

LEAS LIT

The Medford Leas Literary Journal



June 2010

Number 19

LEAS LIT STAFF

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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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THE KEY

Leslie found the key in an antique shop as she rummaged through a box of junk. Collecting old unusual objects was a passionate interest and this small metal relic from the past captured her imagination.

What function did this key perform? To whom did it belong? She held the key in her hand and her fingers played over the worn metal surface as she traced its curlicued design. Intrigued, she paid for it, took it home and placed it in an old printer's drawer along with other oddities. Then she mixed up a batch of herb bread, baked a heart healthy coconut cake from scratch for her mother's birthday, and fixed her special gourmet pasta salad for her lunch "to go." Cooking relaxed her and she loved every aspect of it. Furthermore, she was good at it.

Several weeks later, her job as a sales consultant for Michelle Bouchette Cosmetics required her to fly to California. She was reluctant to go. She was tired of traveling across country, tired of performing makeover miracles on women, tired of having no permanence in her life or joy in her work. Sadly, she didn't have a clue as to how to change anything. She was stuck and needed a key to open a door to a new life.

Her work in San Francisco was completed in a day or two and she had a few hours before boarding her plane. She wandered into a small curiosity shop down near Fisherman's Wharf. As usual, she eagerly scrounged about, digging through the flotsam of past lives. Old oil paintings, mostly of dogs and farm ani-

mals, leaned against a faded velveteen settee. A suit of armor stood guard over a collection of Lowestoft china. She smiled when she saw a stack of printer's drawers, the old wooden compartments stained with black ink from the type that was stored there years ago. In a dusty corner, a basket held antiquated cooking utensils. Jumbled together were hand-carved butter paddles and molds, a wooden potato masher, a tin candle-snuffer and a medium-size metal box. She picked up the box and examined it carefully. The surface was dented and well worn. The box was locked.

"That box has been locked since it came in here," the proprietor said. "Came from a big sale up on Nob Hill."

"How much?" Leslie asked. "I think I have a key that will fit that lock."

"It's yours for ten dollars."

Leslie bought the box and hand-carried it home with her on the plane. It made its way through Security. Weary from jetlag, she unpacked, showered and checked her mail, sorting through the advertisements, the request for donations, the address labels. About to tumble into bed, she remembered the box and reached for the key that might possibly unlock its secrets. The key resisted the rusty lock at first. She found some linseed oil and a piece of sand paper and rubbed away at the reddish brown surface. Then she polished the key in the same way. She tried again and this time the key fit and the dented tin lid creaked open. A very old book, bound in shabby brown leather, lay inside.

Carefully lifting it out, she sneezed as a spicy aroma enveloped her. The parchment pages were yellow and stained. They contained recipes! She turned the book and looked at the binding. In faded gold letters she read "Miss Leslie's Complete Cookery," and the book was dated 1838.

The coincidence of the name astonished her!

She smiled as she leafed gently through the book and read, "Designed as a manual of American housewifery, Miss Leslie has avoided the insertion of any dishes whose ingredients cannot be procured on our side of the Atlantic and which require for their preparation utensils that are rarely found except in Europe. Also, she has omitted everything which may not, by the generality of tastes, be considered good of its kind and well worth the trouble and cost of preparing."

Skipping through the book, she noted chapters devoted to the preparation of venison, hares and rabbits; sweetmeats, preserves and jellies; domestic liquors; perfumery and preparations for the sick. This is a treasure, she thought. A recipe for coconut cake caught her eye. She read, "Cut up and wash a cocoanut and grate as much of it as will weigh a pound. Powder a loaf of sugar. Beat fifteen eggs very light (Leslie grimaced; heart healthy this was not), and then beat into them gradually the sugar. Add by degrees, the cocoanut. Lastly, a handful of sifted flour. Stir the whole very hard and bake in a large tin pan. The oven should be rather quick."

She laughed with delight, wondering what a quick oven was, then puzzled over this entry: "A set of tin measures from a gallon down to a jill, will be found very convenient in every kitchen; it is also well to have a set of wooden measures from a bushel to a quarter of a peck."

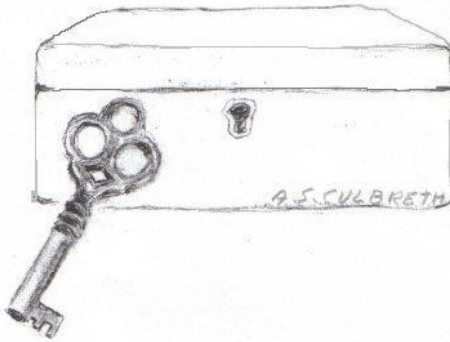
Going to her computer, she pulled up the Google search window and typed in jill. She read, "The gill was introduced in the 14th century to measure individual servings of whiskey or wine. It is a unit of liquid measure equal to $\frac{1}{4}$ of a pint."

Well, why not just say $\frac{1}{2}$ a cup? she puzzled.

Thoughtfully she curled up on her bed, book in hand. Her mind was spinning with outrageous thoughts and impractical ideas. Miss Leslie's Complete Cookery, she pondered. Gourmet Cooking by Miss Leslie, she considered. Miss Leslie's Gourmet Take-Out Lunches, she wondered? Works for me, she thought as she drifted off to sleep.

And a year later it was working very well for Leslie.

Edith R. Pray



SCOUTMASTER EXTRAORDINARY

John B Peterson, a minister of one of our small town's churches, initiated the idea of forming a Boy Scout troop. He was responding to a significant number of boys coming of age in the town. John enlisted the same church's Men's Bible Class as sponsor, and some of the men persuaded him to become the scoutmaster. (I use his first name because I knew him for nearly fifty years, until the end of his life in his nineties.) I became one of the first Boy Scouts of Troop 11. John took great interest in me. He was the one person who brought me into the varied activities of scouting.

In the second year of scouting the boys decided that, as an activity of the troop, we would take "bicycle hikes" on the back roads around our town. Bicycling, of course, was nothing new. Many of the boys and girls used this mode of transportation. Bicycling with a group of scouts afforded an irresistible activity, particularly when it offered an opportunity of an overnight camping experience at the end of the ride. I was more than enthusiastic, but there was not a chance I would be involved because my balance was poor and even with repeated attempts I had not learned to ride a bicycle. John was determined that *all* of us boys were going to participate. He set about finding a way to include me.

John approached my parents with the idea that there must be some kind of support wheels – now called trainer (or helper) wheels – which, when fitted on the bike, would help keep a two-wheeler bicycle upright and make it easy for one to ride. If he found such an appli-

ance, would my parents be able to afford the cost, if it was within reason and their means? My parents could see how much I enjoyed scouting. They were quite willing to have John pursue his idea, having little faith that his helper wheels would materialize.

Our scoutmaster was a tireless and dedicated man. He was also a methodical man who could see a goal and know instinctively, it seemed, how to achieve it. His story came out in due course. As he told it, he visited every bicycle and toy department of the large department stores in Philadelphia – Gimbels, Lit Brothers, Strawbridge and Clothier and John Wanamaker – and almost all the small bicycle shops in the area. With a sketch of what he had in mind, he spoke with the departmental buyers, and not one had heard or seen the bicycle helper wheels represented in his design. This took place in 1947. However, one of the buyers directed him to a shop at 4th and Brown Streets in Northern Liberties. The proprietor of the shop sold rebuilt bicycles and was a skilled welder.

The shop owner said he could fabricate the metal braces to be attached to the fork of the back wheel and supply the two outer smaller wheels. He would fit the helper wheels onto a rebuilt 26" bicycle. The price seemed reasonable. My parents could not say no. Four weeks later, we made the trip to Philadelphia and purchased a strange looking four-wheel bicycle.

That summer I participated in a couple of bike hikes with my friends, the scouts of Troop 11. Scoutmaster John was very pleased with the result of his plan. It was quite an experience for me. However, it was not

altogether a good one. The helper wheels, although three inches off the ground, were a drag on an otherwise smooth ride. The drag was more pronounced when one tried to lean into a curve.

I put up with this friction “drag” for a few weeks. By that time, I noticed that as long as I stayed upright the side wheels did not drag. It dawned on me that that was the point of having helper wheels. I was finally balancing the bike on my own. In order to test my theory and without prompting from my parents or scoutmaster, I borrowed a neighbor’s bike. I took it to the schoolyard and began practicing (without helper wheels, of course). After a few falls and a lot of determination, I found myself riding with great confidence. This took a couple of weeks of practice. Each time I got on the neighbor’s bike it was a thrilling experience.

With much trepidation of my parents, but with their permission, I removed the helper wheels from my bicycle. I was free to ride anywhere. The helper wheels stayed in our garage for a couple of months, gathering dust and rust. A friend of my mother heard about the helper wheels and asked to borrow them for her child. So they left our garage and we never saw them again. Possibly more than one child was able to enjoy a childhood of bicycling fun and freedom.

Whenever I visited my scoutmaster/friend, and these occasions were frequent throughout his long life, he often expressed his regret that he had not filed for a patent on the helper wheels. His eyes would light up, and with a broad smile he would say, “Just think how much money we would have made!” However we both

realized that it wasn't the money. After all, it was the joint venture we shared, between a scout and his scoutmaster. Little had we realized that one day children everywhere would start their biking experience with "training wheels."

Chris Darlington



“FULLERBRUSHMAN!”

When I was a child I believed that a “fullerbrushman” was some sort of itinerant peddler – a Johnny Appleseed of sorts with a sack full of household products. It was only later in life that I learned that Mr. Reisman was a commissioned salesman for the Fuller Brush Company, and that there were at least two words to his title.

But for whatever his corporate origins, Herman Reisman, who always knocked twice and bellowed forth in a thick Germanic accent “FOOLER-BRUUCHMANN!” was someone my mother tried to evade. As I reflect on it now, this was undoubtedly from concerns of economy that our limited family income required rather than from any distrust or dislike of Mr. Reisman, whom we all found quite affable and curious. And Mr. Reisman, with his elderly and gentlemanly demeanor, seemed to genuinely like us as he demonstrated the brushes and other products that he brought forth from a bulging leather suitcase, always assuring us that his products were superior to anything we would ever find in the Acme. But Mother would claim that she had a brush just like the one he was showing and told Mr. Reisman that when it wore out she would most assuredly buy a new one from him. Mr. Reisman would then slowly close his suitcase and shuffle off down the path, once again having failed to make a sale to our household. But before he left he would always pause to tell us that we were a wonderful family who deserved the very best.

I remember that Mother would often appear sad and reflective when he left and told us that Mr. Reisman was a kind gentleman, but that his brushes were too expensive. My first recollection of Mother's evasive tactics was when I was six years old. It was on a morning when my mother looked out the front window and saw Mr. Resman drive up in front of our house in his battered station wagon. For reasons that at the time puzzled me, my brother and I were quickly rounded up and made to huddle with her beneath the front door transom while Mr. Reisman banged on the door behind us. I recall looking up and seeing the brim of his hat through the window as he bellowed forth his presence. My brother became frightened and bolted from our place of concealment as Mr. Reisman shuffled off, and Mother was sure that we had been seen. I suppose she was right, because Mr. Reisman came back later that day and surprised us by knocking on the front window. Disarmed of any opportunity for evasion, Mother opened the front door and greeted him graciously. Perhaps as a matter of conscience she then made one of her rare purchases, selecting a bottle of inexpensive pine-smelling soap that Mr. Reisman assured her was better than the Borox she had been using to scrub our kitchen floor.

I think I first figured out that there was something quite peculiar about the relationship that was evolving around me about a year later, when I saw Mr. Reisman drive up in his station wagon and ran excitedly to my mother to tell her of his arrival. But Mother did not share my enthusiasm, as she quickly ushered my brother and me out the back door. Once in the backyard, Mother still

feared that we would be discovered and had us crawl through the hedges that separated our yard from the adjoining rectory of St. Magdeline's Roman Catholic Church. Once inside the rectory's garden, we didn't know what to do, so we stood by a statue of the Virgin Mary while we listened to Mr. Reisman banging on our front door and shouting out his presence. Father Lawton, who knew we were Quakers, came out of the rectory and greeted us. Mother told Father Lawton that she was showing us the beautiful statue and Father Lawton taught me a short prayer of adoration. By the time I was able to master its recitation, we saw Mr. Reisman drive off. Mother thanked Father Lawton for his kindness and we went home.

But Mr. Reisman returned the next day and it was then that Mother, perhaps again as a matter of Quakerly conscience, made her largest purchase. This was after Mr. Reisman brought forth a radiator brush and demonstrated how it could get between the pipes, suggesting that the dust that accumulated there would surely make us ill. It cost Mother two dollars, which she had been saving for a Sunday roast that she planned on buying from Joe the butcher. My father came home later that evening and, after examining the brush and trying it out on the radiator in the parlor, declared that he thought a rag would do just as well.

That Sunday we had chicken soup, which Mother thickened with a lot of noodles. The new brush was hidden behind the radiator in the kitchen.

Following the radiator brush purchase I think Mother must have acknowledged a certain weakness to

Mr. Reisman's salesmanship, since she seemed even more determined to evade him before he ever set foot in our home. And, to a greater extent, my brother and I became complicit in her efforts. We agreed to never stand at the front window if we saw him arrive and to immediately let her know if he stopped at our house. My brother, who had just learned to whistle, said he would whistle three times when he saw him, and I placed my Cub Scout flashlight by the basement door and put a supply of comic books in a corner of the basement where my brother and I decided we would go and hide until he left.

Several weeks later, my brother, having failed with his nascent whistling skills, came running into the kitchen yelling, "Fullerbrushman! Fullerbrushman!" and we went scampering into our basement hideout, where we read the comic books by the light of my flashlight. Mother hid behind the icebox, but was certain that Mr. Reisman had seen our light through the coal chute port. And I think she was right, since later that evening, as we were about to sit down for dinner, Mr. Reisman surprised us by rapping on the back door before my brother could whistle and before we could flee to the cellar.

Mother, who always managed to muster the greatest civility in tense situations, greeted Mr. Reisman and let him in. I remember that Mr. Reisman looked much older that evening and seemed winded as he lugged his battered suitcase into our kitchen. But before he could open it, Mother suggested that he stay for dinner. My father had just called and said he had

to work the late shift, so there was enough for him to eat.

“It would give me great pleasure,” Mr. Reisman said very formally, “for you are a wonderful family, certainly the finest I have ever met.”

Mother set another place for Mr. Reisman at the kitchen table next to mine, and as I sat down by him I realized, for the first time, how old, stooped and shabbily dressed he was. His black flannel suit was stained and rumpled and seemed cut for a man twice his stature. And he had an air about him that reminded me of a dusty room, the door to which had not been opened in a long time.

Mr. Reisman held my hand during our moment of silence. And then he tucked his napkin under his chin, a custom I had never seen except in an illustration of one of the books I had read. And he ate very slowly, as though he wanted his food to last a long time.

When he was finished, he rose and bowed to my mother and thanked her for her hospitality, telling her that he had not had such a good meal and eaten in such fine company in many years. And then he asked if he might play a few songs “for the children” on our upright piano.

Mr. Reisman then played the most melodic tunes I had ever heard and sang in rich baritone songs in German that he told us were from the “Fatherland.” We all wanted him to continue, but after several songs he rose and said that it must be past our bedtime. He

then gathered up his suitcase, never opening it or suggesting a need for one of his products, and, after again thanking us for a wonderful evening, shuffled off down our path.

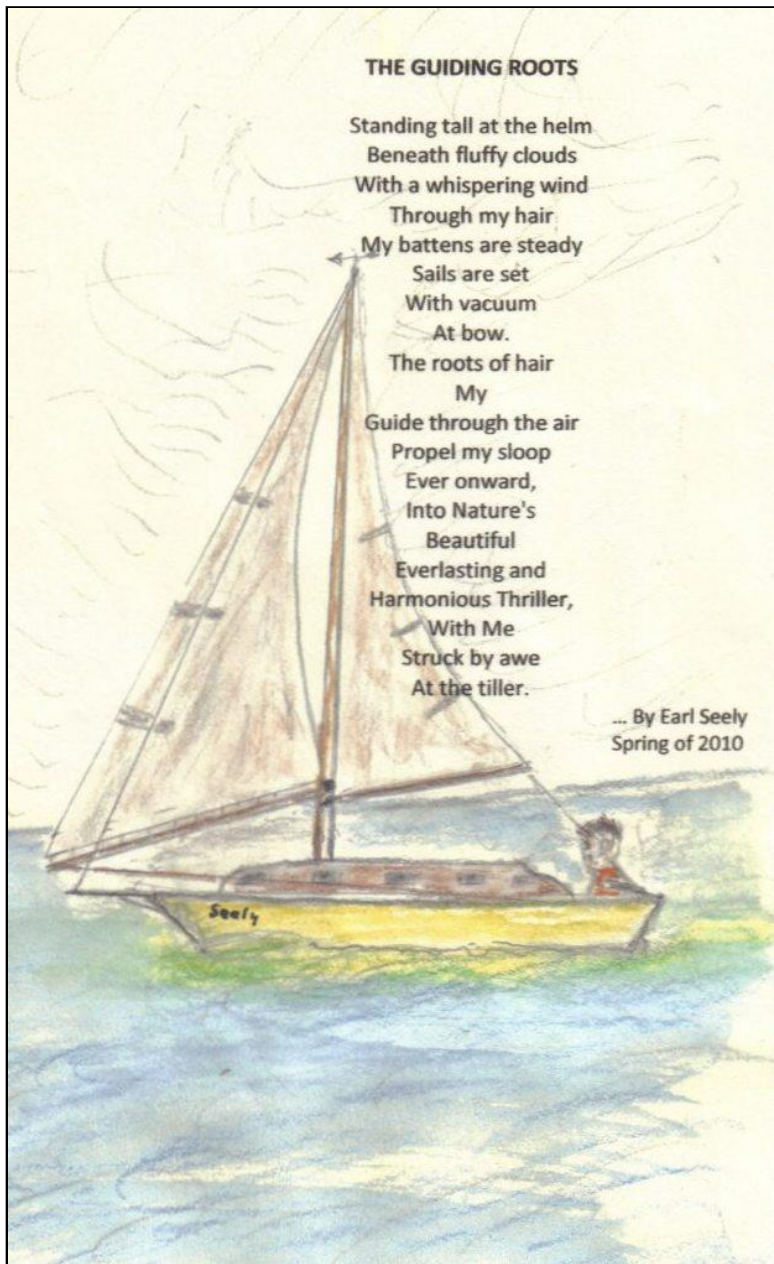
That was the last time we saw Mr. Reisman. Several months later we read of his death in the newspaper and learned that he had lived in a rooming house in Germantown, several blocks from our home. We were all quite sad and Mother said that she wanted to send a letter of condolence to his family. But there were no relatives listed in his obituary.

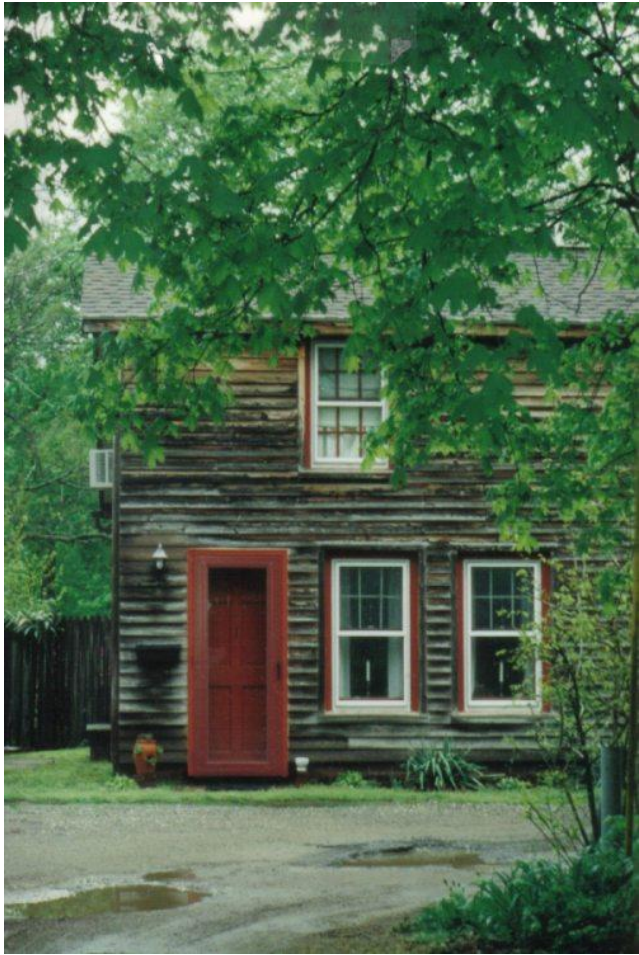
Pete McCord

THE GUIDING ROOTS

Standing tall at the helm
Beneath fluffy clouds
With a whispering wind
Through my hair
My battens are steady
Sails are set
With vacuum
At bow.
The roots of hair
My
Guide through the air
Propel my sloop
Ever onward,
Into Nature's
Beautiful
Everlasting and
Harmonious Thriller,
With Me
Struck by awe
At the tiller.

... By Earl Seely
Spring of 2010





COTTAGE and ME (1997)

Bright, sunny days of
Autumn, standing
Across the alley, I'm drawing
The cottage I now call home.

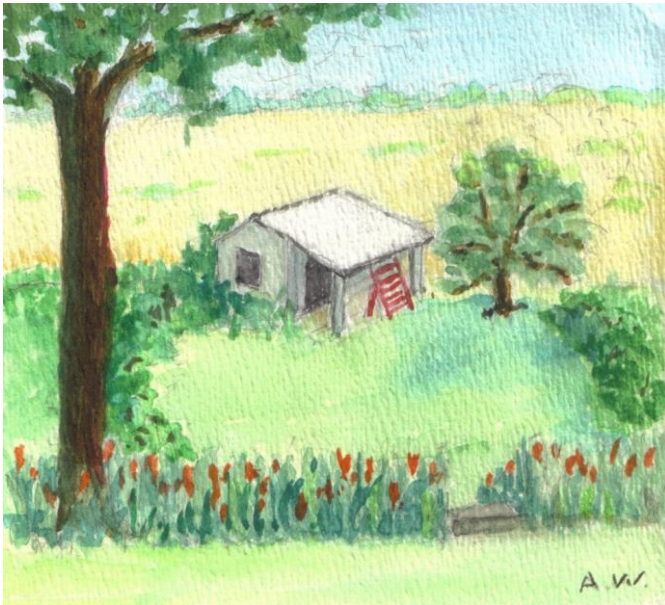
Hold onto the ground
Or it will
Spring up
Out of all proportions.
Line the brown clapboard walls,
Red frames, near black roof;
Make it small,
To its foundation.

Push back the
Near buildings.
It is revealed
Old, of another time.
Alone, all of itself,
Facing the backs of houses,
Like its owner —
Alone, all of himself.
I don't belong
On the thoroughfare,
This alley makes
My home.
You see, I am not
An artist.
But there was a
Cottage and me.

Chris Darlington

LUCY'S GARDEN

Come with me. I want to show you a special place from my childhood, and it will help if we both slip back to being quite young again. Pick any age between six and eleven. Here we are near the big buttonwood tree growing between the sidewalk and the south side of Main Street in Moorestown. We are facing a rather strangelooking house set well back from the street. Actually it is two 18th century houses, one white clapboard c.1760 to the west, and the other red brick c.1785. to the east. We live in the red brick side. A path goes up to our front door between boxwood hedges, but we aren't going that way today. The lot is long and narrow, and our goal, Lucy's Garden, is at the very back.



First we cross the front lawn. There's a big horse chestnut tree there that would be quite good for climbing if the lowest branch were a little lower. Be careful if you are barefoot. Now we are passing the big porch my parents added to the house. Mother's flower bed starts here, backed up to the hedge between us and our neighbor to the east. Once we saw an indigo bunting in the pink dogwood. The garden is fairly narrow here as it parallels the dining room and kitchen and back porch. If you are barefoot, you still need to be a little careful. Watch out for bees in the clover. The dining room is shaded by a great Kentucky coffee tree with roots that make good fairy houses.

Behind the back porch is a place for clotheslines and sandbox, hedged in by lilacs and bridal wreath on two sides and the picket fence with a gate that separates our property from the house next door. Beyond the hedge is the rose bed, and then the lawn opens out and stretches from hedge with flower bed along the east side to fence with flower bed along the west side. There's room for games here – croquet, lawn bowls, badminton, hide and seek, still pond no more moving. All along the south edge you can see a line of daylilies. We're getting close.

Come all the way to the edge and you see that you're at the top of a whole steep bank of daylilies and beyond that a gently sloping little lawn, a semicircle edged with neglected shrubs and not very tidy flower beds. In the spring there are violets. At the far edge is an old tool shed, and nearby is a white mulberry tree. This is Lucy's garden. It is not a secret garden, but it is a private sort of place. Grownups don't come here often, but

Mister George does keep it mowed. Look, there's a narrow stairway of flagstones going down the bank through the lilies. That's how we get into the garden.

I never met Lucy, but my big sister Becca used to play with her here before I was old enough to play. It was Becca who knew that it was Lucy's Garden and gave it its name, and that's what it is always called, even though Lucy herself doesn't play here any longer. We come here a lot, sometimes alone, sometimes just Becca and I, and sometimes both of us with Becca's friend Jo and my friend Beth.

The most useful part of the garden is the old tool shed. It has a doorway and a couple of windows and an odd closet inside. Once in a while we get in a housekeeping mood. We sweep out the cobwebs and find orange crates for furniture. We are not really very domestically inclined, however, and by far the most important part of the tool shed is The Roof. It slants out at a comfortable angle from the ridgepole all the way to cover a sort of porch in front of the building, and its front edge is only about six feet off the ground. An old ladder makes it easy to climb up. Sitting on the roof feels good if you just want to be by yourself. It's also a good place to talk things over with your sister. It's nice to lie in the sun and look up at the sky. I remember a day last summer when I was still nine and Becca had just turned twelve. We were going to see the movie *Romeo and Juliet*, and Mother asked Becca to read Shakespeare's play and me to read the version in Lamb's *Tales*. We did our reading side by side on The Roof. It was very exciting to be going into Philadelphia to see a movie, so we didn't mind the assignment. I think I'm in love with Leslie Howard.

Often The Roof is the launching pad for our pretend games after school. Becca and Jo plan the day's scenario, and Beth and I are just glad that the big girls let us be supporting cast. We all sit on The Roof while we receive our instructions. Sometimes we describe what we will be wearing. That can be time consuming. All our weapons, crowns, capes, or cowboy hats are perfect, since they exist only in our heads. The Roof itself can be the deck of the Bounty or a grand hall or a lookout tower or a balcony or whatever we need. Our horses (of course we have horses) are safely tied up at our individual places in the branches of the mulberry tree. Afternoons are far too short, but we can come again tomorrow.

Sometimes I wonder if Lucy comes back and hides in the bushes and watches while we play. I think she's glad that we call this place Lucy's Garden.

Afterword: I visited the house and garden a few years ago. What used to be Lucy's garden has grown up into a thicket. The tool shed is gone. Instead of the big meadow stretching out as far as eye could see behind our garden, there is now the thicket and then an elementary school and beyond that municipal playing fields going all the way down to Strawbridge Park and the lake we see from Route 38. I'm glad it isn't houses. Lucy's Garden has become Lucy's Woods. Her trees edge a bigger playground now, but there are still violets and children, lots of children.

Anne Wood

**SOUTH JERSEY
SUMMER
SKY**

A
seamless
azure bowl

Cotton balls
floating
in
formation

Feather trails
of unseen
metal birds

Fantastic
billowed
landscapes

Low ceiling
sagging
with unborn
rain

Dying
daylight
immolated

South Jersey
summer
sky

Stan Brush

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

My military career started at the University of Connecticut where I joined the infantry ROTC program. The allowance that I received, \$29.50 per month, along with other part-time work, enabled me to get through college. This was in the fifties and the Korean War was going on. Upon graduation, I was sent to infantry school in Fort Benning, Georgia. Six months later I was training new troops in Kentucky.

New orders came instructing me to go to Korea, where there was always a shortage of infantry officers, mainly because we newly minted officers were so green that, when sent to Korea, most of us immediately went to the front lines for combat duty. There we were quickly wounded, or worse, and sent back home.

I tried to get a free military airplane ride to Fort Lewis in Washington State, and from there await transportation to Korea. However, I could not make connections on any military transport, so I ended up flying commercial. This put me in Washington a day ahead of schedule, which, I might add, is completely contrary to my usual modus operandi. I had anticipated a slow boat to Japan sometime the following week.

I slept that night in the barracks, awaiting a morning call for transport to Japan and then on to Korea. I was rudely awakened at 2 AM and told to prepare to leave immediately. We were bused to Vancouver, a four-hour trip, and put on a military plane that was flying a group of generals to Tokyo. I actually arrived in Tokyo

on the day I was supposed to be arriving in Washington State for deployment.

After a week in Tokyo awaiting assignment, we, along with sixty or so other infantry and artillery officers, were sent to Eta Jima, the Japanese Military Academy. Here we received another week of training.

We were ordered to Southern Japan by rail in order to catch that slow boat to Korea when a monsoon appeared out of nowhere and wiped out the rail lines. We stayed in Eta Jima for another week, sixty guys, double-bunked in one big room. We were now in our third week.

We were then ordered back to Tokyo to await air transportation to Korea by the military Flying Box Car. That day a Flying Box Car, en route from Korea to Japan, went down with three hundred GIs lost. Put on hold again, we waited another week.

I had now been awaiting transport to Korea for four weeks – after arriving a day early. By this time, I was actually eager to get to Korea and would have considered swimming there! Here I was sitting in Tokyo, wearing my impregnated fatigues, holding my carbine, while the Army was trying to figure out how to get me to the action.

They posted a listing of fellow officers from my class at Fort Benning. On it was the name of the guy who was listed right after my name in the class, Bob Laymon. He reported to Fort Lewis in Washington State on time, the same day I was supposed to be there. He was immediately shipped to Korea, was wounded, and

was now on his way back to the States for hospitalization. Also listed was another fellow officer from Fort Benning, an excellent marksman from Maine, who was listed as killed in action. At this point, I was relieved that I hadn't been rushed to the action.

The story has a happy ending. Because of all the delays, the army had built up a surplus of both infantry and artillery officers in Tokyo awaiting assignment. So the artillery officers were sent to Korea and the infantry officers were sent to the Japan's northern island of Hokkaido. Fortunately I was an infantry officer. As an added bonus, I became a ski trooper. I basked in the panoramic view of Siberia in the distant horizon, instead of scrambling for my life in a foxhole on the front lines.

I am delighted to report that the only combat I ever got close to was a stray bullet from Communist forces. This occurred while I was inspecting the change of guard at our munitions dump in Hokkaido.

So I was saved by the monsoon, an airplane tragedy, and being ahead of schedule for the first and only time in my life. My most interesting military experience was how I never got to Korea.

Charles Lassen

TRIPTYCH

I.

Sunlit cascades of white churning beauty
Tumbling over rocky heights.
Light green river flowing endlessly below majestic cliffs.
Leaves of smooth-barked aspens shimmering as a
million coins.
Snow-capped mountains making a background for a tiny
Sierra lake.
Three deer munching contentedly on the water's edge.
Darkness coming, constellations appearing.
Earth and heaven bursting with the beauty of Yosemite.

II.

Funny, small shiny green "marbles" appear on a hedge
of shiny green leaves.
Light pink buds appear on the "marbles."
Soon, perfect pale pink camellias bloom, nature's perfec-
tion. Or are they?
Would that they would have a perfume as lovely as their
appearance.
Even an old, tired, dead rose has fragrance.

III.

Making magic out of colors and shapes,
New blending into old,
Old turning into new.
A child's kaleidoscope.

Jean Nicholson

SOMETHING TO TELL YOUR GRANDCHILDREN

She definitely did not want to go to India. Actually she really didn't want to go anywhere, but Muriel was insistent. "It will be an adventure!" she said, "Something to tell your grandchildren." The girls, of course, were enthusiastic. "Oh, Mom, think of what a great time you'll have. And you haven't been anywhere since Dad died."

But she didn't feel the need to go anywhere. When George was alive, there were always the trips to Florida every February to see his retired parents in Naples. In July they took the girls to that old Victorian inn on the lake in New Hampshire for two weeks. That seemed to be enough, and there were always the dinners with friends, visits to the museums, the occasional weekends in New York for shopping and the theater, the summers working in the garden. They had never really felt the need to go to any foreign countries. Why India now? She had even asked Muriel, "Why don't we go somewhere where the people speak English and look more like.....like us?" But Muriel just laughed and said, "It's 1985, you know, not the middle of the 19th century, and these tours are very well arranged. I've been there before. They're fully escorted with English-speaking guides all the way, and we'll be staying in the best hotels." So somehow, what with Muriel

pulling and the girls pushing, she found herself on a Pan-American flight to India.

That first morning after they landed in Bombay, Muriel suggested that they go for a walk. Muriel wanted her to see The Gateway to India that stood down by the water's edge. The archway was quite impressive, but she had been completely shocked by the two Indian gentlemen who accosted them on the way back and proposed matrimony. She didn't know what to do, but Muriel had responded airily, "Oh, we're already married." Then Muriel turned to her and said, "Now *that* will be something to tell your grandchildren."

She had to admit that the hotel was lovely, with fresh flowers and a basket of fruit on the table by the window. Sometimes a rose would appear on each of their pillows.

The hotels continued to be lovely, but they only stayed in each one for a night or two, and then it was on to the next one. Muriel told her she was anxious for her to see as much as possible of this interesting country, but she was not sure she could share Muriel's enthusiasm. Sometimes they traveled by bus, sometimes on domestic flights between one destination and the next. She began to feel like she was living in a kaleidoscope what with all the temples, palaces, and ashrams, not to mention the shops they visited.

Some of the ladies went shopping for saris, but found them too difficult to keep in place throughout the day. Joanne, a lady of quite generous proportions, was the exception. She wore a sari every day because she said it helped her to “stay in tune with the spirit of the country.” Her sartorial arrangements were not very successful, since there was always an end of material flopping loose somewhere, and the group had to pause frequently for Joanne to rearrange her clothing. On one of their domestic flights, two ladies at the check-in desk looked at Joanne disapprovingly and whisked her away. She was gone quite a long time, and the group began to wonder if she would be returned to them when she suddenly reappeared with her sari in perfect order and the two ladies smiling broadly. When they asked her what had happened, Joanne told them that they had unwrapped her down to her underwear and then proceeded to give her “wrapping lessons” until they were sure she could do it herself. Since they spoke no English, the wrapping lessons had been quite a challenge. After that, Joanne was not perfectly attired, but she no longer suffered from loose ends.

Some of the buses were very luxurious, with bathrooms and movie entertainment on long rides. The movies were not in English and all seemed very much the same, in brilliant color, long dance sequences and apparently happy endings on the “boy meets girl” theme. After an especially long bus ride, she arrived exhausted at yet another beautiful hotel.

There was to be an immediate bus tour of the city and Muriel was, as usual, ready to go, but this time she begged off. "No, I am quite happy to stay here. I will have a long soak in the tub." She had already viewed the bathroom with its assortment of luxuries: bubble bath, oils, soaps, perfumes and a long line of soft, thick towels along one wall. She filled the tub, added a generous supply of bubble bath and gratefully sank into its depths. Yes, it *was* a very interesting trip; she just didn't have the kind of energy that Muriel had. She added more water and bubbles and sank lower into the tub. Was that a tapping she heard at the door? She couldn't be sure. Then she heard a key turn in the lock. Goodness! Was Muriel back already? She must have been soaking longer than she thought. The bathroom door opened suddenly, and a little brown man, almost obscured by a huge pile of fluffy white towels, entered. She was too stunned to make a sound, but sank down into the tub with only her nose above water. He did not look at her, but silently removed the line of clean towels along the wall and replaced them with those he had brought. Then he vanished as quickly as he had entered. She heard the outer door click behind him. Heavens! Was there no respect for privacy in this country?

When Muriel returned a little later, she recounted the whole incident to her in righteous indignation. What a terrible experience! But Muriel laughed and said, "You said he didn't even look at

you, and he didn't hurt you. It will be something to tell your grandchildren." Muriel certainly had a different outlook about traveling!

One place she definitely did remember forever after was the day they spent in Agra. It was a beautiful sunshine-filled day, and they had had a good night's sleep the night before. They spent the morning at the Red Fort investigating its many interesting architectural features. There were a great many of them, and they involved a lot of walking, so that they were ready for the rest provided by lunch when the morning was over. She had learned to be very careful in her selection of food, although she knew that most menus were modified to accommodate the visitors' delicate palates. She had once asked Ravi, one of their guides, if he had ever visited the United States and, receiving an affirmative answer, asked how he liked it. She was startled when he replied emphatically, "Your food is so boring!"

It was fairly late in the afternoon when they boarded the bus that was to take them to the Taj Mahal. She had already heard the beautiful story of how Shah Jahan had created this as a memorial to his beloved wife and how he had been devastated by her death. She found it inspiring to think that the building that some had characterized as the most beautiful in India was a tribute to love.

As they rode along the river, she noted a series of low buildings on the other side and inquired what

they were. She was informed that they were the new gas crematoria installed by the government to discourage the use of the traditional funeral pyres because wood, the preferred sandalwood, was extremely expensive. Unfortunately, people were very reluctant to resort to such a departure from tradition.

When they arrived at the Taj, the sun was already lowering, and the building was bathed in a golden glow reflected in the pool in front of it. The four minarets around the building looked like burnished gold, as they reached up into the sunset. Somewhere inside the Taj she could hear the low, insistent wail of a flute drifting out into the glowing sky. Though she had found it difficult to take many pictures on this trip, she reached into her bag to find her camera because she wanted to fix this moment into something more than her memory. As she snapped the shutter, she said to herself, “This is really something to tell my grandchildren!”

Ruth Gage

A NEW YORK STORY

It was the winter of 1942/1943 – wartime. I was 20 and I had worked that summer as a cook in a children’s camp in Fleischmanns, NY. Upon coming home to my parents’ apartment, I found a job as a coffee cook. In my mind this was an interim position before being drafted. As a German refugee, who had escaped Nazi Germany, I was classified as an enemy alien and could not enlist no matter how much I wanted to. I yearned to fight the German war machine to avenge the death of my grandmother and other relatives.

I was working at the St. James Restaurant on 181st Street in Manhattan. My usual hours were 3-11 o’clock six nights a week. The job consisted of making huge urns of coffee, filling little bottles of cream, preparing side dishes of sour cream, and doing other small jobs. It was not an exciting job except for the time I witnessed one of the chefs go after the dishwasher with a knife raised high, yelling at the top of his voice. Luckily no one was hurt. I was paid \$20.00 per week, of which \$10.00 went to my parents. At that time we lived in an apartment on 151st Street. I was just waiting around until the War Department would decide they needed my services and draft me into the US Army.

One night I left work as usual around 11:45. I walked to the subway and took the A train to my station, which was in the middle of Harlem. It was a dark and cold night. The streetlights were insufficient to light up the area. As I walked home through the deserted streets, two young fellows appeared out of nowhere and

approached me. They were wearing dark pants and jackets and knit caps.

I did not think much of anything when they stopped me. Suddenly they both pulled out knives and said, "Give us all your money." At that moment I had only \$4.00 in my wallet and 21 cents in my pocket. I was wearing a heavy wool-tweed overcoat, which was at least seven years old. I opened my overcoat and showed the fellows the badly torn lining, and said: "Do you think I have any money on me?" They stared, shrugged their shoulders and laughed. Then one of them said, "This guy is even poorer than us." And they just walked away. I must say that in my youthful innocence and as a non-native New Yorker, thoughts of fear never entered my head. I thought of it as an adventure. Not until years later did I realize the potential seriousness of that situation.

Three months later I was drafted into the US Army and ended up in North Carolina for basic training. My wish was fulfilled.

Stefan S. Frank

LOST

She strokes his hand
As she did years ago,
And wonders if
Her touch he'll know.

But in the face
No emotion shows,
The eyes are distant
And she doubts he knows.

She gets up to leave
And wipes her tears,
No comfort found
Despite the years.

The sun has set
Yet will rise by day,
But what of love
Now far away?

For better or worse
The vow was made,
And good years were there
Though memories fade.

It's not love's parting
That brings such pain,
But that it leaves each day
Without refrain.

Pete McCord

