there was no response to the bell or a loud knock. Things seemed quiet inside. He then asked whether I thought his crew should break in to check on things. I couldn’t tell him not to. After all, wasn’t that the logical next step?

It was only when his front door was being hacked apart that Harry drove into the driveway. He had been off to greet a lady friend who had arrived at the airport that morning. I have no idea whether the look on his face was one of puzzlement or astonishment, but either would have been appropriate…not only for Harry but for those manning the axes and crowbars as well.

My fancy thinking about a highly unusual stroke was blown to smithereens when one of Harry’s sons clued me in on the likely cause of his father’s “echolalia.” He had just given an answering machine to his dad and left him with the simple task of installing it. Not so simple for Harry. While struggling to set it up, his exasperated muttering became recorded as his standard greeting message: “What the hell’s going on here? What the hell’s going on here?”

Harry was generous enough to chuckle each time we recalled the event in subsequent years, but, recently, there has been no recall and no laughter. Harry now resides in a very upscale retirement home. He
Harry
Continued

no longer drives a car. He stopped playing cards with the other residents months ago. His conversations with them began to wander in too many directions, and then, they became totally incoherent.

When a caretaker brought Harry in for an appointment, his face lit up, making me feel good to be recognized even though he could not recall my name. His cheeks were now sunken, his limbs had lost a good deal of flesh, and his skin was drier than before. His gait was halting, and he was slow to mount the table in the examining room. Harry wasn’t sure why he was being brought in for the visit. Neither was his caretaker. Nor was I. As I began the ritual of a physical exam, I knew there was little I would find that would make much of a difference to Harry. Or was he still Harry at this point?

I found myself remembering his loud cheer when I struck a crisp four-iron one summer long ago. I recalled his face at his wife’s funeral and the deep concern he expressed when my own wife became ill. Memories of great meals, a Florida get-together, his frank appraisals of other members of his country club were all as vivid in my mind as they would be forever absent in his. Aricept had not accomplished a thing for his progressive Alzheimer’s. I knew what was happening, and I also knew why. The neurofibrillitory tangles, the amyloid plaques piling up in Harry’s shrinking brain, were the stark answer to the question I found myself asking as I looked into his vacant eyes: “What the hell’s going on here?”

My Sorcerer’s Apprentice
Barbara Jordan

At a silent weekend retreat for meditators, I tasted heavenly cuisine and began a lifelong friendship with the man who created it.

The instructor made me look him in the eyes as he promised me that, if I stayed for the whole four days of this Silent Meditation retreat, I would feel much better.

With Prozac and pajamas in my overnight bag, I said goodbye to my husband John, who’d driven me there, and plopped down on my cushion, hopeless. How could I possibly shed this depression by shutting up and listening to a guru drone on in an unintelligible Indian accent while breathing in the foul wisps of my fellow meditators’ bad breath all around me?

Even from the depths of catatonia, though, I sensed that I had nothing to lose. I’d been shedding pounds, didn’t feel at all like cooking, and here at least they’d feed me.

After what seemed like an interminable lecture, I lined up for dinner behind my humorless co-meditators and raised my cardboard bowl to the ladies with the ladles. I was gifted with what looked like prison slop.

Still, this mud did have an intriguing aroma.

As the first slurp slid hesitantly down my throat, I realized that this was not normal food. I twirled and trolled my white plastic spoon around again, then licked the stuff off it gaily, like a chimpanzee playing with its very first candy bar. I looked around to see if anyone else might be doing anything unusual with their food, but all was calm. No one even looked up from their bowls. Had they given me something different, something spiked with anti-depressant?
With each bite, I felt like I was awakening from a deep, restorative sleep—ready to face the day. But it was now bedtime.

I dreamt of the food.

Only later did I learn that the mud I had so relished was something called Mung Dal which was cooked with onion, tomatoes, and ginger tempered with cumin, garlic, green chilis, and some Indian spice powders. The powders remain a mystery.

Seated on an uncomfortable floor cushion at breakfast, color started coming back to the world. I kept looking around, expecting to see other ecstatic eaters, but no one looked like I felt. What I did notice was a dark and handsome young man by the kitchen door. With impossibly elegant posture, arms straight and locked behind his back, he looked down at all of us with amused disdain. He was dressed in expensive jeans and a bleached-white, long kurta that came to his knees. He too was scanning the faces for signs of consciousness, but no one but me seemed to “get it.” I felt his pain.

I wasn’t supposed to talk, so I sign language-ed, pointing to my food, then at him. He stood to attention and gave me a sober nod. When I shook my head up and down like a blissed-out madwoman, he smiled.

The next two days were a blur of food pleasure and some meditation. I kept seeing this proud chef, with his serious eyebrows, searching for validation. I went for a notepad and one of those 2-inch miniature golf scoring pencils from the kitchen and scribbled 20 words and a question mark on the paper:

**THIS IS THE BEST FOOD I’VE EVER HAD IN MY LIFE. WILL YOU TEACH ME HOW TO COOK LIKE THIS?**
Rummaging through the Sales Racks
Maxine Weintraub

While Maxine considers herself a student of flash fiction, her friends and family say that she just has an extremely short attention span! Her work has appeared in “Goose River Anthology,” she has self-published short story collections, and is currently working on both a set of short stories that will be published early in 2020 and a memoir about her life in Kennebunkport, Maine.

The bold printed sign on the front glass window read: 50% OFF ALL DRESSES, WINTER JACKETS, AND PANTS. How could I resist? So, although I had headed to the mall to pick up a prescription and look at some children’s clothing in the department stores, I walked right through the open door and headed for the familiar sales racks.

It is one of my favorite stores. High style, inexpensive, good-looking clothes for middle-aged to older women who have gone slightly to seed but haven’t given up yet. Featuring jackets flared to hide lumps and bulges as well as lots of outrageous jewelry to keep the eyes away from whatever lumps and bulges remain. The customers look like me, working hard to hide the unwelcome addition that appeared between the breasts and navel about five to ten years ago. Younger women call it a “muffin top.” Muffin top, my spreading fanny. Fat! And the sales people don’t prance around in tight, size four jeans. They wear size twelves just like their customers. They are well made-up, bejeweled, and still looking pretty good. Accessorized. Still in the game. I do love that store. A matron’s heaven.

And there, rummaging in the sales racks, was an old acquaintance, a friend of a friend seen semi-annually at dinner parties and weddings. We exchanged nods, chatted briefly about where we had last met, and rifled through rhinestone buttoned taffeta and velvet jackets before entering one of those rare and intimate conversations women can sometimes have in the waiting room at the dentist’s office, the check-out at the grocery store, or the line for the car’s oil change. Intimate and fleeting—and somehow very satisfying.

“Are you browsing or on a hunt?” I asked.

“A desperate hunt,” she sighed. “My high school reunion is in April, nothing fits, and I need to look chic without having to resort to something constructed by the local tentmaker.”

“Gotcha,” I nod. “This is the perfect place.”

We rummaged.

“Where was high school?” I asked.

“Brooklyn.”

“Oh, wow. You know, I never knew that part of the world, and then our son married and moved there, so for the past ten years or so, we have become quite familiar with the area. There’s a terrific new hotel near the bridge.”

“That’s where we’re staying,” she says.

“Well, just wait until you see the Sunday brunch!”

I waxed rhapsodic about the fresh fruit, smoked salmon, and prune Danish. Ah, the prune Danish. No wonder I was shopping here. The jackets that A-lined from under the armpits and sailed away over the hips were beautifully hiding the prune Danish alone.

We were just warming up and heading into more intimate channels of conversation. As the store was filling up, on we nattered. More and more women who looked like us were inspecting jackets, jewelry, and pants. Except for one. She was thin, very thin, and had a Grant Wood painting look about her.
“Well, you should love that hotel,” I said. “We don’t go there any-
more as our son left his wife, met another woman on the internet, and
moved to the midcoast of Maine. New world, right?

“Oh, tell me about it,” she said. “My daughter called from the west
coast a few years back, just to let us know she was getting divorced.
No kids, thank goodness, but we really liked her husband. She called
last year and told us she was engaged.”

“Lovely.”

“To Rebecca,” she said.

I paused.

“You know, it isn’t our world anymore,” I said. “I think it’s important
that they’re well, and happy, and--above all--don’t ask us for money!”

A sigh of acceptance from my companion in the dressing room. And
suddenly a rejoinder from the Grand Wood painting lady who had
been standing nearby the entire time, listening to every word we said.

She turned to us, smiled softly, said, “Amen to that, sisters,” and
walked out of the store.

After a few decades as an attorney, Deb joined BOLLI to explore the
world outside legal analysis and documentation. Her daughter in-
spired her to try her hand at creative writing. This is her first attempt,
since the Reagan Administration.

I don’t like cats. To be fair, I don’t like any animals that can be clas-
sified as pets. Animals are fine in the great outdoors; indoors, not so
much. I don’t like the feeding and cleaning up after them.

I do like my husband and children, though, which is why I have lived
with cats for the last thirty years. Thirty years of cat hair, cat litter, cat
toys, catnip, cat this, and cat that.

Our first two were litter-mates adopted from the local shelter. They
pretty much stuck together, interacting with us when it came time for
food or the occasional scratch. Other than that, they preferred their
own company, and that worked out fine for me.

After they passed away, my family decided that we needed to adopt
another cat. They promised that all care would be done by someone
other than me, so I reluctantly agreed. That’s how Mindy came into
our lives.

We met Mindy at a local shelter. Although already a year old, she was
a small, fragile, black and white fur ball. She was spirited though.
We had scarcely entered the shelter when she leaped onto our unsus-
ppecting son and refused to let go. She had apparently decided that,
when we left, we were going to take her with us. And so, we did.

For me, the next several years with Mindy passed pretty much the
same as the years with our other cats had passed, the two of us abid-
ing by an unspoken code. For the most part, she didn’t bother me,
and I didn’t bother her.
Then I got sick. I was in pain, disfigured, and very sad. My husband, children, and friends did their best to cheer me up, but in those lonely times during the day when they were busy, and in those even lonelier times at night when I was awake and everyone else was asleep, I found Mindy at my side. If I sat down, she would sit down next to me; if I walked into another room, she would walk into the other room with me. Sometimes, while I was sitting on our sofa, she would flop onto my lap and demand to be petted. Invariably, I would feel better after doing so.

As I recovered, Mindy and I developed a new unspoken code. She’d keep an eye out for me, and I’d keep an eye out for her. We weren’t always together, but when either of us seemed to need some attention, we would find ourselves sitting together, silently giving warmth and companionship to the other. Thankfully, my husband still took care of the feeding and cleaning. I could handle the warmth and companionship without the heavy lifting.

Then Mindy got sick. She was in pain; she couldn’t control her bodily functions; and she seemed very sad. My children were on their own, and my husband couldn’t do all of the care and feeding himself, so it was left to me to roll up my sleeves and help out. We tried all kinds of medicine, each one more difficult to administer than the previous one. I’d have to hold her while my husband used a dropper to force the medicine into Mindy’s mouth. She hated it. Sometimes, she would take it and immediately throw up.

Despite our efforts, she kept losing weight. She stopped running around, and she kept having bowel accidents. Everywhere. Often reminding me of why I don’t like pets in general. To be honest, there were times when I resented having to clean up after her.

Then, she would sit down next to me, just like she had when I was sick. This time, though, it was I who was comforting her...or so I thought. When petting her, I would sometimes start to cry. After a while, it occurred to me that perhaps she was trying to comfort me about her illness, and somehow, that made administering medicine, feeding, and cleaning up after her not quite so awful.

As her illness progressed, my husband and I talked about ending her suffering. We were managing her pain as best we could, but the pain was winning. Our vet told us that we needed to let her go, but we struggled with what to do. Was the vet rushing the decision, missing something that could save her? Perhaps Mindy was not yet ready to go. Finally, one night, my husband and I realized that our delay was because we were not yet ready, which wasn’t fair to her. We decided we would put her to rest the next morning.

Mindy had a spot in our finished basement where she liked to sleep. I decided to stay with her that night to make sure that she didn’t feel alone. She didn’t sleep much. Around 3:00 a.m., it became clear that she was in pain that could not be managed even until sunrise. She looked up at me, unable to move, with eyes that seemed to ask me to end this. My husband and I wrapped her in a blanket and took her to the clinic. There, in my arms, she was released from her pain.

Mindy died two years ago. My husband and I have since moved to a new home. And yet, there are still times when I find myself half expecting to see her climbing up on the sofa next to me to be petted.

I don’t like cats, but I did love Mindy. And I miss her.
I Should Have Known
Aaron Goldberg

About three years ago, after graduating from M.I.T. with a Ph.D. in electrical engineering and spending most of his career in the defense industry developing secure voice and radar systems, Aaron joined BOLLI “to try something different.” Writing has been exactly that!

The discomfort on my right side, just below my belt, wasn’t so bad. That’s what I kept telling myself. After all, a similar discomfort on my left side had plagued me for years and, after numerous tests, was still undiagnosed. I was told it was unlikely to be serious since it had been there so long. But this one, which I’d had for maybe two weeks, seemed a little different, and after Thursday’s yoga sort of made it worse, I made a doctor’s appointment for the following day. After examining me, the doctor said he would like a CAT scan and left to arrange it. I did not hear all his conversation, but I did catch something about 3 pm. Since it was Friday, I figured it was for some time the following week, but no, the doctor said, I was lucky. They had an opening at a hospital facility a couple of miles away, and if I hurried, I could have it done now. I had never received such service before. I should have known.

Off I drove, and they took me on time. After the scan, the technician asked, “Did the doctor tell you to wait for the preliminary results?” I had heard no such request from the doctor. And this was different, very different. I should have known.

So, I made my way to the waiting room, and before I could even sit down, out came a radiologist who said, “You have a perforated appendix, and we have called an ambulance to take you to BIDMC’s emergency room downtown.”

“It can’t be that much of an emergency,” said I. “I’ve had this discomfort for two weeks, and I need to take my car home—tell the ambulance to meet me there.”

“We can’t do that,” was the automatic response. Of course, this just shows how rapidly one can become a patient, where others have the say. As they wheeled me out, my neighbor and his wife came in, retrieved my key fob from the receptionist, and drove my car home. I went to the emergency room in the back of a wailing ambulance. Upon arrival, I was given a bed in a walkway and then ignored. I would have been amused at all the goings on, but as a patient, I now had no control over anything.

Eventually, an attractive young woman with both MD and HMS embroidered on her lab coat, asked if she could take my history. I realized that this could be a teaching moment, and as I had nothing better to do, I eagerly consented. A half hour later, she was gone—with my medical history, which, of course, was already in the hospital’s files from the doctor’s office.

Then came two bright-eyed, serious looking young men, again with MD and HMS on their coats, to tell me of their plans. I was going to have a colonoscopy, and if that were to be normal, then surgeons would try to remove all contaminants from my insides as well as my appendix. Hopefully, antibiotics would work their magic to clear up anything they missed.

“And why the colonoscopy?” I asked.

“Well, we are wondering why your appendix perforated, and with a colonoscopy, we can see how it is attached to the intestines. Besides, it has been five years since your last one.”

“What might cause the perforation there?” asked I, and the reluctant answer was…cancer. So, this is how it ends, I thought. Just kill me now. I should have known.

About a half hour later, an older doctor showed up, saying that these perforated appendixes with localized infections as seen on the CAT scan often respond to intravenous antibiotics and they were going to
see how I did on them before trying anything else. If I got better, the appendix would heal and the infection would disappear, but there was still a 25% chance that it could happen again. I was shipped off to a hospital room where I was the healthy one.

Two days later, they declared me recovered enough to go home with oral antibiotics. I was escorted to the lobby, told they were short staffed, and after I called a taxi, my escort left. I was strangely alone, but in control again. Twenty minutes later, I was driven home.

A month later, I had a colonoscopy at BIDMC in Needham, and then, one month after that, had my appendix removed via laparoscopy since, if it perforated again, I might not be so lucky.

So what did I learn? Well, always carry a phone with you.

And I should have known.

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Getting to Know Kattoum
Elaine Pitochelli

During her years in higher education, Elaine wrote extensively for her degrees in clinical social work and education, and she was always a dedicated letter writer. More recently, she has turned to writing in an effort to dig deeper into Self. She knew she had to start with her grandmother Kattoum, the mainstay of her life.

When you have, in your history, a mother dead by her own hand (although it wasn’t intentional), a stepmother who doesn’t want you, and a father who doesn’t protest because he has six other children who need a mother, how do you make sense of your life? How do you come to know who you are, where you are going, and how to survive, untainted, by all that came before you even took your first steps?

No one seems to have asked her. She probably never asked herself.

It Didn’t Start with You, written by Mark Wolynn in 2016, was not on Kattoum’s reading list 100 years ago. If it had been, she might have given some thought to those questions. Wolynn’s book focuses on epigenetics, the study of heritable changes in gene function, and how our response to traumatic experiences can actually be passed on to future generations. This emotional inheritance, he says, is “hidden in everything from our gene expression to everyday language usage and plays a far greater role in our health and behavioral characteristics than ever previously imagined.”

I can’t imagine that separation from her country, her loved ones, her life. But I can imagine how alone, frightened, and abandoned she must have felt. I believe I know how her mother’s death affected her. Passed down like a virulent disease, that tragedy affected her marriage, her parenting, and her relationship with her grandchildren. I know how loss and its consequences reverberate down through the generations, non-stop, unless someone opens the wounds and lets the pus out so that healing can begin. Wolynn’s words might have given
Getting to Know Kattoum
Continued

her some insight, understanding, and perhaps even a resolve to heal.
Maybe.

There was so much below the surface of her being, the roots likely
extending into the caverns of her soul, held down by boulders of loss
and sorrow too deeply entrenched to be dug out with a mere shovel.
The only way to survive, it seems, was to construct an iron will fas-
tened together with girders of steel and fashioned in an erect, strong
body with a long, purposeful stride that put anyone trying to keep
abreast with her to shame.

But it wasn’t always like that.

Early in Kattoum’s life, she ran and played with her brothers on a san-
dy beach by the sea where she lived. From the shore, she looked up
at the mountains where the ruins of an ancient Roman city had been
found, and she dreamed about what life might have been like there.
In their small town, where her father was mayor, daughters were kept
under tight rein, as was the custom in that era and culture. Until all
that changed. Until she was told she was being sent to join an older
sister who lived in another country, America.

There was no one to accompany 14-year old Kattoum on her voyage
across the ocean from Ramilah, Lebanon to Ellis Island where an
officer who couldn’t pronounce her birth name looked at her and said,
“You have rosy cheeks. We will call you Rosie.” At least, she still
had the tattoo on her right hand that she had been given when she was
just a little girl.

Finally, she arrived in Lawrence, Massachusetts where concrete took
the place of her airy, open, and mountain-scented home. Peddlers hawked, cars spewed smelly exhaust, drunks reeled
from nearby taverns. All of it replaced the verdant olive, almond, and
fruit trees left so far behind.

And yet, in Lawrence, she reclaimed some of the life she had lived
and loved for her first fourteen years. Eventually, stands laden with
fruit and vegetables graced the harsh cement sidewalk in front of her
little grocery store, bringing it color and softening its hardness. In
the yard behind, she would wring the necks of chickens to sell, start
orange and lemon trees from seeds, and grow hollyhocks.

Widowed at age twenty, Kattoum was left with three young children
to raise. She never remarried.

I picture my grandmother Kattoum sitting next to the stove in the back
of her store. Dressed in her usual cotton dress and apron, she rests her
hands on her knees as what may be Syrian bread crisps on the stove.
Her once natural red hair, always pulled into a bun at the back of her
head, is now dyed with henna. Her one vanity.

No, I can’t imagine being separated from my country, family, friends,
and life—and at only fourteen. The pain, fear, and loneliness passed
down through the generations left her mostly silent, her body lan-
guage that of a woman who would reveal neither her secrets nor her
innermost thoughts, dreams, desires.

From reading Mark Wolynn and from knowing my grandmother,
Kattoum Tabith Elias, I have learned how loss and its consequences
can sweep through generations, non-stop, until someone finally opens
the wounds to let the healing begin. With such a legacy, how do you
come to know who you are?

I wish that I had asked her.
One Flight Upstairs
Marty Kafka

Parental legacies carry over the generations in many ways. Here is one way my father continues to positively affect my every day.

It started about four weeks ago, a dull ache in my lower jaw. But this is not just a routine toothache being deftly managed at Newton Dental Associates. There is an emotional ache here too, a plaintive, longing ache. This tooth, like so many others, had been previously repaired, lovingly, by another dentist, my father.

Not only were my mother, brother, and I his patients, but I worked occasionally for Dad in his small, one-flight-upstairs corner office on Church Avenue in Brooklyn, across from the BMT subway station. That same train line stopped at the one-flight-upstairs Kings Highway stop, within walking distance of our home on East 27th Street.

I shared my service with Mom, both of us helping Dad with phone appointment scheduling and developing patient x-rays. We were his family dental assistants in the days before group practices, insurance claims, and dental implants.

I remember the pungent smells of x-ray film developer and fixer solutions in the office’s closet-sized darkroom, the sweet smell of tincture of benzoin that he swabbed as an oral disinfectant, the shrieking and grinding squeals from a dental drill working away on cavities, and the many white plaster casts with missing teeth.

I still recall the chocolaty smell of Mallomar cookies Dad savored quickly, eyes closed, when he was supposed to take his lunch break,

Dad loved being his own boss. He loved having a captive audience for exchanging jokes, usually bawdy ones. He loved caring for families as they grew up over the course of forty years of visits to his busy dental den. And he loved being able to choose his vacation times so he and Mom could plan exotic trips. His business ran on his terms, and Mom called him “the King.”

Dad’s hope was that, as his first-born child, I too would relish the autonomy of self-employment, a stable recession-resistant income, and the craft, skills, and science of dentistry. He loved his work, so why wouldn’t I?

At his insistence, I tried dental school, only to find that indentured service didn’t fit my spirit. After I became a psychiatrist, I would joke with him that I had gone from ‘dental to mental,’” but that was little consolation for my dad’s losing his high hopes for a father-to-son passing of the baton.

Dad, even though you have been gone for nearly twenty-five years now, your legacy lives on in my oral cavity. My Newton dentist told me I still have four mercury-amalgam fillings in my molars, quietly celebrating fifty years of your fine craftsmanship. Your fillings are my oral sentinels, still firmly seated in my mouth, standing guard, listening to my breathing, my snoring, my own bawdy jokes and puns, so much like yours. Your teeth, with your fillings, bear witness to foods you loved, especially the charcoal-grilled chicken you nursed on our back-porch grill.

Maybe now, during quiet times, you smile as you listen in on my thoughts. After all, my mental is only one flight upstairs from your dental.
Cows at the Tavern
Helaine Golann

After growing up on a farm in New Jersey where the family’s cows had a tendency to wander, Helaine came to New England for graduate school and stayed to become a psychologist. She continues to maintain a small private practice, teaches yoga, and loves spending time with her family and animals, traveling, hiking, swimming, reading, and writing.

When I was growing up on a small family farm in the 1950’s, our chickens never wandered far, and our pigs seemed contented in their pens. But to our cows, the neighbors’ pastures always looked greener. They broke through their fences and wandered away so often that my older brother Butch took to writing stories about travels he imagined them taking. His stories were like magic to me. In his most terrifying tale, Butch had our poor cows trapped on a battlefield with bombs exploding all around them. “Please bring them home,” I begged. “Don’t they need milking? Aren’t their bags hurting?” Butch rolled his eyes but began writing. What a relief when he used my idea, having Nadine, our nervous little Jersey, whine that her bag was full to bursting and having Juno, our herd’s fearless leader, scold her but agree to bring them home. I imagined Juno rolling her eyes just as Butch had at my suggestion.

In real life, our cows never wandered that far or that dangerously. Ours was the only working farm on a road that had once been lined with farms, so our neighbors seemed unconcerned when finding our cows contentedly munching in their fields. One neighbor said he’d delayed calling because his fields needed trimming, so my father offered to mow and take the hay for our loft. When most of our neighbors made similar arrangements, we probably became a bit careless in our mending of fences, and our cows took to wandering farther and farther. When the cows found their way to the center of town, their adventure there rivaled any that we’d imagined for them.

The center of Meyersville, New Jersey boasted only four public buildings: the Presbyterian Church, Archie’s Resale Shop where Butch and I exchanged our ice skates for larger ones each year, Sam and Ida’s tiny grocery store, and the Meyersville Inn, which was actually quite well known. On summer afternoons, regular customers from New York City gravitated to picnic at the tables arranged in a grove behind the building.

Our cows were so fascinated by the picnic festivities, they arranged themselves in a neat half circle around the edge of the grove where they could study the city dwellers with friendly intensity. Their stares frightened the picnickers, though, who took them to be dangerous bulls. Many city people believe that only bulls have horns, and very few of our cows had been dehorned. And these city dwellers either failed to notice the cows’ large bags with teats bouncing beneath their bellies, or if they did, perhaps thought they were hermaphrodites or seriously deformed males.

One afternoon, we received a furious call from the tavern: “I’m told the #$%@$ animals frightening our customers are yours! Come fetch them immediately, or we can’t take responsibility for what happens!” Frightened that some harm might come to our beloved cows, all four of us jumped into the truck and rushed to the tavern. We found the cows curiously stretching their necks over and through the flimsy split rail fence surrounding the grove, perhaps hoping to join the picnic.

It was difficult for us to see anything scary in our cows’ behavior, but the frightened picnickers had either fled into the tavern or were sitting frozen in place for fear that any movement might incite the “bulls” to violence. Food and dishes littered the grass around one table where a man had snatched off the tablecloth out of concern that the “bulls” would become enraged by the small red squares in its checkered pattern. He’d bunched it onto the bench and was sitting on top of it, concealing it from the cows with his ample buttocks. With trembling hands, a young woman wrapped her red thermos in her white sweater...
and nervously eyed Juno, our large brindle Guernsey, who appeared to
be studying her with unusual intensity.

When Daddy began to shake with laughter, the rest of us tugged at
him anxiously, trying to get him to stop and somehow make it all
better. No success. Mother was close to tears, but whether it was
concern for our cows, embarrassment at Daddy’s laughter, or distress
over the contrast between our ratty, strappy overalls and the city peo-
ple’s finery, we didn’t know. Butch and I were torn between whether
to keep tugging at our father or to comfort our mother. Finally, Daddy
began to gain control, only to be set off again by an angry man de-
scribing our cows as “vicious beasts.”

I decided to go lean against Susie, my favorite, who began licking
my face and hair with her huge sandpaper tongue as I pet her, making
me giggle. I like to think I was trying to demonstrate how sweet and
harmless our cows were, but I was probably just showing off, and
in any case, it had the opposite effect. “Oh my God!” screamed the
young woman, “that bull is eating a child!”

At that, Daddy finally called, “Cows,” and began walking slowly
toward our farm, with the cows immediately re-arranging themselves
to follow. It took some jockeying to allow Juno, the leader, to go first.
Blossom, second in command, fell into step behind her, and so on
down the line until they all gradually formed a single file that reflected
their relative status in the herd. They followed Daddy the half mile or
so home without once breaking rank.

I followed behind as the rear guard, my arm stretched over the side of
our youngest heifer to remind her to resist stopping at each tempting
clump of clover beside the road.
“There was a time when I was drawn to painting the real thing—nature, sports cars, and people. I developed some skills with watercolor but grew tired of the need for fine details. I shifted first toward surrealism and then to abstract art. I went to a teacher who started me on a path to wet-in-wet abstractions, and taught me the ‘rules,’ the most important of which is simply: Don’t worry about people who don’t like abstract art!”
A retired architect, Caroline has been a member of BOLLI since 2016. She has always loved to draw, and, a few years ago, she decided to try her hand at painting. “In London, our walk to the Tube frequently took us past this archway where the brick was a drab brown, the stucco white. I saw an opportunity to warm things up a bit with a more Mediterranean palette.”

Nancy started painting 30 years ago. While watercolor is her primary medium, she also paints in oil. She prefers to work “en plein air” rather than in the studio. She says that being outside, on location, increases her creative juices and helps her to maintain a spontaneous approach to her work. “Who Wants Ice Cream?” was exhibited during Illuminations Weekend in Rockport, MA, where it won a third place ribbon.
After teaching English and creative writing at the secondary level for many years, Miriam moved to teaching at the Boston University School of Education. She did not start painting until she was around age 50.

Working in both oil and pastels, Miriam does primarily landscape and still life painting, working to capture the mood and beauty of all that surrounds us.

*She saw this Blue-Footed Booby on a trip to the Galapagos.*

Gloria exhibited this piece in both her fifty-painting one-woman show, “Holocaust Remembrance,” and at the Montserrat Gallery in New York City. As a member of the National Association of Women Artists, Inc., she had a retrospective at the Sullivan Country Museum in New York where, before moving to Massachusetts, she served as president of the Sullivan County NOW chapter and as a family court mediator. She earned an MFA degree, published a book of poetry, and received awards for her paintings.
Since retiring from the Boston Public Schools where she was a visual arts teacher, Ellen has found more time to pursue her own art. She has worked in several media, including collage and watercolors, but she has consistently enjoyed exploring the various types of monotype print-making, including linocut printing. In the last year, she has had several pieces exhibited in shows sponsored by the Monotype Guild of New England, of which she is a member. She often focuses on motifs from nature. “Floating,” a combination monotype with collage, reflects this theme.
I Give This Poem to You
Charlie Marz

I give this poem to you instead of white
Roses and crimson alstroemeria.
It keeps without water, without light;
A single leaf unbound, a slender reed.

I give this poem to you instead of cash
Mere token of the value of my heart;
It will not keep you warm, or meet your need,
A fragile sleeve unrolled, a line of art.

I give this poem to you instead of wine
Or whiskey drops or London or a feast.
Keep it for a day when we’ve lost time
And hunger for a word, a song, a rhyme.

I give this poem to you to see, to wear,
To drink, to read. It is our voice I share.

Fickle Spring
Karen Wagner

Surprise warm days
coax the trees
to bud early, spoil the taste
of the sap, leave my soul
with the icy core
of winter, resistant
to the melt.
My words stay
hardened through
the next season,
my poetry brittle.
I wait, wait
for fickle spring
to settle, surrender
to the spirited words
of summer.

Charlie retired in 2013 from The Wayland Group, premier consultants in non-profit planning and development. Prior to that, he was the Director of Development and Long-Range Planning at the American Repertory Theatre, Assistant Director of the DeCordova Museum, Assistant Dean of the College at Brandeis, and Executive Director of the Boston Shakespeare Company. He also wrote “The Island of Anyplace,” a play introducing children to live theatre produced by the A.R.T. for twenty years.

Dr. Wagner began writing poetry in earnest after a rewarding career in high tech and is now a reviewed, published poet many times over. She enjoys wordsmithing and expressing concepts beyond the realm of logic.
War Story
Peter Schmidt

Much time has gone by since my wanting to meet the pilot and crew that once bombed our house, RAF in November of year forty-three.

Insignificant we and nothing nearby to merit destruction, just a plain open field in a small sleepy village.

First dropped from on high fell a seeding of flares like hexagonal candles but no celebration. We hid in the cellar of our little house; then a whistling grew louder until it struck home.

They may have been dumping, getting rid of munitions before turning back, or maybe they practiced at hitting small targets in the darkness of night. Over enemy land would one ever think that a mother and child could be cowering below?

But for the impact in a room to our side we would have been dressed in phosphorus flames.

It’s unlikely we’ll meet to trade our war stories--an incendiary past with success for us all: You hit your target, and we stayed alive.

Peter experienced wartime Germany as a child and emigrated to the U.S. in 1949. His professional careers have been in physics and machine vision, but he also developed a fascination for literary forms such as short stories and poetry. Retirement presented him with time for both reflecting and exploring the mysteries of the written word.

The Daffodils, Once More
Ruth Kramer Baden

Each winter’s ebb I burrow from my lair hungry to see if spring has left her early hieroglyphs. This year I go more slowly on the path that bracelets the sun-struck pond. My cane taps carefully between dead branches winter has wrenched from unsheathed trees. My two swans have returned. Once more these eternal lovers glide silently, regally wrapped in their soft white robes.

Are my eyes still true?
Yes, there, where the dun grass huddles close to the ground: a circlet of emerald stems pierces the pallid lawn. Their tips are tumescent with new life.

As I walk I see other halos of spring’s beginnings--the daffodils, once more. Not rapture, but a peace like spring sunlight bathes my core. I rest on a stone bench before I can rise to complete my cycle once more.

Ruth says that she began writing poetry when she was in high school in Brooklyn where she was inspired by her English teachers, continued in college, and had a long hiatus in which she raised a family and worked as a lawyer--until writing poetry became a necessity.
The Weavers
Ruth Kramer Baden

Looms and spindles
needles and pins.
When we were young girls
with smooth-veined hands
and opal breasts
we could spin straw into gold
to lay at the feet of our princes
whose Yes we coveted
above all caresses.

When we were matrons
with bands of gold
on our slender fingers
and silent lips
we wove our bones
into daughters and sons
and these our radiant treasures we laid
before our lords who rode the seas
while we good women good wives
did weave by day and unravel by night
and forgot the sounds of our names.

When we were grandams
with sapient hands
and patient breasts
we looped our threads
into silken skeins
of granddaughters and grandsons
then on the warp of time
and the weft of when
we wove the song of our own names.
Yes.
Looms and spindles
needles and pins.

Ruth’s book, “East of the Moon,” was awarded with a place on the Massachusetts Book Award’s 2011 list of “Must Read” works. She is currently compiling a new book focused on women and aging.
**Counter-pull**

It’s about a counter-pull
Not just what you do or don’t
But what resists you, pushes
Back, carries the work forward
Or obstructs it, changes
The result.

In watercolor painting
Flow of color wet-on-wet
Makes accident a part of
The design, its craft and skill.
We are not alone; we work
In tandem.

So, in this garden the plan
Can never be just mine
Things will grow in their own time
Cottoneaster spreads wide
While the irises retreat
Overcome.

We who wait this illness out
Know that cells and enzymes
Wage their wars by their own clock
Our pills, all our treatments
Small moves in a larger scheme
Divine, or not.

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**Coherence**

Trying to recover
A name, a place, a dream.
I sink into a spongy vacancy.
Who was that woman in Sophie’s Choice?
What is the name of that plant
That is overtaking our garden?
A bewildered traveler,
Looking for missing road signs.
What street are we on?
Cross streets are marked,
But where are we now?
Is this the way we came in?
Is the highway up ahead?
On the muddy bank of memory,
In the silt of an aging mind,
I flail, I gasp for air
Trying, trying to connect.

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*Marjorie has been at BOLLI for nine years, taking classes, teaching classes, serving on committees. Writing has, all the while, helped to frame and deepen experience for her.*
Sometimes a Wall is Just a Wall
Charlie Marz

Sometimes a wall is just a wall, with lime
And rough-cast, in need of mending, though not
Vile or unloved or built to keep apart
Orchards or lovers or neighbors or friends,
But simply built for the love of cold stone.

Stone queried and silent, well balanced with
Time that settles grey and misshapen slabs,
Hard angles and empty spaces piled high,
Slowly encircling graves and fields and lawns,
Insistent though fractured and imperfect.

Imperfect to the touch though perfection
To those who walk along its sturdy length
Alone or holding a hand for balance,
Not seeking meaning beyond the cold stones,
Beyond the path going nowhere sometimes.

Charlie is a graduate of Stanford University and holds a Ph.D. in English and American Literature from Brandeis. He currently serves on the Board of Advisors of the Huntington Theatre Company and the Board of Directors of the Coolidge Corner Theatre. Charlie and his partner, Deedee Philips, live in Waban.
Plants Against Window
Dick Hanelin

For 38 years, Dick worked as an elementary school teacher in New York City and in Newton, often incorporating visual and performing art in his classes. He has had a long-standing interest in photography. At BOLLI, taking classes with Arthur Sharenow and participating in the Photography Club have revitalized and further refined his vision. At this point, his focus and passion is finding beauty in the ordinary.

Lotus Flower on Route #9
Mel Markowitz

A retired radiologist, Mel “developed” an interest in photography as a child in his father’s darkroom. Over the years, he learned to process and print his own black and white film as well as color images for both prints and slides. Digital imaging has allowed him to explore and enjoy all aspects of photography. “Lotus Flower along Route 9” was taken with a telephoto lens from the rim of a detention basin in a parking lot in Framingham. These beautiful flowers bloom at the end of June every year. They are easy to miss if not looking specifically for them.
Coming from a background in architectural design, Carol has gravitated toward photographing architectural components and linear objects. But her deep interest in the world that surrounds us leads her to photographing reflections and elements of nature as well. She tries to capture all of her subjects in ways that introduce the viewer to different sorts of perspectives.

Joanne has spent her entire career in science and technology, leaving little time for hobbies--until she was given a point-and-shoot camera, that is. The result was a new passion. While she enjoys doing her own photography and trying to improve her skills, she also relishes coordinating the BOLLI Photography Group’s activities.

Because Mother Nature is so beautiful, Joanne says, she loves to photograph her at every phase of life--from birth to death and from the miniscule to the gigantic. Fall, with its variegated colors, is her favorite time of year. This photo was taken in November of 2018 after a significant rainfall.
Orange Swirl
Joanne Fortunato

An orange? An art form? Both? Endless possibilities lie in the eye of the beholder. Joanne likes to look at common objects and photograph them in different ways. In order to achieve this unique image, she placed an orange on a contrasting color background and covered it with a swirled glass bowl. This kind of simple juxtaposition can sometimes bring about amazing transformations.

Droplet
Helen Abrams

Before retiring from a career in healthcare administration, Helen’s passions were walking in nature, looking at birds, leading tours at Mount Auburn Cemetery, and traveling with her partner Leo and good friends—taking photographs all along the way. Joining BOLLI opened up a world of study—Shakespeare, Joyce, Melville, and Proust among others—that she says has deepened and enriched her life. She finds the camaraderie of BOLLI’s Photography Group to be a great addition as well.

“My granddaughter was posing for me when she came up with the idea of pouring water on the leaves of a plant and taking pictures of the drops. ‘Droplet’ is one of the outcomes.”
Kudo Antelope, Botswana
Dennis Greene

My family and I were fortunate to come upon this Greater Kudu during our safari trip to Botswana in 2018. I would not describe the photo as “a magnificent picture of an African antelope,” but, rather, as “a picture of a magnificent African antelope.”

Early Morning Ducks
Sandy Miller-Jacobs

This vacation led three generations of cousins sporting cameras to Yellowstone National Park. A park guide suggested an early morning opportunity to see the sunrise, view the wildlife, and miss the crowds. When we did, arriving at 4:00 in the morning, we were awed by the sky’s colors and the sheer beauty of the park. These ducks were just waiting for my camera to capture the scene!

Sandy is an active member of the BOLLI Photography Group, serves as a Study Group Leader and as facilitator of the Aging with Resilience and Enthusiasm Special Interest Group.
Fred has enjoyed sports, family, and travel photography from early on—lasting through college, the Navy, Harvard Business School, and career. He says that the behavioral aspects of the investment profession inspired him to study the behavior of his photographic subjects just as closely as he looks for essential expressions and poses.

For Fred, wildlife has become more than a passion—it has become a source of education and endless challenge. Observing lions in Africa and searching the Rockies for moose to study has led to gratifying photographs.
Mel says that “Great Egret with a Large Fish” was taken on Sanibel Island in Florida where there had been a fish kill and the birds were feasting on the dead fish floating on the water’s surface. “A telephoto lens allowed me to get close to the action, and a fast shutter speed froze the water droplets as the fish was plucked from the water.”

“I was inspired,” Helen says, “by the work of Henry Horenstein whose exhibit of animals and fish photographed in zoos and aquariums was displayed at Harvard’s Museum of Natural History.”
Oh, boy, is she mad. I don’t get it. How come I’ve been sent to my room for, she says, eternity? How can you deal with a mother like that? It isn’t as if we cooked him. I think she’s over-reacting. A lot.

Well, maybe it was dumb to put Duke in the oven, but, really, we were scared, and besides, it was Ned’s idea. Mostly.

Anyway, I was really, really scared. We were all down at the pond by the convent. We can play there when the convent girls have gone for the day. And the ice was frozen, and there was going to be a good hockey game, and even though I am only in fifth, the older kids let me play because I’m pretty good. Well, the ice was good, and we were having a great old time, and Duke followed me out on the ice because he loves me more than he loves Ned, and then, there was this cracking sound, and, oops, he was gone. Into the pond through the ice.

I got so scared. I couldn’t do anything. I thought he would drown and be dead, and he is my dog, and he sleeps in my room when Mom doesn’t know, and I couldn’t help, and Ned and his friend Irish kind of crept out to the edge and stuck their hockey sticks into the hole and got him under the front legs, and I was almost crying, and then they pulled him out, and he was freezing and shivering, and Ned took off his jacket and wrapped him up, and we took off our skates, and we ran home. Mom hadn’t gotten home from work yet, and Ned had this idea that we didn’t want Duke to get pneumonia or anything—he was still shivering a lot—so Ned turned on the oven. I am not allowed to go near the stove yet, and Ned had this idea that we didn’t want Duke to get pneumonia or anything—he was still shivering a lot—so Ned turned on the oven. I am not allowed to go near the stove yet. And he waited until it said 300 degrees, and then he turned it off and took out the racks and wrapped Duke in more towels and popped him in just to warm him up. We didn’t cook him!
We didn’t close the door or anything, and by this time, Duke was having fun. He started wagging his tail, and you could hear it thumping in the oven, and we were feeling better, and Mom came home and saw the dog in the oven and started screaming and hollering and crying, and what were we doing cooking the dog, and she practically went crazy and took Duke out of the oven and sent Ned and me to our rooms for eternity, and I was crying, and Ned had that silent look on his face that I hate, and now, here I am with no supper, and Duke is scratching at my door, and I can hear Mom in the kitchen slamming things and yelling this is too hard, and I cannot do this by myself anymore, and I don’t know what she means because Duke is fine, and we didn’t cook him, and he probably won’t get pneumonia, and we didn’t drown.

Duke
Continued

“Why are you late?” my sister will ask when I finally show up at the family reunion. An island off the coast of Massachusetts is not easy to reach in the middle of July, but I hadn’t seen my cousins since Alice’s funeral, and I knew I should go. “Get a ferry reservation,” my sister advised, “and be on time. If you miss your boat, you will end up waiting for hours...or even days.”

I got a reservation for late afternoon, studied the map to find a back country route, filled the car with gas, and left early in the morning. In a town with tall shady oaks and handsome old houses, I stopped at a coffee shop across from the green. After all, I had plenty of time. The shop was bright and cheerful with yellow walls, tin ceiling, flowers on the tables, and soft pillows on the chairs. A place Alice would have liked. On my way out, I saw a flyer by the door: Saturday Flea Market and Antiques Fair. People were already gathering around booths and tables across the street. Why not take a look?

Alice loved flea markets. She always made me go with her to search for treasures. At first, I resisted. I don’t like shopping, and I didn’t expect to find treasure, but roaming among tables loaded with old china and picture frames on a summer morning was better than pushing through crowds in a shopping mall. I found that I liked looking at old things. You never know what you will find that sparks memory. Once, I saw my mother’s kitchen bowls and a drop-leaf table like the one in my grandparents’ kitchen. There was the exact same food mill Alice used to make applesauce.

The sun rose high in the sky as I went up and down the rows of tables, past stacks of ancient *Life* magazines, tablecloths, and quilts. I found
books with worn but elegant covers, their fragile pages yellow with age. Some had inscriptions written in flowing handwriting: *For William from Father, January 18th, 1900.* There were rows of glass bottles in cloudy shades of green or blue. China plates, teapots, fishing poles, hunting boots, scissors, keys, and carpenters’ planes. All the bits and pieces of people’s daily lives. The people, long gone, their things left behind.

I was looking at a set of pocket watches, all stopped at different times, when I glanced up and saw Alice standing at a table in the next row with her back to me. She had on the blue denim skirt and floppy straw hat she always wore in summer. I pushed through a clump of shoppers to get closer, but then, she was gone. In her place was a woman selling honey. There was someone in a straw hat by the quilt table, but when I got there, I found a girl in red shorts buying a patchwork pillow. I hurried up and down among the tables, hoping for another glimpse of the familiar shape. The crowd was thinning out, and I had a boat to catch. I bought a bunch of zinnias. Alice used to say they were the most cheerful flowers in a garden, always bright and full of color. Then I hurried back to my car.

I drove carefully, squinting against the lowering sun, but traffic was heavy, inching along. Flashing blue lights ahead. A siren’s whine in the distance. Traffic came to a complete stop and then crept forward again. At last, I was able to move, to reach the last hill, round the bend, roll on to the loading dock…and stop. Hands still clutching the wheel, passenger ticket clenched in my teeth, I watched the ferry pull away from the shore. The zinnias lay on the seat beside me, their bright faces beginning to droop.

When my sister asks why I am late, I’ll just say time got away from me.

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Lost in the Past

*Continued*

At This Time of Year: Two Voices

Betsy Campbell

*At first, Betsy says, she isn’t sure where a story is going. She has to keep writing to find out.*

Canned Christmas music. Plastic wreaths. Cardboard Santas. The long line at the check-out counter, but Martha was almost up to the register. She rested her handbag on the shopping basket and stood patiently, coat unzipped to reveal the glittery snowman gracing the front of her Christmas sweater. “It’s the season,” she had said to herself when she got dressed that morning. “It’s the season to be jolly.”

Waiting in line ahead of her was a young woman with two small kids in tow. Martha watched her sigh with impatience. Hair in a sloppy ponytail. No makeup. Some people just don’t care how they look thought Martha. The little girl was exploring the candy display while a younger boy, leaning over the side of the shopping cart, stretched an eager hand out toward the treats. The mother pushed her cart forward and spoke sharply to the child. “Put that candy back this minute.” And she handed her credit card to the clerk.

“But I have my dollar. You said we’d get lollipops.”

“Not now. We don’t have time. You better not lose that dollar!”

The boy started to cry.

“Stop that!” When she jerked the cart away from the candy rack, the boy’s cries rose louder.

“Stop it right now!” Her voice was like an angry slap.

Martha couldn’t stop herself. “He’s only a little boy,” she said. “It’s not his fault. You shouldn’t speak to him like that.”
The line at the check-out was long. “This place is a zoo,” thought Eric. He stood near a white-haired woman whose coat hung open to expose a garish snowman grinning across the front of her bright red sweater. “Good God. The things people wear at this time of year. That one could win first prize at an ugliest holiday sweater contest.”

Up by the register, a young woman was trying to keep two little kids out of the candy display. Her blond hair was pulled up in a careless pony tail, but even without make up, she wasn’t bad looking. The kids were whining about candy, and the mother was trying to quiet them, pay, and get out of the store.

Then the old granny in the ugly sweater started picking on her for the way she was treating her kids. Nosy old woman. Should have kept out of it. For all she knew, the woman’s husband could have just left her, or her mother could be dying of cancer. Anyway, she’s just trying to get her whiny brats out of the store. Told the old bag to mind her own business. She got that right!

And she wasn’t bad looking either.
sharpshooter. He was selected to serve in the Polner Forest, the forest where he had ridden on that memorable day with Libka.

As he waited his turn to shoot, he saw Rav S and his wife fall into the death pit and then saw Libka’s red curls. Looking into her eyes, his silent message said that he would shoot her in the shoulder, and she should fall. Pretend to be dead. Escape.

In 2017, now a widow, Libka, her children, and grandchildren live in Tel Aviv where she volunteers at Yad Vashem Museum greeting visitors as they sign the guestbook.

Two siblings from Poland told Libka that their grandfather from Vilnius always told them they must go to Israel to apologize for him for everything that happened during the war. He had worked for a Jewish family and liked the older daughter with red curls very much. “She was spirited,” he said.

“Your last name is Žukauskas? And your grandfather is Darius? He is alive?”

“Yes,” they said.

Libka asked them to come back at the end of their visit to pick up a note.

“Dear Darius. Thank you for my life. I had a husband, children, and now grandchildren. Did you have a good life? Your grandchildren are lovely. I still have nightmares of the forest. You are there with apples and bodies. Do you dream of me with panic and sweat? We were both punished. Libka.”

_In Lithuanian, “zukas,” a shortened form of Žukauskas, means “white rabbit.”_
My high school years were spent at The Cambridge School of Weston where I majored in baseball. My plan to be a major league pitcher somehow didn’t work out, so I went to Brandeis where I gained a wonderful education and met my future wife Judy. I still held out hopes that the Red Sox would grab me off the Brandeis field, but since that didn’t happen, I went to Harvard Law School. Studying law was interesting, but practicing law was less so. Judy and I bought camps Kenwood and Evergreen in New Hampshire and spent the next 44 summers at camp directors. The Red Sox still didn’t want me, so I bought a camera...and that has been my game ever since.

Carole joined BOLLI in the spring of 2001 after careers in elementary school teaching and financial management. Photography soon became a major interest. She says that “For the most part, I take photos of the beauty in nature and the beauty and joy of my family members.”
Carol finds that smartphone technology provides not only the luxuries of spontaneity and convenience but also those which make creative construction such as this possible.

“Looking Up in Atlanta” was shot in the modern lobby of the historic Georgian Terrace Hotel. The unusual design and geometry called for a wide-angle lens capable of capturing both the lines and curves.
Since joining BOLLI in September of 2018, Susan has taken photography courses given by Mitch Fischman and Arthur Sharenow and has been an active member of the Photography Group. She says that, as a result, she has definitely improved her digital photography skills and that many of her pictures are on Instagram. When it comes to shooting images, her passions are birds and street scenes—like these.

Newbury Street in Boston

Here, Susan has succeeded in capturing unique images of moments in which people simply move through life on the busy streets of both Provincetown and Boston.
A retired aeronautical engineer with degrees from Penn State and RPI, Juri has been involved with photography since high school. In film days, he sported a Pentax SLR with three lenses, along with a simple point-and-shoot camera. When digital cameras came of age, he chose a pocket model with a movable viewing screen over the SLR which means he always has a camera on him when opportune images present themselves. He had not planned to photograph the Chihuly exhibit at the Phipps Conservatory in Pittsburgh, but when he saw this sculpture “planted” among the live greenery, he was ready to capture it with his Canon PowerShot A620.

After leaving a beloved Yashika camera on a train in France in the 70s and shooting the rest of the trip with an Instamatic, Nancy learned to be resourceful and depend only on her eyes to tell stories with her photos. More recently, she has turned to the iPhone, various apps, and teaching photography.

Here, she was touched by the contrast between the man on the bench with seemingly no place to go and the others walking quickly on their way to somewhere.
“I was struck,” Barbara says, “by the gentle face of this Ugandan craftsmen selling her wares on the Waltham Common at the height of summer.”
Happiness in Medellin
Marty Kafka

“This mother and child stared at Karen and me as we passed by them in a poor section of Medellin, Colombia. I asked permission to photograph them, and she proudly gave her consent.”

Mykonos Fisherman
Fred Kobrick

Fred says that, when he watches people in their daily routines, he tends to see a great deal about their lives and natures reflected in their faces. So it was when observing this Greek fisherman eating his lunch by his boat in Mykonos.
Commitment
Jennifer Coplon

Jennifer, a practicing clinical social worker, is on her third affiliation with Brandeis—she has a Ph.D. in social policy from the Heller School and was a Visiting Scholar at the Women’s Studies Research Center before becoming a BOLLI member.

Harriet Jackson-Lyons, 90 Years Old

Three years ago, Jennifer created a storytelling and photography project with KINnections, a Boston-based program serving grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Little did she realize then what it would do for the grandparents to see their stories and photographs in public galleries—they feel empowered and valued, which many have never felt before. Harriet spoke to Jennifer in March of 2016.

As descendants from slaves, we came here from all over Africa. We came as individuals, not as a collective, and had to build our own culture. We were punished or sold if we tried to form our own community. We were misunderstood by others and had no jurisdiction over what happened to us.

I have profound feelings about Raising Our Children’s Children (ROCC), which I founded in 1997. Historically, our babies were created to be sold. As nannies, we took care of white men’s children. We never had a chance to nurture our own.

My oldest daughter Naomi had a drug illness. When the state heard that Naomi’s daughter Charlene was living with me, they threatened to take her and her older sister Jamillah away. I went to Superior Court and was directed to a pro bono lawyer who advocated for me to obtain custody of my grandchildren. The judge’s response was: “God bless grandmothers!”

I had an idea about groups for grandparents that Codman Square Community Health Center encouraged me to organize. We met wherever we found free space. We brought in experts on housing, safety, and legal issues. I do hope that each neighborhood group remains unique.

Longtime community activist and advocate for the humanitarian rights of inner-city youth, Harriet died this past November at age 93. She was preceded in death by her daughter Naomi.
“At a dude ranch in Idaho, my son rode up the crest, dismounted, and looked out. I found my camera.”