

# LEAS LIT

*The Medford Leas Literary Journal*



*December 2005*

*Number 10*

## **LEAS LIT STAFF**

Barbara Ballou  
Stan Brush  
Sally Burrowes  
Herb Heineman  
Maggie Heineman  
Eleanor Henderson  
Sarah Klos  
Patricia Lowe  
Joan McKeon  
Edith R. Pray  
George Rubin  
Ellen Stimler  
Hana Stranska  
Avivah Trost  
Helen Vukasin

Original cover design by Harry Forrest

Illustrations by Stan Brush, Todd Butler,  
Sarah Klos, Melissa Pray Muldoon,  
Martha Palmer, John Sommi  
and Lili Wronker

Medford Leas Residents Association  
Medford Leas, Route 70  
Medford, New Jersey 08055  
609-654-3000

© Copyright remains with the author.

## CONTENTS

Grandmother's Rocking Chair	<i>Edith R.Pray</i>	1
If I Were His Age	<i>John Sommi</i>	5
What Is a Shadow?	<i>Sally Burrowes</i>	8
Whort, the Music Maker	<i>Chris Darlington</i>	9
The Kip	<i>Sarah Klos</i>	11
From Bell to Cell	<i>Hana Stranska</i>	14
When the Gloves Came Off	<i>George Rubin</i>	16
Ode to Bridgetown	<i>Chris Darlington</i>	21
Remembering When	<i>Martha R.Palmer</i>	24
Sunset on the Back Porch	<i>Dorothy Pierce</i>	27
Music Hath Charms	<i>Avivah Trost</i>	28
<i>Minuit des Abeilles</i>	<i>Patricia Lowe</i>	30
Christmas in Algiers	<i>Todd Butler</i>	32
Specs and the Single Girl	<i>Hana Stranska</i>	35
Autumn	<i>Eleanor Merrick</i>	41
The V.A. Hospital	<i>George Rubin</i>	42
Gerhard	<i>Gil Goering</i>	43

blank

## GRANDMOTHER'S ROCKING CHAIR

“Knit two, purl two. Do I have it right, Grandma?” Samantha asked as she bent over her work. Sitting in a small, ladder-back rocking chair next to her grandmother, Samantha struggled with the snarled piece of knitting.

Patiently, her grandmother took the yarn and needles from her young granddaughter and soon had the tangled mess straightened out.

Visiting Grandma was a special treat for Samantha. She and her family lived on a dairy farm. Grandma lived in a small town that offered all sorts of exciting diversions, such as a library. Using Grandma's library card, Samantha spent hot summer afternoons browsing through books in the cool, quiet room. The town also boasted a movie theater, with Saturday matinees, a drugstore with a soda fountain, and sidewalks for roller-skating!

“What shall we read today, Samantha?” her grandmother asked.

Hugging her doll, Samantha listened as her grandmother's soft voice transported her to the world of Oz, down the rabbit hole with Alice, or to the castle where Rapunzel let down her hair.

The years passed and Grandma was ninety now. Samantha was in high school.

“Knit two, yarn over, knit to the end of the row. Do I have it right, Samantha?” Grandma asked as she bent over her knitting.

Sitting in the ladder-back rocker next to her grandmother, Samantha patiently took the wool yarn and large needles and picked up the dropped stitches. “This is the prettiest baby blanket you’ve made so far, Grandma. I love the rainbow of colors. How many does this make?”

“Ten. I have two more to go!”

Samantha grinned. “Even though I’m the youngest grandchild, don’t forget me. It will have to wait awhile to be used, but I’ll put it in the blanket chest I received for Christmas.

“What would you like me to read today, Grandma? Shall we continue with *Gone with the Wind*?”

“Oh, yes indeed.” So Samantha picked up Margaret Mitchell’s story of the Old South and soon they were caught up in the escapades of Scarlett and Rhett.

Then, one day Grandma was gone. When Grandma died, Samantha was in college, a young woman, engaged to be married. The old ladder-back chair came to her. Putting together furnishings for their small graduate school apartment, she and her husband-to-be stripped the old stain and varnish from the chair. To their surprise they discovered the chair was made

from maple. They lovingly sanded the old wood, following its grain, smoothing it, but not totally erasing the marks of time. They then applied linseed oil and turpentine to the flat stretchers and turned rungs of the chair. As they stroked the natural wood it began to glow and became a rich warm color, the color of golden brown leaves.



To the delight of Samantha, her sister offered to have the chair recaned as a wedding present. Totally restored now, the chair, not too big, not too small, became a talisman that accompanied Samantha through life giving comfort and stability in her ever-changing world. She rocked her babies in it. She knit rainbow blankets for her own grandchildren, though Samantha's blankets were made from a soft acrylic yarn that could be easily tossed into a washing machine and restored to its anxious owner before nap time. The chair became a

favorite with her grandchildren, just right for coaxing a teddy bear or a doll to sleep, while listening to a story or watching Mr. Rogers on TV.

The years passed and Samantha now lived in a retirement community with her husband. Downsizing their large home was a challenge, but the rocking chair, not too big, not too small, went with them.

Rocking gently, Samantha's granddaughter, Krista, bent over an array of sewing needles and thread spread before her. "I've threaded a bunch of needles in a variety of colors for you, Grandma. If a button pops off or if you need to hem up a skirt, you'll be all set. That should hold you until my next visit."

The old chair rocked on.

*Edith R. Pray*



## “IF I WERE HIS AGE ...”

Catherine and I were among the early settlers on Woodside Drive, arriving in late September 1999. As an outstanding sidewalk superintendent, I closely observed each day the work in progress as housing units were built and added to our lovely community. By late spring 2000 the time had come for construction of the community center.

A very large backhoe took several days to excavate the site for the building’s foundation. I estimated the bucket could scoop a yard of earth with each pass. The machine operator dutifully stockpiled an impressive cone of soft earth as high as our second-story windows. Trucks would come sometime in the near future to cart the soil away as clean fill, probably for a very good price.

The weekend after the magnificent mound of loose soil was created, a few of our children and approximately seven of the grandchildren arrived. With warm sunny weather beckoning, we took a walk after lunch to explore how our new community was developing. When we came to the conical pile, the grandchildren looked up and were as impressed as I.

“That’s quite a big pile of soil,” I said.

“It sure is,” one of the young boys replied. “How long did it take to make it so big?” While waiting for an answer, he bent over, picked up a clod of earth and threw it against the hill. Several of his cousins did the same – great fun.

“Three days,” I answered, looking at the upturned faces. I thought, *If I were his age, wouldn't I like to climb this oversized sand pile.*

“Does anyone think they can climb to the top of the hill?”

“Really, Grandpa?” the seven-year-old girl nearest me posed, eyes wide with hope and expectation.

Like Eve offering Adam the apple, “We can really climb it?” they asked, unwilling to believe.

“Sure. Grandpa says it's OK.”

My children looked from their children to me and let their inner child win. “Grandpa said it was OK, so go ahead. Last one up is a monkey's uncle.”

In a flash they were clawing up the hill, their feet sinking deep into the loose earth. Some made it easily to the peak, only to come tumbling down during the descent, more often by intent than by accident.

One of the more creative grandchildren found a large piece of cardboard nearby and fashioned a makeshift toboggan. Thanks to the steep angle of slope, the ride was much like that achieved on a snow-covered hillside.

Luckily for them, after eight months in Lumberton, we had just about finished unpacking. Our basement contained a number of neatly folded cardboard boxes. Two boxes quickly came from my basement and, aided

by a few deft strokes of a sharp knife, every child had their own piece of cardboard.

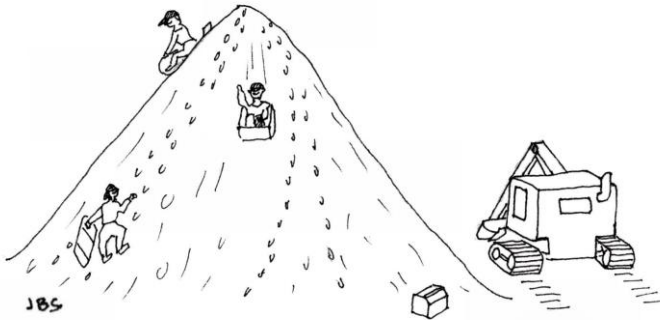
Needless to say, dirt and child became intertwined. Clothing and shoes were hopelessly covered. When the children had burned all their energy, we slowly walked them home, a bedraggled but very happy group.

While they showered and toweled off, clothing went through the wash cycle and into the dryer. Shoes were clapped together to dislodge compacted dirt, then brushed to remove the remaining soil.

After dinner it was time for the grandchildren, clean and dry once again, to go home. As one six-year-old said goodbye and gave me a hug, he asked most eagerly, “Grandpa, when can I come again?”

“Whenever you want.”

*John Sommi*



## WHAT IS A SHADOW?

A shadow is

a patch of darkness  
tied to toe tips,  
stitched to heel;

a form cast on a wall  
by lamplight,  
by moonlight;

a thought patched on a mind  
by fond recall  
or imagining;

a dream in daylight's  
flickering wand  
of forgiving love;

an echo of sound  
of music's swell  
or voice rebound;

the impress of will  
caught in the net  
of one small life.

*Sally Burrowes*

## WHORT, THE MUSIC MAKER

On June 6, 2005, the Delaware Valley experienced a prolonged pyrotechnic show in the form of a severe thunderstorm, the first major thunderstorm of the season. These storms always seem to bring out the best and worst in nature, including some strange sounds.

One of the sounds I am referring to is an old one, most likely predating the development of Homo sapiens. Actually, in this instance, I had heard this sound last year, coming from one of the drainage pits in the court where I live. It was a strange sound, possibly a large frog trapped in the drainage pipe. No matter how often I looked for the creature in the pit, it was never visible to me. In fact, when I approached the pit, its inhabitant would cease its music making, I suppose for spite, or just to listen to what kind of strange sound this two-legged invader of its space would emit. However, I determined the creature must like thunderstorms. We had that much in common.

Whort – the name I have given my croaking music maker – has been at it again. That’s the maker of the sound coming from the drainage pit in my court. It probably is a frog of some substantial size, but the sound it makes is more like a dog barking. More often it attempts a genuine croak. It is not an agreeable sound. It is not as pleasant as the gentle rain on a tin roof or the pleasure of cool water washing over perspiring feet. However, it is nature’s music. Whort’s main song is one note, a single bark, but sometimes it sings what sounds

like a two-word phrase. The single bark is an A-natural, the double bark an A-natural down to an F. This is in the bass register, of course, and approximate; I do not have perfect pitch.

As in my early childhood, I am waiting for the next thunderstorm. Not that I want to splash about in muddy water, but for more modest reasons – just possibly Whort’s croaking repertoire will increase by one or two musical notes. By the end of the summer perhaps there may be a real music maker living in my court – making husky melody and, to be sure, a lot more croaking.

*Chris Darlington*



## THE KIP

**N**ever trust a dictionary to have the last word. Webster, for example, would have you believe that a *kip* is an obscure noun having to do with 1.) the act of sleeping, 2.) cheap taverns, or 3.) oriental money tables. He doesn't seem to be aware that a kip can also be 4.) a clubhouse, built from scrap lumber, intended for use by its builders only or its interlopers.

We never questioned what a kip was in the 1930s. A kip simply was. Oh, the kip I knew was obscure alright, smothered as it was in a field of sunflowers that grew in Mr. and Mrs. Snow's backyard. And it certainly was a noun. It leaned a little to the side and its front door hung on rusty hinges. The big brothers who had built the kip crawled into it on their hands and knees and sat cross-legged on the earthen floor. I don't actually know for sure, but I think they talked boy talk and thought deep thoughts, or whatever else it is that boys do when they gather in a kip.

Often one of the big brothers sat just outside, kind of like a sentry. I suppose the sentry was needed to warn the big brothers in the kip of the approaching enemy. As far as I can remember the enemy was a threesome of neighborhood girls, the little sisters of the big brothers. The little sisters actually did spend a good deal of time trying to breach the kip in various and devious ways. I confess. I was one of those schemers.

When the coast was clear and the big brothers were off doing other tasks or playing in someone else's yard, we quickly left the piazza (that's another obscure noun for what was actually the Snows' side porch). We would head for the kip with our dolls and toy furniture, tea sets, and all the trappings that little girls needed to "play house." Once in a great while we would manage to enjoy a long uninterrupted afternoon in the kip. More often, however, we were chased unceremoniously out of the kip and banished once more to the piazza.

One time toward the end of summer the big brothers all went off to Boy Scout Camp for a week. Oh, what joy that we could have the kip to ourselves! At last we were able to spend more time in the kip than we had ever been able to before. As though we needed to share these golden, stolen moments with someone we loved, we planned an afternoon tea for our mothers. Mrs. Snow just had to go into her own backyard, but she was absolutely key to the success of the tea. She was both cookie baker and tea brewer. Once we knew all three of our mothers were able to come, there was such joy and anticipation. We cleaned the kip inside and out, sweeping great clouds of dust from the dirt floor.

Our mothers, being on the plump side, could not squeeze through the door of the kip. Never mind. We seated them outside the kip, while we sat in the kip handing the tea and cookies out to our mothers through the window. Why is it that I can still see the delighted, totally bemused face of my mother? Perhaps one of the reasons I remember the event so clearly is that my



mother never got done telling others about the afternoon tea at the kip.

I don't remember any other special events in the kip after that summer afternoon tea. You could say that it was the ultimate defining moment of my childhood memory of the kip. Now that's saying a lot when you recall that Mr. Webster didn't even know the fourth meaning of the word *kip*, and it has been up to me to give you the last word!

*Sarah Klos*



## FROM BELL TO CELL

This story's kind of sad to tell:  
As you know, Alexander Graham Bell  
Gave the world the telephone.

Now, if we'd only left well alone,  
We might still have a functioning phone,  
Instead of having to turn to stone  
While forced to listen, with dwindling patience,

While a store, or some other organization  
Apprises us of their wondrous display.  
To state *our* wishes, we must press button A,  
Or, perhaps, it's button B.  
(Are they the nuisance, or is it me?)

Yet, even on reaching the proper venue,  
A robotic voice gives the *previous* menu!  
It's enough to make many tear  
At their precious, ever scantier hair!

And if you press the button  
To get a person's attention,  
They're all busy, we hardly need mention.

What happened to the "one-minute-call,"  
When a real voice answered questions you ask,  
So you could put down your receiver,  
And go on to another task?

It not only wastes the customer's time,  
It also increases the jobless line,  
Since robots now claim to do our business,  
While we're left to ponder what the meaning of  
"IS" is.

But let's leave this exercise in futility,  
And turn to the latest facility,  
Which, as of now, seems alive and well.  
We refer, of course, to "Almighty Cell"!

Now, the cell is great, for dire distress,  
Like, "My car won't start, get me out of this mess!"  
Or, "I'm being hijacked, call 9-1-1."  
Now, the criminal flees, his deed not done.

Instead, we're treated to loud conversations  
About the most mundane situations,  
Of which we only hear one end!  
No doubt in our mind where we'd like to send

The offending party, cell phone and all,  
So we could have quiet, in street or mall.  
Instead of being a captive audience  
To loud nothings, bereft of sense.

Here, then, is the story "From Bell to Cell."  
Alive, maybe, but is it well?

*Hana Stranska*

## WHEN THE GLOVES CAME OFF

The streets of Brooklyn were hot and noisy in the summer of 1940. At the corner of St. Johns Place and Utica Avenue, the Reid Avenue trolley came to the end of the line. The motorman, in his dark blue uniform, came down the steps, took off his cap, and with a large handkerchief wiped the sweat from his face. He then pulled down the pole that connected to the overhead wire at one end of the trolley and walked around to put it back up at the other end. As he was doing this, two men got off the trolley and slowly walked over the tracks, being careful to watch the cars going by them as they hustled to the sidewalk. They stopped at the corner drug store. The shorter of the two men bought two cigars and a racing form. They walked up the street a short way, to where the sign on the building in front of them said Dental Office, and opened the front door. The staircase was not well lighted and seemed even darker after the bright sunlight outside. When Moe and King reached the top of the stairs, Moe was puffing, slightly out of breath. He gave King, who was in front of him, a shove.

“Get moving, you big lummoX.”

“Do I have to?” whined King.

In front of them stretched a long hallway. On the right were a series of closed doors. Overhead dim ceiling lights reflected onto the gray-green walls. As the two men walked to the end of the hallway, they entered a large square room. The sunlight that filtered through the

venetian blinds seemed to cover the leather couch with white streaks. Next to the couch were two straight-backed chairs. In one corner there was a large console radio, flanked on both sides by tables with lamps and magazines. A large glass-fronted bookcase stood against the other wall. This was Doc's waiting room.

Moe gave King another push as both men sat down on the leather couch. Moe Levy was short and stocky. His vest was open and his tie hung loose over his shirt. His black fedora sat on the back of his head. He chewed away on his cigar as he spoke to King.

"I told Doc we were coming – so just sit there quietly."

King Levinsky was tall, over 6 feet. When he was a young boy at school everyone seemed to make fun of his big body. He started fighting early in life to protect his dignity. On this warm day his big frame was enclosed inside a large gray overcoat. His big hands held the coat together. His head hung down but the sunlight coming in behind him showed the battered, scarred face of a prizefighter.

"You know I don't like dentists," King sniveled.

Moe didn't answer him but took off his hat and plastered down a few strands of hair over his bald head. King played with the freestanding ashtray that was set on a counterweight base. As he pushed it one way it rolled back the other. It reminded him of a sparring partner.

“Stop it, King.”

King put his big hands back in his lap. Moe opened his racing form. He was a Brooklyn fight promoter with a stable of boxers. He had started out as a fight handler and trainer at the Bushwick Gym. At one time he was a numbers runner for the Brooklyn gangs. Even as a boy, he had hoped to make it big in the fight game, but now he saw that his future depended on that big lug of a boxer sitting next to him. Moe stubbed out his cigar, put a toothpick into his mouth, and began to chew on it. His small brown eyes seemed to be constantly moving, first to the racing form, then up to the glass doors in front of him, behind which was Doc’s dental surgery, and then back to King.

“You know we have to get that tooth out before the Saturday night fight,” Moe said.

King nodded slowly.

Doc opened the glass doors and looked out. He was wearing a white dental jacket open at the neck. He wiped his hands on a towel and straightened his glasses. He looked at both men. He knew them well. Doc knew that Moe would never be a success and that his last chance was making King a winner. Doc remembered seeing King’s last fight. A big slow-moving boxer with a very deliberate jab and a good right hook. He could take a lot of punches without any sign of flinching. His eyes would be cut and swollen and still he continued to fight. He usually was good for ten rounds, win or lose. The

mouthpiece Doc had made for him was still intact. He was the best middleweight that Moe had developed in a long time. When he boxed he was aggressive and sure of himself, but here in the dental office he became the biggest coward of any of Doc's patients.

“You're not going to hurt me, are you, Doc?”

“Shut up and get into the chair,” Moe said again with a disgusted look on his face.

King raised his large body off the couch and walked slowly through the open glass doors to the dental chair in front of him. Moe followed. The dental surgery was a large corner room with windows on two sides. The sunlight and the noise from the street below filled the room. In one corner a fan, on a shelf, whirled back and forth.

“We have to have that bad tooth out, Doc. King has to fight Saturday night at Stillman's Gym and he's got to be ready,” Moe said.

“Fine,” Doc said. “King, put your head back and let's take a look.”

Doc clipped a white towel around his neck. King wrapped his coat closer around him as he opened his mouth.

Doc's skillful hands worked fast. After the novocaine injection the tooth came out easily. Moe

stood beside the chair and looked relieved when it was over, but King continued to cry, his big hands gripping the chair.

“Hey, big guy, it’s over. That wasn’t too bad. You take more in the mouth in one round than this!” Doc exclaimed with a smile on his face.

“He’s always a big baby when he comes here,” Moe said, looking disgusted. “And Doc, let me know what the damage is. Here are two tickets for the fight. You can bring the missus if you want.

“Alright, King, get up and let’s get the hell out of here.”

King slowly got out of the chair, raising his big frame up and at the same time clutching his coat tight around himself, his face swollen and numb.

“Thanks, Doc. I want to go home, Moe,” he mumbled.

The two men walked out of the office, back down the hallway, the big guy holding his coat with one hand and his jaw with the other. The little guy behind him lit up another cigar when they reached the street. The two of them stood still for a minute, only to be greeted by the noise and the heat of busy Brooklyn on this summer day in 1940.

*George Rubin*



## AN ODE TO BRIDGETOWN

Visitors came to this place,  
Strange aliens cast in strength,  
Users of tools,  
Cutters of wood,  
Tillers of land,  
Nurturing animals;  
Begetters laying  
Logs on stone,  
Bricks on hearths,  
Mills on creek runs.  
Strong backs  
Harvesting  
Wheat, milled for  
Bread. Brick schools  
And learning  
Turned into industry.  
Prosperity into  
Colonial halls with  
Counting houses  
And meetinghouses  
Along our thoroughfares.

An otherworldly  
Brought forth  
A Chinese-like  
Cottage, a rare  
Delicacy for living.  
Others wrought Gothic points,  
Vertical boards  
And Victorian relish;  
All this society is now  
Bounded by our  
Bridged creek, flood runs  
And winding streets.  
In three centuries,  
Aliens, mystics, millers,  
Artists, poets, farmers,  
Magistrates,  
The bound, the free,  
Strangers to us all,  
Never abandoned their work.  
They have stayed on  
In their eternity.

Walk the streets with me  
Where they walked, now entombed  
In logs and bricks and stones  
And boards and color.

Burials quickened by  
Singing and delight.  
Windows and open doors now  
Reveal presences of our  
Alien strangers once  
Thought long vanished.  
Their spirits walk by day,  
Delighting in gardens well-kept,  
Guardians of their own handiwork.  
But in the long night,  
High up on our Mount,  
Listen to their  
Dancing and singing  
Life among the ancient trees.  
While we, down below,  
In their houses,  
Under the covers,  
In the silence of early dawn,  
Whisper.

*Chris Darlington*

*Note: Bridgetown is an early name for Mount Holly. The name survives in the Bridgetown Pub at 44 High Street.*

## REMEMBERING WHEN

The air is fresh tonight and the moon is lovely as I drive along lonely country roads. I am on my way to the Lambertville Antique Market. It is forty miles to this market, located near Trenton on a hillside overlooking the Delaware River. Antique dealers and collectors congregate here during the summer months to display and sell their curiosities. They also come to buy, seeking that elusive teacup, that hand-tinted Wallace Nutting photo, or some such artifact from the past century.

It is an old market and vendors must have certificates issued by the state in order to display their wares. The market will tolerate nothing but antiques and collectibles.

Few cars pass me as I find my way to Lambertville in the wee small hours of the morning. I am confident because I know my way so well. Four deer suddenly leap from the bushes and cross the road! It is now 3:30 in the morning. I must be crazy to be doing this, I tell myself. But if I do not arrive early enough, I will not be able to find a suitable dealer space. I think of my friend Kay, whom I am meeting. She probably arrived last night and slept in her van so she would be able to claim “respectable” spaces for us. I smile as I think of dear Kay. A graduate of Alfred University, New York, with a major in ceramics, she worked for Stangl Pottery in Trenton for years. She supervised the transfer of her original designs to the pottery. Over the years, her interest in antiques grew, as did mine. We met at

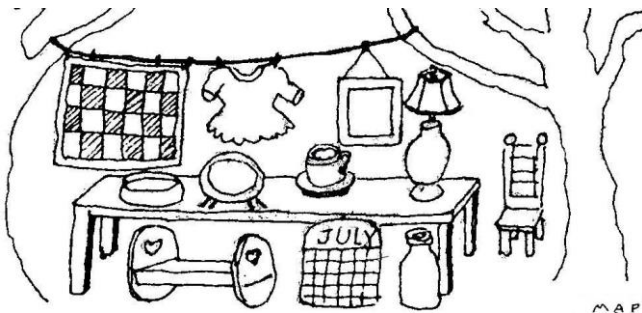
auctions, and again at antique markets where we sold our treasures.

It is 5:30 when I pull into the parking space allotted to vendors. By ginger, there's Kay! What a welcome sight to see her coming toward me eagerly with her flashlight waving and that wonderful welcoming smile. She has on baggy trousers, layers of shirts and sweaters, and her old hat that covers a tangled mound of gray hair. She has saved me a dealer space next to hers under the trees, and together we begin to set up. While we are setting up, "early birds" and antique store dealers from Lambertville begin to drift by asking if we have this or that. The birds are chirping and the moon has retired and I put the finishing touches on my two tables. One table is covered with a Queen Anne's Lace table cloth. On this I have showcased cut and pressed glass, silver, mirrors, and fine china. The other table is covered with an old quilt. On this I display pottery, books, primitives, and kitchen items. "Oh, look," someone says, "I remember when my grandfather used to shave using this old-fashioned equipment." Another lady is thrilled to find a set of Phoenix blue and white kitchenware. "I remember when my grandmother used this lovely china for special family occasions! Is that the best you can do, pricewise?" she asks. I make a small adjustment, and she buys the set. A man comes along and admires my Weller jardinière. This earthenware pot was made around 1872 and is lovely with its large floral decorations imposed upon the cream and green background. He is indecisive. Later in the afternoon, he reappears and buys it.

The morning moves slowly as I answer questions, “Do you have any gold jewelry?” or “Will you lower the price on that lustre pitcher?” I collect money and tax (if the buyer is not a dealer). Kay and I eat our picnic lunch in the cool shade, keeping a watchful eye upon our tables. “Oh, look there’s Fritz!” I exclaim. Fritz is a well-known fixture. A book dealer, he attends the Lambertville Market regularly.

Packing up at 3:00 p.m. is a chore, but I am pleased with my effort. The lustre pitcher was sold, also a Norman Rockwell plate and a glass swan. The day has been a success and, after comparing notes, Kay and I bid our good-byes. We already have plans to meet at an upcoming auction and, of course, “God willing and the creek don’t rise,” we’ll return to Lambertville. A couple of antiques ourselves, we are patched and chipped, but we never tire of remembering when.

*Martha R. Palmer*



## SUNSET ON THE BACK PORCH

Box-seated between two posts,  
hands clasp. Squeaking boards  
precede Act 1, strangled note,  
caught by the throat,  
surprise.

Cloud-furled serpents stalk  
flame-throwing sun. Confetti,  
from a fun-time gun, slowly  
signals play-day's end.

Like hand-thrown spray,  
spilled from cavernous cups,  
twilight bats emerge to  
merge on fading parchment.

Night's long white fingers  
touch minor keys, moon-songs,  
melodies. From treetop strings,  
they wind down toward dawn.

*Dorothy Pierce*

## “MUSIC HATH CHARMS . . .

...**T**O soothe the savage breast/To soften rocks or bend the knotted oak.” So wrote William Congreve, the Irish playwright, three centuries ago. True then and still true today. However, he should have added something about the “very young” breast or the “cultivated” breast. But since he didn’t, let me do it by recalling two moments of musical enthrallment from my past.

I grew up in New York City. My parents were refugees from Russia. We lived in the Bronx in a close-knit community where everyone knew everyone else. We shared life’s joys and sorrows. These included birthday parties at school, when mothers of pupil celebrants would bring in cookies for everyone. It gave us, the small birthday persons, a moment of glorious popularity.

But not my mother! She decided that a much better way to celebrate my fifth birthday was to take me for my first-ever visit to the Metropolitan Opera in Manhattan. We went by subway. Our seats were in the balcony. The opera was *Madama Butterfly*. I was thrilled. At some point, probably the intermission, I was afraid it was ending, so I stood and shouted, “Don’t stop. Keep going!”

Mother was shocked and quickly put her hand over my mouth. But it was too late. Everyone had heard, including the ushers and, as it turned out, the performers. When the opera ended one of the ushers came to banish us from ever coming again, we thought. But just the opposite happened. “Madama Butterfly” had



heard and had asked the ushers to bring me and Mother to her dressing room. It was absolutely the most exciting thing that had ever happened to me.

Many, many, years later, after having been a cellist in the American Youth Orchestra, I was married and living in Princeton. My husband was a young graduate student working on a Ph.D. in physics. I played in a chamber music trio with a violinist and pianist. We used to practice in the afternoon at the pianist's house on faculty row. One afternoon we sensed a presence in the hall. Someone was listening at the door. The violinist lowered his bow and stepped out only to find it was Professor Albert Einstein! The Einstein house was adjacent to ours.

“Please, Professor Einstein, come in and take a seat.”

“No, I don't want to disturb you. Just let me listen from the door. Don't stop. Please go on.”

We did, and Professor Einstein continued to listen quietly at the door as we practiced that summer. And I continued to be haunted by the memory of a five-year-old girl uttering almost those same words under music's irresistible spell.

Yes, the playwright was right.

*Avivah Trost  
as interpreted by Stan Brush*

***MINUIT DES ABEILLES***

**(The Bees' Midnight)**

Joseph Cornell made boxes to survive him,  
magic casements, imaginations.

I had one once, kept  
it for years on loan  
and lived inside  
where it was midnight blue  
and there were bees.

It is years since I've thought about it,  
or of the times I sheltered there –  
my vision is not clear,  
but it survived, as he had wished.

I try to remember:  
Was there a moon, an indigo sun  
for lizards, and stars?  
Or were there clouds?  
Angles were shadowed,  
perspectives endless.  
The rainmaker was not there.  
In the box secrets were translucent  
and they are still.  
There was a glass between  
that world and this,  
but it was easy even then to pass  
beyond, walk among miniatures;

volcanic ash, chewed cedars,  
the lyrical complexities  
of rocks and tiny hares  
at pond-side feasts  
accompanied by violins.

Tonight I go into this magic place,  
crouch beside stalks  
of flowers nourishing, lie  
upon fronds beneath a violet-scented night.  
The sky's alive with worlds  
calligraphied in wax –  
where wings of bees whirr  
in my ears and I hear  
the same songs –  
heartbeats and bees  
in that velvet box.

*Patricia Lowe*

*Note: Joseph Cornell, an original New York artist of the mid 1900s, constructed boxes with unusual, often mysterious, evocative interiors (such as the one described in this poem), a three-dimensional "painting," you might say – and one of genuine artistic merit, and so considered.*

## CHRISTMAS IN ALGIERS

**I**n 1943 the United States Army was poised to begin the invasion of North Africa. It was just before Thanksgiving. By Christmas my division was governing the city of Algiers. My infantry unit was dug in along a roadway fronting a plantation of vineyards and date palms.

I had discovered the water in the irrigation ditch to be clear and was preparing to wash my clothing when a young lady from the plantation house hurried down to urge me to use the laundry room in the house instead. She spoke perfect English and introduced herself as the daughter-in-law of Madame Luzhardy, the owner of the estate. She laughingly showed me how to use the paddles to beat my clothes on a stone table.

Before I'd finished, I'd received an invitation to join the family for dinner that evening. She also extended an invitation to share the traditional Christmas Eve dinner with them. Upon returning to camp, I learned that we would be moved out to scattered guard posts around the city on Christmas Eve. Responding to that, Madame Luzhardy simply moved the dinner up one night.

The main course of the Christmas Eve dinner was a calf heart cooked French style in a savory wine sauce. It was a rare treat and won me over to French cooking at once. The young son had arranged a crèche with antique figures in the salon. Candles illuminated the room, the walls, floor and arched ceiling of which were covered

with patterned tiles. These tiles kept the space comfortable during the long, warm summers. We sat upon cushions, placed on the cool tile seats of a U-shaped banquette. Servants set a large brass tray, covered with a brass dome, on a stand on the floor at our feet. Within the tray were burning coals. When we were seated, a quilt was laid over the dome and all of us tucked the edges about our legs. We were soon toasty warm and spent the evening sipping coffee and visiting.

The following evening we had been dropped off at posts facing the endless reaches of the desert. By the time we had dug our foxholes, none of us was feeling the Christmas spirit. Each of us had received packages from home and, oddly, many had received dates that had been packaged right in Algiers.

Looking out at only a distant two-story warehouse and endless stretches of sand, we were feeling a bit gloomy until a truck driver appeared with large branch from an evergreen tree. He stuck it in the sand near our small campfire. His little effort stirred cheer in us and we began to decorate it with ribbons from packages and decorative shapes folded from the Christmas wrapping papers. Soon the vast emptiness surrounding us didn't matter! We even began to sing traditional songs ... we were children again. About then, someone noticed that the second-floor shutters of the warehouse were open and women dressed in glittering attire, jewels, and veils appeared. We made a dash to continue our wild singing just below those windows. The women waved and responded until a servant pulled the shutters closed.

Other shutters opened further along the building and we circled round and round until a delegation of burly guards came out the door and urged us away. We were told that the elderly owner of that harem was not a well man. Our revelry was cut short, but we had had great fun and a Christmas to remember always.

We returned to curl up in blankets in our foxholes and to dream our dreams.

*Todd Butler*



## SPECS AND THE SINGLE GIRL . . . ITALIAN STYLE

**T**antalized and titillated by such movies as *Summer Time*, with the dowdy middle-aged heroine reclining in a Venetian gondola and the arms of Rossano Brazzi, or *Roman Holiday*, with wide-eyed young innocence sauntering down the Spanish Steps into the arms of fascinating lower-middle-aged Gregorissimo Peck, I decided that Italy must be a spinster's wonderland, and rushed out to buy my plane ticket.

My scant Italian consisted of *a rivederci Roma* and *hai brossato i denti con Gleem?* Like a few of my unattached sisters, I am on the wrong side of the wrong decade. Moreover, I am myopic and must wear strong glasses at all times.

In spite of these handicaps, the first thing I did when I arrived in Rome was to take a room near the Via Veneto. *Dolce Vita*, here I come, I chanted.

Determined to learn the truth about Latin lovers' pinching maneuvers, and trying to look my most cuddly and pinchable, I left my glasses at home. My unfeigned helplessness and stumbling gait soon aroused the unslumbering instincts of the Italian male. As I accepted shoulders to lean on and arms to guide me (occasionally finding it necessary to guide back the guiding arms), my only regret was that I wasn't quite able to see my gallant rescuers.

“*Bella, bellissima,*” clamored the chorus of side-swiping, wolf-whistling lady chasers. To ignore them would have been futile, while to smile and indicate that flattery would get them – well, almost anywhere, might have been truthful but foolhardy.

“*Signorina,*” a soft, melodious voice said, out of the blue. I saw a dark and fairly tall blur, and compulsively concluded that he must be handsome.

“*Una piccola passeggiata?*”

For all I knew he was inquiring whether I liked spaghetti for breakfast. My choice of an answer was severely limited. After such short acquaintance, I could not very well ask whether he had brushed his teeth, so I replied:

“*A rivederci Roma.*”

“Americana?” he asked, adding proudly, “I speak-a de good English. I ask, ‘*Signorina* will go for walk with-a me - yes?’ But *signorina* say ‘*Arivederci Roma.*’ *Signorina* is leaving - yes?”

“No!” I almost shouted. “I just arrived.”

“*Bravo, bravo,*” he said. “Then, *signorina* will come with me? My name Giovanni. Ho-kay?”

“Okay, Giovanni, where shall we meet?”

“Spanis’ Steps? Tonight? Eight?”



“Fine,” I said. “See you then - *a rivederci*.”

“You catch-a fast, speak-a de Italian beautiful.”

I spent the rest of the afternoon applying everything my cosmetic case had to offer. The result, I thought, was highly gratifying, and I looked forward eagerly to a romantic evening at an elegant Roman restaurant, one waiter serving delicious food, the other pouring exquisite wine, while mellow music undulated from a guitar and a sweet tenor sobbed Neapolitan songs. I would look up to see the loving glance of my smitten Giovanni, who would be conscious of nothing but his *bella signorina*. (Ha! See? What could I possibly see?)



MPM&SEB

I decided on a stratagem that would at least allow me to catch one real glimpse. When I came down the Spanish Steps, just before he could see me, I would peer at him through my glasses, and then put them away again.

And so it happened that I sauntered down the Steps, just as Audrey Hepburn had done in the movie.

Yes, there was Giovanni waiting, his face turned towards me. Quick, off with my glasses! I continued, looking in his direction. My graceful step landed on air. I

bounced and slithered down the rest of the Steps, and passed out.

I woke up in a hospital. I never saw Giovanni again. Luckily, except for bruises which did little to enhance my appearance, I was unhurt and soon allowed to go back to my hotel. My left leg was black and blue and my left eye looked as if I had joined the “Unswitchables.” I might as well wear my glasses now; I could not possibly look any worse.

Wearily, I limped over to the Fountain of Trevi. Nobody pinched, pursued or otherwise bothered me. Only when I had deposited my wishful coin did a man approach me.

*“Signorina sola?”* he asked.

I nodded.

*“Permesso?”* he continued.

I shrugged my shoulders.

*“Lei piace Roma?”* he asked.

*“A rivederci, Roma,”* I said, with some feeling, for it occurred to me in that instant that I might try Venice, where I could at least recline specs-less in a gondola without falling down any steps.

*“Signorina molto simpatica, molto intelligente.”*

I could not help but understand those words, although I failed to see on what he based his statement.

Maybe, if an Italian cannot bring himself to say “*bella*,” that is what he says instead? Maybe it’s the Italian translation of “What’s with you, you egg-headed frump?” I was too depressed to care.

“*Spaghetti? Chianti?*” he suggested, hopefully.

I nodded again, and we made our way to a small restaurant with red-and-white checked tablecloths, a red-and-white striped awning, a corpulent and perspiring waiter, and a smell of garlic.

During our meal, I looked at my companion furtively. He bore no more resemblance to Gregory Peck than I to Audrey Hepburn; he was paunchy and middle-aged. Most of the hair on top of his head had permanently left its moorings; it was still firmly anchored on both sides and where its length permitted, he smoothed it carefully over the bare scalp and oiled it into position. His nose was fleshy and purplish veins boldly branched out from it into his upper cheeks. His hands were thick, coarse, and hairy, and held his knife and fork as if they were weapons of combat.

His name was Giorgio, and he seemed fond of spicy food. He smiled and nodded approvingly several times during his meal, which made him forget everything around him, including me. He gulped down his Chianti, spilling it over the tablecloth, his chin and clothes, wiping his face with his greasy fingers only after red rivulets had stained his throat and collar.

“*Molto buono, eh?*” he finally asked, leaning back, satisfied. I had hardly touched the heavily seasoned food.

Giorgio did not ask me whether I would prefer something else. I don't think he even noticed.

He paid, and we left the restaurant. At the Fountain of Trevi, he stopped, put his arm around me, and drew me close. His face hovered over mine. The smell of garlic was overpowering.

*"Not hai brossato i denti!"* I shrieked. Some passers-by snickered. Giorgio, his amorous swoop intercepted, reacted to the interruption with the full venom of a thwarted male. He pushed me away angrily and stalked off.

Back at my hotel, I packed my bags and called the airline. To my questions, the clerk replied, "Yes, Madam, there's a seat available on tomorrow's transatlantic flight. And rest assured, Madam, we show only new movies."

*Hana Stranska*

## AUTUMN

Death still,  
Soul suspended,  
Dust-gold,  
Mauve, yellows, browns  
Through mist extended -

Smiles through withered tears will.

Veiled sun  
Breath hung,  
Gray dim  
Sorrow-sad shades  
Autumn's farewell song.

Lord, and is my life unspun?

*Eleanor Merrick*

## THE V.A. HOSPITAL

The clinic is crowded.  
Only the sun's rays, slanting through the window,  
Brighten the room.  
The men sit and stare,  
Some without limbs.  
Their faces are lined and scarred.  
And behind those eyes,  
What battles are they seeing and reliving?  
Where they lost their youth,  
For it died in the air, on the ground or in the sea.  
At times they shout out to an unseen enemy.  
They know they have faced death,  
And were the lucky ones to get away.  
Yet, after all these years they still face these same fears.  
They sit and stare, while the sun shines down on them.  
The forgotten heroes that we no longer care about?

*George Rubin*

## GERHARD

**T**he story of Gerhard begins with his parents, Jacob and Elisabeth. Jacob and Elisabeth spent their early years in a little village named Kotosufka, located in what is now Ukraine. They were part of a small religious sect that had originated in Switzerland. The group left Switzerland in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to escape religious persecution. They were part of the Protestant group that had broken away from the Catholic Church. But they differed from the mainstream Protestants (Lutherans) in that they believed that people should be baptized into the church only when they were old enough to be accountable for their actions. This resulted in severe persecution by both the Catholic and the Protestant Churches. Some of the men were burned at the stake and some of the women were drowned because of their beliefs.

The group was forced to flee from Switzerland seeking religious freedom. They first settled in the Alsace region, then in Austria, and eventually made their way to Russia at the time of Catherine the Great. They were welcome because they were diligent farmers and were needed to make the plains of Russia productive. They were granted certain privileges, among them keeping German as their primary language and having their own schools and church services.

Jacob and Elisabeth spoke a Swiss-German dialect but were schooled in High German. The Luther

Bible was the most important book in their respective families and this study was all in German. Life in Kotosufka was simple. The families were quite poor but both Jacob and Elisabeth were able to attend school for a few years. At an early age they left school to help with work in the home or the field. Religious training was an integral part of their upbringing. Sundays were devoted to church activities and Bible study.

When Alexander II became czar, things began to change. Some of the privileges were taken away and an edict was issued that all schools must teach in the Russian language. Also all of the young men were to spend time in the army of the czar. So a scouting party was sent out to investigate the possibility of once again moving to a new land. The delegation consisted of twelve men from various congregations in the south of Russia. Representing the group from Kotosufka was Andreas Schrag. The group left Russia in April 1873 and landed in New York in May. They toured for 3 months, going from Canada to Texas, talking with officials about the availability of land, taking soil samples, and examining the laws of various states. They were assisted by groups of like minds who had come to America earlier. They boarded a ship in New York in August 1873 and arrived home in September.

Land similar to Ukraine was available in Kansas, so the entire Swiss-German group decided to go there. In 1874 Jacob and Elisabeth left Russia with their parents on a long journey to the New World.



The early years in Kansas were difficult, but through hard work and with an abiding faith in God they prospered. In 1877 Jacob and Elisabeth were married and moved to a farm of their own. They had many children and in 1892 Gerhard was born.

Gerhard was able to attend school, where he took 5 months of English followed by 3 months of German and Bible. Gerhard was a diligent worker on the farm and with the rest of his family spent all day Sunday in church services and Bible study. The family had daily devotions and started each day with prayer. Gerhard took his Bible study very seriously and knew much of the Bible from memory. He along with the Church believed that it was wrong to kill other humans. Love of their fellowman, kindness to others, and compassion to all were integral to their lives.

In 1917 things changed in the peaceful, rather isolated community in which Gerhard lived. The United States entered the war and young men were being drafted into the military. Many of the young men from the community were allowed to take non-combatant duty after they entered the army. Early in 1918 Gerhard was called up. He reported to Camp Funston in Kansas but soon took a stand: He refused to put on the army uniform. He believed that war was evil and his convictions did not allow him to be part of the army.

This attitude did not sit well with the officers in charge. For his refusal, one of the punishments he endured was being placed in a pit dug in the ground, tied

or chained so as to immobilize him, and then being subjected to a steady dripping of cold water on his head. Other actions were taken against Gerhard such as beatings and general rough treatment. He was put on a rotating diet of bread and water for one week, then normal rations for a week, followed again by bread and water. Gerhard was forced to stand on the north side of the barracks in the cold weather with his hands extended above his head for long periods. He was put into a barrel without a shirt and made to stand upright with a weight around his neck. At times he was doused with cold water. Through all this Gerhard remained spiritually strong and faithful to his understanding of God's call to peaceful living.

The abuse was more than Gerhard's body could take and he died on April 14, 1918. The cause of death was listed as natural causes – flu and pneumonia. After his death Gerhard's body was placed in a coffin and shipped back to his parents for burial. When the coffin was opened there lay the body of Gerhard – *in full army uniform*. Gerhard's mother, Elisabeth, never fully recovered from the shock.

This is a true story. Gerhard's full name was Gerhard Stucky. He lived not far from where I grew up and he was a first cousin of my mother. Even though I was much younger, I knew many of his brothers. I never heard any of his ordeal discussed. All wanted to forget it as soon as possible.

*Gil Goering*