

# LEAS LIT

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## REQUIEM FOR 'CURIOSITY'

Twinkle, twinkle, Little Car  
high above the Earth so far  
I don't wonder where you are  
but saddened,  
knowing  
as you roam  
antenna wagging,  
on orders  
from handlers  
nagging  
unaware  
that no matter  
how faithfully you "write"  
with photos enclosed  
you will never,  
not ever,  
be coming  
home

But wait,  
what's that I discern?  
a message from Mars  
from which humans  
might learn?

"Welcome, Little Car!  
You're long overdue.  
You've no idea how long  
I've been waiting for you!

Waiting to share  
my secrets at last  
I once had water  
protective atmosphere, too,  
with my very own water and microbes  
beginning to brew

“But then something went wrong  
so very terribly wrong,  
of that there’s no doubt  
Where once I was with,  
I now am without!

“So Earthlings,  
beware  
and take care  
of these singular gifts  
Once *they* disappear  
*they* never  
come back”

*Stanley Elwood Brush*

Note: ‘Curiosity’ is the name of the Rover  
placed on Mars by rocket and parachute  
by NASA. It is the size of an SUV  
and weighs about one Earth ton.  
A NASA spokesperson told reporters  
that the terrain on Mars looks close up  
like the California desert  
east of Pasadena.

## HANNAH AND EMMA

**D**avid Shaw often talked about the time he visited inside the home of the two maiden sisters next door. The visit with Hannah and Emma Keane, however brief, came early one evening after dinner. His mother asked him to deliver a portion of cake she thought they would enjoy. David was soon on his way out the side door, clutching a paper bag.

David walked across the Shaws' side lawn. He crossed the driveway and walked into the neighbors' yard. The soft light of late afternoon highlighted the silver gray of the old, weathered siding of the Keane house. He was certain Emma would soon have her pail of whitewash, climbing on a ladder, in order to scrape the crumbling old whitewash off the window frames and mullions before applying a fresh coat.

As he approached the sisters' house he heard a radio playing in the front of the house. Its volume was turned down low. He could just barely hear a hymn being sung by a church choir. The music he heard he knew well, having sung the gospel song many times in church. When he walked by the window, the radio was switched off, leaving the sounds of the few passing vehicles and kids playing a game down the street.

Emma met him at the back door.

Like her sister, Emma was old, very old, in David's mind. It wasn't so much the lines in her thin face or frailties of her slight body. The sisters' age came from

the small world in which they lived. It seeped into their countenances.

David never saw them leave the house except for Hannah's infrequent trips to Sweeten's, the grocer on the corner, or to the post office a half block beyond. Occasionally he would see Emma tentatively venture down the street on a quick errand. Thinking about it, when he saw them return home, they seemed to carry so little for all their pains.

Emma's greeting was soft, in a clear and precise voice. When David stepped into the "shed," there was a world of smells, of kerosene for the lamps and stoves, oilcloth on nearly all the flat surfaces, linoleum on the floor, the stove black, the laundry soap and bleach. With these smells it was hard to detect the presence of cooked food.

The shed was a lean-to on the back of the saltbox-style house. It was the room where the sisters worked, doing laundry they "took in," no matter whether summer or winter, in good health or illness.

Inside the door was a cast-iron sink set in a very low frame, no higher than for a child. This low sink made sense when one realized it was built for filling buckets and laundry tubs. The tap over the sink was the only source of water in the house. In the left-hand corner of the small room was a hand washer made of wooden coopered slats, turned black from the repeated use of hot water. The long agitator lever – the wonder of these small women working this agitator nearly all their lives! – pointed toward the low ceiling. A copper laundry boiler, dull brown and sick green, covered the

top of a kerosene stove. Because it was the end of the week, no laundry was waiting to be washed and ironed.

Emma smiled slightly when he offered her the bag with an explanation about its contents. She put the bag, unopened, into a tin breadbox on top of the icebox which stood by the door leading into the kitchen. “Hannah’s in the front room,” she said, “go on in.”

Hannah did not move when David entered the room. She sat in her rocker next to a low table; the radio was on the table. She held her hand lightly on the radio. The late afternoon light made the thin hand pearl-like. Yesterday’s newspaper was folded and placed by the radio, signifying that David’s mother had been visiting earlier in the day.

The front room was like a painter’s palette of various colors. The floor was covered with reed mats, neatly placed together, in various tans. These were covered with remnant pieces of carpet and by so many braided rag rugs, it was hard to see where one ended and another began. The predominant colors were reds, blues and shades of yellow and green.

The walls of the front room were neatly wallpapered. But it was curious to David that though the wallpaper colors seemed to match, there were actually two, or possibly three, different patterns cleverly seamed from one wall to the next.

Hannah was all color, like the room — blue sweater, a red shawl, a calico house dress under a pale green apron. Emma had been all grays, dark blues and white, to match the gray walls of the kitchen and the dark col-

ors of the laundry. Color defined the rooms in a peculiar way, somber labor verses colorful play.

“Come sit with me.” She offered him a straight-back chair opposite her rocker.

“I can’t stay long. Mom sent over some cake,” he smiled broadly. He liked Hannah and was happy to be invited in. Even though David was a twelve-year-old, he fitted well into her world. “I heard the gospel music when I came by the house. We sang that in church not long ago.”

“It’s one of my favorites.” Hannah kept her hand on the radio as she continued to speak. “I like to listen to the music once in a while and some of the sermons. But I don’t like to use the batteries too much. They’re something hard to find.”

David knew that batteries had been scarce during the war but not now. Hannah meant money was hard to come by, to pay for what she considered a luxury.

“Thank your mother for the cake. She is always thinking about other people and not herself, like she should. She’s not well, don’t you know. You don’t know how good your mother and father are. Sometimes I don’t know how we could do without their help.” Hannah noted his embarrassment and changed the subject. “School is soon out. You’ll be in what grade next year? Fifth?” Hannah was always interested in the activities of the young people in the neighborhood.

“Sixth,” David corrected.

“Your mother says you’re doing very well. I’m glad. It won’t be long, you’ll be in high school.”

“Oh, Hannah, I have a long way to go yet.” Without pause, much in the habit of a twelve-year-old boy, he continued, “well, I really have to go. Mom said I can go to the school yard before it gets dark.”

“Thank you for the visit. You can use the front door, it’ll be closer for you. Mind, don’t hurt yourself playing.”

David laughed. “Say that to my sister. She’s broken one arm once and the other twice. I don’t think she knows how to fall like I do. You haven’t seen me with a broken arm. Not yet,” he declared.

“That’s because she’s a tomboy, playing football with boys almost as big as grown men.” She paused. “Anyway, be careful. And come see me again.”

“Enjoy the cake, Hannah.”

He said good-bye and let himself out the front door. Hannah still held her hand on top of the radio, as if by doing so, she could still hear the music.

*Chris Darlington*

## FOR THE BIRDS

When first I hear a twitter

I listen for more

But when the twitter becomes a chirp

My spirit soars

And when the chirp becomes a song,

My heart sings.

*Mary Ellen Van De Water*



## THE LEGACY

**R**ebecca Cunningham glanced at her watch. Another week of work was drawing to a close. Over the weekend, she would work on that fast food campaign and nail the account on Monday. A graphic artist, she was a rising star for Horizon Advertising Agency in New York City. She had a small apartment in a respectable neighborhood near Central Park. She should be happy. She should feel a sense of accomplishment. She felt neither.

A brisk knock at her office door brought her back to earth. Reed Atwood, handsome, polished, well dressed, stood there. His dark eyes registered approval of her chic, silk suit and the pearls that glowed around her neck and in her ears. He came forward and pulled her into his arms. His chin rested on her crop of reddish, blonde curls. Rebecca liked Reed. They were good friends, working well together, but something was missing.

“Umm, you smell good.” Reed nuzzled her neck. Then, grinning like a little boy, he pulled two tickets from his pocket. “That new art gallery down in the village is opening tonight. You’ve been wanting to see their show on Abstract Expressionism.”

“Oh, Reed, I don’t know. I’m beat. I just want to go home.”

“Aw, come on Becca. You know you love that avant-garde art stuff.”

True, whenever she managed to scrape together some extra cash, she prowled the galleries and purchased

original artwork, usually from unknown artists. Her small apartment lacked furniture, but the off-white walls glowed with bright, colorful prints, small oils and water-colors.

“We’ll stop at Giuseppe’s for pasta first.”

She hesitated. “Well, maybe, but let’s make it an early night.” Grabbing her purse and briefcase, she hooked her arm through his and they left the building together.

The pasta and wine were exceptional; however, the art exhibit proved to be a little far out for her taste. Who couldn’t wrap a canvas in Saran wrap and throw paint at it? Reed was attentive and affectionate; still something was missing, that indefinable zing.

Furnished in minimalist style with pale gray carpets, black leather couch and a chrome and glass coffee table, her apartment was cool and aloof. There was a message on her answering machine from her mother when she returned.

“Rebecca dear, how are you darling? Surprising news! Grandma Becca’s estate has finally been settled. She has left you, darling girl, a legacy! Call me in the morning and I’ll elaborate. Love you!”

Her mother’s mother, for whom she had been named, had passed away well over two years ago at the age of ninety-nine. Rebecca missed her dreadfully. Her fondest childhood memory was the three months she spent at her grandparents’ farm in New Jersey the summer she was eleven. It was a time of happiness and freedom for her as she rambled about the farm, helped her

grandmother in the vegetable garden and watched her grandpa in his workshop as he skillfully repaired and re-finished old furniture with loving care. The ancient farmhouse had many curious nooks and crannies and was furnished with threadbare carpets and old furniture. A sense of contentment filled her as she thought of that long-ago summer. She went to sleep smiling.

The next morning, just out of the shower, she answered the ringing phone.

“Becca, it’s Mother. Are you up?”

“Yes, Mom, I’m up. I was planning to call you. So, tell me your news. Has the farm been sold?”

“Yes dear, and the good news is that it’s going to remain a working farm, and Becca, your grandmother has left you the lowboy!”

She envisioned the plain Queen Anne chest of drawers, mounted on simple legs that stood in the central hall of the old farmhouse. Handcrafted from walnut, about 1750, her grandfather always referred to it as “the perfect lady.” Her grandmother’s seasonal arrangements of simple flowers always graced the lowboy’s top. Rebecca remembered tramping down country lanes and jumping over ditches as she and her grandmother gathered Queen Anne’s Lace, Black Eyed Susans and Bittersweet. Looking around her contemporary apartment, she wondered if the “Perfect Lady” could be happy here.

“It’s quite a valuable piece, Becca,” her Mother’s voice broke her reverie.

The following week the lowboy was delivered. She was pleased that her grandmother wanted her to have

this old family piece. It looked bare. She bought several bunches of hothouse blooms. Searching for a container in which to arrange them, all she could find was a plastic florist's vase. Something in pewter is needed, she thought. This weekend, she would scout out an antique shop that she'd passed on her way home.

A bell jangled as she entered the "Wooden Horse," named after the ancient carousel horse in the window. The shop was a comfortable clutter of bric-a-brac and furnishings from another century. Rebecca was transported back in time to her grandparents' house by the smell of old wood, linseed oil and dried lavender.

"May I help you?" a polite voice inquired.

Startled, she turned. A man of medium height stood there. He was dressed in unpressed khakis and a blue denim shirt. His eyes were the exact blue of his shirt. Those blue eyes met her gray-green eyes and a spark of attraction flickered between them.

"Oh, good morning," she replied flustered. "I've passed your shop many times. I love the old horse in the window."

"Yes, that old gray mare's prancing days are over, but she's still a beauty. Now, were you looking for something special?"

"Do you have a container that would be suitable for holding flowers? Something plain, pewter perhaps."

"Well, let's see." He led her to the back of the store. After some rummaging around, he came up with a pewter tankard. She turned it over, and gasped at the price.

“It is a bit pricy,” he apologized, “but it dates back to Colonial America.”

“Yes, it’s perfect.” She took out her checkbook and wrote a check.

“Anything else I can show you?” He wanted to detain her.

“Not today, but I’ll be back.”

“I certainly hope so.” Their eyes locked again.

Winding her way towards the door, the unmistakable back of a Queen Anne side chair caught her eye. “May I see it?”

“That was a fine old piece. I picked it up a while back at an auction. Had to replace two of the legs and repair the seat.”

“Really! You are an accomplished craftsman,” she said in admiration.

“Nothing I like better than working with wood.”

She examined the chair carefully, and made a decision.

“I’ll take it. Do you deliver?”

“But you don’t know the cost, and yes I do.”

“I want it.”

“Well, since it’s pretty patched up, the price is quite reasonable.”

She gave him her name and address.

“May I bring it around tomorrow afternoon?”

“Wonderful! I’ll be expecting you. Oh, your name is?”

“Michael. Michael Manning.” They shook hands and smiled.

Back home, Rebecca placed her flowers in the old tankard. It was just the homey touch the lowboy needed. She curled up on her comfortable leather couch and thought of Michael Manning. She smiled to herself and was definitely looking forward to tomorrow.

Michael arrived with the chair at three o’clock the following afternoon. “Hello, again,” he smiled. It was going to be all right.

“Please come in.”

“Great apartment,” he exclaimed as he took in the artwork in the light, airy room.

Then he saw the lowboy. “Oh, my, look at that!” He crossed the room and stood before it reverently.



“I’ve just recently acquired it from my grandmother.”

“It’s a rare and beautiful piece. You’re a fortunate young woman. This is why you wanted the chair.”

“Yes.”

“Well, let’s introduce them to each other.” He unwrapped the chair and placed it to one side of the low-boy.

Rebecca sighed, “They were meant for each other.”

“I like mixing the old with the new,” Michael said approvingly as he glanced around her apartment.” I gather that you are an artist?”

“A graphic artist. I work for Horizon Advertising Agency.”

“Pretty high-powered job?”

“Yes, but I enjoy it, most of the time. What about you? How long have you been in the antique business?”

“My father and I own and operate the business together. He’s out hitting the auction circuit this weekend.”

There was an awkward pause. “Would you like some coffee?” Rebecca nervously asked?

“Sounds good.”

Over coffee and cookies, they exchanged their stories. They discovered that his father knew of Becca’s grandfather’s farm in South Jersey and had been in that area on one of his “picking excursions.” “Fine old place,” Michael said. “The house was built around 1795,

I believe. Your ancestors had very good taste in choosing its furnishings, as did Queen Anne of England. In 1702, when she came to rule, she had chairs, tables and chests of drawers designed for her. Her tastes were simple and it was reflected in the furniture, plain, clean lines, little carving and always made of walnut. The period, 1700–1750, was called the age of walnut because this rich, hard wood was used primarily in the making of Queen Anne furniture.”

They smiled at each other and Michael reached over and took her hand. “Why don’t we continue getting to know each other over dinner? I know a great little pub a few blocks from here.”

His hand was warm and strong and a little rough, the hand of a man who worked with wood and lathes and sandpaper.

She felt the zing all the way to her toes. “Maybe we could have a ploughman’s lunch in honor of Queen Anne.”

“How about roast beef and Yorkshire pudding,” he added, “or fish and chips?”

They both burst out laughing as they grabbed their coats and headed for the door.

*Edith R. Pray*

## **FIREPLACE, NEW YEAR'S EVE 1993**

Friend's Meeting for Worship

This was the year that I dropped  
like the Yule log suspended  
over kindling  
into the unexpected flame:  
crackling with shock, we  
transmogrified slowly  
into an altered state.

*Judith A. Kruger*

## A HAIKU

outside winter rain  
I expect visitors soon  
dandelions likely

*Bill Braun*



## POLIO!

Audrey pushed back a damp strand of her hair under her scrub cap. She looked over at the windows in the hot room. They were wide open, but they did not admit any air. “Candy,” she called over to her fellow student nurse, “didn’t they say they were going to give us a couple of floor fans for this room?” That July of 1944 had really been hot with no sign of the heat abating any time in the near future, and both girls were dripping with sweat in their heavy muslin precaution gowns.

Candy appeared around the end of the iron lung where she had been working.

“Yeah, they said so, but who knows? Don’t hold your breath until they show up.”

“I really worry about these poor guys in the lungs,” Audrey sighed, “especially when we have to put the packs on.”

“Well, right now we don’t have time to worry about that. The visitors will be at the doorway any minute.”

Audrey drew a deep breath. She hated this part of her assignment. Every other day heavily gowned family members were allowed to approach the occupants of the four iron lungs in the room for fifteen minutes. They couldn’t touch them, but they could talk to them and look at them. Mostly they were looking for reassurance that their loved ones would be all right, but there was no way to predict that. Both girls tried to be supportive without offering any opinions about outcomes. They

both remembered the terrible experience of one of their colleagues who had assured a young mother that her three-year-old would survive. When he died two days later, the mother was hysterical, screaming over and over at Betty Lou, "You told me he was going to live!" Betty Lou was also beside herself. "I only wanted to help her. I couldn't stand to see how upset she was!" She had to be taken off the polio unit and assigned to another floor. There was also a rumor that she had been sent to a psychologist.

Fortunately, there were few visitors that day. Maybe it's the heat, Audrey thought. The County Communicable Disease Hospital was a distance away from the city, requiring a long bus trip for family members without cars. The student nurses had the advantage of school buses that picked them up at the three city hospital nurses' homes and transported them direct. She said goodbye to the last of the visitors, and then she and Candy rolled their washing machines to the sinks and filled them with hot water. The wool blankets for the packs were already in them. Although they ran the blankets through the washers' wringers twice, they were still very heavy and hard to manipulate through the ports of the iron lungs. But there was no other way to conduct the Kenny treatment, and the routine was extremely strict.

Mr. Quincy was very patient and never complained about the weight of the blankets or the manipulation during the treatment. Eight-year-old Jimmy Henderson was quite another matter; he protested constantly and had to be cajoled into complying with the treatment every time. Assuring him that these treatments would help with his recovery, he still countered with "When? How

come it's taking me so long to get better?" Audrey was glad that it was approaching the end of the week when she was a "dirty nurse," confined to the same room and giving direct care to her patients: feeding them, checking their skin for pressure sores, changing them, giving the treatments, dealing with the families. Next week she and Candy would be "clean nurses": not entering the rooms, but bringing equipment and supplies to the "dirty nurses" and making sure they had everything they needed. Today seemed unaccountably long, however. Her back ached and her neck felt stiff. And she was so hot! What she really would like to do was to go home for a break, but her mother had reluctantly forbidden it, afraid she would endanger her younger siblings. The only place to go was back to her room at the nurses' home. There really was no other place anyway. Everything was closed: the movie theatres, the bowling alleys, the city pools, the USO Club with its popular Saturday night dances. There had been no lack of dancing partners before the summer began, as the local Army base ensured an endless supply. She had heard that polio had struck down there as well, and she wondered if any of her acquaintances there had gotten sick.

Audrey was glad when the day was over. She was so tired and achy. As they were getting on the bus, Candy looked at her sharply. "You all right, Aud? You don't look so hot."

"You're no prize winner either," Audrey replied testily. "This job will kill us!"

When they got back to the nurses' home, Audrey went straight to her room and fell into bed. She did not

feel like heading to the cafeteria along with the rest of her classmates. She soon fell into a restless sleep, but was awakened by a knock on the door. "Get lost, Candy," she called. "I'm not getting up." She was startled when the door opened and Mrs. Metcalfe, the housemother, and Miss Rhein, the hospital night supervisor, appeared. Candy must have alerted them! In short order Miss Rhein had taken her temperature, checked her neck and her reflexes, and bundled her off to the infirmary. "Audrey, you may have contracted polio! We can't take any risks."

The next morning Audrey found herself a patient in the County Hospital on the polio unit. She was terrified, although she was not having any breathing difficulties and kept moving her arms and legs to see if there was any sign of paralysis, but there was none. However, every part of her body felt stiff and sore. She knew she had a fever and felt miserable, but was fortunate that she did not hear the rumors circulating in the nurses' home: "Audrey Flynn's got polio! She's completely paralyzed! It's bulbar! They've sent for the priest!"

The next few days passed in a kind of blur. Audrey slept a lot and, when she thought of it, was glad nobody was putting packs on her. Candy and some of her other classmates materialized at her doorway occasionally and then disappeared. They paused only long enough to speak words of encouragement and assure her that they wished her well.

She was surprised to discover that in a few more days she found she was feeling less stiff and achy and was taking an interest in what was going on around her

and looked forward to her classmates' appearances at the doorway. "I wonder what's going on," she thought. "I feel better. How can that be if I have polio?" What really surprised her was she noticed she was actually feeling hungry. "Hope they're going to give me some real food today." While she was pondering this possibility, Dr. Sylvester walked into the room and stood at the foot of her bed. He had been very kind to her all the time she had been on the unit, sometimes stopping in twice a day, checking on her symptoms and examining her mobility.

"Do you think I can get something to eat?" she asked him.

He smiled at her. "I think that's a very strong possibility," he told her. "You know you are a very lucky young lady. You are now recovering from an abortive case of polio and will be immune from the disease for the rest of your life."

Audrey stared at him incredulously. "Abortive case? What's that? I never heard about that."

"An abortive case is when someone contracts the disease, but it's very mild, and the symptoms don't last very long, usually fever, aching, stiffness for a few days like you have just experienced. It's like the disease just goes through you and leaves. We very seldom see anyone like that here, but it happens occasionally."

Audrey drew a deep breath. Dr. Sylvester was right. She had been a very lucky young lady indeed! Now, about that breakfast!

*Ruth Gage*

## DID YOU SAY DIOR?

You've seen her here, I know you have.  
It doesn't matter where she goes,  
She turns all heads – she looks so great –  
Her hair, her style, her gorgeous CLOTHES!

I watch her in the dining room,  
And as she moves among the tables  
I do my best to get a glimpse  
Of what must be designer labels.

That bag – an Oscar de la Renta?  
That scarf (Hermès?) in azure blue –  
That jacket looks oh so Chanel,  
And aren't those shoes by Jimmy Choo?

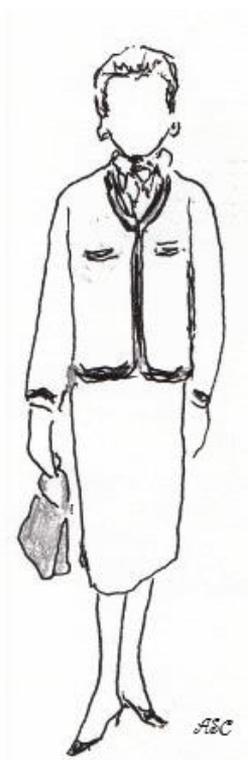
Designer names run through my head.  
That lady, if she only knew  
How much I love the clothes she wears –  
(D'you think that coat's a Jason Wu?)

I had to know, and so I asked,  
“How do you always look so chic?  
I recognize designer clothes.  
From Bergdorf's, Saks? From what  
boutique?”

“Thank you, my dear,” she kindly said,  
“But you must never be too sure  
Of stores that sell designer clothes  
Or where to shop for haute couture.”

“I never have to travel far,  
I buy just when I please.  
I build my wardrobe piece by piece  
From the Thrift Shop at the Leas.”

*Joan McKeon*



## CRANES

It was Asbury Park when I was a boy,  
the merry-go-round and amusements were great!  
Put a coin in the slot and a crane would move  
and the bucket would drop –  
    Hoping to catch a toy.

Years later, cranes lifted steel beams into place  
in buildings which I had designed.  
I stood and I watched as each piece was set –  
    Hoping for satisfied clients.

Now, age 76, I sit on the edge  
of my HUP hospital bed with a spoon in my hand,  
lifting ice cubes from pitcher to cup -  
    Hoping to quench my continuous thirst.

*Robert Hill*



## A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE

When my husband says that he's going shopping, he means that he's going to the hardware store to get a nozzle and then he's coming home to water the garden.

When I say I'm going shopping, I mean that I'm going to cruise a few stores to see what's out there and I'll probably try on some black slacks and I ought to be home before lunch.

When I come in and ask my husband if there were any calls, he says "no" and then later, maybe at dinner, he says "your sister called." When there's a message for him I write it down and make sure to tell him who called, and when, and what about, and how the caller's wife is recovering from her sinus infection.

When I ask my husband how his day went, he says "fine." When he asks about my day, I tell him that it was pretty good, what I had for lunch., what my friends were wearing and about the problem with the dry cleaner about the stain on his camel's hair jacket.

We're looking for an important receipt. I say I know where it is. I look in the bottom drawer and under the telephone and in my pocketbook and in the glove compartment. My husband says he doesn't know where it is but he starts by looking in the file cabinet where we keep receipts. It's there.

It's flu season. I have a pain like tiny blisters under my thumbnail and sore, tired knees. The insides of my wrists feel tender. I'd like some tea. He doesn't feel 100%. He doesn't need a thermometer or an aspirin but

do we have any salty beef broth or maybe that rice pudding with the brown crispy top that his mother used to make?

I remember when we were active weekend athletes. We'd sit on the porch in the twilight, sipping our drinks. He'd ask me about my tennis and I'd say something like "My serve was really off but it was great out there."

Then I'd ask him about his golf and he'd say, "I shanked my first drive left about two hundred yards. My next shot was short of the green but I chipped onto the green and putted for a four. On the second hole, I had a good drive, on the fairway, and my approach shot was on the green but I three putted. On three, I got off the tee with a great shot, I used my driving iron, but then.....

On eighteen, Joe and I were one up and then.....

*Marcy Webster*

## A TALE OF TWO CULTURES

In the fall of 1932 my parents had a problem finding suitable German reading material for me. I was nine and we were living in the faded elegance of a castle-like mansion in Vienna. My parents wanted to improve my German and diligently tried to find German books that would appeal to me. Austrian children's books appeared to have been written by neurotic, psychopathic, misanthropic authors. Their message was that life was a stern, dreadful experience, a far cry from the Hollywood vision of the land of fun, frolic, *Gemütlichkeit*, and waltz. Children were to be taught that life was serious business and the world was filled with weird people. Only exceptionally lucky children were permitted to encounter families as psychologically well balanced as the "Munsters." It is difficult to imagine that the culture that produced these books was the same culture that invented the kindergarten.

Wild West stories would have appealed to me. Unfortunately my parents hadn't heard of the German writer Karl May. He never visited the United States but became the world's most prolific author of Wild West stories. Eventually my parents found a lively German book about a boy and his sailboat which he sailed into numerous adventures while interacting with normal human beings.

Even fewer movies for children existed. However, one day my father, Haggott, saw an ad for a movie about two Austrian ski bums. The ad made it sound like a fun-filled frolic. Dad thought it was exactly what we needed

to counteract stern Austrian attitudes. Furthermore, it was showing just around the corner from where we were living in the Grünzing district of Vienna. I think he wanted to see the show as much as I. We trotted happily to the theater, blissfully unaware of the cultural road-block ahead of us.

As Dad started to buy the tickets, he barely noticed the policeman standing erect by the ticket booth. The policeman asked if one of the tickets was for **das Kind**.

Dad said, “**Natürlich.**” The cop said, “**Nein, es ist streng verboten**” for children to see this picture. I could only think what a fantastically great show it must be if a cop had been assigned to prevent kids from seeing it. For once, Haggott was momentarily speechless. He then made the egregious mistake of suggesting that because we were foreigners the officer could look away for a moment as we slipped into the theater. It was immediately obvious that the officer was deadly serious about his official duty. He sternly informed Haggott that youth of all nationalities needed protection from temptation. His voice went up a notch as he said Austrian law was to be obeyed even by foreigners. He said we were lucky to be living in a country that protected children from the siren song of laughter and indolence. So we poor sinners, who had succumbed to the temptation of happy sloth, beat a hasty retreat.

Change the scene to New York City a year later. The same movie about the two Austrian ski bums was showing on Manhattan Island with rave reviews. PTAs, psychologists and school authorities were recommending the film as a must-see for children and therapy for adults.

So Dad and I finally got to see the show in a sold-out movie theater. The police were there only to control the crowd of eager kids and parents. The show was a wonderful fun-filled spoof, the kind kids and adults of all nations and cultures enjoy, about two energetic lads who did imaginative, outrageously funny tricks on skis. I still remember them stuffing straw into their hats so they could – what was it? – my memory has faded, but the laughter remains.

Culture can be nutty,  
or as the Austrians say,  
**Kultur macht Spaß**

*Gordon Beckhart*

## CATAPULT

It was a quiet Monday morning,  
Then came a loud “meow” of warning.

Pumpkin was here,  
And then she was there,

Leaping from sofa then on to the chair,  
Over the table and through the air.

From the ridge of the fridge,  
To the edge of the ledge.

I think she’s considering a brand new orbit  
Or maybe a wee nap on her lofty soffit.

Perhaps it’s her way to say, “Hey, look and see!  
Why aren’t you paying attention to me?”

Oh, Pumpkin dear, don’t be distressed,  
Would you believe? I’m truly impressed.

Because of your airborne feats so difficult,  
You’ll always be my funny, furry catapult.

*Sarah R. Klos*

## LUMBERTON MUSINGS

**D**riving along Creek Road and approaching Lumberton Leas you would never know that our community is built upon a ridge. Our houses sit some forty feet above Rancocas Creek and Monarch Lake, a man-made body of water behind our home, although as you'll learn another name might be far more appropriate – but more about that later. If you include the stream that lies to our southeast, we are surrounded by water on three sides.

As one of the 99ers, that is, original settlers (September), we were treated to a feat of modern engineering as we witnessed the lake come into being. The site was originally a gravel mine, and the owners were determined to reclaim every last bit of stone by also scooping out the lakebed. Giant excavators and trucks in a steady stream were utilized to carve a twenty-plus foot deep bowl. When they hit the water table, steady seepage began. That was no deterrent to the project. A huge diesel engine was brought in and connected to an equally large pump with intake placed at the lowest point of the excavation. They dug deeper as the pump kept pumping, all through the night, keeping the work site relatively dry. After the pump was removed, the excavation filled with water over a period of months until reaching its current level.

When it became time to build the lakeside homes, the water table again presented a problem. The basement floors had to be raised above the water table, because they flooded. To correct the situation, the previ-

ous project was reversed. Loads of crushed blue stone were dumped into the foundations. Once the layer of crushed stone was well above the water level, concrete was poured to make the foundation floors.

We are indeed fortunate to have waterfront property, at a much higher, safer elevation, just beyond the tennis courts, where we are treated to a seasonal display from our deck. When the winter solstice has passed and the trees are bereft of leaves, each evening at sunset we witness a festival of lights. We see before us a tiny water-side village, only lacking a small pier and a few boats. On crystal-clear winter nights we can even detect the glow of large-screen TVs; and during the holiday season, the varied hues of twinkling Christmas tree lights. Needless to say, after our children took in the view, there soon arrived a present of powerful binoculars.

As you stroll along the perimeter walking path, you will find a bench conveniently placed for everyone's enjoyment. Stop and take in the view and keep an ear open. Don't be surprised if you hear a raucous, and I do mean raucous, chorus of Canada geese, which have adopted the protected waters as a haven. Each morning and early evening you can witness row after row of enormous Vs heading and honking to and from the lake. At times the flowing Vs seem to stretch from horizon to horizon, conjuring in my mind the waves of troops at the Normandy invasion. Watch carefully and you will see wings stop beating as the geese begin their graceful glide toward the water.

My heart goes out to the homeowners at water's edge. I'm certain they had no idea how noisy geese can

be, especially when numbering in the 1,000s, yes 1,000s. They certainly don't need alarm clocks to rouse them for the arrival of sunrise, and must soon tire of the cacophony accompanying their dinner. No doubt many residents who never planned on owning pet dogs have acquired them to keep the two legged, feathered, fertilizing machines from straying to their back yard lawns. Goose Lake seems to me a most appropriate name for this body of water.



There is another lovely spot from which you can view our high elevation above the waters, Overlook Point. Walk beyond the magnolia trees in the circle and follow the path beside the holly trees some ninety feet for the additional perspective. You'll also find a bench there for your convenience. At the far end of the long narrow extension of the lake before you are two large

metal grates that determine the water level. They are an overflow outlet into Rancocas Creek, which lies to the right and below the ridge of trees.

Our long-term residents well remember 2004, when our area received over twelve inches of rain within 24 hours. During the night the deluge caused a succession of manmade dams to collapse upriver In Medford, releasing a biblical flood along the Rancocas. It may be hard to believe, but all the land you see before you was underwater, including the traffic circles at the end of streets where water rose above the curbs. It does make you wonder about those raised basement floors.

Check on the veracity of what I have said. Come see for yourself before spring and a green curtain of leaves returns in its glory to restrict the view. Or – simply follow the honking geese!

*John Sommi*

## NINE

**M**y birth-language is German, which is natural as I was born in Bavaria and was living there. This went on happily for six years. Then religious school began, which meant I had to learn how to read Hebrew to be able to follow the prayers in the prayer book. As we lived in a small town which had no synagogue and no other Jewish residents, my brother and I had to travel once a week by train to the big city where our grandmother lived. We had our noontime meal at her house before we were off for the temple to have our lessons. There the teacher started to instruct me in recognizing the Hebrew alphabet. Later on I learned how to pronounce words, to read passages in the prayer book and to understand the meaning of the words. It was quite an experience.

At age ten I entered the Gymnasium (German preparatory high school) and one of the subjects I had to study was classical Latin (for three years). It meant also that I had to learn a script that was different from the angular German writing. I was not very happy with that language. My father, fortunately, still remembered a great deal of the language and helped me with my homework. When I was thirteen we started classical Greek, which meant I again had to learn a brand new alphabet. At that time it did not make much sense to me to study a dead language.

It is now one year later. Because of the threatening conditions for Jews in Germany due to the Nazi regime, my father made up his mind to send me to the USA to be safe. With this in mind, he decided I should have

some training in a profession so that I could earn a living in my new country. Therefore he took me out of the Gymnasium and found a place where I started training as a chef. I liked cooking and baking. I had done some of that previously at home. He also made arrangements for me to have private lessons in English. As I was working as an apprentice cook in a spa town at the time, I had to take two afternoons off a week to accomplish that. My teacher was a retired English instructress who did this at her home. After two months of being immersed in that endeavor I was off to the United States. The American ship on which my father deposited me was crowded with German-Jewish refugees, looking forward to their destination with trepidation. The menus were all in English. I, the fifteen-year-old youngster, who was the only one with some knowledge of English, had to translate the bill-o-fare to my adult table mates.

Initially, after my arrival in the US, I stayed with my aunt in Brooklyn. She gave me *Alice in Wonderland* to read to improve my sparse English vocabulary. It proved to be very difficult and I have hated that book ever since. Of course, I now attended an American school, which tremendously improved my speaking of English.

I now switch forward thirteen years, passing over schooling, working and soldiering. I was now a college freshman at Queens College. For my language requirement I choose French, which I enjoyed. The book we were studying was *Le Petit Prince*, which was delightful, not like my initial experience in Brooklyn. However, we never did finish translating it, to my regret. After one semester I transferred to Cornell University. As I was

studying chemistry, I decided to enroll in a course of scientific German. When the professor discovered upon registration that I was fluent in the language, he denied me access to the class with the remark that I knew German better than he did. Consequently I took a German literature course.

Let's go forward twelve years. I was working for a food company as a food technologist in the international section of the product development department. My assignment was working on products for Mexico. This meant I had to make frequent trips to that country. I asked to take Spanish lessons at Berlitz and the company granted this request. Berlitz uses native teachers who teach without the use of English. I spent two afternoons per week in Philadelphia for that purpose. This went along famously and I got a good grasp of Spanish. I used it satisfactorily at the Mexican location. The week I graduated from Berlitz I was told that another technologist was being assigned in my place to the Mexican project. Luckily I was reinstated three months later.

I also worked with various other international locations, one important one being Italy. Again I asked to go to Berlitz to learn Italian. Alas, my Spanish interfered and I kept mixing up the two languages. I decided to quit studying Italian, it being a hopeless task. Luckily it turned out that the people I worked with in Italy spoke English.

Years later I received a new assignment, namely Brazil. We were developing a new line of products for that country to introduce them to canned soups. Again I studied with Berlitz. This time I had no problem with

absorbing the Portuguese language. The provisional plant was in Sao Paulo, where the one-way street signs were often changed overnight. Luckily I had an experienced Brazilian driver. Excellent products were developed and successfully panel-tested. Just as I was graduating Berlitz, the project was cancelled.

At the present time I am only fluent in English and, probably, in German. I still can read most Hebrew printed words but not Greek. I remember some Spanish but the rest of the languages are mostly gone. What did I get out of studying all those different languages? For one thing, I can understand the meaning of words, trace their roots and use them intelligently. I met many foreign nationals and found them friendly, hospitable and knowledgeable. I am comfortable in conversing with people who have accents. In my retirement I do regret that my memory did not retain all of these nine languages.

*Stefan S. Frank*

## HER LAST TASK

She sat like a Sphinx,  
oblivious to any other presence,  
unseeing eyes fixed, wide open, on infinite space.

Day upon day her world had shrunk  
until none remained outside herself.  
Nothing mattered now  
save her diminishing vital signs.

For she was engaged in the ultimate task  
that every sentient being faces.  
A task so demanding that  
its proper performance brooks no distraction;  
a task so solitary that the best-intended  
offer of help is but a futile intrusion.

During the night, as the world slept,  
she completed it.

And next day we buried her.

*Herb Heineman*