

# LEAS LIT

*The Medford Leas Literary Journal*



*December 2010*

*Number 20*

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Writing and Art at Medford Leas  
Published by the  
Medford Leas Residents Association  
Medford Leas, Route 70  
Medford, New Jersey 08055  
609-654-3000

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## HOW I BECAME MVP

In my early teens I learned to play basketball in the basement of the First Baptist Church in New Haven, Connecticut, where the ceiling was about twelve feet high and not conducive to a “rainbow” shot.

Additionally, there were six supporting columns on each side of the court where we learned the art of the pick (where the guy dribbling the ball runs straight at a teammate – or in this case a stationary column – with the defender in hot pursuit, then suddenly swerves, resulting in the defender running into the obstacle). The columns were an obvious advantage for our home team. We played against other churches at the YMCA, and of course, like any other youngster, my goal was to become good enough to play for the local high school team, New Haven Hillhouse.

Hillhouse was a perennial qualifier for the New England basketball title, and to my surprise I made the team, based mainly on my skill as a defensive player with quick moves. During my senior year I was the starting point guard and we played some very formidable opponents, including a Waterbury team that boasted Jimmy Piersall, a future Hall of Fame center fielder for the Boston Red Sox, as their star player.

Our biggest game was against our crosstown rival, Commercial High. In my senior year an MVP award was instituted, to be given by the superintendent of sports in New Haven at the city championship game. The winner

of this game would most certainly qualify for the tournament at the Boston Garden, where the prize was the championship of all New England.

The game against Commercial was one we really wanted to win. It was played on the New Haven Armory basketball court in front of about three hundred screaming fans, their loyalties equally divided. In those days, the late 1940s, everyone shot two-handed set shots, but the one-handed shot was becoming popular because the shooter was moving and was much faster to the basket. Our team consisted of center Bob Saulsberry, a two-time all-state player, and forwards Joe Johnson, who went on to play football at Boston College and then played professionally for the Green Bay Packers, Bob Stefanowski, who went on to play semi-pro basketball, and Joe Barbado, who went on to play professional baseball. Finally there was me, as the tagalong point guard from the church league.

The game was a thriller! Amazingly I turned out to be the high scorer and, further to my surprise, I received the MVP award at the end of the game (which Hillhouse won)! I had had so many uncontested shots and most of them were one-handed. At the end of the game the opposing coach of Commercial High, Tommy Degnan, came over to congratulate me. I told him I was surprised that I had so many open shots. He confessed to me that his instructions to his team before the game were to play his five players against the four best Hillhouse players and not to worry about Whitey Lassen (I came from a staunch Italian neighborhood and was the

only kid with red hair and freckles; hence the nickname), who he said was not a scoring threat and was unlikely to put the ball in the basket even if he got the chance to try.

Thank you, Tommy Degnan, for helping me become the MVP. I still have the trophy!

*Charles Lassen*



## SAMPLES OF “AMAZING GRACE”

### Letters from My Mother as a minister’s wife at Grace United Church in the Mission District, San Francisco (1940-1943)

*Imagine me, Alan Gaylord, and a manuscript of 297 carefully typed pages, written by my mother based on her letters written every Sunday evening to my father’s parents who were, like them, a minister’s wife and a minister. She had kept her carbon copies and began, years later, to think her chronicle of her experiences in San Francisco between the end of the Depression and the early years of World War II might be as interesting and entertaining for others as it had been for her. The manuscript made its way to literary agents and various presses, but although she got some friendly responses, a contract never came. So at last the MS was put away into a fat folder and wound up in one of my brother’s files. He, J[ohn] Edward Gaylord, had been the one to type the final version that Mother assembled, and at my request he dug it out of obscurity and brought it to me the last time we visited, June 2010.*

*I knew, and did not know, this MS. My father and I had read over her shoulder each letter as it emerged as she pounded away at her old Remington in that distant time of Sunday evenings, but I had not read through it since then. Now, more than twice the age she had been when she was writing, I was revisiting the life of my mother, a Congregational minister’s wife, and that of her two young children, and of my father, as they explored the sacred and profane world around them—the vibrant and gritty lower-middle-class world of the Mission District.*

*Mother titled this book “Amazing Grace,” for it was centered on my Father’s church, Grace United Church of the Mission—a union of Methodist and Congregational polity. And she found it, found all of it, quite frequently amazing.*

## AMAZING GRACE – SF

By Carol Fulton Gaylord

3168 21<sup>st</sup> Street

In the heart of the Mission

San Francisco, 1940

Dearest Father and Mother,

*You need to get a sense of my Mother's voices. Here she is, the first Sunday night after moving into the old Parsonage, built before, and surviving, the Great Earthquake of 1906.*

You remember that two months ago when we were visiting this parish it seemed to me that I would hardly be able to bear living in such an old-fashioned house in this very slummy looking district. After growing up on an acre of ground it seemed to me that to live in the middle of the crowded city with no yard at all would be most painful, to say the least. The house is built directly on the sidewalk; there is only the space of another walk at one side between the parsonage and the church; the gymnasium is built right against our back porch, and the house is attached to a building of some six or eight apartments on the other side of us. Dwellings which can have windows on all sides are indeed rare in San Francisco. They fall into a special category, being described as “detached houses.”

The happy fact is that I am fast falling in love with the old house. Built some fifty-five years ago, it still retains a flavor of what must have been near grandeur in its day. Actual measurements of the rooms are large, and

the twelve-foot ceilings add to the feeling of spaciousness. We have a full basement on the ground floor. Two large living rooms and a dining room, one behind the other, are on the first floor. Huge, double sliding doors can be used to close off each room, but we leave all of it open. Then there are also on that floor a very large kitchen and pantry, and a hall which is as large as several ordinary rooms. There are five bedrooms on the second floor and one bathroom. On the third floor, a partially finished attic, are another bedroom, a large playroom, and a storage room. Although we have only one full bathroom, we do have on the back porch a sort of lean-to which houses a flush closet.

There are three additional bowls with marble-topped washstands in bedrooms and downstairs hall. These bowls are unique in that they have wild roses hand painted on them. Some artistic lady fashioned them there long ago when the house was first built. We have three fireplaces, but two are closed by gas heaters. We plan to have a chimney sweep clear the one in the dining room. I've never before known of a chimney sweep outside a storybook. We wish the fireplace in our bed-sitting room were the one left open. Johnny finds the number of stairs a difficulty for a not yet two-years-old boy. He kept trying to follow me around when we were moving in and unpacking. Since he still has to go up and downstairs on all fours, it was not long before he grew so discouraged at our constant running up and down that he would sit down at the foot of the stairs and wail in loud protest as I would rush up on some new errand. Alan, at his superior six years, doesn't even notice the stairs.

We soon found there are a lot of ups and downs in going about in San Francisco. You can't be sure of a good route just by the street lines on a map. Alan, Johnny and I walked and Taylor-Totted to a fine park while Don was busy with some correspondence this afternoon. We found a fairly level way to come home, but going there we went up and down some hills that were so steep that we really had difficulty keeping our feet from skidding right out from under us. Going downhill I had to go off the walk to uneven ground because Johnny in his Taylor-Tot was dragging me too fast.

For several nights at bedtime as Don traveled the very long hall from our front bedroom to the bathroom at the extreme back of the house, he had a strange feeling that he was forgetting something. Suddenly it came over him that he felt as if he should be carrying a bath towel as he did when in a hotel. You can see that he has not frequented very high-class hotels!

*Nowadays, if the house were in a better part of town, it would be recognized as a "Victorian," a high-demand, very posh dwelling. It was not a "painted lady"; indeed, much of its paint was peeling, and when the War was over and my father was called to another church away from the city, the parsonage was sold and torn down for senior-citizen housing...and the antiques-vultures moved in to rip out its treasures. (The church itself shared the same fate.)*

*San Francisco was an altogether new experience for Mother. One of four sisters, daughter of a high-school principal, she grew up a few miles east of Los Angeles, in rural-urban Monterey Park, where the family's one-acre*

*plot was filled with flowers, fruit trees, and vegetables. She was a Southern California girl (parents from Kansas) and Northern California was another state and another state of mind.*

Yesterday and today have been warm enough that the children and I spent some time out on the play space, which is fenced off on a part of the gymnasium's flat roof. You get there by climbing out one of the bedroom windows and walking along a sort of "cat walk" with protective sides of chicken wire. Except for the inconvenience of carrying food upstairs and out the window, it would be a good place for outdoor suppers on balmy evenings, which, however, are few and far between. Out there on the roof we have an interesting picture of life on the block, looking out as we do on outside, rear, open stairs, littered back stoops and garbage pails, and many clotheslines on pulleys from the various levels of flats and apartments. In short, it looks just like the sketches artists of the Ashcan School loved to make of crowded tenement life. Inside our big house we are removed from this, knowing there the feeling that our house is indeed our castle.

*We lived in a connected set of three large wooden buildings: the church itself, our parsonage, and a fairly large gymnasium between church and house.*

*This next extract is very special to me, as my mother (who is improvising all this as she goes) exhibits a heroic-comic character, with a lot of sympathy and a bit of mischief. The tone is light, and happily the bad-boy miscreants are winsome and not nasty. But the gym was a dark place and potentially dangerous. As I read through her*

*narrative I am struck, over and over, by how hard this minister's wife works, from vacuum cleaners to the needs of boys. Imagine my mother swinging on a rope from the gym!*

*"The Reverend works from sun to sun,  
but his spouse's day is never done!"*

Yesterday afterwards I worked very hard cleaning upstairs, being a little more thorough than usual, and as I glanced out one of the back windows in passing I discovered that some boys were in the gym by themselves, which is strictly forbidden. Earlier in the week we had experienced our first real vandalism there. Someone had thrown broken dumbbells up at the skylight in the roof, breaking glass to the tune of about twenty dollars worth of damage. Wood paneling had also been torn off the inside walls. Having glimpsed boys in the gym that afternoon, I went first to the church to find out if anyone was supposed to be in there. Alice said that she had already gone over once that afternoon to "throw out" some boys. The gym door was locked, but I had a key and walked right in. You should have seen how fast three boys vanished into the dressing rooms at one side of the gym! They went so fast that I had little idea as to their size or age.

I got nothing but silence to my firm (very school-teacherly) command to come forth, so I called out to them that I would just take their jackets along with me, and that I lived next door. I then walked as far as some mats and sat down on them between the boys and the door to wait for further developments. It really was funny. The boys were too young to stand the suspense for

long. Pretty soon I saw one come creeping out of the wings on the stage in a painfully cautious manner. He got well out in view before he saw me, and then he fairly leaped back out of sight. I laughed right out loud, and I heard a couple of nervous giggles from them before long. I called out to them saying that I guessed I must be pretty fierce looking, and did they think I was going to club them or something, and how funny that they were so scared to come out...unless they had been doing something pretty bad...still a deep silence from the dressing rooms. I waited some more, and then I told them that I had seen them from the window of the parsonage and that I knew they had been sent out once already.

Pretty soon a head peeked out of one door and then jerked back again. In a moment a boy fairly jumped out of one of the doors, pushed from behind, of course, scurried back in for a moment, and then two boys ten and eleven years of age came out grinning quite sheepishly. It happened that the one I had seen before hadn't emerged, so I called for him by description, and he also appeared. I, as you would expect, began gently lecturing them, but I didn't know what I was getting myself into. After reminding them that if they broke the rules, the boys wouldn't be able to use the gym, and wouldn't that be too bad, because the gym was for the boys...you know the line, true, but typically adult, I suppose...the smallest boy said somewhat wistfully, "Well, WE are boys." They were crazy to stay and play on the big rope and spring board. I said that they simply couldn't be in the gym without some older person in there with them.

Another boy immediately suggested, “You stay; why can’t YOU stay?”

I couldn’t think of a quick, honest answer to that one, and I was moved by the appeal. I took the boys back with me to the parsonage while I got Johnny up from his nap, and then, with Alan also, we went back to the gym and stayed until 6:30. I really enjoyed it myself, though I got some extremely sore muscles from taking a swing on the rope myself and from throwing kickballs fast in a game of trying to hit Alan’s feet as he stood against the wall. I’m ashamed of how ancient and stiff I’ve become!

At 6:30, when the boys left, they asked to come back in the morning...said that I could accompany them again. I protested, “How will I get my housework done?” They said, “We’ll do it!” It was agreed that, if I had any errands or vacuuming for them to do in the morning, they could do it, and I’d stay with them in the gym from nine to ten. Boys’ Club begins then, and they all three said they would like to join it. One boy said regarding the nine o’clock hour, “Why so late? I get up at five or six in the morning.” I hastened to inform him that I didn’t! They came next morning as per agreement, but I didn’t make them do any housework. They didn’t bring up the subject themselves.

At five o’clock Saturday evening my three boys appeared at the front door with still another friend wanting to go in the gym again. I couldn’t oblige this time, but I sent them up to the attic to play ping-pong. They ended by going out to play catch between our house and the church. They soon got their ball stuck in our second sto-

ry drainpipe that runs from the gym roof to our house. I had to leave dinner preparations to help them struggle with removing a section of pipe. Leaning out the window in the struggle, my hands black as pitch and dinner on the stove, I reflected on how one good turn could certainly lead to a heck of a lot of trouble.

*End of a sample of "Amazing Grace".*

*Alan Gaylord*

## WHO CARES?

Day follows night  
The sky is still blue  
A breeze  
shuffles  
end-of-the-summer  
leaves  
Birds  
at the birdbath  
still bathe

It all seems so normal  
Don't they know  
that she isn't here?  
That nothing will ever be the same?  
Don't they care?

How can they know?  
That's really not their domain  
What the world out there  
does know  
is  
that life goes on

Caring is what we do  
as we remember what was  
and face  
what  
will be  
without  
her

*Stanley Brush*

## CONSIDER THE LILIES

A sound at the door, the footsteps leave.  
Seen through the screen, a florist's pack.  
I read my address, it's hard to believe.  
The tapes are cut, the wraps rolled back.

Who could afford these fragrant greens?  
This gift of love, for me a thrill.  
The folded buds toward light will lean,  
They'll open on my windowsill.

He works two jobs, gets little sleep.  
She works as well, is always striving.  
Their mortgage payments will not keep.  
At sports and school their kids are thriving.

I consider the lilies, smelling so sweet.  
I think of my dear ones sending this scent.  
My heart is full, my joy complete,  
I know, I know how much it meant.

*Ariel Hollinsbead Hyun*

## WHEN I FIRST BELIEVED

When I was 9 years old you couldn't tell me that professional wrestling wasn't real. "The Sandman," who stood for all that was good and noble in the world, appeared every Saturday afternoon on Tommy Logan's TV. It was an event that we never missed. At the start of the match a black-masked villain would routinely club our hero into delirium with a variety of dirty tricks. But The Sandman would rise from the mat as screaming kids at ringside (and Tommy and I in front of his TV) hollered encouragement. Slowly and deliberately he would shake off the ill effects of the treachery that fogged his brain and magically come back to life. And then, after several rapid and strategically placed drop kicks that toppled the villain, The Sandman would apply his patented "sleeper hold" and render his opponent immobile. The referee would pound his hand three times on the mat to signal the finality. The ringside crowd and Tommy and I would go wild and The Sandman would walk around the ring with his hands raised, humbly acknowledging his cheering admirers. Once again good had triumphed over evil, as it had the previous week and would the next. But it was all undeniably real.

So, too, was Captain Midnight, who got his tremendous strength from drinking Ovaltine (which also sponsored his radio show). In the closing minute of each show, Captain Midnight himself would come on to deliver a special coded message that could only be deciphered by those who possessed a Captain Midnight Glow-In-The-Dark Decoder Ring.

It took a disciplined three weeks for me to save the required coinage from my allowance, which, along with the lid liners from two jars of Ovaltine, was sent to Captain Midnight's headquarters in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Grand Rapids, I discovered, was a long distance from Philadelphia, and it took another seven weeks for the decoder ring to finally arrive in our mailbox.

But what excitement on its arrival! With the numerical codes I had copied from Captain Midnight's radio broadcasts I crept into a dark corner of our basement for the secret glow in the dark decoding process.

Slowly the message appeared:

**“D-R-I-N-K M-O-R-E O-V-A-L-T-I-N-E”**

Yes! It was Captain Midnight actually talking to me - personally giving me advice on how to grow up to be just like him!

Well, here I am 60 years later. My heroes, Captain Midnight and The Sandman, have been replaced by a vast array of aliens who shoot each other with atomic rays in what are called “interactive” computer games. Somewhere along the line imagination also must have been “zapped” and I doubt that today's youth would ever have the patience to wait ten weeks for a decoder ring to arrive from Grand Rapids or could even find ten minutes to decode Captain Midnight's special message.

I'll leave it to history to judge which generation produced healthier youths.

But of one thing I am very certain. Back then it was real!

*Pete McCord*







## A WILD FLOWER

A wild flower  
In a white china dish  
Was placed  
Hoping that it would live

And it did  
Until the day  
That I did not water it  
Because I thought  
It so cruel  
A circumstance  
That withering flowers  
In white china dishes  
Must live

O God

I pray that I  
Will never be  
A wild flower  
In a white china dish

*Pete McCord*



## THE AFFAIR

She,  
a smoky candle flame  
hot inverted heart  
dancing tethered  
in the night

He,  
a wandering  
Saturniid  
drawn  
not unwilling  
toward  
the light

Does he,  
does she,  
crave the frenzy  
and the taste  
of moth smoke?

*Stan Brush*

## A MOMENT OF HAPPINESS

They lay together on the unmade bed. The moonlight coming through the curtains cast a spotlight on their entwined nude bodies. Her arms were wrapped around him, her head on his bare chest. He gently stroked her hair. He could feel her breast rising and falling. He knew she was sleeping. His own eyes were beginning to close, as he thought to himself, "This is a moment of pure happiness."

\* \* \* \* \*

"*Raus! Raus! Mach schnell!*" the sergeant bellowed, and followed up in English, "Get up! Get up! We're moving out!" The steady rain had become a mere drizzle. The sergeant repeated his command with a jab of his boot to Mort's side. Mort rose slowly. Everything he wore was soaked. He had learned a long time ago to wear everything, even his B-4 flying jacket and his Army issue coat that covered his pants and legs almost down to his shoes. He had discarded his flying boots along the way; in any case they were impossible to walk in for any long distance. Mort tried to wring out as much water as possible from his GI blanket and winced as his shot-up leg began to ache. Slowly he made his way from the roadside on to the macadam of the highway. From ditches and out of the woods and along the road men once again began to form a long ragtag column. On command they began to shuffle forward. Half asleep, Mort reached out his hand and grabbed the back of the coat of the man in front of him. "It's OK, soldier, hold on," the man said as he turned his head. Mort knew that this helped to keep

him from falling, while he dragged his bad leg. The be-draggled line of men was tired, haggard, and dirty – none had washed or shaved in weeks, some not in months. They were also hungry and thirsty. The line of POWs stretched for miles. They walked with no sense of direction or destination. No need to know the time, for the ritual of walking and resting was constant and timeless.

Gray streaks in the east announced that daybreak was not far off. Then dawn broke and almost simultaneously the rain stopped. The rising sun silhouetted a line of wooden barns. A command to halt was passed down the column. The guards were given orders to assign the men to the different barns. Once inside, Mort pressed some straw together into a makeshift pillow. He lay down on the earth floor that smelled of cows and mold and he slept.

It was the loud guttural commands of the sergeant that woke him. He raised himself from his makeshift bed and walked outside. The sun was high overhead. Parked only yards away was a Red Cross truck, and food parcels were being distributed. Someone had started a fire and water was boiling. Mort learned that some of the “Kriegies” had bartered with a farmer for tea, and a weak hot drink was being dispensed. He had figured out long ago how much of his food parcel to eat and how much to save. He knew that the Red Cross parcel had to last at least a week.

The hot tea was in his tin cup when he heard the distant roar of the bombers. Suddenly an armada of B-17 Flying Fortresses appeared from the southwest and filled the sky. “Do I try to run and hide?” Mort thought, “Or

will they just pass us by for a more important target?” Using a branch he had found as a walking stick, he got up and stumbled back to the barn. But as quickly as they came the bombers disappeared. “I guess we were not their target for today,” Mort said to himself as he sat down against the barn door. And he found himself sweating, even on this cold day.

With the sun’s slanting rays behind them, the long column was on the road again, their shadows reflecting onto the macadam as they wearily shuffled along. Mort saw that they were passing through a large forest area. The sky was clear, but it was cold. Mort could tell that spring was not far off as flowers were beginning to break through along the side of the road. He continued to hold on to the coat of the soldier in front of him. “Did I ever think that the GI Joe in front of me would turn out to be my guide dog?” he thought. “What do I do to pass the time? My lousy leg hurts and I’m dog-tired. Hey! How about a song?” He remembered the ditty that a British POW had taught him. Loud and clear he began to sing out.

*I don't want to be a soldier.*

*I don't want to go to war.*

*I want to play around in the Piccadilly Underground*

*Living off the earnings of a high-born lady*

*And live in London, bloody London, all my livelong days.*

*I don't want a binding up my asshole*

*I don't want my goolies shot away.*

*I want to live in London, bloody London, all my livelong days.*

Slowly at first, those around Mort began to sing. Then with raised voices, like a wave breaking, the song

spread along the entire column. Over and over it was repeated until, the men too tired to continue, it faded away. “Damn it! That felt good,” Mort said, to no one and everyone.

The sound in the air grew. First it was a low growl, then a thunderous roar that filled the sky. Everyone in the line stopped dead in their tracks and looked up. Out of the southwest, flying low above the trees, were two fighter planes, their aluminum skin shining like two stars in the bright sunlight as they swept past the column.

“Hey, did you see that, it’s our guys!” Mort shouted out and raised his fist as if to salute the planes. The fighters then banked and turned back toward the column. Suddenly the machine guns of the first plane fired into the head of the line. Mort watched as bodies of POWs fell to the ground. Someone then yelled, “Run, run, that son of a bitch is firing at us!” The German guards, including the sergeant, had already disappeared. Mort stumbled and half ran and limped into the forest, deeper and deeper among the towering trees, searching for any type of safety and protection. He could hear the second plane firing and a tree branch shattered by the bullets broke off near him. He lay flat on the ground scrabbling with his bare hands, trying to dig a hole. He grabbed at the dirt between his fingers. “Please let them go away. I want to live!” he cried out through his tears to the unanswering forest.

\* \* \* \* \*

She shook him awake. “You’re having one of your bad nightmares,” she said.

He didn't answer her, but wiped away the sweat with the back of his hand from his forehead. He turned to her and held her body close to his own.

“Just relax, old boy,” he said to himself, “you're safe here in her arms.”

He slowly relaxed, with her pressed next to him, and waited patiently for that feeling of pure happiness to return.

*George Rubin*

## A NIGHT IN REGENSBURG

It was 1922. Rosa was in her ninth month of pregnancy. She had hoped that the new baby would arrive on the birthday of her firstborn, three-year-old Michael. But, she had miscalculated. The family of Julius, Rosa and Michael were planning a move from one city to another, as Julius had recently been appointed a judge in the new municipality. The timing was not good. Where was she going to have the baby? They decided, in order to have the best medical care, Rosa and Michael would stay in her mother Betty's villa in Regensburg, a merchant city on the Danube, not far from her future home. Her mother was a no-nonsense woman, the widow of the owner of a large department store. She had two maids to care for those who lived in the villa and a gardener to take care of the spacious grounds. It was a satisfactory arrangement because Julius would be able to come from his assignment and join the family over the weekends.

After arriving in Regensburg, Rosa went to the clinic of Dr. Doerfler, which had been well recommended. She met the doctor who was a slim, 5 foot 7 inch, ramrod-straight gentleman with a carefully trimmed mustache. His piercing black eyes and serious demeanor instilled confidence in Rosa. After examining Rosa, he assured her that she was in good shape and that he would take excellent care of her. Reassured, she walked back to the villa and waited.

It was a Friday evening when Rosa felt the first birth pangs. She immediately picked up her previously packed satchel and said goodbye to Michael, who was left in the

care of the maids. As the clinic was not far away, she and Betty walked there. The attending nurse helped her undress and put on a birthing gown. A message was sent to the midwife to come as soon as possible.

Rosa wondered when the doctor would show up as her pains started to come more frequently. The midwife arrived and took over Rosa's care. She made the patient feel that she was in good hands, but where was Dr. Doefler? It now was 11 o'clock. The pains were getting stronger and stronger. Suddenly, the water broke. She again asked for the doctor. The midwife assured her that everything was all right. (Rosa found out later that because Dr. Doerfler was a martinet and ran a very tight operation, the midwife was afraid to call him at midnight to come to the clinic. She was certain he would thoroughly berate her and maybe terminate her services. She was not going to risk that.) Rosa was now yelling for the doctor but the midwife kept on calming her and reassured her that everything was happening in a normal manner. Suddenly, at around 1 o'clock, the baby's head appeared and quickly the rest of the infant was born. It was a healthy boy! His little arms and legs were so skinny that some people compared him to a frog. Soon the afterbirth appeared and the midwife tied the cord. Rosa held the baby for awhile and then fell asleep.

When she woke up at 7 o'clock, she was handed the baby to give him his first feeding. While she was doing this, she heard shouting in the hallway. It was Dr. Doerfler yelling at everyone around him for not calling him when the daughter of such an important merchant family

was giving birth. He then entered Rosa's room and apologized profusely for his non-attendance, blaming the staff of the clinic.

Thirteen years later, with the coming of the new regime, Dr. Doerfler became an ardent Nazi. He would have denied this Jewish woman access to the clinic.

*Stefan Frank*

## CATEGORIES

I have to say about my kitty  
That (as cats go) she's really quite witty.  
Today I had plans intentional,  
To gather dirty clothes unmentionable.  
I sorted them into categories,  
White and lightest,  
Black and darkest.  
Into the washing machine went the latter,  
But wait, there's something the matter.  
Out of the blackest garment I ever did see  
Were two green eyes staring at me!  
Oh, my, what a quandary with all this laundry  
Something with black fur  
And a great big purr.  
Never fear. It was Pumpkin dear.  
Now it was – purrfectly clear.  
She'd sorted herself out categorically  
To be with the black and the darkest, you see.

*Sarah Klos*



## GREY RAIDERS

Quiet warfare is occurring on our campus, a true battleground believe it or not, between man and animals. Yes, you read correctly, a war between us and our fellow residents, the grey raiders. Battles occur almost daily in various combat zones.

Puzzled? Just think for a moment. You've probably seen at least one or two skirmishes each week. We are battling the grey squirrel, *Squirillus americanus*, ever hungry and determined little foragers. The reason for the conflict, the prize, possession of seeds, a magnet for them. See a feeder, find a grey squirrel in attack mode.

You may wonder how I came to this conclusion. Simply stroll in my footsteps along the perimeter walking path and see for yourself. There is almost a medieval fortress approach employed by some residents, except possibly for the absence of moats, in their efforts to protect the many bird feeders and their oh-so-tasty seeds. Most residents employ metal cones to block progress up the slender pole atop which sits the feeder. Others have feeders with trap doors designed to block access by a hungry, furry grey mouth to the treasure trove of seeds contained within. One outstanding defense you will observe consists of a gigantic metallic cylinder all situated about one foot below the feeder. The smooth barricade is somewhat more than a foot in diameter and extends three feet in length down the mounting pole.

Another energetic, and probably very annoyed and frustrated resident has gone to the extreme of tossing a rope some 25 feet into the air and over a hanging limb.

Dangling at the end of the rope, eight feet above the ground is the feeder, safe from an Olympic class squirrel leaper. When the feeder needs refilling, it is lowered via the rope, filled and lifted out of harm's way. I can't help wondering if some crafty, skilled squirrel has mastered a vertical rope descent. I know they have no problem with ascents or moving quickly along cable or rope barely the diameter of a finger.



Be it noted, the hanging bird feeder is nonetheless the type containing a spring mechanism to deter our attackers. Can't be too safe, that's for sure.

I personally have tried three different approaches, beginning with a simple feeder at the top of a six-foot metal pole. My mistake was placing it only four feet from the railing on my deck. How was I to know that distance was no problem for the grey raiders.

When the feeder required surprisingly frequent fillings, I originally thought there was a multitude of birds who were simply very hungry and busy enjoying my offering. I was shocked when I saw this large fellow – by his size it had to be a male – soar through the air from my deck and alight nimbly on the feeder. He landed, checked out the scene and had the temerity to knock loose the top of the feeder and obtain total access to the contents. As my blood pressure rose, he simply sat enjoying his fill of my seeds. Before me was the reality of my seeds' disappearance, not famished birds but hungry squirrel.

My next attempt was a spring-loaded feeder. Any mammalian weight on one of the bird perches would cause the outer shell to drop, blocking the openings to the seeds. A kind neighbor was nice enough to give me a hook with which to hang it from the deck railing outside my sunroom window. Seemed foolproof to me, but then I was not as yet a seasoned combat veteran.

Do you know that grey squirrels are conversant with the laws of physics? In less than a month I was chagrined to learn they had solved the problem. They

would put their hind paws on the railing and leaning out, rest a fore paw on the perch and with the other, scoop seeds through perch openings. They knew enough not to use the lowest openings, because that threw enough of their body weight on the perch to cause the outer shell to drop. By reaching for the higher perches they kept almost all their weight on the railing, outsmarted the spring mechanism and enjoyed my seeds. More than once they turned their heads toward me as they gnawed on big sunflower seeds and, so help me, looked as if they had a snide grin on their faces. They seemed to be saying, “Gotcha, big boy,” in squirrelspeak

Time for another strategy I deduced.

I have a third type of feeder on the tree at the front of my house. It hangs from a branch far from the trunk, distant enough that if a squirrel leaps to it, the feeder will swing away violently enough to cause the raider to fall to the ground. It is high enough that I need a ladder to reach it, above the leaping ability of the villains. Problem is when the wind is strong and the feeder knocks against the trunk it spills seeds. Maybe I need a different type feeder.

I’ll also need to remember to remove the string every other year so as to avoid strangling the branch to which it is tied.

Being a frugal sort – that’s what I like to think about myself – I priced my choices at Walmart and Lowe’s. Each store had a nice variety in my price range, under twenty-five dollars. Most seemed to incorporate features designed to deter if not prevent predation by the grey raiders. Once I stopped at a store in Vermont that ad-

vertised bird feeders for sale. To my shock and amazement many lovely feeders exceeded \$100 in cost, far above my comfort zone. I'm frugal, remember. They were simply out of my price range.

I think I've evolved successful coping strategies, defenses if you would. I moved the freestanding feeder ten feet away from the house and six feet above ground. If any squirrel can make that jump I'm capturing the scene for YouTube and starting an Internet competition for the longest recorded jump. My spring-guarded feeder has also been moved farther away from the deck railing. To reach the seeds now the average squirrel would have to be prone, with half its weight on the feeder. That much weight should flex the springs. I tested the mechanism with fishing line weights and anything above three ounces closes the perch openings. My tree hung feeder still occasionally drops seeds upon the ground, which the birds and squirrels share, a community of the hungry. One thing I have learned is that squirrels and cardinals are attracted to the same seed mix. If a few squirrels still obtain some of my seeds, they darn well have earned them.

Take a walk around our community and see for yourself how your neighbors attempt in vain to deter the dashing grey raiders. If you have some better ideas, we would be most happy to make your acquaintance and profit from your inventiveness.

*John Sommi*

## **SING YE HEAVENS SING!**

Each Star's melody is born, lives and dies...

This final Song sings of our dying Star,  
Whirling eons on its path celestial.  
The heavens intone creation's Song:  
Stars heave, collapsing in space ethereal.

Meantime, hominids are fated to forestall  
The demise of their cherished memories —  
Of languages created, gods worshipped,  
Of unrivaled and honored visionaries.

Before they see their end on living Earth,  
Before they leave, life seemingly secure,  
Wills are diminished, energies expired,  
None are left to dream, none endure.

Thus sings the Song that ends loved chaos,  
Devouring, dies away. The Fates conspire.  
Caught lively chanting their own sacred hymn,  
They once again ignite the birthing fire.

The Universe sings, Infinity replies.

*Chris Darlington*

## SIGEWARD BARN A MEDIEVAL TALE OF FAITH

*Note: The name of Sigeward Barn appears once in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Who he was or what he did is not told. His name and all the names of persons and places (and their spellings, as translated) in this story are of eleventh century England. Except for the plague and famine mentioned, this is a work of fiction.*

**I**n the year 1072 childe Eadgar – childe, a medieval title of lesser nobility – came up from Peterborough to the monastery at York to be blessed by bishop Ægelwine. Childe Eadgar had come to join king William of Normandy who was making his way north from Westminster, to do battle at Tynemouth.

Sigeward Barn came in the same year, appearing outside the monastery on Candlemas (Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>). He got his name because he was found in a barn when new born. Having no father, he could not be “the son of,” a common thing among the wandering peasants. He had made his way to York from the countryside of Gloucester. His walk was solitary. Nonetheless he was recognized throughout the countryside of England.

Wherever Sigeward Barn wandered, eftsoons he was in another place; he worked the fields, fed livestock, worked in the bake houses, or for whoever of the common folk needed his hand. This he did for morsels of food to warm his body or scraps of cloth to hide his nakedness. He took no coin for his labor. When night came, he slept in stables in winter and orchards in sum-

mer. He was a healer. He was a wonder to all men, both high and low. He was welcomed everywhere.

It was Lammas (the first of August) when Sigeward Barn watched childe Eadgar approach the guesthouse yard, followed by his knights and squires. Childe Eadgar dismounted with much lameness and with the aid of his two squires. Because the monk's infirmary was closed to guests, Sigeward Barn knew from this unusual event that he would be needed that day. He worked in and around the stables until he was called.

Too soon, the servant of squire Æthelm – squire to childe Eadgar – was sent throughout the vast monastery, calling the name of Sigeward Barn. The servant's voice was heard among the stone buildings, the monks' kitchen, the bake house, the brew house, the round houses for fowl and poultry. His cries added to the din of the workyards, echoing among the buildings. Sigeward Barn stepped from the stables and, without a word, followed the servant.

Squire Æthelm met Sigeward Barn in the vestibule of the guesthouse, a fine stone building for noble persons. There was no need for speaking.

Led into a spacious room, Sigeward Barn saw childe Eadgar lying on a straw-bedded pallet. Wrapped in the trappings of fealty, he seemed to be in one grimace, his whole body now stiff with pain. Sigeward Barn's strong hands went straight to the cause of the pain, a lame right leg. With soothing strokes, he tenderly and rhythmically kneaded the lame leg as if to an unknown heavenly music. In a very short time childe Eadgar's body was with less pain and a calmness came over him. His body came

to a natural state in which he breathed deeply in true sleep. Words that may have passed between the two men were not recorded.

Sigeward Barn tended to the needs of childe Eadgar for a week then left the guesthouse to continue his labor in the stables and fields of the monastery.

Childe Eadgar healed quickly but did not leave the guesthouse. In time he sent for abbot Turol and sought a novitiate, pledging to renounce the world. Abbot Turol discouraged him but childe Eadgar would have it no other way. He did not join the king when he stopped with his army at York. Seeing his intent king William willingly released him of his oath of fealty.

After Michaelmas (Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>) Sigeward Barn was no longer seen at the monastery. Asked over and over, most visitors and pilgrims – there were many – had not seen the healer. One or two men, bent on pleasing a master, swore they had seen him as far away as Brytland (Wales). How true can this be?

At the end of the following year the chronicler of the monastery recorded: “The year was a very heavy and pestilent one in this land. Such a malady came that almost every other man was wasted with fever, and that came so strongly that many men died. Afterwards there came, through the great tempests, a very great famine over all England, so that many hundred men perished. Alas! How miserable a time was then! when the wretched men lay driven almost to death and afterwards came sharp famine. Who is so hardhearted that cannot feel pity for such misfortune?”

After three winters had come and gone no visitor to the monastery, not even the long-suffering travelers, had a single report of Sigeward Barn. Childe Eadgar thought often of the man who had softened his heart and settled him in the faith and work of the monastery. He was convinced Sigeward Barn had been swept away, either by plague or by famine. As an act of deep respect and with a grateful, willing heart, childe Eadgar made fervent lenten prayers for the soul of the healer.

Soon childe Eadgar was under the Benedictine cowl. On the Assumption of St. Mary's mass day, 1076, he took the order's holy vows in the presence of brother monks in the monastery church. From that day he was known as brother Sigeward Barn. *Beati pacifici.\**

\*Blessed are the peacemakers.

*Chris Darlington*