

LEAS LIT

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This Issue is Dedicated to

DOROTHY TILLMAN
1917 – 2005

author
photographer
creative spirit

Dorothy contributed captivating short stories to every issue of Leas Lit since its founding in 1998. She also served on the Leas Lit staff from 2001 until just before her death.

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ATLANTIC QUEEN

Julie was cold. She tugged at the old blanket that was around her shoulders and pulled it close, but it didn't help. Sometimes she felt she'd never get warm again. Just as she felt she'd never really sleep again.

It was cold in the room. She knew she should get up from the couch and turn the heater up. Or, she could go to bed. She considered the possibilities, but she couldn't find the energy or the desire to do either one.

She looked around the room. It didn't look clean. Cups, half filled with old coffee, were on several tables. She should get up and put them in the sink at least, but she just looked away. There were a number of plants on the windowsill. They had been dead for some time but they hadn't been thrown away. It looked like a room whose owner had gone away. A lamp was on the table next to her. It had a three-way bulb, but it was turned to the lowest level. The rest of the room was in semi-darkness.

She tried to remember what it used to look like. She recalled how carefully she had chosen each piece. Lamps glowed softly from every corner. The plants were healthy with clean, shiny leaves. Flowers from the garden were everywhere. The pictures, which she now saw were hanging crookedly, were chosen one by one and there were long discussions about the very best place to hang them. It didn't make any sense now, but as she thought of the way it was before, the room had had a special

smell, a nice smell that was a combination of her and Greg and ...

“No,” she said aloud. “No.”

She thought of the session she had had earlier that day with Alex in his office. “I can’t make you better, you know,” he’d said. “I can help, but it has to come from you. You’ve got to try. I know, no, I don’t know, but I can imagine how awful it is, but life goes on. You’ve been mourning a long time. But now it’s time to think of yourself, your life.” He hesitated a moment and then his voice was softer as he said, “It’s time to decide about you and Greg. You had a good marriage. Are you going to let it all die, too?”

She hadn’t answered him. She was angry. I don’t want to try, she’d said to herself. I don’t want to get better. I want to die. “The only reason I’m here is so everybody will stop pestering me,” she said aloud.

She hadn’t realized she was crying until he held out a box of tissues. She took one and blew her nose. She tried to dry the tears, but more just came. She was sobbing.

“It’s not true. I guess I don’t want to die, or I’d be dead by now. It’s just that I feel dead inside. Everybody says ‘try.’ I don’t know how to try. I don’t even know what it means.”

“I guess it just means take one step at a time, even if you don’t feel like it. You have pretty hair, but I don’t think you’ve done anything to it for some time. Maybe you could go to the beauty parlor ...” He stopped when

he saw the anger rising in her again. “Maybe you have to find your own small step. I’m afraid time’s up. Perhaps next time you’ll be able to tell me of one small step you took.”

Now, she looked around her room again. “Try,” she said. But it was too hard. She picked up a dirty cup and took it to the kitchen. The window above the sink looked out on the small garden in front of the house. The curtain was closed, as it had been ever since that day. The tears were flowing freely now. She wiped her nose with the back of her hand. A shudder went through her whole body but she moved quickly and pulled the curtain back. “Annie, Annie,” she screamed.

She had been washing dishes and smiling to herself as she watched her beautiful little girl playing in the garden. She had turned away for a moment when she heard Greg’s voice calling her from upstairs. She had heard the squeal of brakes and in that moment she knew Annie was dead.

“What did you call me for?” she asked him weeks later. “That day, what did you want?”

“I don’t know. I can’t remember. Maybe I wanted a cup of coffee or just a break. The work wasn’t going well.”

She never told him, but that was the moment she’d begun to hate him. She knew that if she’d still been watching, Annie would not have run out of the garden. She would not be dead. Once she’d tried to tell Alex, but he hadn’t understood her. “But, Julie,” he’d said, “it

wasn't Greg's fault. He couldn't know and you were too far away. It all happened too fast." She never spoke of it again. Alex tried to get her to look at it, but she refused and changed the subject. She could see that he was frustrated, but she didn't care. She didn't care about him or anybody, or anything.

And then one night, Greg was watching TV and she heard him laugh. She walked into the room and turned the TV off. He looked up in surprise.

"I think I would like you to go live somewhere else," she had said.

He stared at her. "What are you talking about, Julie. What's the matter? It's me, Greg; I'm your husband. What the hell made you say that?"

"You didn't love her. You can sit there and laugh. How can you laugh when Annie's dead?"

"You mean I should never laugh again for the rest of my life?" He was getting angry. "I didn't love her, you say. I loved her more than you can ever know. I think of her every day. But I'm not crazy. Not laughing won't bring her back. Nothing will bring her back. She's dead. Dead, Julie. And I'm alive, and you're alive. I've tried to be patient but I can't reach you." He was crying now – tears of anger and frustration and love.

"I don't love anyone or anything. I want to be by myself."

"OK," he said, "OK, I'll go and you can sit here and enjoy your grief."

SHE PUT the dirty cup in the sink and then walked back to her spot on the couch. She pulled the blanket tightly around her.

She was surprised at the pile of catalogues that had accumulated and which were lying on the floor near the couch. They had to be thrown away. Maybe that's what 'try' meant. She'd always been compulsive about looking at them before she got rid of them, so now she flipped the pages. It wasn't working. She didn't want clothes, or house furnishings or anything.

With a sigh, she picked up another one. She was about to throw it on the pile of those to go in the trash, but instead she sat for a long time looking at the cover. It was one of those catalogues she found hard to look at these days – beautiful children all over the world. Children with hands outstretched for food or water. Children with eyes the color of too-strong coffee. "I can't help you," she would say as she tossed the catalogue aside. "I have no money, no love, no feeling except sorrow."

The child on this cover was not extending her hand. She was smiling and looking out on the world with a look of such pure joy and love that Julie felt the tears coming to her eyes. She reached out and rubbed her finger gently across the cheek. It was the color of the most beautiful pear she had ever seen. She moved her finger and touched a shining, glowing eye. It was slightly slanted. An Inuit, she decided. A beautiful little Eskimo girl. Julie realized she was smiling. For a moment she was frightened and she curled in on herself. But then, almost without being aware of it, her hand reached out

and caressed the beautiful cheek. She allowed herself to smile.

She tore the page off the catalogue and then carefully cut out the picture of the little girl. She put it on her refrigerator door. In the morning when she was waiting for her coffee to be ready, she would look at the picture and she would have to smile an answering smile.

SHE STARED at the telephone for a long time and then, tentatively, she picked up the receiver. Again, she sat without moving. Taking a deep breath, she dialed, checking the piece of paper she held in her hand for the number.

“Hello.” She could tell by his voice that she had wakened him.

“Greg. It’s me, Julie.”

“Julie.” He was wide-awake now. “Are you all right? Is anything wrong?”

“No, no. I’m O.K. I just wanted to ask you about the pear tree we used to have.”

“Julie, for Christ’s sake, it’s midnight!”

“Oh, I didn’t think. I’m sorry. Good night.”

“No! Don’t hang up. Please.” His voice was urgent now. “I’d like to talk to you. I was hoping you’d call.”

“I don’t think I can talk now. All I wanted to know was . . .”

“Yeah. About the pear tree.” She could hear the disappointment in his voice and she sensed the effort he

was making to be patient and understanding. “What about it? What do you want to know?”

“What was its name?”

“Its name? I – I don’t know. We had three, remember?”

“I mean the one with the biggest pears. It was so beautiful – sort of golden and when it was ripe, it had a rosy, pink blush on top of the gold.”

There was a long pause this time and she didn’t know if he was trying to remember the name or if he was annoyed with her and trying to keep it under control.

“I think it was called the Atlantic Queen. Julie, I don’t suppose you can tell me why you want to know this?” He didn’t say “at midnight,” but she knew that’s what he was thinking.

She began to feel panicky. “No. I – I can’t. I don’t really know. I just wanted to know its name.”

“Julie, could I come to see you? Just for a little while? I could come tomorrow, anytime you say. Please, Julie, I’ve missed you so.” His voice broke and at the sound, she hunched her shoulders and drew her arms tightly against her body. But she couldn’t speak.

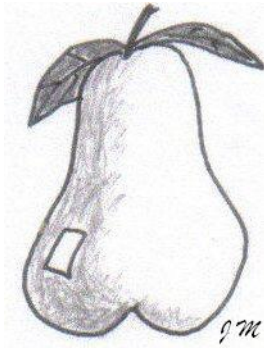
“Try,” Alex had been saying for a year now. “Try. Just one small step.”

“Julie, please. I won’t touch you if you don’t want to be touched. I won’t talk about.... I won’t talk about anything you don’t want to talk about. I just want to see you. I love you, Julie.”

He was a proud man and she realized with a start how difficult it must be for him to plead like this. One small step. One small step. Her voice when she finally spoke was high and hardly more than a whisper. "All right," she said, "two o'clock."

She hung up before he could speak.

Dorothy Tillman



LETTERS FROM THE PAST

The thick packet of letters, browned with age, lay in the bottom of the bureau drawer. Faded blue ribbon held them together. A postmark, 1939, was barely discernible. I would see the letters in the spring when the winter sweaters were removed and then again in the fall when they were returned to what I considered my “sweater drawer.” New sweaters would be added of the latest styles, and, depending on weight gain or loss, the sizes would change. The letters remained.

I knew who sent the letters. They were sent by my mother when I was in nurses training school. I was nineteen years old at the time. What I don’t understand is why I kept them so long without reading them. Was I fearful of their contents? Would they reveal something painful that I had blocked from memory? My relationship with my mother during my teen years was not the best. I felt smothered by her overprotectiveness of me and tried to escape by not responding to her letters. My two older sisters were happily married, living away from home, so all her attention seemed to be centered on me. I wrote to my sisters, but rarely received a response. I felt I didn’t exist for them. When I was growing up, they claimed they loved me, yet there was always a subtle underlying hostility in their actions. The mirror of any weakness, perceived or imagined, was frequently held before me. I could never fit into the mold they demanded. My self-esteem faltered.

When spring arrived this year, as was my custom, I removed the winter sweaters. Upon lifting out the last sweater, I saw the packet of letters again. With housecleaning in mind I mentally debated: Should I throw them out? Give the envelopes to a stamp collector? Read them? Why hadn't I read them before? What was I afraid of? Reason prevailed; I might gain insight to my nineteen-year-old self and possibly a better understanding of my family.

I carefully opened the first letter and wondered if I should continue. It was discolored and stained. Could it be tears? My mother was concerned that I do well in school and why didn't I write home? She missed me. Toward the end of the letter she longed for her old life with her three little girls and the wonderful life she had when her husband was living. I must have complained that I rarely heard from my sisters, they didn't reply to my letters, because in the next letter she wrote that, in time, they would admire and respect me, and I should be patient with them. She apparently sensed my low self-esteem. There was a reference to "you have a good head on your shoulders," and later, "you have always been able to stand on your own two feet." I remember not believing her, because we both knew I was different from my sisters. She ascribed it to different genes and reminded me that I was like her mother, whom she idolized. The last letter in the packet was short. She complained of feeling tired with no stamina to do her chores. Two months later cancer claimed her life.

Her prediction regarding my relationship with my sisters came true. As we advanced in age, forgiveness and compassion replaced the sibling rivalry. I realize now the “smothering” I found so painful in my youth was a loving mother’s panic of leaving her youngest daughter behind. I regret that I waited sixty years to read her letters. By reading them now, I filled in the missing pieces of my life’s puzzle to complete the whole picture. I am grateful for my mother’s gift of helping me to understand myself. My son has the letters now. I hope he reads them soon, so he can get to know the loving grandmother he never met.

Laura Farr

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

I am a “somewhat” on a “scale from one to ten” –
Such weighty questions I attempt to answer when
So many things I’m required to lay bare,
When – as you’ve guessed –
I’m answering a questionnaire.

How does one tackle such a ticklish task?
How intimate the questions that they ask?

Am I, they want to know, “very” or “somewhat” happy?
And would an answer “very” sound too sappy?
Am I “often” or only “sometimes” sad?
If I said, “I don’t know,” would that be bad?

And, what of those situations
On that “scale from one to ten”?
If my pain, for instance, is a “one,”
Should I keep silent, then?

Better say “five,” or more?
Would “eight” be a respectable score?
But, am I now retreating into fear?
Telling them what *I think* they want to hear?

How true are those percentages,
How valid such a stat?
If based on these subjective thoughts,
And craven ones, at that?

If those “little drops of water”
And those “little grains of sand”
Convey the wrong idea,
What will happen then?

Never mind ramifications,
Never mind the why and when,
I'll be safe by being “a somewhat,”
On a “scale from five to ten!”

Hana Stranska

ETERNITY

We cannot own beauty nor hold its formula in our hand.
I tried, when teaching structure and form
in flower vase or tree.
We cannot change the restless wave, its pounding.
I sighed, the lonely ripples in the sand
could not remain for me.
I want to keep these things of beauty
And clasp them close to me.
I cried, they will live on, a joy forever –
even though I will not see.

Edith Young Ellis



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A KIMONO FOR KAZUKO

“It’s not fair,” cried Kazuko. “I’ve worn the same kimono since I was five years old. I don’t like the color, I don’t like those huge orange chrysanthemums and I hate the obi! It’s the color of mud.” She threw the worn brown sash on the floor and slumped onto her futon. “This is the ugliest kimono in all of Tokyo!”

Her dark eyes glittered and her usually soft voice had an unpleasant edge to it.

“I’m sick of wearing castoffs. Michiko has such stupid taste.”

The last remark was unkind, because the kimono she had inherited from her older sister was lovelier than most.

Kazuko’s mother looked sympathetically at her youngest daughter. Having three daughters continually taxed her energy and her patience, to say nothing of the family purse.

In Japan, the kimono, an elaborate outer garment, worn by women, men and children, was usually acquired at age three. Skillful workmanship, making use of pleats and tucks, allowed it to grow along with the child. If made from silk and embellished with embroidery, it was a major investment.

“Please may I have a new kimono, one that I choose myself?” she begged. She was tired of being dutiful and uncomplaining.

“We’ll see,” said her mother.

Summer vacation was approaching, and Kazuko looked forward to the month when she didn't have to grind away at her studies. The pressures of schoolwork were increasing as she prepared for high school. If she was lucky, this would be followed by university. She sighed. Growing up was difficult enough without having to be seen in that excuse for a kimono. She thought of all the festivals and events she had attended over the years. "I can't appear one more time in that bedraggled robe."

Unexpectedly, the next day, her mother took her aside. "How would you like to spend your summer vacation with Grandma and Grandpa Someya at their farm? I am sure they would welcome your company and your help with the farm chores."

Kazuko thought of the cool, green countryside, the rushing mountain streams, of the unconditional love her grandparents showered upon her. She dropped the pan of rice she was washing in her excitement, and the tiny kernels scattered about the floor. Hastily she swept up the rice and gave it another rinse.

"Oh, yes, Mother. I'd like that!" And so it was arranged.

Her grandparents' silkworm farm was an hour's train ride from Tokyo. The old A-frame farmhouse was surrounded by fields of rice and groves of mulberry trees. A mountain rose up behind the house and, down below, a swift, winding river clattered over rocks as it rushed to feed the terraces of rice.

As Kazuko entered the ancient house that summer, she kicked off her sneakers next to an odd assortment of wooden clogs and slippers. She exchanged her jeans for a soft cotton yukata just like Grandmother's. Its blue and white folds enveloped her slender body comfortably. She sat on the straw-covered tatami floor covering and watched Grandmother pad about preparing tea. In an alcove, pictures of departed ancestors were displayed and Grandmother spoke to them each time she passed, and left pieces of fruit and bits of food for their pleasure. Directly across from the shrine, high on a shelf, stood a 21-inch TV. Kazuko sat cross-legged on a cushion before a large, low table. The table was built over a pit. In the winter, charcoal smoldered there and kept one toasty warm. Sitting there, drinking hot green tea, Kazuko wondered what her great-grandparents thought of this modern miracle called television.

Kazuko was kept very busy that summer. Grandfather, a stocky little man, was active from morning 'til night. His eyes twinkled behind the wire-rimmed glasses he was never without. "Rise and shine, little one," he'd call each morning. "Our babies are hungry." Tumbling off her futon, Kazuko quickly dressed and followed him into the shed where the silkworms were housed. The air was warm and moist and smelled of the spicy mulberry leaves which covered the trays of worms.

"Here, Kazuko, cover this tray with leaves," and Grandfather handed her a basket of fresh leaves. "We must feed the caterpillars, larva of the common silkworm moth, every two or three hours until they spin their cocoons of fine silk thread."

Pampered just like babies, Kazuko thought as she watched the hungry worms crunch and munch the leaves. Their crunching and munching rustled the leaves day and night.

“Munch-munch, crunch-crunch. It’s time for lunch. Eat a bunch,” sang Kazuko. The worms, the size of her little finger, ate steadily for five weeks.

Each morning she rushed out to see if the cocoons had been spun. “Not today, Kazuko,” her grandmother smiled. “Here, have another piece of pickled cucumber.” Finishing her breakfast, Kazuko continued the task of covering the worms with fresh, green leaves as she sang her little song.

“Grandfather,” she asked one day, “how many cocoons of silk would it take to make a silk kimono?”

A secret smile played around Grandfather’s mouth, and he scratched his head as he thought.

“Well now, quite a few. There are about 900 feet of thread in one of those little casings. Hard to imagine, isn’t it? I’d say the number of caterpillars you’ve cared for this summer would just about do it.”

“Oh Grandfather,” and Kazuko ran to him and gave him a bear hug. “Is it really possible?”

“Yes, it is possible, my little one,” Grandfather answered affectionately.

One morning, it was very quiet. There was no crunch-crunch, munch-munch. Kazuko tiptoed to the shed. She carefully lifted the leaves, and to her delight,

there were the silkworms, all cozily encased in their silken cocoons.

She shivered with excitement and asked, “What happens next?”

“Well, to keep the threads intact, the moths must be killed before emerging from the cocoons. This is done by placing them in a hot oven. Then in order to soften and loosen the filaments, the casings are soaked in hot water. The threads will be carefully unwrapped and twisted together to form the strong silk fiber that can be woven into cloth.” As the words sank in, Kazuko let out a little sigh. Her stomach felt queasy and she wished she hadn’t eaten that extra bit of salted squid for breakfast.

Grandfather saw the expression on her face. He knew what she was thinking. Wise from years of living, he said, “Choice is a part of life, Kazuko, and life is full of contradictions.

“The oyster gives up its life when it relinquishes its pearl, and the nourishing tidbits of fish and meat that are tucked into your favorite balls of rice once swam in the sea or wandered through fields of grass.”

“And if I wish for a new kimono, the silkworms must be sacrificed,” Kazuko said with new insight.

“Yes,” said Grandfather, “we must be careful what we wish for.”

Summer vacation over, Kazuko returned home to her studies. Weeks later, she received a call from Grandfather.

“The thread is ready to be woven. It is time for you to choose the pattern and colors you desire.”

“It’s happening,” thought Kazuko, “it’s really happening!”

She met Grandfather at the silk factory the following weekend. Long frames, holding lengths of silk thread, ran the length of a large room. As she watched, stencils were placed on the warp threads, and by using a roller, a design was carefully imprinted. A different stencil and a clean roller were used as each new color was added to the design. When the pattern was dry, the weaving began, as horizontal or woof threads went under and over the warp threads. The result was a lovely, delicate pattern of soft, subtle color. Kazuko had thought a lot about the color and design of her kimono. She wanted her kimono to be made of pale yellow silk, the color of forsythia in the early springtime, and she chose a stencil that featured a flock of cranes in flight. The Japanese crane was a symbol of good luck, and she envisioned her cranes printed in green, gold, crimson and plum. The obi, plum colored and shot through with gold threads, would add a pleasing contrast.

Kazuko left the silk factory and returned home, tingling with anticipation. A month or so later on a blustery November day, as the wind rattled the canes of bamboo growing in the garden, Grandfather appeared. He carried a bundle wrapped in a blue and white cotton cloth.

“Here, little one, just in time for the festival welcoming the new year,” and he handed her the package.

Kazuko held her breath as she took the package. Her hands fumbled as she unknotted the ties. As she folded back layers of the wrapping, soft, silk sunshine poured forth.

Cranes in flight skimmed effortlessly across a silken sky, their vibrant colors flashing against the yellow fabric. She sighed and lifted the garment out and held it up to her slight frame. It was perfect in every lovely detail.

If she lived to be one hundred, there would never be another kimono like this one.

Her conscientious caring for her small charges contributed to this feeling; but the miraculous succession of natural events, helped along by Grandfather and the skilled silk workers, filled her with wonder. As her wish for a new kimono came true, she was comforted by the thought that her caterpillars would live on through the beautiful silk they created.

“Crunch-crunch, munch-munch. Followed my hunch. Thanks a bunch!” she sang happily.

Edith R. Pray

RED SHOES

Red Shoes! Red Shoes!
Why does everyone want you, Red Shoes?

“Listen up. I’ll tell you.
I am small red sneakers
 running in wet grass,
red galoshes splashing
 in rain-runneled gutter,
red beaded moccasins
 with forests to explore.

Suddenly I become
 rose-red ballet slippers
 then spike-heeled party pair
 or fuzzy scarlet bedside mules.

Now I’m yours,
 in step with your antiquity.
Slip on your worn grey flats
Let me rest upon the shelf
of your very old self.”

Sally Burrowes



THE HURRICANE OF 1938

In September of 1938 there were no warnings about an imminent hurricane. Hurricanes didn't come with warnings – or with names. They just came. Uninvited. Unanticipated. Hence it will always be known as the Hurricane of 1938, a storm that has never been equaled in terms of lives lost and property damage. It clobbered the whole northeast United States. If you lived on Long Island, you believed you were getting the whole thing dumped on you. If you lived in Rhode Island, you thought you were at the epicenter of the storm. If you were an 8th grader at Stacey Junior High in Milford, Massachusetts, as I was, you only knew that a typical school day was turning into an event never to be forgotten.

This was to be the day of an organizational meeting of a troop of Girl Scouts at our school. When classes were over, I joined the other girls heading to a downstairs classroom. I don't remember if we ever did talk about Girl Scouts. I only remember the leader going to the window and looking at the strangely darkening sky. Was it dark yellow, turning grayer and grayer? She turned to us and said, "Girls, I think you should go home immediately. We'll talk about Scouting another time."

Hardly had we left our school and passed the Memorial Library than the rain began to sting our faces. The wind howling fiercely lifted our skirts and made us stumble. We had to bend into the wind, and sometimes it seemed as though our legs were moving but we

weren't getting anyplace. Some of the girls peeled off in different directions toward their own homes until there were only Eleanor Hixon and I to plod along Main Street.

Hands reached out and pulled us into a furniture store. Several people were there seeking refuge. As we listened to the panic in the adult voices, there was suddenly a terrible crashing sound, splintering glass, pops and bangs and flares. It wasn't too hard to figure out that the neon-type sign that ran the full height of the furniture store had tumbled down. It was enough to send us all out onto Main Street again.

We turned the corner onto Franklin Street. Home didn't seem so far away now, only a few more blocks. However, the once tree-lined street was now unrecognizable and seemingly impassable. The beautiful elms and oaks had been tossed like so many matchsticks. It defies description and yet the picture is implanted in my mind. These huge, old, uprooted trees stretched from one yard to the yard directly across the street. Their enormous branches, still in leaf, lifted their huge boughs, and underneath were cars crushed by the weight of them.

Our progress was incredibly difficult. Sometimes we could crawl under a tree trunk. Sometimes we could shinny over. Other times we had to try to find a way around the roots, but that meant watching for the gaping holes the roots had left. We met no other people as we inched up Franklin Street. Sometimes we could recognize a friend's home, but the entrances to their

homes were blocked by the trees. We couldn't have made it to their doors. We didn't even try.

Eventually our own street came within sight. Claflin Street didn't seem as bad as Franklin. At least there weren't as many trees down. However, a whole new set of problems became evident. Telephone poles and wires were either all the way down, or they were tipping dangerously, their wires dangling. Someone's tin roof had rolled up, like a great big carpet. It tumbled down Claflin hill, like something coming after us out of a nightmare. Before it reached us it became wedged in the downed trees and poles.

Eleanor left me at this point, each of us on our own now to make those last steps into our own homes. We parted with words of encouragement to each other. Although it was still raining and the wind was still whipping about us, the storm was beginning to abate. There was my house standing firm, looking weather-beaten, but welcoming!

I don't remember the welcome I got when I first opened the front door. My mother and father were there. They still had my sister Jane and my brother George to worry about. Jane was presumably safe at Framingham State, where she was a student. George would have his own tale to tell about his trip home from school in Boston. I do remember hugs and kisses and warmth. I remember the dry clothes. We each told our stories, and Mother told about Papa moving the car seconds before a tree would have crushed it.

I remember a lot of incidental things that followed in the wake of the Hurricane of 1938. Time and

sequence are not a part of the memory. How long was it before we could go back to school? How long was it before streets like Franklin and Claflin were open to traffic? We walked all over town looking at the damage and the freaky thing that happened – to my church, for example. The beautiful white steeple, so tall and stately, so New England, was top down into the earth, looking for all the world like a giant had misplaced his ice-cream cone. The Boston Globe thought it was worth a picture!

We lived with candlelight and lamplight. We lived without telephones and radios. And long after we were back in school I was still doing my homework by the lantern that sat in the middle of the dining room table.

Now you can read about the horrendous damage caused by the Hurricane of 1938, the thousands of lives lost, the millions of dollars spent on recovery. But only I can tell you what it was like to be 12 years old trying to get from Stacey Junior High to 28 Claflin Street in the middle of the Hurricane of 1938.

Sarah Klos

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE

What wives will put up with is truly amazing. Shortly before Lois and I were married, I asked her if she liked camping. Her answer was an unequivocal “No!!” It seemed she had tried it once with a woman friend and her three children. They had gone to a lake in New Hampshire, but when Lois saw the size of the small tent and learned she was supposed to sleep on the ground, she opted for a nearby motel room instead. The wisdom of her decision became abundantly clear later that night when her room was invaded by her friend and her children all soaking wet from the heavy rain that had poured through their tent as if it were a sieve.

I explained that I was not talking about that kind of camping, and that I had a travel trailer with all the conveniences of home, a complete kitchen, toilet and bath, and even a furnace and air conditioner. Actually, in my eagerness to obtain her agreement to spend the coming summer with me on a fishing trip to the Yukon and Alaska, I had failed to mention that this trailer, while perhaps satisfactory for a single male, might be much less than that for a newly married couple on a protracted honeymoon.

The kitchen and breakfast nook up front were very cramped and dark, and the bathroom was so tiny that when one sat enthroned, the door had to remain open. However, it was the bed located in the rear that provided the greatest challenge. It was rather narrow and jammed up against the outside wall on one side across from the bathroom and a small wardrobe on the other.

Its foot was partially blocked off by a three-foot-wide partition on which a storage cabinet was suspended facing a similar cabinet on the rear wall over the head of the bed. This meant that the person sleeping next to the wall had better not be prone to claustrophobia, especially since any escape would be blocked by the person sleeping on the outside of the bed, ME. To make matters worse, the foot of the bed had been cut off at an angle to permit room for opening the bathroom door. This left little space for feet, and if two people attempted to share the bed they were condemned to playing footsy the whole night long.

In spite of continuing reservations, in the blush of being newly married, Lois agreed to go along. Thus on one fine day in the middle of May we started out, spending our first night just north of Syracuse. The next morning it began to rain and by the time we had crossed the Thousand Island Bridge into Ontario it had turned bitterly cold. That night, spent crowded against a freezing wall and fighting a losing battle for covers, was undoubtedly one of the worst Lois had ever endured and aroused thoughts about how much worse could “for better or worse” be. Unfortunately, she was about to find out.

The next morning things were a bit strained, but once I got the furnace going and we had consumed a warm breakfast, Lois began to relax even though she still had a caustic comment or two about husbands who stole all the covers and left their wives to freeze. However, the rain had ended, and by the time we were on the road again, harmony had been restored. About ten o'clock, we

stopped for gas just west of Sudbury, Ontario, and changed drivers with Lois taking over the wheel.

I should explain that for pulling our trailer we had a big Suburban station wagon with our fourteen-foot aluminum boat secured to a boat lift on top. The rear of the wagon was crammed with camping and fishing gear, equipment for our boat, boxes of canned goods, and other supplies for our long trip ahead. So far the wagon had performed beautifully, but a couple of times when I had been driving, the trailer had shown a tendency to fishtail. Since both times I had easily brought it back under control, I hadn't paid attention, an act of carelessness that could have proven fatal.

As we gained cruising speed and I made myself comfortable in the passenger's seat, I noticed that two huge logging trucks were approaching us fast from the opposite direction and taking up more than their share of the highway. Lois must have noticed them also and, perhaps in a move to give them more room, somehow caused the trailer to fishtail. Suddenly the trailer took complete charge. We were spun completely around, shot across the highway in front of the trucks and over the edge of the embankment, rolling into a deep ditch to land sitting upright.

Fortunately, we were wearing seat belts and the boat on top of the Suburban absorbed much of the force of rolling over. Still it was a miracle that neither of us was hurt. The heavy boat motor stored in the back of the Suburban had broken loose and was now lodged against the back of my seat. The windshield was completely gone. As canned goods and other stuff went sailing by

our heads, we came to a sudden stop. Lois's door was jammed, but I was able to get out and help her out my side. The trucks had gone on their merry way. Other people stopped immediately and came rushing to our assistance, turning off the propane tanks on the trailer, alerting the police on a cell phone, and staying with us to make sure we were okay until the police and emergency vehicles arrived.

The police were wonderful in their concern and efficiency in handling what appeared to be a hopeless mess. Two large tow trucks arrived. With great effort their crews managed to unhook the trailer from the Suburban and pull both out of the ditch to be ferried to an impounding yard in Sudbury. After making sure we did not need medical care, the police took us to a nice motel where we sought to calm our nerves with a swim in the pool. We also contacted our insurance company and without much success tried to get a night's sleep. The following day, having rented a car, we visited the impounding yard. It was only then that the enormity of the damage done to both the Suburban and trailer became clear to us. The Suburban with its front smashed and the roof partially caved in had clearly been totaled, but it was the flimsy trailer that had suffered the most. When we were finally able to pry the door open and looked inside, the mess was unbelievable. Everything that could be smashed or broken was smashed or broken. The refrigerator door had flown open, and eggs, milk, orange juice, and whatever else was in it had scattered over everything including our bedding and clothes. A stick of margarine had hit the ceiling so hard that it had remained stuck there like a rectangular

stalactite. The juice from a bottle of maraschino cherries covered the only unbroken window, turning it into a lovely pink. It in turn had been followed by the contents of a box of Equal that had stuck to the window, creating a weird but unbelievably beautiful design in pink and blue.

The authorities at the yard helped us locate a U-Haul truck and provided a couple of young men to help us load what we could salvage into it. Thus began the long journey home. On the way, Lois made it quite clear she would never again ride in any contraption where the tail could wag the dog. I immediately attempted to seize the opportunity, assuring her that if we had a motorhome, such a thing could never happen. When this observation was followed by a long, dead silence, I realized I had better hold off before attempting to pursue the subject further. However, after we had returned home and spent several days cleaning our gear and washing all our bedding and clothes, I tentatively broached the subject again. "What would you think about taking a look at a motorhome?" Again there was a long silence, but after a while she said hesitantly, "Well, I suppose we could look." I was so elated I chose to ignore the accompanying sigh.

Allyn Rickett

L'HIVER A MEDFORD LEAS

En hiver, il fait froid.
Si vous voyez un nez rouge,
C'est à moi.
Peut-être il vaut mieux
De ne pas me voir en face,
Et je suis trop gelée
Pour qu'on m'embrasse –
Alors, qu'est-ce-que vous voulez
Que je fasse?

Hana Stranska



MEMORIES OF MY FAMILY

Meeting of the Minds

Elias Avery Lowe, age 27, met Helen Tracy Porter, age 30, in Munich in 1906. He was short, with a mop of black curly hair and eyes of a deep brown that looked about him appraisingly. She was taller and slender, with the tiny waist of the period, and heavy hair piled on top of her head. They were not immediately sympathetic.

Helen came to Munich in 1906 as a graduate of Wells College to enroll in the drama department of the university. Elias was in the final year of work there for his Ph.D. in Latin paleography. Their backgrounds could not have been more diverse. He, a Russian Jew by birth and now American through his father's naturalization, came to America with his family at the age of twelve, intent on absorbing everything he could of this new land. She was the product of a small town in rural Pennsylvania, a "lady" and cultivated, but with rebellion beneath her quiet demeanor.

Initially, Elias had been smitten by Helen's sister, sweet, gentle Fanny – in Munich a few years earlier to study voice, but now returned to America to marry. He was less drawn to Helen. But after a few weeks of long walks in the Bavarian hills, and fishing expeditions in Bavarian streams, he became increasingly attracted. They talked endlessly, of the friendship between Goethe and Schiller, of Shakespeare and Keats, her special loves, of *Childe Harold*, which Elias was reading, of *Lohengrin*, which he had seen so many times he almost knew it by

heart – she did not match him there. They talked of George Eliot and Georges Sand, of John Stuart Mill, of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, of George Bernard Shaw – she considered herself a feminist, she told him. They read Plato and Browning aloud to each other. They could not stop talking – as though their entire past had been spent in steeping themselves in Western culture and now, suddenly, pent up so long, it all came spilling out, scalding them with the headiness of it all, the relief of finding someone else like themselves. It was their minds that fell in love.

Sunday Lunch

Our household was by no means affluent, in spite of the household help. I believe our education was mostly paid for by my father's brothers. We lived austerely, by American standards.

My mother had minimal desire for fripperies, did not dress herself extravagantly, or to excess, or us children either. We were not taught how to make ourselves look our best. Any wish to acquire “things” was not part of our upbringing – though I remember secretly coveting a silver-backed brush-and-comb set lying resplendent on my mother's bird's-eye maple dressing table. Meals were simple.

But on Sunday we had the celebratory joint – usually roast lamb or beef with Yorkshire pudding – and sprouts. It was a rather solemn occasion, at which the grown-ups carried on conversation and we were silent. When in the company of adults, at that time, children

were pretty quiet unless spoken to.

The main course was followed by dessert – fruit of the season – grapes, plums, pears, apples and oranges, with nuts and dried figs and raisins spilling out of the cracks, and all heaped on a large platter. And it was my job as “junior fellow” to pass this platter around the table.

My father had what amounted to reverence for Oxford, the university and its traditions, and at his college in hall at dinner it was the junior fellow who passed the fruit. As I remember it, I as the youngest carried out this mimicry solemnly, but with embarrassment and some discomfort, as the platter was heavy.

But I loved to watch my mother, at the end of the meal, pour herself a glass of port from a cut glass decanter with a silver lid and lip. I sat entranced as she shelled walnuts and filberts, picked the meat out of them, sometimes adding raisins, and filled up the glass. I remember its color, wonderfully red and deep, not quite opaque. The color of rubies, I imagined. Sometimes my mother held the glass up to the light, turning it slowly. She'd let the mixture steep for a minute or two, then stir and begin to sip. The whole idea of it remains, for me, a potion with mythic properties.

Patricia Lowe

VIEW FROM THE TRAIN

October Along the Hudson River Valley

Thought

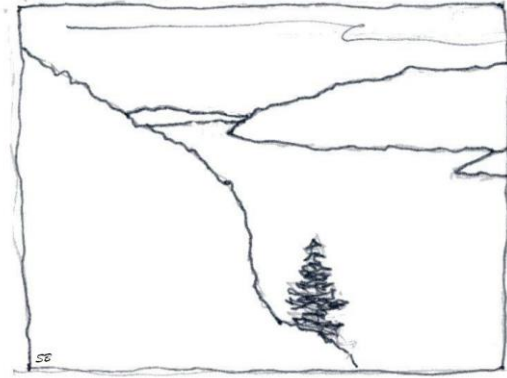
The picture window scans the landscape
At 100 feet per second.
How wondrous that abandoned factories,
Panels shattered, bricks crumbled, roofs collapsed,
Flit by in an instant,
Only to reveal again, exactly where they were,
Majestic Palisades across the watery divide,
Orange-clad trees worshipping at their feet.
What marvel to witness Beauty and Permanence
Make a mockery of Ugliness and Decay
Swept aside with such dispatch.
How lucky to have Trigonometry
As my travel companion!

Afterthought

A thousand or two Octobers hence
They'll excavate, brush, measure, frown, delight
Over shards and blackened concretions,
Over objects rusted beyond recognition.
Beautiful! they'll say. What a find!
And they'll divine what took place here
In ancient times.
Then, exhausted by their efforts,

They'll rest and behold the landscape.
Majestic Palisades across the watery divide,
Orange-clad trees worshipping at their feet.
And they'll think, Those trees weren't even sown,
Nor even the trees from whose seeds they sprang,
When all this stuff was new.
How lucky they'll feel to have Archaeology
With its own definition of Beauty and Permanence!

Herb Heineman



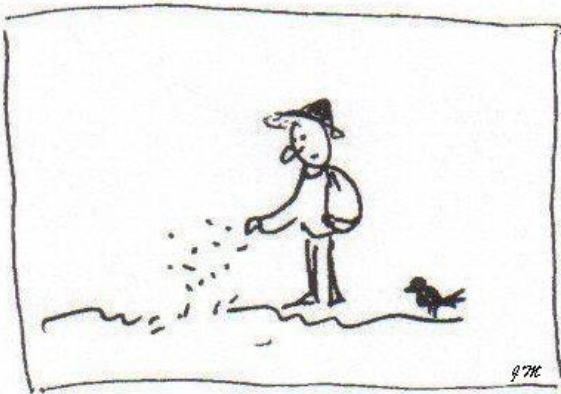
HIDDEN BEAUTY

It's time to buy my seeds –
those colorful envelopes that promise
to produce the beautiful flowers pictured .
The racks of seed packets
are a joy to behold –
so brilliant, such an unbelievable variety,
some annuals, some perennials,
some need shade, some sun,
giant or dwarf, mixed colors or only one,
and some have a promise of fragrance.
So many choices that it is hard to decide
what I want to grow in my garden

Daylight hours have increased,
the sun has warmed the earth,
and gentle rains have moistened it.
Now open an envelope.
The seeds are very different –
some flat, long, oval or round,
tan, brown, green, black, even orange,
as tiny as ground pepper, or as large as a sunflower seed.
Each holding its secret of beauty.
Come out, little seeds, I'll put you in your bed
and cover you gently,
so you can swell and crack your shell
to let the roots and sprouts escape.

Come on, little seeds, grow,
reach up toward the sky and form your flower heads.
May they be as lovely as your mother's
were last year.
Seeds are promises of beauty in my garden.

Lois Rickett



ONE SUMMER DAY

It would always turn out to be the hottest day of the summer when Pop took me to the shore. Oh how the weather forecasts were read and re-read in the newspapers, because when I was five no radios or TV's were announcing this thing. What if I should awake to hear it raining! Suppose the sun forgets to come up! Suppose I just couldn't make my legs work in the morning! The agonies of childhood – suspense – and oh how many hours one must wait before the last goodbye could be said and off we could go – Pop, me, his inevitable and unfailing black bag, and Possie.

Now I must tell you about Possie. He was a stuffed animal, and I hesitate in calling him that, who started his life being an opossum. Except for his long nose and small eyes, a tail long since departed and sparse would-be fur, he never resembled such an animal. He was a “person,” a very special individual who had whole suits made for him from what was left of my new dresses with sometimes even hats to match – and he had his own little shoes. Someone in the family added eyebrows to Possie (in ink), which gave him a rather sad and quizzical look. He stood about nine inches tall and was just a perfect size to hold up to any window, including cars, trolleys, trains or buses, so he could look out. There was never a trip in my childhood that did not include Possie. I longed for a bathing suit for him but was persuaded against the idea on the strength that his anatomy would not take kindly to water.

I always missed seeing Pop's bag being packed because of my constant rushing out to check the weather. But the great day started with a hasty and tasteless breakfast. I had a new pair of sandals and new socks and garters with rosettes to hold them up saved especially for this day.

* * *

Pop and I wait at the corner of our street for the trolley car. I've found out you could press an ear to a telegraph pole and hear the car blocks away long before it comes into sight. I yelp "It's coming, I hear it," and know I'll get the same rather tepid response from Pop – "Just vibration," he'll say, and some of the mystery will leave this thrilling feat. The trolley must go around the "loop," which means it heads away from town for a few blocks before it turns – another delay. From the trolley stop to the train station is a strange walk in the very early morning, as the streets are nearly deserted with perhaps a dog trotting along headed for whatever dogs head for.

The tickets are bought and there is the train snorting and puffing, seeming very impatient to leave. This is an excursion train, so the fares are lower. I always expected an excursion train to be in bright reds and yellows and even blues, but here's an ordinary looking one but nevertheless exciting. "Let's hurry and get a good seat," says Pop. Of course one must never sit by an open window because a cinder will get in one's eye for sure. We feel quite snug leaning back on the maroon plush seat and Possie has his window to gaze out of. From out of Pop's bottomless black bag appears a roll of Boston wafers, little flat candies of all colors, just right

for a trip, and I still think so after all these years even though they've acquired a fancier name.

Arriving at the shore we find several conveyances ready to take us to "points of interest" or to the "amusement center." There is a large carriage drawn by two horses that has seats one behind the other and a canvas roof with a fringe all around it. There are several jitneys, also waiting, their drivers keeping a wary eye out for business.

But there is a glimpse of the boardwalk and just above it a stretch of the ocean itself. And yes, if all is quiet, one can hear the pounding of the surf! We will walk –

Before we can go down to these wonderful waves there is a bucket and shovel to be bought; it would be unthinkable to be without that. "I think I want a green one this time," I declare, "a beautiful green one!" And sure enough, along the boardwalk we come to quite an array of little buckets and it is hard to choose from such lovely colors.

But here we go with my new green bucket and we are fortified by now with root beer. Oh yes, we can drink things but never, never must we eat anything before bathing! I had visions at these times of the contents of my stomach turning into a hard ball, my legs and maybe my arms paralyzing, with death the end of it all if I should be so foolish as to partake of any food whatsoever. I even worry a bit about having eaten the candies on the train. But Pop says, "Oh no, that candy has gone down into the place where candy goes by

now,” and it’s rather comforting to know I have a special compartment for candy.

We must rent bathhouses and bathing suits now – the man will look us up and down judging for size and hand over our suits with two keys having numbers for our dressing rooms. We roar with laughter at each other when we meet on the ramp leading down to the beach because Pop looks so funny in his shapeless red and black suit and I in the inevitable black and white dress-like thing, square neck, puffed sleeves and long bloomers hanging down.

Pop has his black bag, of course, and you will see later why this is. But then comes the most horrifying thing that must be endured – Possie must be put in it! Oh yes, he can never be left out on the beach – someone might take him, and even the tide could possibly claim his life. So there is no way except that he be shut up in his horrible prison.

But Possie and all else is forgotten, even the necessity for watching our possessions stowed carefully by a post under the boardwalk – as we splash in the glorious waves.

As people stroll by we hear a rumor that a whale has been sighted off this coast! So Pop asks a man we meet about it – sure enough someone has seen a whale. A whale – Oh what a thrill this is. Not concerning myself with the fact that this episode happened miles out to sea, I half expect to bump noses with a whale any time for the rest of our swim.

At last we sit on the beach and find ourselves terribly hungry. From out of the bag comes a series of things to eat that taste like nectar from the gods. There are little long hard rolls that Pop cuts into slices with his penknife. On these rounds he smears pieces of cheese and sometimes squares of bologna. Oh yes, down in the depths he finds a can opener to open a can of sardines. I can see to this day his carefully removing the tiny backbones and other nasty things from the sardines – then we have bits of fish on our slices of roll. There is no end to these little tidbits. All of it is washed down by rather tepid lemonade he has brought in two Citrate of Magnesia bottles. These are glass bottles having a sort of porcelain-topped cork on a hinge-like spring. (It was usual to be enjoying your drink as you drank from your bottle and this cork thing would come down and whack you on the nose.)

This little picnic is enjoyed to its utmost, however, and to this day I have never tasted any better food.

I don't think of asking but wait hopefully to see if there is a Wilbur bar of chocolate for dessert – and of course there is. This is a semi-sweet chocolate made in little blocks spelling WILBUR and it's always a guess which block will taste the best, a W or perhaps a B. Anyway, a piece was generally wrapped up and saved toward the warding off of a starvation attack on the way home.

Where is Possie? Oh, he is ensconced on a throne made of sand and is watching everything in general.

Now there comes the time when Pop must have his stroll along the sand. I realized even then that this is

the high spot of the whole thing for him. I must sit and watch our belongings and perhaps draw things I see. Yes, Pop has provided me with a tablet and pencil from the never-failing black bag! But the empty feeling I endure as I see him walk off to pick up choice shells and other treasures! Did parents leave five-year-old little girls on their own in those days or did it mean that Pop trusted me to sit tight, not speaking to strangers, as I was warned, patiently to await his return? Suddenly the people about me do become strange-looking to me and there seems nothing much worth making a sketch of – perhaps for Pop’s sake I do halfheartedly try to draw a boat I see in the distance. This will probably turn out to look like a flat box bouncing around on a very bumpy sea. Mostly I have my eye on Pop as I watch him get smaller and smaller in the distance until he is a tiny speck! What if, oh horrors, what if a huge wave dashes up and sweeps this speck that is Pop right away? This does not happen and in a very short while here he is back with some shells and seaweed to take home. Today I have managed to find a dandy little fish that must go home with me – very dead. It is now resting in my little bucket in which Pop has confidently stored away his trophies. More about the fish later.

And now comes the time Pop will read his “Tower,” a little magazine he has brought, and I am allowed to start covering him with sand – this is a special privilege and a decided thrill to see Pop being reduced to a mound of sand! The reading is abandoned finally as I persuade him to lie full length with his head on a sand pillow. Then comes the fast and furious piling and packing down the sand with just his head allowed out for

breathing purposes. I work away against the chance of his getting restless with it all. Then there will be huge cracks appearing in my masterpiece as Pop emerges from his sand cocoon. But of course, emerge he does and we find it is time to pack our things, take a last quick dip in the waves to wash off the sand, and to leave this lovely ocean perhaps for another whole year – what a nasty thing that is. A year in a little girl's life is an eternity.

This is the day I buy my GOLD balloon! We are dressed quite properly again and here, walking along the boardwalk, I see a balloon man, his many-colored balloons bobbing away above his head, and there among them is a really and truly gold one. After many sortings of strings it is at last mine, and oh the joy of it. I am sure everyone is saying – just look at that – a real gold one. It must be tied to my belt because of the gas inside of it as it could possibly fly away up into the clouds.

Here is the Playhouse, having the most wonderful amusements – slides, roller coasters, flying ships and all kinds of daring things to ride. I, however, am only allowed a ride on the merry-go-round. It is a wonderful thrill and a time for almost utter abandonment – this riding up and down and round and round on a most magnificent-looking horse. I enjoy every minute of the glorious ride, the tinkling beep-beep of the music coming from its center. The music seems to be getting slower and slower as my horse loses some of its bounce. It is then I begin to hope that it will come to a stop right where I see Pop patiently waiting and not on the other side.

We must have our ice cream cones now. There was the mistake once of indulging in this treat before the merry-go-round, resulting in a very nasty accident. There are games of chance, one after another, there are darts to throw at balloons, wheels to turn to try your luck, guns to shoot down dummies and lots of ways to win or try to win prizes. I long to try my hand at one of these booths and perhaps win a lovely big teddy bear or something equally as nice. "This is nothing but a kind of gambling," Pop says, and we must move on. I do not question why Pop thinks the Fish game does not come under this category but accept the chance to play it. Here bright wooden fish must be hooked with a little rod and line before they disappear over the edge of a trough of water. The breathless wait as the attendant looks at the number on the bottom of your fish and you are told to choose something from the bottom shelf. I triumphantly stride away with a little cat made of chalk and am sure I got it for nothing.

Our day must come to an end, but there is the train ride ahead. This is enjoyed again except for an embarrassing incident. There is an odor of fish that seems to pervade over us and the odor is of a fish that has long departed this life. And now Pop traces it down to my little bucket and promptly throws the whole thing from the train window. "My lovely bucket, my lovely fish," I cry, but he only gives a disgusted grunt and says, "It's a good thing we are out in the country; never could have gotten rid of the thing in town."

At last we have arrived in Bridgeton, our hometown, and Pop buys a box of gumdrops for Mother

in the drugstore. “Nothing much she would have liked down at the shore,” he says, “and these are her special kind.”

It is quite dark when we reach home and there is barely time to relate the experiences of the day, before I have to go to bed. We begin to feel our sunburn but believe that is just part of having a wonderful day at the shore.

And what are a little girl’s dreams made of? Sand castles, a friendly whale that allows you to stroke his nose, endless pink ice cream cones, a gold balloon that has not yet shriveled but is hanging on the ceiling, a merry-go-round horse that decides to live in her own backyard and the sound of waves making a perfect lullaby!

Edith Young Ellis



MY FIRST DANCE

I was amused last Christmas when I saw that high school couples going to their Christmas dances could rent a stretch limousine to add a touch of glamour to their evening.

I laughed out loud. It took me back (was it really fifty years ago?) to my first real dance, one where you brought a girl a corsage, and stretch limousines were, thank God, a thing of the future!

It is a memory that I treasure with warmth and a little bit of pain and embarrassment.

Naturally all dances begin by getting a date. I remember sitting next to the phone, picking it up, putting it down, panicking whenever the operator said, "Number, please?" (which is what operators did in those days), trying to find the courage in my fourteen-year-old soul to call Ann.

My mother came into the den where the telephone was to ask if I was all right.

Bordering on disrespect I shouted, "Leave me alone!" I think she realized that I was going through one of the more difficult passages of manhood and that I should be left alone.

I finally completed the call and when her mother answered, I asked if Ann was there.

"Yes, I'll get her. Just a moment."

After an eternity or two, Ann said, “Hello.” My throat, before or since, has never been dryer.

“Would you like to go to the Christmas Dance?” I blurted out.

“Who is this?” she asked, and when I stopped to think about it, it was an eminently reasonable question.

“Oh, sorry, Ann. This is Gus Owens. I just wondered if you’d like to go to the Christmas Dance with me?”

“I’d love to,” she said, which was like hearing the music of the heavenly spheres in their courses.

Well, one hurdle had been successfully cleared.

The next one was that at a dance, one was expected to dance and I was very shaky in that field of expertise. I conscripted my mother to give me fox-trot and rudimentary waltz lessons the afternoon of the dance. So far, so good.

It took about two hours to get dressed, an hour and a half of which was spent trying to get the right kind of wave in my hair. I finally gave up trying to compete with what Ronald Reagan had been given by Divine Right and settled for what I had.

The angst began as soon as my father dropped me off at Ann’s house. Huge knots formed in my stomach, my mouth again became the Sahara, and my breathing felt like someone had a stranglehold on my windpipe. Nonetheless, I summoned up the courage to knock on the door. Mrs. Dowling answered with a warm, motherly smile, which I desperately needed, and invited me in.

“Ann will be right down. Why don’t you sit on the sofa,” she said with the utmost kindness. My mind was a total blank. I clutched the box holding the corsage like a survivor from the Titanic must have clutched onto a piece of driftwood.

And then it happened, one of perhaps, relatively speaking, the worst experiences of my life. Ann’s ten-year-old sister, Margaret, came running into the room with a wicked, wicked smile on her face. “Are you in love with my sister?” she asked.

I have a memory of trying to crawl under the sofa but surely that must have been a fantasy. I am absolutely certain that I didn’t shrink to two inches, although I felt like it. The reality probably was that I just sat there thunderstruck, embarrassed as I have never been, before or since, to this day.

“Margaret,” Mrs. Dowling said in a command voice that would have made General Patton sound like a choirboy, “you get upstairs this instant!”

A few moments later, Ann floated down the stairs in her new party dress, looking beautiful, and off we went.

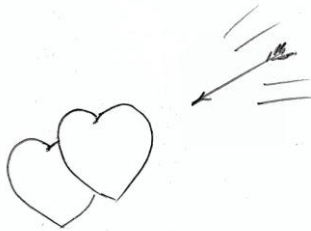
I tried to quench the yearning that Margaret would be locked in her room until Groundhog Day on a strict diet of peanut butter (no jam), crackers and water, but with little success.

I spent the rest of the evening apologizing to Ann for stepping on her feet, and she spent the rest of the evening smiling graciously and saying that it was all right. It has since occurred to me that one of the differences

between raising boys and girls is that boys' mothers try to teach their sons how to dance, and daughters' mothers teach their daughters how to smile graciously, hold back the tears and say, "That's all right."

Honor forbids me from saying what happened when I dropped her off after the dance, but it is an evening I remember fondly, even with its awkward moments.

Gus Owens



NOODLES-OUT-OF-MACARONI

I didn't know I was a cat person until well into adulthood. When I was a young girl my pets were goldfish and a turtle. As you can imagine, I was totally deprived but did not know it. I was terrified of cats, and my first close cat encounter didn't help the situation when a friend's Siamese, sensing my fear, eyed me as though my legs would make a nice scratching post.

Well, that was a long time ago, and now I am totally captivated by cats. After my conversion, two wonderful cats owned me, at two different periods in my life. Presently, I am owned by JT, short for Jasmine Traffic, a name she came by quite naturally.

JT is 16 years old now and has been with me for almost all of that time. Happily, I can report that JT is thriving at Medford Leas, although she was not well before we came here. She weighs in at about five pounds and is really scrawny, down from her maximum weight of 12 pounds. However, her coat still shines, and she is agile enough to jump on the bed that we share. We are two old companions who love my new apartment and have made a wonderful adjustment to our new living arrangements.

I have met so many wonderful people since coming to Medford Leas; and many are owned by cats. When we discover our common interest, the special bond that is formed is quite amazing. Each of us is not hesitant to share stories of how we came to be owned by our special pet, knowing that we are common spirits.

I want to tell you about my first cat named Noodles. Her mother was named Macaroni so, I picked the name Noodles to keep it in the pasta family, and, as with thoroughbred horses, she was thought of as Noodles-out-of-Macaroni.

In 1965, when I married my second Sam (yes my first husband was also named Sam and, by coincidence or otherwise, so was my father), he thought that feline-fear should be conquered. As a psychologist, he believed in emotional growth. Kittens were readily available just for the asking, but we traveled from our Bronx apartment to Princeton to get Noodles. Sam had a client who lived there. Her cat had just had kittens, and she convinced Sam that one of them would be worth the trip. She was right.

The trip home with this adorable kitten was memorable. I was frightened because I did not know what to expect, and I am sure Noodles was also, since at six weeks old, she had just been precipitously separated from her mother. Sam held the kitten on his lap, and I drove the two hours it took to get home. We had arranged the kitty litter, water and food in the apartment before we left, and, as soon as we got in, Sam released the kitten into her new home. She was skittish and gingerly looked around the apartment. We introduced her to the kitty litter, and, without hesitation, she was in the box and knew how to use it. I was truly amazed.

After the initial excitement caused by such a little kitten smart enough to use the kitty litter, take a drink and eat a little food, we prepared for bed. I put the kitten on the couch in the living room on a soft blanket.

I thought that Noodles would be missing her mother, Macaroni, so I put a clock in a sock and placed it next to her so she would be fooled that the ticking was her mother's heart. We went to bed and after a few minutes, I was curious as to how Noodles was doing. I walked into the living room and approached her but became quite frightened because she was growling at me.

What could I have done to cause her anger? My first time alone with Noodles and I was frightened by her. How outlandish to have such a reaction from an adorable kitten. I called out to Sam who came at once to see what was happening, and he burst out laughing because Noodles was so happy that she was purring. I had never been that close to a cat and thought that the purring was a growl. After feeling a little foolish, I also laughed and felt comfortable to get close enough to give Noodles a gentle pat on her head.

When Noodles was two, Eben was born. We then became a family of four because Sam's daughter, Nina, also lived with us. Our family moved from the Bronx to a single-family home in Montclair. Noodles then became an outdoor cat and managed very well because she still had her front and back claws.

Noodles was always very independent and had several ways to come and go with only a small gesture or meow to get attention. Sometimes the meow was accompanied by some scratching at the back door. However, that changed when we adopted Laika, our Great Pyrenees, who was named after the first dog in space. To avoid Laika, Noodles found a tree to climb to reach the second floor of the house and would scratch at

the bathroom window to ask to come in. Noodles was also a high jumper and was so agile that she could jump from the floor to the top of a secretary. She found that perch very comfortable and as far from Laika as she could get.

Another very wonderful characteristic of her independence was her fastidiousness. She was always cleaning herself. For her whole life as an outdoor cat, she was so fussy that she never would allow a flea to stay on her long enough to need a flea collar.

Noodles brought us a lot of joy over the twenty years that she lived. She was playful, comforting when I needed her to be and just a wonderful addition to our family. She was totally independent even up until her last day with us.

We were all in the kitchen having dinner when she had what appeared to be a slight stroke. She fell down but after a few minutes was able to stand on her four paws. She quietly walked to the back door and meowed to go out. When she did not come home after a reasonable time, we searched for days to find her. But we never did. She had left to die and spared us the grief to have to make other arrangements. We never saw her again. Perhaps, it was just my idealism, but I was comforted in the belief that when she left this world, she did so on her own terms and found her Valhalla.

Anita Walters Goldworth

LOST IN FLORENCE

My class of Interior Design was traveling the length of Italy. In Florence, those many years ago, we were having full days, composed of lectures and tours of the city's treasures. Each evening, most of the group wanted only to sit down at a café table with a glass of wine and relax. My own preference was to retrace my steps once again. One such place was the park on the promontory high above the river and city. I had come to the replica of the statue of David and had only a short while to enjoy the changing effects of the setting sun on the bridges and city. Below, lanterns all over the city came on, creating an even more spectacular view.

Suddenly, every light went out and I was left in the dark. I realized then that the postwar curfew was still in effect. I could not see my feet! How was I to find my way out of the park and back to my hotel? Groping with my foot, I found the curb of the sidewalk. Walking with one foot in the gutter, I located the entry, which was hidden in dense shadow by trees and shrubs. Step by step, I moved downward, finally locating the river and bridges.

The winding way was lined with darkened houses that bordered the road. I began to hear a rich, deep male voice singing. Ahead of me, in the doorway of a building, I saw a cluster of neighbors standing in the light of a single bulb. Staying back, to remain unseen,

I heard this budding Pavarotti finish his singing. All entered the house and that light went out as well.

With lifted spirits, I made it to the Ponte Vecchio, and crossed the Arno River. No longer lost, I then managed to locate my hotel in that dark, deserted city.

Todd Butler

PRIDE OF AGE

It's dangerous to become prideful of one's age. Too soon this pride becomes an encrustation of barnacles on an old piling, dull monotonous, begging for the days of pink and lavender anemones that swayed and furled their searching tentacles.

Or it is an empty oyster shell on barren mud bank with only shine of pearly lining to bespeak the turn of many tides. A child may come by, lift your cast-by shell, try to skip it on cutting waters of the marsh channel.

Is there perhaps some middle way to hitch one's age to one's seaside history? How about a periwinkle, slipping ever more slowly over rocks of a tidal pool, enchanting young seekers with your tiny conical shell...

Sally Burrowes

THE BOY WHO LIVED

The town of L'Anse, Michigan, sits in the arm of Keweenaw Bay on Lake Superior where my husband's engineering firm was building an electric power plant.

Here, bear and deer might wander into our back yard to eat apples in the fall. The lake would freeze in winter, northern lights flicker in the sky and temperatures could drop to forty degrees below zero.

Then spring would come with smelt running and salmon fighting their way upstream to spawn. Nestled in the woods, L'Anse was a beautiful spot.

I was a nurse at the hospital on the bay when my two children were in school.

One midnight, the phone rang. "Would you come in to 'special' a boy who was run over on his bike by an automobile? His parents are from out of town. He has multiple injuries and fractures and is not expected to live through the night."

The young man was awake and terrified. His pulse was high, his blood pressure low. Intravenous ran into his veins. The prognosis was grim.

"I am dying," the boy told me. "Would you hold my hand?"

"Yes," I said. "I'll hold your hand, take care of you and pray that you will have a good night. Why don't you go to sleep and hopefully, things will be better in the morning. I won't leave you."

He smiled, squeezed my hand and went to sleep. During the long night, I sat with him. He held onto my hand.

Gradually, his vital signs improved. By morning, he was not only alive, but better.

Steadily, the boy improved. On the day of his discharge, I had coffee with him.

“Do you remember the night you came in that I ‘specialed’ you?”

He smiled. “No, I don’t remember anything of that night at all,” he said.

These many years later, warm memories remain of a boy whose hand I held during a long night of dying. The boy who lived.

Grace Spicer Stewart

COLUMBIA: A Fictional Story

Clarence stood leaning against the doorway of the hangar. He watched a light rain falling on the field. The rising sun was trying to push away the heavy clouds. Small flags along the grass runway stood silently at attention with rain dripping off them. He turned slowly, closed the hangar door, then walked back into his office and sat his long, lean frame down behind the wooden desk. Clarence unbuttoned the top of his flying suit and tore off the top page of the desk calendar. It read May 20, 1927. He leaned back and put both arms behind his head. He felt the tension as if waiting for something to happen. Then impatiently he suddenly leaned forward and reached for the telephone on the desk.

“Operator, get me President 4-1806.”

His long fingers drummed on the desk and he thought to himself. Why did I ever go in partnership with this guy? Talk about unreliable, he takes the cake.

“Hello, operator, I’m trying to reach Charlie Levine. Still no answer? Thank you.” He hung up the phone in disgust, got up from the desk and walked back into the hangar. He flipped on the wall switch. The hangar was bathed in light from the overhead roof lamps. In front of him sat a silver-winged monoplane. It was Blanca’s great aircraft design, a metal tube fuselage and the powerful Wright J-5 engine. He knew it was worth every penny that Levine had paid for it. Along the front of the fuselage written in bright blue was the word *COLUMBIA*. He walked around the aircraft, as he had

done a hundred times, and inspected every part of the plane. He said to himself, if that son-of-a-bitch would only show up, I know we could do it, win the \$25,000 Orteig prize, be the first to cross the Atlantic from New York to Paris.

After one last look he turned off the hangar lights and walked out onto the field. The rain had stopped; a light mist hung like a blanket everywhere. The dull sun was rising in the east. Across the field he could see Lindbergh and his ground crew getting the *Spirit of St. Louis* ready. He thought, there is still time if Charlie would only get here.

Clarence caught sight of Bert Acosta, his co-pilot, running toward him. He was a short man with steel frame glasses. When he got close he yelled out:

“Lindbergh’s going to take off; have you heard from Levine?”

“Not a word and he has all the necessary clearance papers, so there goes the prize!” Clarence said in a voice filled with sadness. They could only watch as the crew pushed the *Spirit* into the wind. The engine caught and slowly the plane rolled along the bumpy field, picking up speed as it passed the flags. It lifted off the ground flying over the trees and telephone lines. Heading east, it disappeared into the morning haze.

Clarence Chamberlain put his hands into the pockets of his flying suit as he and Bert returned to the office. He sat himself back at his desk and closed his eyes. Bert’s sudden shout made him jump up.

“Here comes Charlie, and he’s in one hell of a hurry!”

They both ran outside and watched as a black Pierce-Arrow sedan raced across the field and skidded to a stop in front of them. The chauffeur got out and opened the rear door. Out stepped an elegant man wearing a three-piece suit, gray spats over his shoes with a light tan camel hair coat draped over his shoulders. He was tall, only twenty-eight, with an angular face that women called handsome. His dark hair was wavy and his eyes a deep blue. This was Charlie Levine. He was a millionaire who had made his fortune in war surplus material.

He lit a cigarette and said, “Chamberlain, I want you to get *Columbia* out of the hangar NOW! We are taking off right away.”

“What do you mean we’re leaving? Lindbergh is gone, the prize is gone with him, we don’t even have clearance papers,” said an angry Clarence.

“Look, I’ll explain everything to you as soon as we get out of here and into the air,” Levine responded, looking back across the field. “I don’t have time to argue with you, just get going now.” He nervously crushed out the cigarette under the heel of his shoe.

Clarence and Bert hurriedly went back and slid open the giant hangar doors. With the help of Charlie and the chauffeur they all rolled the silver monoplane out onto the field. The mist and haze were gone and the plane glistened in the morning sun.

“OK, Clarence, let’s get in and get the hell out of here.”

“What do mean us? What about Bert?”

“Bert stays here, I’m going as your passenger. I’m still the owner of *Columbia* and I make the decisions. There will be no discussion about this.”

Bert and Clarence looked at each other in complete disbelief.

“You really don’t need a co-pilot,” exclaimed Bert.

“Will you two end the bullshit and get my plane in the air right now,” said Levine.

Clarence shrugged and gave Bert a puzzled look as if to say, I don’t understand any of this. Then he put on his leather fur-lined flying jacket, helmet and goggles.

“Bert, pull the prop through for me,” Clarence said as he opened the side door of the plane cabin. Charlie jumped in and took a seat at the right side of the cockpit. Clarence followed and lowered his big frame into the pilot seat. He switched on the ignition and yelled “clear” out the side window. Bert pulled down on the propeller and let it swing a complete circle. He stood back as the Wright engine came to life with a deep throaty growl. Bert and the chauffeur each held a wing spar and helped maneuver the plane onto the field. Then they let go and watched the silver craft move down to the end of the runway. The morning sun reflected off the wings as the plane began to move. Slowly *Columbia* became airborne. It seemed to follow the same flight path that the *Spirit of St. Louis* had taken only an hour before.

As Bert and the chauffeur stood watching, suddenly two cars approached the hangar at full speed. The first was a police car with its siren wailing, the second was a dark green Packard. When they came to a stop, two policemen, one in uniform and the other a detective, got out of the police car. The door of the sedan opened and out stepped a beautiful, young, well-dressed woman. She walked over to Bert with the policemen behind her.

“All right, where is that bastard? He is supposed to be in the Kings County District Court today.”

Bert pointed to the aircraft just disappearing behind the trees.

“Well, lady, there he goes and you will have one hell of a time trying to catch him.”

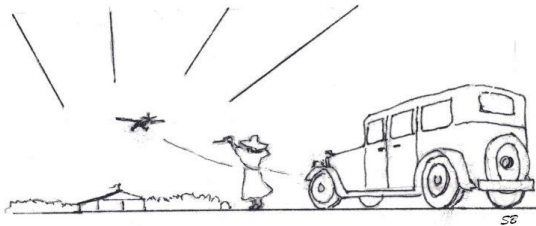
“I knew it, as soon as I had him served with the divorce papers and Judge Kaufman had set a court date, that son-of-a-bitch would find a way to get out of it. But flying away in his damn airplane takes the cake.” Her voice grew louder and her face redder.

“How did you know where to find him?”

“That’s easy. He always loved that dumb plane, even more than me. He tried to sell it to Lindbergh and when that deal fell through he hired you and Chamberlain and brought the plane here to Roosevelt Field. Now he’s gone.” She had started to cry. One of the two policemen walked over to Bert and said, “So, where do think they’re headed?”

“I would guess anywhere you can’t catch them. Charlie is one smart wheeler-dealer and you never know what he will do next.”

They all looked up as *Columbia* made one final swoop over the field then headed east into the rays of the morning sun.



BERT SAT in the hangar reading the *NY Times*. The headline for May 22 said “LINDBERGH LANDS IN PARIS, making the first solo flight across the Atlantic.” As he folded the paper, he saw a small news item on the bottom of page two: “Clarence Chamberlain has piloted the aircraft *Columbia* from NY to Eislebern, Germany, a distance of 3,905 miles. He had been in the air for 46½ hours. This is a new record for distance and time in the air. With Chamberlain was Charles Levine, owner of the *Columbia* and the first passenger to fly across the Atlantic.”

Bert put down the paper, smiled and said to himself that Charlie Levine is really something for the history books – and he was.

George Rubin

WALLS

A recent trip to Italy, and a subsequent cruise into the Mediterranean, reminded me that our world has always had problems with pirates and marauders. Every city we encountered had massive stone walls built for protection to keep out the Genghis Khans and those intent on usurping power and land. How simplistic a solution – dependent entirely on extensive manpower and the time to put the massive walls in place. Invaders, coming by sea or galloping across plains, found themselves momentarily rebuffed, and perhaps discouraged.

Today, we use walls primarily to define property or insure privacy. Robert Frost suggests we do not need walls, unless we have cows, but his neighbor insists, “good fences make good neighbors,” so together, each spring, they mend the wall they share.

What are we walling in or out? In the 7th century B.C., the Great Wall of China was started under the Chou Dynasty. Built for defense purposes, it was constructed entirely by hand of local stone, and stretched 4,500 miles across northern and north central China. It is visible from outer space.

In A.D.117, the Roman Emperor Hadrian built a wall that reached from the North Sea to the Atlantic, separating Britain from Scotland. Legionnaires of the Caesars manned this outer edge of the Roman Empire against the barbarians, the Celts and Scottish.

Following World War I, the Maginot Line, named after André Maginot, French minister of war, was built.

A system of heavily fortified pillboxes, tank traps, underground tunnels and catacombs, it stretched along the eastern frontier of France and was considered impregnable. It failed to prevent invasion by the Nazi armies some twenty years later; they simply went around it.

During World War II, the wall built around the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw kept people in. The Berlin Wall, following that same war, blockaded the East from the West, and kept people out and in.

Now in the year 2005, yet another defensive fence/wall is being constructed. Built of concrete and steel, it separates the country of Israel from the Palestinian Authority. The fence/wall runs from the north to the south of the West Bank and around Jerusalem.

Building codes today allow walls to be built on zero lot-line communities. Where land is scarce and at a very high premium, as in Tokyo, Hawaii, California and even Longboat Key, Florida, tall concrete walls are thrown up to insure privacy and safety. They are built to keep out noise and to corral small children and pets. But these are not the kind of walls we can erect to protect ourselves from international terrorists in the twenty-first century. Over the past hundred years, we have been primarily preoccupied with tearing down the walls that separated us from the world, and resorted to building bridges, bridges that allowed for communication and negotiation to flourish, as well as commerce and trade. Across these bridges, we have exported love and compassion. We are the nation that helps the world. We

send food and blankets, volunteer service and missionaries, education and healthcare professionals.

On September eleventh, 2001, we were attacked in our own backyard with deliberate and massive cruelty by fanatical zealots.

Is it time, perhaps prudent, to focus on the idea of creating a new kind of wall, not a wall made of stone or mortar, but a defensive wall made of strengthened cooperation between international communities? A wall that heightens the security of our airports, government and civilian facilities; a wall that coordinates intelligence strategy; a wall that may resort to electronic surveillance of public places. Some will hasten to say that this kind of wall infringes on our rights as free Americans and will be unconstitutional. As painful and inconvenient as these deterrents may be, it is increasingly clear that it is necessary to balance liberty and order in a chaotic world that allows the Stalins, the Hitlers and the Osama bin Ladens, and their oppressive regimes, to rise to power.

Heightened awareness of our vulnerability makes the building of this new kind of wall necessary. At the same time, let us continue to reinforce peaceful bridges of love and compassion and pay particular attention to mending fences that make for good neighbors.

Edith R. Pray

SONG OF THE LAND

Somewhere west of Kansas City
one crosses an imaginary boundary
and enters the area of the high plains,
the land of the short grass prairie.

For me it is always
a sense of arriving home,
well before I am anywhere near
the communities I knew in my youth.

I had not been in Kansas
in late September
in a very long time.
It was the color that surprised me.

The colors of the Plains
are distinctly seasonal.
To one accustomed to the riot of
fall color in the Delaware valley
these are definitely muted.

The wine red of the ripened maize, field after field, hard
by the deep green of the ripening corn, and now and
then the light brown of a field ready and waiting for the
planting of wheat.

There is something about these large blocks
of color, without pattern or design
that evokes celebration.
If you listen you can hear in the wind
the song of the land.

Howard McKinney