

LEAS LIT

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LEAS LIT STAFF

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THEY ALSO SERVE WHO ONLY STAND AND WAIT

The final English exam of the New York State Regents Board for high school students in their senior year in 1943 required, among many other exercises, a written composition. The composition was to be written on one of the several suggested topics. It was the most feared part of the whole exam, which supposedly tested us on all the skills we had learned in our four years in high school.

I don't remember the titles that were listed for the composition part of the test, except for the one I chose: "They also serve who only stand and wait." They were John Milton's words from *On Being Blind*, words that during World War II were used often to ennoble and embolden those of us who could not serve on the battlefronts. They were words to remind us that there was much to be done on the home front – no matter what our age. So I felt comfortable with Milton's words as a topic for my composition. After all, I knew all about writing letters to the soldiers, knitting classes, Victory Gardens, selling stamps for War Bonds, rolling bandages, collecting scrap metal, blackouts, ration (pronounced *rashun*) stamps, spotting airplanes.

I've done a little sharing with my friends who would have been teenagers in the early forties. Our experiences were similar whether we lived in small towns or cities, in New York State or Minnesota. We were so

passionate in our efforts to support our soldiers and win the war. (Only years later did I come to realize that there were war protesters even then, that not everyone supported World War II. What I knew was this passion to serve and support.)



I can still picture a room full of girls struggling with unwieldy knitting needles to make khaki-colored sweater vests. I wonder how many of those sweaters ever made it overseas. If they did, much of the credit belonged to our Latin teacher, who had volunteered to teach us how to knit. Almost every evening she took an armful of unfinished sweaters home to pick up dropped stitches and to undo horrible mistakes like the time one of us knit the armhole shut.

One Medford Leas resident told me that all she did was knit sweaters. Each sweater, as she finished it, went off to her husband, who kept passing them on to his buddies. When I found out that her husband was involved in the Battle of the Bulge, then I could imagine that those sweaters were warmly welcomed. One resident responded that her boyfriend was in the South Pacific, so she never did learn how to knit. But you can be sure she found something else to do. To let “the boys” down was unthinkable.

Some roles at school that we performed with patriotic fervor gave us a sense of great pride. For example, being chosen to sell stamps at 25 cents apiece was a special privilege. Somewhere in the hallway, or perhaps on the gymnasium floor, you got to sit at a desk and collect the quarters as they came in. Students pasted the stamps in their special war bond books, something like the old “green stamps” books. Once there was \$18.75 worth of stamps in the book, you got to turn it in and get a War Bond that would be worth \$25.00 in ten years. That was a lot of money then.



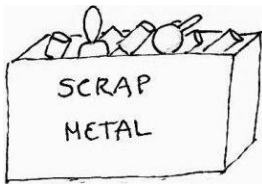
If your father was the “Chief Warden” in your town, some of the glory shone on you too. You could bask in his honor saying proudly, “My father is the Chief Warden.” That person was the adult who made the blackouts work.

He (I don’t think the warden’s job was ever done by a woman) got to carry a flashlight and a whistle and he wore a very distinguished-looking helmet. In a blackout he made certain that all the assistant wardens were on the job checking for little chinks of light. Such was the serious nature of the “blackout” that I don’t remember

anyone ever getting arrested for not conforming to the lights out order. One Medford resident still remembers that when her father went off to perform as a warden, she and her mother retreated to the bathroom., she to read with a penlight in the bathtub and her mother to knit seated for the duration of the blackout on the toilet.



There were jobs for kids and parents alike, and there were those that we did as a family. Whoever was standing closest when my mother opened a can of fruits or vegetables was the person who got to wash out the can, remove the paper label, remove the bottom lid, carefully tuck the top and bottom lid inside of the can, then stand firmly on the can until it was as flat as a pancake.



On Saturday the Boy Scouts were at our back door to collect our scrap metal and take it to a collection point, where it was then sent off to help the war effort in its great need of metal.

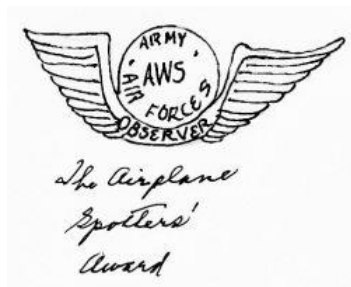
Most everyone in my little town had a “Victory Garden” in the backyard. However, my mother was bet-

ter at stretching the ration books than any of us were at gardening. If our diet had depended on our Victory Gardens . . . well, we would have been a mighty hungry family. We sure did have a yard full of satisfied bunnies, however.



Learning to be good volunteers in the family had special rewards. I don't know whose decision it was for our family to "spot airplanes," but that's what we did once a week. My mother would pack a picnic supper, and off we would go walking up the side of West Hill. Halfway up was a structure much like a fire tower. One person at a time would go up the ladder to the lookout cabin that was perched on top. We took turns "spot-

ting." Charts of the shapes of American, German and Japanese airplanes lined the walls. The idea was that when a plane flew over we were to check the charts and discern whether it was a friendly plane or an enemy plane. Once we felt sure of



the identity of the plane, we called a number that was in full view. I have absolutely no idea to this day whom we were calling, but I can't begin to tell you how exciting it was when a plane did fly overhead and we got to call it in. Talk about "They also serve who only stand and wait." This was the ultimate. We just knew we were protecting our land from invasion.

This was volunteerism at its best! But not all that we did for the war was as a volunteer. I felt fortunate that in the summer of 1943 I was able to work at the Norwich Pharmaceutical Company, a small manufacturing company known for its *Unguentine* and its *Pepto-Bismol*. So large were the orders for items needed on the battlefield that they welcomed high school girls and boys to work in the packaging department. It had its moments as an interesting place to work. The jobs could change from day to day, and sometimes even from hour to hour. One minute we could be counting pills, then we'd get moved to pasting labels. Sometimes it meant sitting in front of a moving belt, grabbing a jar and popping it into a small box that we had made from its flattened state.

One day I was picked to package morphine tablets. We knew we were on a serious job when that happened, because we were surrounded by guards and searched when we left for break time and at the end of the day. Another time we were not told what we were packaging, but again the guards surrounded our worktables. There were thousands of little glass vials. Each vial had to be inspected to make sure that whatever was in the vial lined up perfectly with the markings on the

outside of the vial. We never did learn what that job was. We only knew that it was secret and it was important.

No one worried about telling us what we were packing the day we did the sunscreen order for the U.S. Navy. We had to put together a small corrugated box first, then put the long tube of sunscreen into the box, making sure that all was snug and tight. This was called “piece work,” and we got paid by the number of tubes we were able to box in a day’s work. Somebody should have called it the “Battle of Bloody Run,” such was the job that those boxes did on our hands.

Periodically we were summoned outside to a grassy plot where the red, white, and blue proudly flew. Our supervisor would read a letter of commendation from President Roosevelt for the fine job we were doing, and then he would hand out an “E” pin to each one of

us. It was a production award from a grateful president. I think the E stood for Excellence. I still have mine.

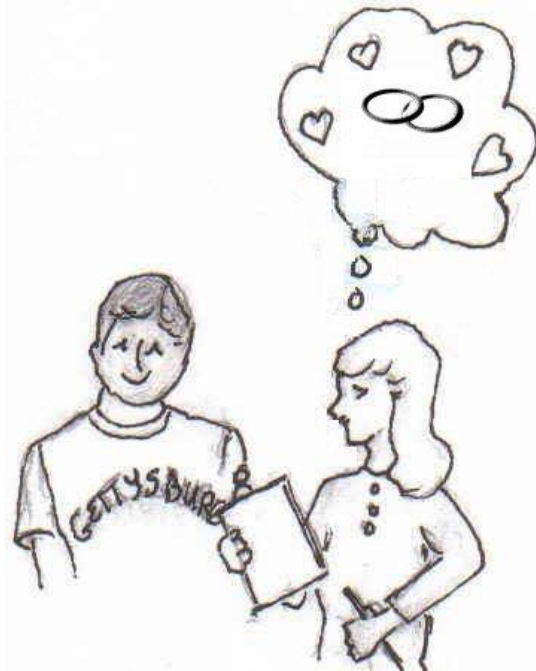
There was one last call to the grassy plot the third summer that I worked there. That was in August 1945, the Monday after World War II ended. All of us who were summer helpers were told that there was no more work for us. The standing and waiting was over for us. Or was it?



*Army and Navy
Production
Award*

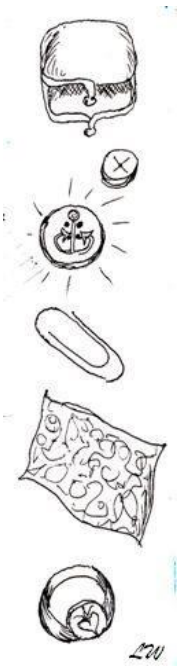
It was time to pack and head back to college again. My first assignment on the *Gettysburgian*, the college newspaper, was to write about the veterans returning to campus. One of those veterans I interviewed was a young man named Frank W. Klos. He wanted to be sure that I spelled his name right and to remember that it sounded just like Santa Claus. Hmn. Was this what I had been standing around and waiting for all this time!

Story and illustrations by Sarah Klos



SMALL THINGS

Small things fit snugly in a coin purse:
No coins, only cherished reminders.
In one corner is a brass button, one of his.
An old hearing aid battery, gone dead,
Shines like a tiny silver moon.
A large paper clip, meant to hold
Scraps of an intended memoir,
Rattles among the loose memories.
Lift out a small pillow of silk brocade,
Slowly open its folded ends.
An engraved friendship ring
Captures the light. Can it be?
Was it that long ago?
It was given with youthful gestures,
And a few hesitant words.
Gently rewrap the ring in its silk
Before the memory wanders.
Close the purse – until tomorrow.
The ball clasp is lightly brushed,
Remembering that first kiss.



Chris Darlington

NOT TO SEE YOU FACE TO FACE

I don't have to see your face to express my thought.
I'm not in the least distracted by a raised eyebrow,
Nor by your disdainful motions, or being distraught
To think I'd quiver in anticipation of a frightful scowl.

Do you think I can express anything in this way,
Not just trying to be completely empathetic?
And knowing that I cannot see your body sway,
Do these words make you feel somewhat parenthetic?

Oh, for certain, it does seem I'm still communicating.
(Yes, I'm certain, though your face is not in view.)
And yet, I find myself in doubt, even ruminating:
Am I really certain? Are these words reaching only you?

Our separation is measured in many a painful mile.
It seems my words go round the world,
 returned unheard.
Yet, in my imagination, your face forms a playful smile,
Suggesting you have always understood my ev'ry word.

Chris Darlington

TAXIS FROM HEAVEN

It was a long and exhausting trip. Four of us, myself, my wife, my sister-in-law, and her husband, left Newark airport at 5 p.m. on Wednesday in mid-September 2000, bound for Paris with a stopover in Pittsburgh. Once in Pittsburgh we had to disembark, reclaim our luggage and then pass through security before boarding our fully loaded 747, nonstop to Paris de Gaulle airport.

As a result of a long-ago encounter with the polio virus, I must use a wheelchair whenever lengthy walking is involved. For this purpose, when traveling, we use a light, collapsible companion chair that is not self-propelled. Once we are on the plane, the chair is small enough to fit into an onboard closet or it can be placed in the hold and retrieved when we land. In this instance, my companions shared the pushing chores, with my brother-in-law doing the major share.

Our plans were to spend two days in Paris, rent a car, and then travel to south central France for two weeks. We had had a similar vacation in England two years previously. France was to be more of a challenge, since none of us spoke French, and we had heard that the French were not particularly fond of Americans who didn't speak the language. My wife did brush up on her high school French, using a computer program, and we all carried English-French pocket dictionaries.

In any case, after a sleepless night on our fully loaded plane, we landed at de Gaulle airport at 8 a.m., Paris time, Thursday morning. The airport was so

crowded that our 747 had to “park” away from the terminal building, forcing everyone to debark by stairs. This was impossible for me, of course, so we had to wait while a tall bus-like vehicle, with an elevator, pulled up to the other side of the plane and took us to the terminal. To our amazement, we were assigned a French “guide” who took us through the subterranean areas of de Gaulle airport and deposited us at the luggage retrieval – customs area.

Once through customs, it was our intention to call a cab to transport the four of us, our luggage, and my chair to Montparnasse, where our hotel was located. We had read that French cabs were permitted to carry only three passengers, and we did not wish to be separated. Fortunately, we found a Travelers Aid booth with English-speaking personnel and explained our dilemma. They suggested a private cab company with larger vehicles, which was somewhat more expensive. At that point, about 10 a.m., we were too exhausted to care. All we wanted to do was to get out of the madness of de Gaulle airport and to our hotel. Travelers Aid called for the cab and told us to wait at the exit door.

Within 30 minutes, our first “Taxi from Heaven” pulled up. It was a spotlessly clean, white minivan driven by a well-dressed, bow-tied, dapper French man with a big smile on his face, a “Welcome to Paris” on his lips, and apologies for keeping us waiting. We were so relieved that our first contact with a Parisian was with this kind, helpful English-speaking man that we would have paid him anything he asked. As it was, he took us by the shortest route, pointed out some areas of interest along

the way, helped us unload at our hotel, gave us his card, and offered to pick us up in two days to go back to the airport for our rental car. Needless to say we were overjoyed.

Our second “Taxi from Heaven” came to us later that same day. After we had checked into the hotel, we had lunch at a nearby outdoor cafe. We had intended to stay awake until 9 or 10 p.m. that evening, as advised by many experienced travelers, but we were too exhausted. We returned to our hotel and took a brief nap. At this point, we had had about two to three hours sleep in the 24-hour period since we began our journey. Wanting to fully utilize the brief time we had in Paris, we decided to take a boat ride on the Seine before supper.

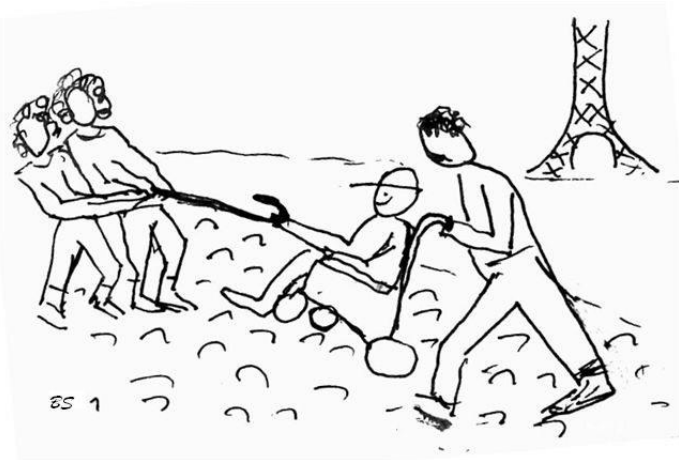
The district in which our hotel was located was a good distance from the Seine and central Paris. Getting to the boat dock was a longer and more complicated affair than we had anticipated – a long walk to the bus, a ride on a crowded bus dragging the companion chair with us, and then another long walk to get to the boat.

If you’ve been to Paris you know that the Seine runs through the city in a man-made canal and that the river surface is at least 30 feet below the level of the street. Getting to the boat dock wasn’t too difficult – just down a cobblestoned ramp used by taxis and buses. Obviously, getting back up was going to be another matter entirely.

Boarding the boat was also not difficult. My wheelchair was stowed and I sat on one of the available seats. We were soon cruising down the Seine River with all of

the lovely Paris sights floating by. Instead of enjoying my first visit to this beautiful city, I was obsessed with thoughts of the difficult return trip to our hotel. Suddenly the thought occurred to me – “Why are you worrying about that now? Stop fussing and enjoy!” How was I to know that our second “Taxi from Heaven” would soon appear?

After debarking we headed back up the cobblestoned ramp, now appearing much steeper than it had on the way down. As my brother-in-law was pushing me up the steep gradient, it was becoming obvious that the exhaustion of a long day with little sleep was getting the best of him. As a desperate measure, I held out my cane. My wife and sister-in-law grabbed the end. With them pulling and my brother-in-law pushing, we began making slow progress up the ramp. However, we were all so utterly worn out that we became giddy and started laughing hysterically. What a sight we must have been to any passing Parisian!



It was just at that moment that we noticed a taxicab coming slowly up the ramp with the driver observing our feeble progress, obviously amused. He stopped his white (!) cab and called to us in very good English, "Do you need a ride?" Our second "Taxi from Heaven" had appeared. We were only too happy to place ourselves in the hands of this delightful Frenchman. He tossed the wheelchair in the trunk of his cab and bundled all four of us inside. Not only did he speak English but also he was telling jokes and commenting on the Paris scene as we rode back to our hotel. By the end of the day we were all convinced that "someone up there" had taken pity on us, sending us the two "Taxis from Heaven."

The rest of our two weeks in France went smoothly. Although handicapped access is limited in some areas, the French people were invariably helpful in arranging whatever accommodation they could. All in all, our impression of France was one of beauty, good food, friendly people, and, of course, the "Taxis from Heaven."

Frank C. Snope

THE PRAYER

Oh Lord, have mercy!

Coughing, coughing, coughing tears my ribs apart.

My nose is stopped airtight,

My mouth is parched,

My eyes are on fire.

My head will surely explode.

I dare not breathe for fear of coughing,

I cannot sleep for lack of breathing.

Have mercy!

I sneeze, not once, not twice, but thrice on a single
breath.

Oh my ribs! Oh my ribs!

I lift my eyes heavenward in supplication.

Oh Lord, have mercy!

“God bless you.”

The voice behind me rises from waist level,

Accompanied by the screech of a two-wheeled walker

Whose other two legs long ago have cast off their
rubber tips.

I turn and look down.

The old lady’s upper body forms a bridge between her
hips and the walker.

I picture a child riding freehand, laughing, on her back.

I picture her mock remonstrating: “Now don’t you ride
this old nag too hard!”

Does she remember a time when she stood straight?

Her head is turned on its horizontal axis to face me.

Her luminous smile comforts me
And, penetrating to my innermost self,
Rebukes me.

I behold the answer to my prayer.
Heaven is not where I thought it was.
I look down upon my angel with awe,
And I say "Thank you."

Herb Heineman

THE PROPOSAL

I love you, dear lady, though fully aware
That some of your values I simply can't share.
I'm willing to bet that with passage of time
Your views will improve and merge closer to mine.
Thus, knowing how much I can offer your life,
I've duly consented to make you my wife.
*Go away, man, you bore me, and let me remain
To suffer alone my inferior pain.*

You're obstinate, woman, for surely you seek
The protection the strong can confer on the weak.
Just think of the riches, the jewels, the gold
Which you, thanks to me, in your dear hand will hold.
The scents you will broadcast, the fashions you'll sport,
Each one further proof of my generous support.
*Does it ever occur to you, Mighty and High,
That I don't give a damn for the tchotchkes you buy?
I concede that my life might be richer with you,
But it seems to escape you that you'd profit too.
In your eager desire your largesse to bestow
You are speaking from hauteur, to a poor soul below.
Therefore listen to me; let's be plain and direct:
If you really would woo me, then show me respect.*

I am offering you gifts, you may e'en kiss my hand.
And if that's not respect, then I don't understand.
If you cannot see reason, if you will not agree . . .
Hey, try my kid sister. She'll fall for it, you'll see!

Herb Heineman

THE BOOK FAIRY

Emma looked forward to her overnights with Grandmother. Packing her small brown suitcase, she put in her pajamas, her toothbrush, her teddy bear and a change of underwear.

At Grandmother's house the Book Fairy always came. In the morning, after sleeping soundly in the little bed in the little room prepared just for her, she would wake up and find a book tucked under her pillow.

"Who is the Book Fairy, Grandma? How does she know what books I like to read?"

Grandmother just looked wise and polished her glasses. Then the two of them would sit down and read the new book.

Emma knew who the Tooth Fairy was. When a baby tooth fell out, you put it under your pillow and the next morning there would be a shiny quarter or a half dollar in place of the tooth. Once the Tooth Fairy ran out of quarters and left an envelope of rebate coupons. That was O.K. because she had collected the proofs of purchase needed and redeemed them for a neat blue-denim backpack. But the time she found coupons for Kleenex tissues and Crest toothpaste, she lost her patience and confronted her mother. Her mother smiled sheepishly and wrote out an I.O.U.

At Grandmother's, the Book Fairy never reneged. There was always a beautiful book.

When she was small, she had received colorful alphabet and pop-up picture books. These were followed by *Goodnight Moon*, *The Little Fur Family*, *Green Eggs and Ham*, and *The Cat in the Hat*. Then came *Amelia Bedelia* and *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. Now at eleven years, she had her heart set on *Anne of Green Gables*.

She had often tried to stay awake and wait for the Book Fairy, but it never worked. She couldn't keep her eyes open. Over the years it occurred to her that Grandma was probably the Book Fairy, but it was fun to keep playing the game of pretend.

Christmas was approaching. The days were short and dark. Santas appeared on street corners ringing bells, and the stores were bright and sparkly filled with tempting ideas for gifts. Grandmother was planning to visit Emma and her family over the holiday weekend, and Emma decided to surprise her by putting a book under her pillow. Her mother helped her to find the special book of poetry by Emily Dickinson that was one of Grandma's favorites. She already had a copy, but the red leather cover was worn and falling apart, plus the print was so tiny that even Emma had trouble reading it.

There is no frigate like a boat, to take us lands away. Nor any courser like a page of prancing poetry, quoted Grandma. Emma wasn't certain what a frigate was or a courser until it was explained to her. Emma's favorite poem by Miss Dickinson was, *I'm nobody! Who are you? Are you a nobody, too?"*

She couldn't wait to see the look on Grandma's face when she found this book under her pillow Christmas morning.

Emma helped her mother and father prepare for Christmas and Grandmother's visit. They baked four different kinds of cookies. They all went to the Christmas tree farm and selected a beautiful tree. They hung a wreath of fresh holly on the front door. Emma arranged a nosegay of evergreen and holly on Grandma's bedside table and then placed a teddy bear on her pillow so she wouldn't be lonely. Grandmother arrived and they ate homemade soup and fresh applesauce for supper on Christmas Eve. They hung up their stockings and sampled the Christmas cookies, leaving some on a plate for Santa. Brimming with excitement, Emma went to bed with Grandma's book tucked safely under her pillow. She planned to get up early and tiptoe into the guest room and slip the book under Grandmother's pillow.

Emma did wake up early Christmas morning. She felt under her pillow for the book. It wasn't there! In its place was the book she had dreamed about, *Anne of Green Gables*.

She slipped into the bathroom and washed her face and brushed her teeth. Then she peeked into the guestroom. There sat Grandma, cross-legged in the middle of the bed, wrapped in a warm quilt. Gray curls framed her face and glasses perched on her nose. She was reading her book of poetry. With a delighted squeal, Emma jumped onto the bed shrieking, "Merry Christmas, Grandma! The Book Fairy came, the Book Fairy came."

“Merry Christmas, darling! Do you suppose the Book Fairy and Saint Nicholas are related?” and she opened her arms to give Emma a hug. Then they both snuggled together, enfolded in the cozy quilt, letting their books carry them to distant shores as they waited for the rest of the family to wake up and another Christmas to begin.

Edith R. Pray



ESCAPADE IN MEXICO

In my postwar search for a future profession, a friend of mine and I formed a partnership teaching adult classes in painting. It was our custom to take a yearly vacation together, traveling about sketching and painting. We decided to return to Mexico, driving in a station wagon that had been converted to meet our needs for sleeping, eating, and storage of assorted belongings and art supplies.

One of our students mentioned our trip to a professor at nearby Rutgers University whose family owned a wholesale orchid business. After we met the professor, whom we soon knew as Carl, we were asked to keep an eye out for any orchids we might come across in our wanderings. If we found any, we were to tag each bulb, noting the description and location, then store it safely out of harm's way in our accommodating station wagon. It was also Carl who expressed interest in locating the area where hallucinatory mushrooms grew.

The drug culture of the 50s and 60s was in full swing and escape from the real world in the form of heavy drinking or smoking pot was rampant. Here was something new, growing in the wilds of Mexico. Local Mexican women, known as "Curandero," gathered, cleaned and dried the mushrooms. Placed in small bowls, they were offered as a special treat to the local men. It was like a private club. Only men could experience the results of eating the mushrooms. The more one ate, the

deeper the effect of “All’s well” became. Near the end of our stay, we were to meet Carl and pass on our collections and findings to him.

It was through Carl’s contacts in Mexico that we met Chico. A native Mexican guide, he and his brother owned a small general store deep in the jungle. They were very knowledgeable about the strange foods sold in the market places and the exotic plants and medicinal herbs gleaned from the tropical forest. Chico introduced us to a treasured root. If one peeled the bark from the root, soaked it in water, and then washed one’s graying hair in the water, the hair would be restored to its natural color.

Chico’s eyes were dark and his skin swarthy. He had a quiet, knowing demeanor that gained our trust as he guided us through the jungles of Mexico and Guatemala. Chico would signal a stop in a long jungle drive. Removing his shoes, he would jump out of the car barefooted, run into the tangled underbrush and, in minutes, return with a miniature orchid hidden in one hand. His knowledge amazed us all and we came to depend and rely on him. It was he who spotted a shark’s fin moving in on my friends as they swam in the Gulf of Mexico. I, incapacitated with the “Tourist Problem,” observed them “running on water” getting into the shore. That close call was retold again and again by my friends.

It was Chico who warned us not to try to photograph the locals as we plunged deeper into remote areas. Not familiar with tourists or cameras, they thought we were stealing their souls. We learned to aim our cameras

well beyond our subjects and make a final swing into focus before snapping the picture.

As we reached areas seldom visited by tourists, we came upon local women with trays of mushrooms balanced on their heads. They led us to the hallucinating type growing in the wild. We photographed and painted them, then packed and shipped samples of the mushrooms back to Rutgers University, where the study of hallucinatory mushrooms would take place. Everywhere we went, my friend Vince and I sketched and painted or photographed that exotic country.

A month into our trip we met up with Carl and his colleague, a professor from a Mexican University. They made arrangements for us all to dine at a country inn, noted for its excellent restaurant. In what seemed like wilderness to us, we pulled into the plush grounds of this establishment and swept into the grand entrance of the hotel. The two professors were in their element, but Vince and I knew, not only were we not dressed for this fine restaurant, we just didn't belong there. Our new friend, Chico, knew he didn't belong there! Vince and I exchanged glances and flanked Chico. No proprietor was to offend him in any way! Vince sat beside Chico and I sat opposite him. As the food was served, I caught Chico's eye and demonstrated the proper piece of silver to be used. Chico mirrored my every move, his large dark eyes expressing his awe and delight, and perhaps a little fear. I was proud of him and imagined the telling and retelling of that great moment, as he and his large family squatted in their small hut eating their simple meals.

Our adventure came to an end. Upon returning Chico to his home, it was our turn to share a meal with him and his family. We sat in a circle on the floor of his hut. We were served a delicious sort of rich, savory stew in blue and white enamel bowls. A large enamel spoon accompanied each bowl. A far cry from the elegant hotel meal we had experienced earlier, it was in many ways more enjoyable.

As Vince and I packed up preparing to return home, we experienced a deep satisfaction. Our escapade in Mexico had been a trip hard to match. Carl had his orchids and mushroom samples, Vince and I had our paintings! The paintings and sketches sold quickly and more than paid for that trip south of the border.

Todd Butler



THE HANGAR DECK

Today, tonight –
The Hangar Deck –
Slate grey steel
walls, deck, overhead,
hatches, ladders,
going up, going down:
two football field lengths of
steel, steel, steel covered with steel.
Scrubbed clean, new paint . . .

Today's night –
It's empty, so empty, so huge, so vast –
high ceiling, twenty feet or so,
thick steel above and below.
Silent. Well, not completely.
A ship lives.
Hear her breathing, sighing through
air vents, and ductwork.
Feel her pulse, a never-ceasing throb
of engine, compressor, generator, pump
that you feel the rest of your life.
Even ashore.
She moves, ever so slightly, for a more
comfortable spot in the tide or current.
But today, tonight, so quiet, so empty . . .

Tomorrow.
Dark. Early.
Start to load. A city to load . . .
Airplanes, engines, baggage, people,
On and on, no longer empty.

Inches between aircraft.
Wings folded, pointing to the steel heaven,
planes chained to tiedown slots.
Prometheus bound.
Tractor engines roaring. Shouting. Swearing. Whistles.
A hundred men in brown shirts push and pull.
A dozen men in yellow direct.
The hangar bays fill. An officer on the phone –
nods to himself –
motions to yellow where to put the next.
Yellow to brown. Push, sweat.
“OK. Brakes! Chock it!” Chains.

The walls become a mural.
Drop tanks for fuel. Wing tip tanks for same.
Bomb racks for, well, bombs. Rocket racks also.
Forty mm gun barrels, arresting hooks for each type.
Arresting wires for all types.
Tow bars, catapult gear.
Hung, fastened, winched up, pushed up.
A mural, a portrait, a paean, to war.

The sun rests. Men rest, eat, lounge, talk.
The ship is ready to go.
She has her arms.
She has her men.
She is content.
Tomorrow's tomorrow.
Sunny. Raining. Whatever.
Norfolk, Newport, San Diego. Wherever.
Bands. Crowds. Festive air. Always.

Lines shortened, singled up, bunting on gangways.
Women, children, most women with children.
Fancy dress. Both women and children.
Crew in whites.
Gone the yellow, the red, the brown, the green.
Brilliant white. White hats. Black shoes.
The band plays. A march.
A tear, quickly wiped. Control.
Brave smiles – another tear.
Searching for the face. Finding the face. Wave.
“See darling, there’s Daddy.”
“Hey Chuck, there’s my wife.”
More waving, waiting.
The band plays “Anchors Aweigh.”
The women shiver. The men, excitement.
Time’s getting close.
The band plays the Navy Hymn.
The tears come freely.
A dark woman with rosary – “Por favor, mi
Dios. Por favor, Madre de Jesu.”
Looking at a tall, black,
Chief Petty Officer in brown, looking at her.
A horn. Lines dropped.
Men in dungarees pull them ashore.
Tugs tugging.
She moves. Ahead, dead slow.
Sobbing. “Goodbye, my love.”
Goodbye for five months, if everything’s OK.
Six months with problems.
Seven, eight, more if going into harm’s way.
Please God. Keep it to five.

“Wave to daddy, darling.” Wave. Sob.
The band plays
“Now is the hour that we must say goodbye . . .”
Traditional.

Faces growing small, lost in the crowd.
Some turn to go. Home. Lonely home.
Children fussy and tired.
Some stay, watching the ship move to sea.
Good bye, my love. Farewell, my love.
Come back, my love.

But that’s tomorrow’s tomorrow.
Tomorrow’s yet to come.
Today, tonight –
Silence, space.
Steel, steel, slate grey steel.

Steve Denham

WORD PLAY

Travel:
Unravel time!

A floating feather
is a mortal threat
in a perfect vacuum.

Rancor closes doors
Which friends leave open

Skinny:
Heft bereft!

Fuss:
Thus no muss!

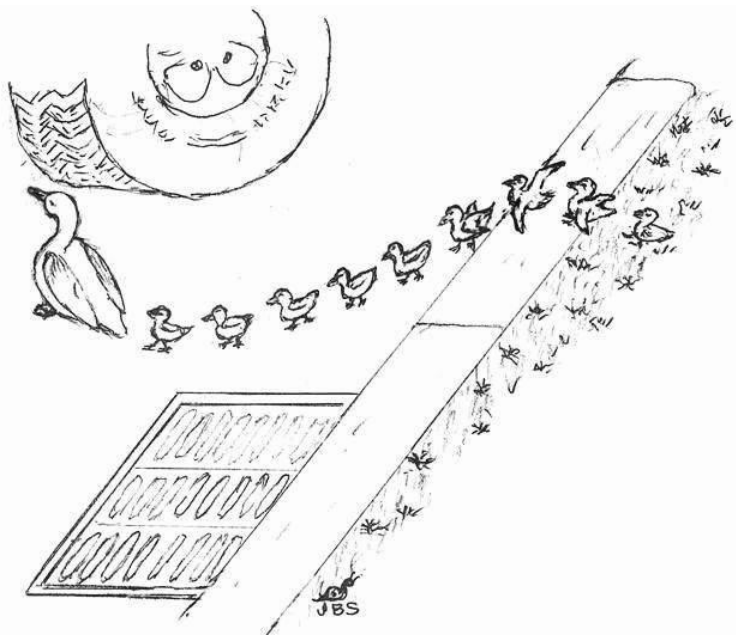
Is life a metaphor
For death
Or vice versa?

Bill Pickering

THE PARADE

Driving down the boulevard
I quickly slammed my brakes, quite hard.
First, I saw the mother duck
and next, oh what luck!
Small balls of down, all nine,
were following her, all in line.
Through the mirror I saw a car,
it was speeding – not too far.
I honked my horn
to warn the driver
and each baby.
The mother
proceeded calmly,
the perfect lady.
The car screeched to a halt
and watched the parade.
Thank goodness,
I am grateful
that I came
to their aid.

Laura Farr



**NIGHTTIME PETALS
AND THORNS**

Waking up from a nightmare is
Always a relief
Waking up
From a dream
Is sometimes a nightmare

Lori Berliner

GRANDMOTHER TO GRANDMOTHER

I have a picture of my maternal grandmother when she, Hannah Bremer, was the same age as my 10-year-old granddaughter Isabella. Young Hannah, wearing a flouncy black dress and pantaloons, is skipping over the cobblestones in front of the opera house in Hannover, Germany. Hannah's older brothers formed a string quartet and were well-known musicians in Germany.

When Hannah was 12 years old her mother died. Soon, her father decided to leave her four older brothers behind, and to accept an attractive job as a construction engineer in St. Louis, USA. Suddenly, as was the custom in the 19th century, Hannah, as the oldest daughter, took on the tasks of caring for her younger sisters, Jennie and Lucy, and younger brother Herman. Hannah learned early to cook, sew, care for the sick, and keep a clean home, and to be caring and patient.

Much later, the family moved to San Francisco, where her father died. Jennie married a fine man, William McKeon. Pretty Lucy ran away to enjoy singing "on the circuit" to the horror of her family, and ended up rich, famous, and happily married to the owner of a copper mine. Herman joined the Navy, journeyed all over the world, and stayed an old salt until retirement. Hannah became known for her skills at making fashionable hats, joining an established shop in New York City. It was there that she met a handsome widower, William Cahill, who came with his little girl Ellie to buy her a hat. My grandpa Bill swept Hannah off her feet, married her, and took her to many exciting places in Europe and

America. They had a beautiful little girl, Gertrude, who was to be my mother.

I remember Grandma Hannah for many things. Her delicious red raspberry and white currant jelly was made fresh from our garden in Lombard, Illinois. At Christmas time, I would hide under the long dining table as thin sheets of dough came down the tableside. The unforgettable holiday pastries! She sewed dainty clothes for my dolls and knitted nice sweaters for us. She developed hearing problems and had a box near her rocking chair (my brother and I learned not to shout into it). On Saturday afternoons, she sat very near the old Philco radio in order to listen to Milton Cross and the New York operas. My most precious memories have to do with early evening. After bath and getting ready for bed, I would come downstairs and sit on her lap, and she would rock and sing fine German songs and lullabies. I remember several, but never actually knew the full meaning of some of these songs. One of them she sang over and over during her last year. But I did not know how sick she was, nor that it was her last year. I was only five years old.

Decades later, in May 2007, a long-awaited special event was to hear our two dear grandchildren, ages 8 and 10, perform with the Children's Chorus of Washington. This time the venue was Strathmore in North Bethesda, Maryland, a new, great art center, with a huge charming hall with good acoustics. The younger children sing in the Treble Chorus, as well as often in the combined chorus or the selective Bel Canto Chorus. After a combined chorus opening with Leonard Bernstein's "Gloria Tibi"

from his Mass, the Treble Chorus, with our Spenser and Isabella in the front row, opened with “Bist du bei mir” (an aria from a notebook for Anna Magdalena, Bach’s second wife). I recognized it as the song my maternal grandmother Hannah used to sing to me in German. With surprise, hearing my own grandchildren sing it in German, I could not keep the tears (joyous) from my eyes. I loved the music, but at that tender age, so long ago now, I did not realize the meaning of the words, which interpret something like this:

“If Thou art nigh, then I am joyful,
 Though death await, I trust in Thee
 Ah blessed delight, if at my dying
 Thy gentle touch, Thy tender hand
 Might my faithful eyelids softly close.”

Ariel C. Hollinshead



Illustration penned by Grete Hirsch

GENETICS

Mystery metronome
Measures my muscle,
Measures the minuscule
Music corpuscle.

Each of my cells
With irreverent certitude
Changes in age
To my grandmother's amplitude.

Sally Miller

WEEKEND

The spring that I was 16 years old was as hot as blazes. I had no job, and was just hanging around home, getting in my own and everyone else's way. Living home had really become unbearable, though not because I had a bad relationship with my parents. I was the youngest of three and born long after the others were pretty nearly grown, so my parents most often left me to my own devices. However, my 91-year-old grandfather had gotten so senile in the past year that he had become a real trial and burden to all of us. He didn't know which of us was who, didn't remember when he had eaten last, but worst of all, forgot that he had to get to the bathroom to perform his natural functions.

My mother was a strong believer in filial duty. I think she also perceived my grandpa as a precious antique that must be preserved at all costs, including her sanity. She refused to even entertain the idea of sending him to an old folks' home, though she did try having somebody "live in" – many somebodies, in fact, who all quit in disgust, because of Grandpa's bad smell and bad temper. (Who says old people are sweet, anyway?)

I was very attached to my grandpa, with whom I had lived my whole life, but at this point, he wasn't the same vital, interesting, even exciting person I had always known. That part of him had been destroyed by the decay in his brain, and what was left was the worst area; the aggressiveness that had no controls and the loss of intellect and memory. I felt that to salvage what was left of

our household, which was also on the verge of decay, Grandpa should go to where there were facilities to take care of him. However, nobody dared mention this in front of my mother, not even my dad, who, believe me, was getting much more than just fed up with the whole situation.

Mother was becoming very testy and skittish, so I warily suggested to dad that he take her away for a weekend, before there was a real explosion. Surprisingly, my dad, who didn't always have much faith in his daughter's judgment, was all for the idea. However, how could we convince Mom? I volunteered to stay and "Grandpa-sit." Maybe my red-headed cousin Geraldine, who was a couple of years older than I, and lived three blocks away, would come and sleep over. In an emergency, we could call her parents or her huge brother Sam, who was out of work, therefore available. I must have given an impression of great self-confidence and responsibility to Mom, or else she was so desperate that she was willing to jump at any kind of relief. She packed bag and baggage and off they went for a weekend in Atlantic City.

Geraldine and I slept in the same bed that first night, though there were four other bedrooms in the house, listening to Grandpa stumbling around in his room, or (though we would never admit this to each other) other strange sounds in the big house. Finally, we fell asleep, only to be awakened by a tremendous crash and thump at about 6 a.m. We jumped out of bed simultaneously, narrowly missing crashing into each other, and raced for Grandpa's room. He was lying in a pool of urine, by the side of his bed, out cold.

We tried to lift him. Dead weight – we couldn't even budge him, far less get him onto the bed. We had a very short conference and decided to call the doctor and Geraldine's parents. They arrived with brutish cousin Sam and had Grandpa on the bed with one big heave. "Small stroke," was old Dr. Cohen's diagnosis, "he'll come out of it, but in worse shape than before. He has probably had these before, and will continue to have more – blood vessels in the brain going. Best place for him is in the hospital, permanently. No business at home, bad for everybody!" He wasn't given to wordiness.

We all looked around at each other. What to do? What to do? My Aunt Martha, who was my mother's elder sister, had been trying to convince Mom to "put Grandpa away," but Mom had been accusing my aunt of laxness in the care of their father and leaving the whole burden on her. This was quite true, but I could see my aunt's point, too. Mom, at this juncture had become unreasonable.

Discussion as to what to do went on with us all standing around Grandpa's bed. He was still unconscious (his face purplish, crowned by the bristly white hair), lying in the middle of it. I prayed silently that he couldn't hear the discussion! If the whole debate on how to dispose of a human being that was still living was not one of the most distressing proceedings in life, it could have really been a comic scene.

We were extremely worried about how my mother would react, but finally the decision was made. Grandpa

had to go, for his own and everybody else's sake, as the doctor had said. Mom might rant and rave for a while, and be really angry with us, but she would eventually get over it (we hoped) and come 'round to seeing that it was "for everybody's own good." She could go back to enjoying life again. Go out, have guests, all the things that had been prohibited by Grandpa's condition. I was very upset and depressed by our decision, but not all decisions are happy and they still have to be made. Should we call my parents? No, Aunt Martha could sign all the legal papers. Mom would just come home and find it a "fait accompli."

Doc Cohen called an ambulance and Grandpa went off in it with Aunt Martha, never to return. Geraldine and I took his room apart and scrubbed everything in it. We carefully put away all of his things. His books, which he no longer read, the tobacco with which he had rolled his own cigarettes, candy, little chocolate squares with which he used to entice his grandchildren to spend time with him. We could bring these to him later if he wanted them. My parents were due to return early the next day and we wanted to have everything cleared and straightened up before then.

It was up to me to break the news to my mother. Geraldine stayed on to give me moral support. We knew Mom would be furious because we made this decision without even the courtesy of consulting her.

Finally we heard them coming into the house and I tried, gently, to tell Mom that her father had been taken away, without her knowledge and against her will. We

explained what had happened. She said nothing through the whole declamation and then she smiled. Tears streamed down her face. Tears of relief. She was happy. The light dawned! We had done what she wanted to do but hadn't the guts. She knew it was the best thing that could have happened, yet she didn't need to carry the burden of guilt and responsibility for the actual deed. Things really turned out all right, even though a sense of sadness pervaded our house for a very long time. We all tried to visit Grandpa as regularly and often as we could. He didn't know us and held no grudge.

Margery W. Rubin

DEPRESSION

She measures her day by small tasks:

Getting out of bed,
Slowly getting dressed,
Choosing to answer the phone.

A neighbor says, “Snap out of it!”
What is that, to snap?
When I cannot rise?
When I cannot lift my hand?

A friend calls to say, “I’m coming.”
She moves to unlock the front door.

Sally Miller

MEDITATION

Early morning stillness, quiet
Calms my soul inviting Spirit.

Sensing Breath of God drawn in
Source of being, home again.

Grounded in the earth yet flying.
Always living, always dying.

Sally Miller

SEASON'S END

It's the end of September and time to return from Maine to our "other home" in New Jersey. Several houses on the dirt road in the forest, where our family enjoys a lakeside log home, are shuttered already. Neighbors with school-age children have returned to their winter homes. On weekends, fewer sailboats or motorboats cruise the lake. Tourists have left, and it's easier to find a parking space in town. The meetings of the organizations we belong to will be the last we attend for the year. We'll depend on e-mail and newsletters to stay in touch until spring. It's hardest to say good-bye to our long-time friends, though we hear from each other often.

But the animals who enjoy the lake year round are awaiting our departure as eagerly as our friends bemoan it. The loons no longer have to dive to escape the water skiers and the fast boats that pull the skiers up and down the lake. The skittish deer will come from the forest to drink and to eat what's left in our garden knowing that people will not be around to frighten them away. The raccoons will no longer be frustrated by our attempts to keep them from raiding the compost bin.

We work hard to outsmart the red squirrels and the mice who always try to find a place inside that's warmer than the frigid forest floor. Red squirrels will manage an opening the size of a nickel; mice will squeeze through one smaller than a dime. We check all the windows, doors, and sills for tightness. Pillows and blankets, unless protected with heavy synthetic material, must be stored

in drawers or tightly covered bins. Upholstered furniture must be similarly protected. Good climbers that they are, the mice would love to take hair from the deerskin on the stairway and to pull batting from the antique quilt hanging in the living room to add to a nest. Both get carefully stored. Mothballs under the eaves seem to discourage the squirrels from chewing wood to gain entry and keep mice out of boxes and storage bins. Despite all our work, every spring turns up at least one well-mummified mouse in the house.

Because mice will dine on any food in the house they can get into, especially partially used boxes of cereal or pasta, a thorough kitchen cleaning becomes imperative. Every kitchen appliance is left spotless. Should a basic meal be needed when the house is first entered in the spring, some canned and well-packaged food and an unopened jar of instant coffee are left in the kitchen cupboards.

Hoses have to be brought inside to protect from the winter's freezing cold. The plumber will come after we leave to drain all the water from the house and shut off the well in the lakefront yard. The basement oil tank must be filled to prevent condensation over the winter.

The generator needed for power outages has to be drained of gas. We drive our son-in-law's motorboat back to the marina on the other side of the lake. The sailboat, kayak, and canoe that comprise the rest of our "navy" are parked under the porch. We arrange for the dock and the "float" to be taken out. The "float," actually a wooden raft on pontoons anchored out in the lake,

becomes a rite of passage for young children when they can swim to it from the dock. In pieces, dock and float are piled high on the lakefront yard. The porch seems drab and bare after we take down the colorful windsocks, the buoy bells, and the wind chimes. We move all the furniture inside, including the traditional rocking chairs.

We tell the phone company to suspend our number. We advise the daily paper to stop our subscription for the winter, and we leave our Medford address with the weekly newspaper and the post office. Finally, with the house well secured, we pull down the window shades, turn off the circuit breakers, and shut and lock the doors. One season ends and another begins as we return to New Jersey to spend the winter months in the comfort of our Medford Leas home.

In the spring the children will open the house and bring it to life again. They're slowly making it theirs, spending more and more time enjoying it, but still planning overlapping times with us. They'll reverse the time-consuming end-of-the-season closing process, working hard to thoroughly clean both the house and the yard, and deal with the perennial dead mouse.

Joy Moll



EPIPHANY

As crystallized snow
Glistens at my window
And on the river beyond,
My jonquils bloom
On the sill inside,
Sweet fragrance offering
And memory of gentler times.

In this balance serene,
Prayer is chanced,
And wounds are salved
By hands unseen,
While beneath its crust
Still the river courses,
And wisdom to my soul.

Peter A. McCord