

# Leas Lit

**ORIGINAL WRITING  
AND ART  
BY RESIDENTS  
OF MEDFORD LEAS**



**NUMBER 27**

**JUNE 2014**

**PUBLISHED CONTINUOUSLY SINCE 1998**

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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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**MEET THE WRITERS AND ILLUSTRATORS  
for Tea and Talk in the Holly Room**



**THURSDAY, June 19, 2014**

Come and exchange ideas about writing  
with the authors of Leas Lit.  
Hear how illustrators approach their work.

**CONVERSATION AND REFRESHMENTS at 3 pm  
PROGRAM at 3:30**

Presentations by  
**Kay Cooley, Herb Heineman, George Rubin,  
Barbara and Chuck Lassen**

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## THIS JUST IN

Seeing that Forsythia was almost bursting  
with the news,  
Cardinal, flushing scarlet, tweeted a quick dispatch  
from his branch.  
But Daffodil, with emerald spears  
thrusting through the icy garden,  
Was first to break the story of Spring.

*Carol Suplee*

## A CONVERSATION AT McSORLEY'S

**“I** know you won’t believe me – but it’s true, every word of it.”

I have seen him often sitting alone at the bar, but he walks over to my table and without being asked is now sitting across from me with a glass of dark beer in his hand.

“You gotta know it all started in Brooklyn that summer in 1941.”

He is tall and in his youth he must have been a good-looking man; now he is bent and thin with a thatch of white hair that once was blond. Even his eyebrows are white streaks over light blue eyes. With a beer between his hands he continues.

“I’m in the dentist’s chair with my mouth wide open and Doc filling a cavity. Suddenly my sidekick Pete comes into the room and announces that I got a call from the boss and I better take it.”

He stops, takes a gulp of beer and puts the empty glass down and looks around to see if anyone is listening to our conversation. Let me tell you, McSorley’s Ale House in the East Village is not a place you have to worry about being overheard. Its motto – “We have been here long before you were born” – bears testimony to a lot of stories heard and told here.

“Hey bartender,” my storyteller shouts out. “How ’bout another round of beers for us?”

“I’ve had my fill,” I say, “ but you go ahead, I want to hear the rest of your story.”



As another beer is put on the table, he shrugs his shoulders and takes a gulp of the dark lager.

“I went to the phone. It was Sam ‘Red’ Levine. ‘Hello Harry, I got to talk to you, we got a big problem, so meet me at Dubrow’s in about an hour.’

“First you gotta know that Dubrow’s Cafeteria on Eastern Parkway was the meeting place for all our transactions. It’s where we transferred messages, weapons, and money. And where Murder Incorporated did all its plotting. It was always open and always busy. A place where nobody would notice you.”

He takes a deep breath and then continues.

“So I get to Dubrow’s, I grab a meal ticket from the machine and look around. Then I spot Sam, with his thick red hair, sitting in a corner booth. As usual he is wearing his light brown camel hair coat. I sit down and don’t say a word. Sam looks up at me with those dark piercing eyes. ‘Harry,’ he says, ‘I got a job for you. You know the Feds are holding Kid Twist at the Half Moon Hotel and he is going to testify against us, especially about Al Anastasia and the Cosa Nostra.’

“He stopped and grabbed my arm real hard, ‘Harry, we can’t let this happen. I’m leaving it up to you to make Kid Twist go away. Understood?’ ”

My storyteller stops for another drink of beer. He reaches into his Burberry and takes out a pack of Camels and matches. He lights up the cigarette and inhales a deep breath of smoke. He seems suddenly tired as he puts both arms on the table, and as he looks up at me he continues.

“I know that Red means that this has to be done,

not tomorrow, but right now! I leave Red at the table and walk out leaving the unused meal ticket with the cashier. At the corner of Utica Avenue and Eastern Parkway I spot Pancake Kelly. I know this cop, who is attached to the 77th Precinct and has helped us for a fee in the past. With a big hello I ask, ‘Pancake, do you know who is in charge of Abe ‘Kid Twist’ Reles over at the Half Moon?’ He looks at me as he twirls his nightstick.

“That would be the 61st Precinct, over at Brighton Beach.’

“Thanks, who can I get in touch with over there?’

“I would try Gus O’Brien, he’s with the Detective Squad; he helped the Feds on some of their cases.’

“I thank Pancake as I hail a cab and I’m on my way to Brighton Beach. Let me tell you about the Half Moon. It’s a big 15-story hotel that caters to the summer commuters from the city, and it’s just off the beach. When I arrive there, it takes one telephone call to get Gus to meet me at the reception desk inside the lobby.

“Gus is a big man; he could have been a linebacker for the N.Y. Football Giants. He looks me up and down and asks how Red is doing. Then he says, ‘Let’s go into the hotel office.’

“It doesn’t take much of an explanation from me for him to get the picture and how this caper means a large financial gain for him.

“We ride the elevator to the 15<sup>th</sup> floor. There are two rookie cops sitting outside of Abe Reles’ hotel room. Gus goes over to them and flashes his badge. After a short conversation with them they open the door for us. It’s a nice airy room with a great view of the

beach and the boardwalk. Stretched out on the bed Abe is reading the *Daily News*. He is a short squat guy with little hair left on his balding head. A cigarette hangs from the corner of his mouth; the smoke from it veils his squinty eyes. He looks up at us surprised and scared and sits up straight on the edge of the bed.

“ ‘Hey, I don’t have to be in court until tomorrow. What gives with you guys?’

“Without saying a word, Gus walks over to the bed, I follow. Standing just behind Abe, he gives him a swift blow to the back of the head. Reles slumps forward. I walk over and open the bedroom window. Then Gus and I carry Abe to the open window and with one heave out he goes. I say to Gus, ‘He flies like a canary, but he can’t sing.’



“We leave the bedroom and open the hotel room door shouting to the two rookie cops, ‘We got a problem; Abe Reles has just jumped out the window of the bedroom.’

“The two cops look at each other – shocked. How could this happen on their watch? They run to the hotel phone to call headquarters. I look at Gus with a smile, ‘Thanks, be at Dubrow’s tomorrow, its payday.’ ”

My table companion has finished his cigarette and twisted it out in the ashtray. I watch as he takes a deep breath and orders another beer. All of a sudden he looks much older.

“Well, son, how is that for a story! Next day it was the headline in every New York paper. The Fed’s star witness fell or jumped from the hotel. To this day the Abe ‘Kid Twist’ Reles death still remains unsolved. Only you and I know the truth.”

He sits back with eyes closed, neither of us saying anything. There are so many questions I would like to ask him. Instead I look at my watch and know it’s time to go.

“I want to thank you for your story,” I say as I get up and put on my coat. We shake hands. As I walk out I look back and all I see is a lonely old man sitting at the barroom table with a beer in his hand.

I guess I’ll never know if what I heard was all true, as he said, or fancy fiction. But I’m sure about one thing: For good conversation stop anytime for a beer at McSorley’s.

*George Rubin*

## HOW A CANE HAS CHANGED MY WORLD

I have always thought that carrying a cane added a note of distinction to persons with tall figures. It emphasizes the vertical line from head to foot and narrows the lateral dimension.

But when my gait evolved into the waddle of an emperor penguin, and getting from one point to another in a straight line was no longer an option, I resisted acquiring one. I feared that it would be the first step down the slippery slope of assistive devices: first a cane, then a walker, then a wheelchair or electric cart, ending in the total loss of my independence. I had no idea of how, instead, a cane would change my world.

I first made this discovery at the Wegmans Mt. Laurel supermarket. Soon after I adopted a shiny aluminum cane, I parked in the corner space of the parking lot that borders the side of the market cafe entrance. In front of me and on my left, cement walkways extended six inches above ground level. Try as hard as I could to push myself up with my cane, I couldn't get to the higher level.

Then I heard a voice say, "May I help you? I won't touch you!" I looked up to see a tall, elderly gentleman in a long black overcoat.

"Haul me up!" I pleaded. He grabbed my arm and energetically drew me up to a walkway.

"Thank you so much!" I blurted.

"How extraordinarily kind," I thought. But I was soon to learn that the urge to help wasn't extraordinary at all. It dwells in all kinds of people ready to spring into

action at the slightest provocation. For many, that provocation is my cane.

“May I help you?” is the greeting I get time after time from fellow residents or complete strangers whenever I seem challenged by circumstances. What they are asking is to let them use their energy to accomplish something I want to do but can’t. They get satisfaction from doing this.

I learned this in the Wegmans parking lot also. The day before a heavy snowstorm was to strike, I turned into the entrance of an upper lot. The parking spaces were all full. It was noontime, and people were shopping during their lunch hour for supplies before the storm closed in on them. I could park only in a space far from the entrance all the way across the lot.

Wobbling with my cane, I began the long, slow trek to the entrance. Then a SUV heading for the exit pulled up alongside me. A woman’s voice called through the rolled down window, “May I drive you to the entrance?”

She had spotted me in the stream of pedestrians making their way to and from the store and perceived the arduous walk I had ahead of me. Instead of exiting, she was willing to reenter the stream of traffic in the parking lot and slowly make her way back to the entrance.

As I climbed inside, she said with satisfaction, “I’m an assistant leader with a Boy Scout troop. We’re all about service.” I had provided an opportunity for her to practice her calling.

The offer of help proffered so many times, in so many ways, in so many places has put a new face on the world I meet. I now anticipate people will be compassionate and caring. Those who aren't are exceptions, not the norm. I respond with openness and trust, as well as appreciation. Thanks to my cane, I live in a world of kindness.

*Kay Cooley*

## YOU GREW UP IN INDIA?

Only now that I'm in my 90s have I figured out how to answer that question. I had my second birthday on the Atlantic Ocean, on our way to India. My father had died when I was fifteen months old. He and my mother were planning to be missionaries, he a medical missionary, she a teacher. He contracted pneumonia while he was interning, so she went forward with what had been their plans.

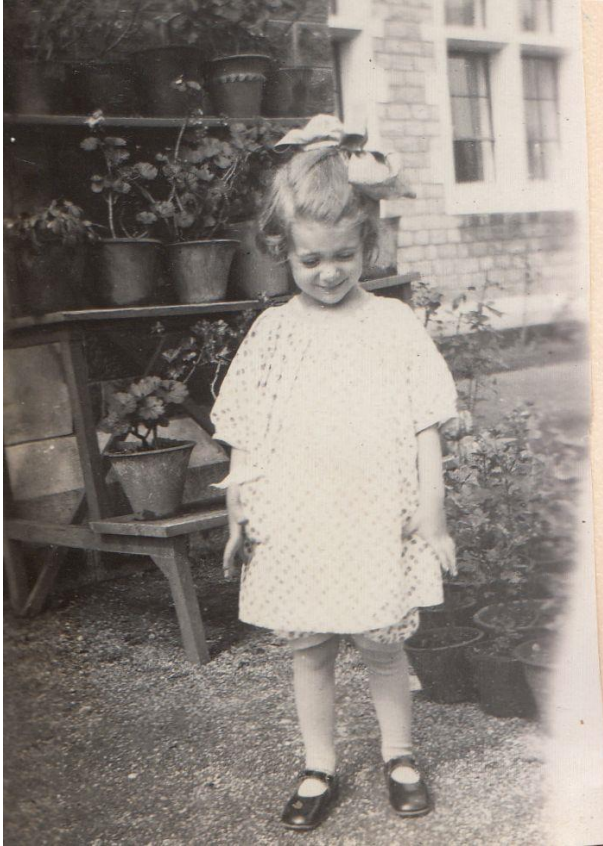
My mother was what was called a “contract teacher” in a Methodist boarding school in Darjeeling. She had dormitory duties, teaching duties, recreation duties, and a two-year-old child. Needless to say, she quickly engaged an *ayah* (Indian nursemaid) to keep an eye on me. But she also arranged for me to spend time in the school's kindergarten – at age two. The school operated under the British educational system and its graduates were eligible to take Cambridge University entrance examinations. The kindergarten's content carried students through the American equivalent of second grade; the class levels were known as “standards,” not “grades.”

From the time I was two until we came back to America on furlough when I was five, I was enrolled in the kindergarten, so I learned to read and write and do arithmetic.

Scheduled to be back in the U.S. for most of a year, my mother set about enrolling me in a public school. To the principal of the school, six-year-olds went into first grade. My mother would not hear of that; she simply would not enroll me. The principal agreed to let me try second grade, but very soon the second-grade



teacher let it be known that third grade would be more appropriate, so at age six I spent several months in third grade before we returned to Darjeeling, where I entered second standard, the academic equivalent of America's fourth grade.



**Six-year-old Mildred**

The climate in Darjeeling is generally cool and damp. It is reputed to get snow every ten years and, in fact, it snowed the year before we got there and the year after we left, which validated that reputation. It is also reputed to get 120 inches of rain a year, most of it be-

tween May and October, due to the monsoons. Because of the climate, school was open from March to November, and parents sent their children to the schools in the hills so they could escape the summer heat and humidity on the plains. When the weather was nice after months of monsoons, we sometimes were given a half-holiday, so we could play out in the sunshine.

At various times in my childhood, although I lived in a boarding school, I had pets. At one time, I had a dachshund named Reggie; another time there was a cat named Saraswati, an Indian goddess's name; and later there was a pair of guinea pigs, which produced more guinea pigs. We used to take the little ones to class with us in the pockets of our pinafores. Being the principal's daughter had its advantages; it also had its liabilities, like when the teacher sent me to stand in the hall for talking out of turn and "the principal" happened to walk by.

Although we lived in Darjeeling for nine years, it was only in the last year that I lived in the dormitory with other girls my age. Before that, I roomed with my mother. During her first term I was too young to be in the dormitory; during her second term she was principal of the school and had a suite of rooms, so I lived with her there. During our last year in India I lived in the dormitory with other girls in my age group. This meant getting up at 6 am; washing up at a congregate wash stand; going to daily chapel services every morning; playing outdoors when it wasn't raining, and often even when it was; kneeling on the cold cement floor with all the other girls in my dorm for bedtime prayers; and so on.

*Chota hazri* (little meal) was tea and toast at 6:30 am. The tea was strong Darjeeling tea, to which plenty of sugar and milk had been added. Breakfast was at 11 am. It consisted of *brown suji* (Wheatena), *white suji* (Cream of Wheat), or *kwakerotes* (oatmeal). The next meal was at 3 pm. It was a light lunch called “tiffin,” Supper was at 6 pm and often included curry, rice, and *dahl*, a special preparation of yellow split peas. For children who found curry to be too spicy, *dahl* and rice was a favorite meal. Other favorites were egg curry, chicken curry, and mulligatawny soup.

The school was situated on what was known as Mt. Hermon Estates, on a level below the main road in to Darjeeling. Part way up the hill, there was a “tuck shop” over on the right below the roadway where we could buy things like graham crackers and sweetened condensed milk – and probably lots of other things, too, but those are what I remember. Farther up the hill, also on the right below the roadway, was the North Point Post Office. This memory is significant because fifty years later, as my husband and I neared the school, I said to him, “Around that next curve is where the post office used to be.” And sure enough, it was still there.

As principal, my mother was responsible for the school car, which was a Whippet. She drove it and maintained it. She would lie down in the driveway under the car with a flashlight and the manual and do the necessary lubricating.

She had taken a transformer with her to India, so she was able to use her American sewing machine to make our clothes, her iron to press things, and her waffle iron to make waffles when she entertained. The laun-

dry, of course, was done by the *dhobi*, who picked up the things to be washed every week and delivered them the following week. Every item in our bundle was stamped with indelible ink by the *dhobi* using a special symbol to identify every item as ours. Our symbol was three dots in a triangle. It was years before that symbol disappeared from our lives.

So that's what it was like growing up in India. Certainly different, now that I think of it.

*Kitty Katzell*

## ROAD VOYEUR

**W**hile driving through neighborhoods I can't help but glance into garages with open doors and cars parked in driveways. Wonder why I have done so – either bored with nothing better to do while travelling, or a person with a deep interest in people and how they live their lives. I'd like to think of myself as simply curious about the human condition, but in all truth, I am probably simply nosy. I know there are many with a similar penchant.

My garage observations have produced a number of impressions and theories, particularly homes with two- and three-car garages. Oh yes, as you have probably already guessed, a garage provides a peek into someone's life in many ways. A person's stuff tells who they are, possibly more than they would admit.

What is surprising is how often a garage has no room for a car. Those many garages with a car parked before them are a sure sign, particularly if the vehicle is consistently parked in the driveway. On the street does not count. If the house looks like it lacks a basement or an attic, the odds increase exponentially.

With a three-car option, there is a good chance the garage has enough empty space for at least one car. To make that determination you must again note whether the house has a basement or an attic. A one-car garage and no basement and I'd be willing to make a small wager, with a better than fifty-fifty chance of winning, that there is no room in that garage for that car. Lacking such areas for storage, space for a car diminishes ex-

traordinarily as it readily coverts into the family “temporary” holding area.

Upon reflection, I believe garage use could be a possible TV series, akin to “hoarders.” This is particularly true because families today need a place for all the “stuff” that just seems to accumulate, since it is rarely thrown away. Who knew people had so many treasures? Of course, overloaded garages may exist with a simple explanation, maybe imminent garage sales and a redistribution of stuff. You know, “one man’s treasure is another’s...”

Careful observation can indicate the possible number of children in the family and their ages as well. Tricycles, bikes with training wheels, carriages, baby strollers all provide solid information – surely signs of young children. Skis, skateboards, midsize bicycles all indicate older children, as does a basketball hoop or a lacrosse goal. Lawn service obviates storage of that symbol of suburban living, the John Deere riding lawn mower and related equipment, not including gardening tools.

The one- and two-car garage owner will sometimes have an outbuilding in a corner of the property. If cars are still parked in the driveway, you know the situation, too much stuff.

Inventive residents have found creative uses for the space. One imaginative individual has created an art gallery. The three walls are resplendent with a variety of works, all carefully spaced and hung. Perhaps some are works by the owner. Another surprising find has been a boat under construction and a loom replete with assorted wools coming together in an interesting design. A

workshop is nothing exceptional. Fitness equipment migrates there as well, although our cold winter weather makes me suspect that garage has not become the family fitness room.

Furniture in a garage sends a mixed message. Are these discarded items awaiting the special trash pickup day or antiques and family heirlooms? Although if treasures, wouldn't they warrant considerably better care. Given these hard times, a third possibility exists. Could unfortunate circumstances have forced an adult child to resume residency. That would also explain an extra car in the driveway.

I must admit I have taken special note of that very rare garage with carpeting on the concrete. I am at a loss to explain why, given winter salted roads and melting snow and ice beneath vehicles.

There are the few families with neat, everything-in-its-place garages with space for the car. These residents take such pride in their achievement; I believe they deliberately leave doors open and want the world to witness their achievement. I tip my hat to them.

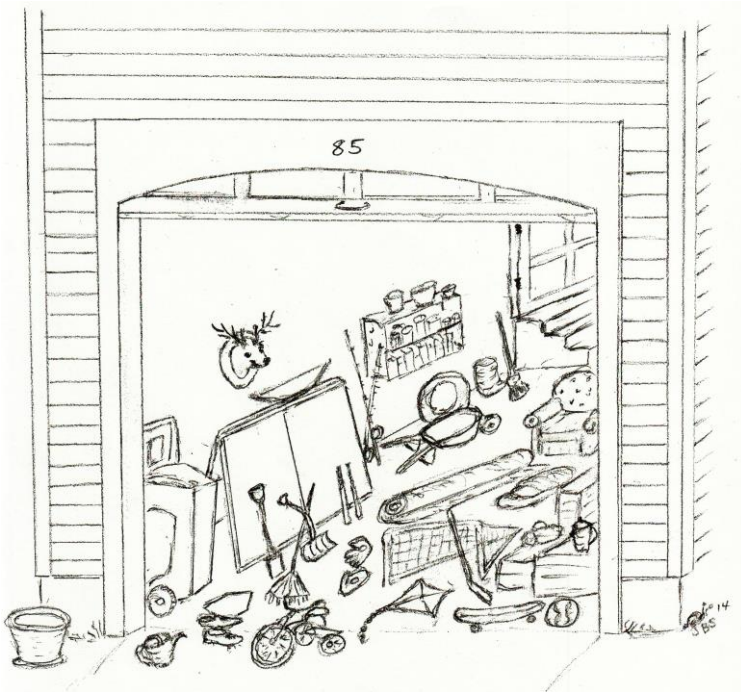
For residents of Medford Leas at Lumberton a garage is for a car, without exception. We like entering a dry car on a rainy day or having a clean, frost-free windshield when we leave home in winter. Well...let me clarify that thought. There is often a temporary exception, associated with the new resident move-in phase. The garage then becomes a storage/transition area. As the moving-in process moves forward, stuff whose final household destination remains in question and boxes and packaging awaiting disposal come to rest here. The timeline is measured in days, at most a few weeks. Ex-

actly how long a car remains in the driveway is a testament to decision making both before and during the moving-to-Lumberton process.

I've given you a framework for exploration, observation and analysis. As you drive around, take your time. Check things out. I know a little curiosity exists in each us. How observant have I been?

One final thought. Have you exposed all to prying eyes by leaving your garage door open?

*John Sommi*





## MY HERO

**M**y Uncle Les was always my hero. Dressed in the goggles and leather jacket of the Air Services of the US Army, pictures of the ace pilot filled my mother's scrap-books. Here he is as a dog fighter in World War I presumably popping German planes out of the sky. And then here he is training with a zeppelin group in the '20s. And look! Here is a great picture of Uncle Les where he has become a career officer in the US Army Air Corps, no longer called Air Services of the US Army. (During World War II it will change its name again to the US Air Force.)

Could I compare my Uncle Les to James Cagney in "Devil Dogs of the Air"? I think I could. Uncle Les had the same mischief in his eyes, but he never got into trouble the way Cagney did. Instead, Uncle Les was seen in a slightly different light. Here is a newspaper clipping my mother has put into the photo album. One time when he was a brigadier general, he played poker with the noncommissioned in the aisle of an airplane as they flew to a new battleground. The reporter didn't see it as a bad thing, but rather as an example of a general who was accepted as one of the guys.

Perhaps I could better compare Uncle Les to John Wayne. When Wayne wasn't swaggering through a great Western, he was smoothly bringing in an airplane with the landing gear destroyed and one engine on fire. Uncle Les had that easy-going confidence, and if he had had to bring in a damaged airplane, he would have done it smoothly. And then he could have swaggered just like John Wayne right off that disabled plane... But the thing

is, Uncle Les was real. He wasn't play-acting. He didn't have to prove anything to anybody.

Photo albums weren't the only way we got to know him. "Uncle Les is coming to see us next week!" What a welcome announcement that was in our family. In fact, it was like a charger giving us new life. It was not something that happened regularly or often. Uncle Les was on distant assignments that had him stationed in places like Hawaii or the Philippines. During World War II he was the commander in chief of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. That meant he was closer to us, but his responsibilities during World War II kept him from traveling.

It usually caused a bit of a stir in our little town of 8000 people when he did come to see us. He rolled into town in a jeep driven by a young soldier. I have to admit I was at an age when the young driver was as interesting to me as the general, my hero. With a general's stars on the front license plate, and the stars on his uniform, the local paper usually got wind of his presence. It was worthy of mention on the front page that the General was in town to visit his sister – my mother, and his mother – my grandmother.

Some things stand out – memories I don't want to lose. This giant of a man would scoop my grandmother up as though she was a doll, hugging and kissing her, so genuinely happy he was to see her and to be with her. He would exclaim how pretty she looked. She obviously loved every minute of his very special attention. Incidentally it was the only time I ever saw my grandmother wear her glass eye. Uncle Les had made sure she had a glass eye, when surgery had left a cavity. I have to admit

that it was a favorite prank of mine to show my friends the glass eye that was kept in a jewelry box in my grandmother's bureau drawer. There's nothing quite like seeing this perfect blue eye staring at you from a box . . . well, you had to be there.

Here's my other choice memory when Uncle Les came to visit. Our little town was having a carnival. My parents had been rather adamant that I should not go and meet friends there. Uncle Les spoke up and said he would go with me. He would be my escort to the carnival, staying with me and bringing me safely home at the magic hour of 10:00. My parents could hardly say no to his proposition, once they realized he was serious.

The carnival was filled with soldiers, some in groups, some with their dates. The soldiers were nearly paralyzed when they saw that Uncle Les was a general. They paled at the sight and fumbled awkward salutes. Uncle Les returned each salute with a snap of his wrist, obviously comfortable. I, on the other hand, was not prepared for this kind of lavish attention. When we got in line for a ride on the Ferris wheel, one of the soldiers called out, "I bet that's as high as you've ever been, General!" Uncle Les laughed and waved. "Don't worry," he said. "I've heard the pilot and the navigator are experienced."

It seemed as though everyone gathered around then to watch us get on the Ferris wheel. As for me, I've been on many a Ferris wheel ride since then, but never have I flown so high. It's not every day you get to go round and round with your hero.

*Sarah Klos*



Maggie Heineman

## WORDS FOR A SACRED PLACE

I look, I listen.

I feel an indefinable presence.

In the majestic woods, in whose embrace this sacred  
place is nestled,

I feel it,

though my eyes see only trees and the sky above.

In the ground on which we stand, so full of life and the  
remains of life deceased,

I feel it,

though my ears hear only the occasional birdcall and  
the random rustle of leaves.

I sense a hand beckoning and a voice softly saying,

“If you are moved by what you’ve felt here,  
then, in your good time, come to me, add your voice  
to mine,

so that together we may afford the same experience to  
those you’ve left behind.”

*Meditation Garden, a place for quiet and contemplation in the woods at Medford Leas, underwent extensive reconstruction in the summer of 2013.*

*These lines were written for its dedication on November 7 of that year.*

*Herb Heineman*



Marylou Morrow

## BOXES

She sits quietly on the floor before the low table. Bright, colorful squares of paper are spread before her, creating a kaleidoscope of color. She is practiced and patient as she chooses a square with fingers that are more arthritic than nimble, carefully folds the paper into a box.

The winter has been harsh, brutally cold with more ice than snow. The simple act of walking is treacherous and driving is precarious. So she has depended on her books and rediscovered origami, the art of paper folding. As she carefully coaxes and bends the paper, her mind is busy, adjusting to this new phase of her life, aloneness.

She looks forward to the emails and phone calls from children who flew away and settled in California, Montana and South Carolina. You did encourage them and gave them “wings” to fly, she tells herself. They are happy with families of their own and at any moment she is expecting to find the announcement of another great grandbaby on Facebook! She has been following this pregnancy from its conception, and if truth be told, a little too much information, complete with sonograms, proud photos of the mother in her maternity clothes, revealing the proud “bump,” have been displayed for all the world to see. All this is fine and good by today’s criteria, but it makes her a bit uneasy. Privacy and discretion seem to be outdated and old fashioned, but does this bit of news need to speed along the “information highway?”

She has accepted the passing of a husband three years ago. For sixty-three years their marriage centered her life. Why did he leave her floundering and alone?

Even now she feels betrayed. She knows he was successful in his field. The long hours he spent preparing lectures for the classroom, the off hours when he counseled and advised his students, the letters of recommendation he wrote helping them to get into graduate school were endless and tedious. The joy of teaching was his life and this disappeared upon retirement. Traveling to far places, and it was safe to travel back then, eased the despondency and they truly saw the world. They swam on the Great Barrier Reef in Australia; he had his shoes polished in Istanbul (paying twice “because you see I have two feet,” he points out to the street urchin); and they were stunned by the beauty of cherry blossoms surrounding the Imperial Palace in Japan.

For a number of years, he volunteered as a guide in the Mote Marine Science Center in Sarasota, Florida. She worked in the gift shop, mastering the computerized cash register. He gave lectures and helped to train the volunteers. During this period, he felt productive and happy, and now they swam with the manatees! Eventually, a hip replacement became necessary. This was followed by several episodes with his heart, which took their toll, and he was gone.

Then, along came Bill. He was not an ordinary guy! He was filled with humor, intelligence and wisdom and he proceeded to fill the empty cracks in her heart. They enjoyed chicken soup and chocolate cake lunches off campus, over which the problems of the world were discussed, if not solved. He read *The New York Times* and she *The Wall Street Journal*. They pondered the different points of view as they sipped their iced tea. They joined the Walnut Street Theater group and enjoyed the variety of productions that were presented, and one fall they vis-



ited Longwood Gardens, moving about easily on scooters! Evening dinner became a special event as they mixed and mingled with a variety of residents and friends. His generosity and kindness to others and his determination to continue to enjoy life were his trademarks, as were the pink roses that arrived frequently on her doorstep! Then suddenly, he too is gone and she is alone once more.

She realizes she is a fortunate woman, and privileged to have known two such men in her lifetime.

She reaches for another square of soft blue paper, a quiet restful blue, the color of laughing, blue eyes. She begins folding and makes sharp creases in the paper. A smile crosses her face as she glances out the window. More snow is swirling and skittering about her patio, brushing against the sliding glass door. The chickadees are scrabbling around the bird feeder. Her thoughts return to the present. She is safe and warm, sitting on the floor of her comfortable apartment, surrounded by fragments of the past and her colorful boxes.

*Edith R. Pray*

## **FROM THE JOURNAL OF MY FIRST YEAR AT MEDFORD LEAS**

DECEMBER 2012 -- Visiting

Marge gave me a tour. After eighteen years of living high up in apartment buildings, what would it be like to live at lively ground level? After twenty years of so much isolation because of my health, what would it be like to have people to be with so easily? And after looking at so many other places, could I trust the feeling I have that ML would be just right?

FEBRUARY 2013 – As a new resident

I'm beyond tired. Have I just moved to a new universe? Absolutely everything is unfamiliar. In my life I've moved 23 times, but this place feels entirely different. It feels like it could really be home. But settling in is overwhelming. Hard to learn where things are, when to eat, and a million new names! Thank goodness for that white notebook. Already I sense that moving here was exactly the right decision.

A surprise emotion: I feel undeserving that so much has suddenly been given to me: a beautiful environment, prepared food, caring help with daily life, so much attention to everything, such dedication to every aspect of life. I've discovered that many employees have spent their entire working career here, lots are second generation, and there is a braiding of related residents and employees.

## MARCH

Out the porch window: woodpecker, blue jay, house swallows, hawks, crows, cardinals, mourning doves, finches, mocking birds, squirrels, chipmunks.

People have invited me to meals nearly every day. What a change from all the years of isolation. But I must learn how to balance my need for privacy with my need for socialization. This will take close attention day to day.

In past *Medford Leas Life* newsletters I'm reading profiles of residents. The degree of life achievement of residents is downright intimidating to me, despite the fact that no one trumpets their past accomplishments.

I've gone to my first Meeting for Worship at ML. The Holly Room is like a forest lookout tower. How many years have I wished for a Meeting where I can fit in despite my debilitation? This is a worship group, not a full Meeting, so bye-bye guilt about all the administrative stuff I can no longer do, because there isn't any here. In the warm sunshine a few people inevitably nap. My younger, healthy self would not have understood. Now I feel tender toward others' frailty.

## APRIL

Living here is like being in a big family. That's somewhat literal when you consider how many old family names are related to other old family names, how many resident-employee family ties there are, and how many residents had parents, siblings, cousins, and in-laws who were/are residents. Some days I'd describe ML as a college campus, other days as a kindergarten, in its fullness of playing, primal needs, naps, feelings about food, quiet avoidances and maybe still some competitiveness.

Too many people question me about why I'm here because I'm "young." I feel like getting a T-shirt printed that says "Don't ask, I'm older than you think...and my health is my private business!" Having one's presence questioned makes one feel illegitimate, like I don't really belong.

## MAY

Two monarch butterflies flying together. Everything around us is reproducing itself. Having lived in paved suburbia, I had forgotten how erotic May really is.

## JUNE

Uproarious dinner with five people, all in dire straits health-wise. To be able to laugh so much near the end of our lives seems like a wonderful gift. I wonder how each person at the table has made her own peace with the inevitable end.

This month is perilous for small creatures. Crickets get stuck in my sink. A baby wren fell out of the tree in our courtyard and has been cheeping for help all day. Bugs wander inside. A neighbor found a frog on her counter.

## JULY

Half the place has relocated to the shore. The rest of us are suffering 100+ degree heat and developing severe cabin fever. I broke out and went for a long drive in my car, taking a look at Burlington County. Because of my health, I haven't driven here in over twenty years and am shocked at how much farmland and woods have been lost.

## AUGUST

Starting to visit with people at their homes, a privilege. I hadn't realized that there were so many configurations of units, nor so many color choices. Starting to consider how I can make my studio unit more my own.

Finally took a drive up 541 and walked around the Lumberton campus for the first time. I don't really understand yet what brings healthy people in their 60s-70s into a CCRC.

Still struggling to remember names. This is really bothering me. People have been so outgoing and helpful in every way; at the least I should be able to greet them by name.

## SEPTEMBER

Lovely, cool, bright days to eat lunch out on the patio behind the lounge. All these marvelous spots to find on the grounds. I love the tiny pond at the top of the main parking lot, too. The resident frog and I have kept company there frequently since spring.

Attended a peace vigil at the Medford Meeting-house. I wonder how many ML residents have kept up any interest in politics, still make calls or write, contribute, show up for meetings? It would be so interesting to know what those most advanced in age still feel passionate about.

Writing for our newsletter has been a fruitful way to get to know other residents, especially from their comments reacting to articles after the newsletter comes out.

## OCTOBER

Strangely, it is possible to take a strong dislike to a tree. This deciduous fir tree called a golden larch is the ugliest, mangiest tree I have ever seen. I glare at it from my porch.

## NOVEMBER

Went for a stroll on the meadow trail on this gorgeous, sunny day. It smells wonderful in there and I'm surprised at the number of birds still present. More often than ever expected are these moments of enchantment. In a strange way the dedication of the memorial garden was enchanting, too, because of thirty people's willingness to sit under the trees in the drizzle, most without umbrellas.

## DECEMBER

Have been taking stock of this past year. I love how residents take much of the responsibility instead of having everything done by staff. My own little but enjoyable volunteer "jobs" generate an ongoing sense of meaning and worthiness. I'm still in awe of other residents and of the dedication of staff members. Still figuring out those issues of privacy, intimacy, blending versus individuality, boundaries, play/work/rest ratios, and so on. It has been an incredibly interesting and stimulating year.

*Judy Kruger*

## ACQUIRED TASTE

I went to my first New England country auction more than fifty years ago when my husband, children and I were visiting my parents at their summer cottage. I don't remember how I learned about the auction, but it was probably from a flyer tacked to the door of Proctor's General Store in Enfield Center, NH, where I went to buy Gerber's baby cereal and coloring books and to do loads of laundry in the hot, buggy building next door. Or I might have seen a notice in the *Valley News*, the paper that served the Upper Valley of the Connecticut River and featured auction announcements in every Thursday's edition. But the information surfaced somewhere and I was intrigued. When Saturday came I located the site on the map and, with a baby sitter in place and the men playing golf, my mother and I set out.

In those days, auctions were held on the grounds of the soon-to-be emptied homestead, with a tent spread over the most level stretch of lawn and rickety wooden folding chairs set up on the grass. Somewhere behind the house was either an outhouse or one of the new-fangled Port-a-Potties. The auctioneer used a handheld mike and a mixed crew of helpers, old-timers and college kids. There was a set patter of jokes and some well-rehearsed repartee. The crowd under the tent was made up of summer people (there to furnish their cottages), dealers (there to stock their shops) and locals (there to gossip and inspect their neighbors' belongings).

Sometimes the location was an elegant old mansion of rosy brick, built in the Federal style. At those houses there might be an ailing, patrician owner watching from

a wheelchair or, sometimes, there was no one left at all. More often, the place was a ramshackle farmhouse, down on its luck. There, the family often sat on the porch or doorstep, watching grimly as their possessions were brought out, examined, discussed and sold.

Whether the setting was distinguished or drab, there would be a string of cars lining the country road and a lunch wagon off to the side.

While the most beautiful and valuable items came from the more substantial houses, there was no guarantee of this. At a farmhouse, a buyer could be lulled by a succession of battered Sears appliances and boxed lots of Pyrex bowls but then, without warning, a rare cherry cupboard would be brought out. The people under the tent would lean forward in their chairs, hold their numbered cards more tightly and pay close attention. This was why most of us were here.

We were all looking for a great buy, but there was more to the experience than that. There was a blend of entertainment, competition, nosiness and gambler's rush. I fell for it right away, wrote histories in my head about the place and the people who had lived there, and speculated about the other folks under the tent. For me, at the beginning, the auctioned items were incidental.

Initially I was afraid to bid. I gave my ID and picked up a bidder's card, but it stayed in my lap. I sipped weak coffee, ate a greasy donut and tried to learn the system. I realized that we should have brought newspapers and cartons for packing any "smalls" that we might buy and that we would have been wise to come for the early inspection to scope out the desirable things because, once started, the action moved incredibly fast.



Often, by the time I'd decide that I wanted something, it was gone. There was no second guessing: a final bid was final. The auctioneer cried, "Fair Warning" and that was that.

Everything about the process was fair. The auctioneer never failed to point out flaws and, more than once, I've seen bidding stopped to clarify a misunderstanding. One auctioneer that I came to know would mention his assessment of an item before he began the bidding and, if the price got much higher than the anticipated value, he would be uncomfortable and stop to caution the bidders who were, most likely, caught up in momentary lust. Because that is part of the process, the blood races, and only a firm grasp of the balance in his checkbook could control a buyer in those pre-credit days.

At the end of the first day, when the farm machinery and the property itself had been sold, and the crowd had thinned out, I found the courage to bid on a pine school desk that had been forgotten in a shed. It had ornate iron legs, a hole for a bottle of ink and a front seat that folded up. The auctioneer opened the bidding at three dollars and I raised my card and got it for four.

When I took it back to the cottage, my father teased me and said I'd wasted the money. But that desk wasn't a mistake; I took it home to Philadelphia, it moved with us to Cleveland and St. Louis, and it is back in New Hampshire in our son's farmhouse today. That purchase was the first step in a lifetime hobby.

There were several auctioneers operating in the central New Hampshire-Vermont area in the sixties. Times were tough for small farms then and owners were

selling out and moving away. There were usually mid-week sales and two or three to choose from on Saturdays. Before that summer was over, I was attending two or more a week.

In the next few years, our visits to my parents, which had been for two or three weeks, began to stretch in response to the auction schedule. I started to range farther afield, venturing into Massachusetts and north toward the Canadian border.

I grew savvy and I gained enough confidence to bid on larger pieces of furniture. We were having more children and moving into bigger houses. There was always a need for more stuff. Once, heavily pregnant with my fourth child, I bought a Welsh cupboard, which the helpers took apart so that the base would fit into the trunk of my small Renault and the top could be tied to the roof. Usually, I tried to drive a station wagon to the auction site and later, when my father-in-law gave me a VW camper, I could really let loose.

It is not an exaggeration to say that our final house, a three-story Victorian, was furnished at auctions. We inherited a few antiques, bought a recliner and a sofa bed, and appliances of course, but everything else came from an auction. With many of our things I can remember the house, and the price, and the thrill of the bidding. Our good china, service for twelve with at least twenty serving pieces, was bought in an old barn in Post Mills, Vermont. I resisted at first because it has gold trim and I visualized handwashing, but my husband, who was with me that day, loved it and we got the complete set for thirty dollars. I use it once or twice a year and put it in the dishwasher. The gold is still brilliant.

Like everything else, auctions have changed. Things from several homesteads are brought to a central location, which is more convenient for the buyer. Here there's a comfortable space with a snack bar and rest rooms. There are banks of phones where employees take calls from bidders all over the world and credit cards are essential. Although the provenance of each piece is carefully given, the sense of connection that I felt in the old days is lost.

It's still easy to spot the dealers and now there are decorators in the mix. The prices have gone crazy. I watched a desk sell for more than a hundred thousand dollars. I've watched people spend that much to enhance their collections in the course of a morning.

I have refined my auction style over the years. I am more purposeful and less capricious. I've learned that lots of people drift away at about one for a late lunch. They are the ones who are there to pass the time, or for a unique New England experience, or to buy something specific, a particular oil painting, for instance. If I wait until they have gone and the buzz has died out of the crowd, usually about four o'clock, I can bid on something with a chance of getting it at a reasonable price.

Ten years ago, we wanted a rug for our living room and traveled to an auction barn in New Hampshire. One lovely rug after another came up during the morning and was sold. The bids were steep. At close to five, a final rug was brought out. It was the right size and color. I shifted to the edge of my chair and felt that familiar rush. I was having a wonderful time. The rug, which is perfect in our house, was simply a bonus.

*Marcy Webster*

## IN THE HILLS ABOVE ATHENS: AN IDYLL

*The names and places are familiar, otherwise this is a work of fiction.*

One warm afternoon Isocrates led a group of young men into the northern hills overlooking the city of Athens. He was an old man. He claimed to be more than ninety-five. (He died in 338 B.C.E., age 98.) He could look back on his long life and know that he had lived during some of the grandest years in the history of the world.

When they had come to the end of their walk, climbing up one of the low hills, the group gathered around him. Some sat on the ground and some sat with Isocrates on a low stone wall. There were ten of them, more youths than he liked to teach at one time. How could he deny their fathers? If they had been so misguided to spend good money to shape most of these dull minds, the money eased the worries of his old age. Nevertheless, he knew from long experience there were at least two or three good minds among the group that made the effort worthwhile.

“We have been walking all afternoon. Now we can rest and enjoy our surroundings. But I see that you, Lysias, have brought for your offering only one bottle of wine and a few sorry looking figs...”

“Not very good wine, either,” murmurs came from the group.

“...And I was about to say, Lysias, give us a few lines that would please even your great-grandfather, our

great grammarian and speech writer, for whom you are named, as you are so proud to remind us.”

Lysias stood aside from the group and faced Isocrates. He gravely gestured for silence. He began his recitation with less than noticeable confidence and in a soft voice.

*“Hesiod, prais...”*

“No, no, Lysias. It’s Heesiod, it’s a long ‘e’ in the first syllable. You know the Attic. Now, begin again with confidence, which honors the words you have composed. And, young Lysias, sing.” Isocrates swept his arms in a half-circle, motioning to the hills around them. “You are singer to these hills. These beautiful hills are like an unruly audience at the top of the amphitheater. Listen. Hear the birds chattering? They’re your audience. Let your voice be heard above their noise. Now, go on. Begin.”

*“Hesiod, praising Zeus, singer after the time of Homer,  
Instructs Perses, his brother, on plowing fields,  
Cultivating the soil, keeping flocks, holding with honor  
The sacred gifts of Earth, her bounteous yields...”*

“You have made a fine beginning, Lysias, But, I must emphasize, only a beginning. You’re a little loose in the rhyming. But we’ll let it go. That’s not important for the first attempt.”

Lysias walked to the stone wall and sat down next to Isocrates. For a few moments, the boys were quiet, observing the beauty around them, of the fields, of the vineyards and even a few groves of olive trees. They began to understand why Isocrates had brought them to this place.

“What do the words mean to you? Anyone? Remember what we have talked about? Epistoles, what do these words mean to you?”

“Hesiod is telling us that knowledge is to be passed on.” Epistoles was a young man of few words. He had the physique of his father, who was one of Athens' wrestling champions.

“Again, this is a good beginning, but it does not go far enough. There is something else than just simply “passing on knowledge” from person to person, father to son. Might we say we human are compelled to share our knowledge? But not just any knowledge will do. Take, for example, prejudice. Prejudice is learned through daily impressions and by observation. But there is a paradox here. While prejudice is learned, its boundaries hold nothing but ignorance. We'll pursuit this kind of “learning” later. Now, Epistoles, we are waiting for your lines. Don't disappoint us.”

Epistoles remained seated on the stone wall and recited the following.

*“But, Perses, do you remember all that I urge – and gain?  
Work Perses, that hunger may never take your youth,  
That your storehouses may be filled with sustaining grain,  
And all earth's household may live in universal truth.”*

Isocrates got up, signaling he was ready to return to the city.

“Boeotios and Pelias, be my crutches. Let me lean on your arms, one on each side. Boeotios, named after that dull-witted race, you have a strong arm. And you, Pelias – I will never understand why parents feel compelled to name their sons after the gods – yours is another

er strong arm. It's the going down the terrain that is the most difficult."

His pupils gathered round the small knot of three. Isocrates was their main focus. They listened intently. He continued the lesson as they made their way toward Athens. The young men knew Isocrates' great age. Any day could be the last day to hear the wisdom of their master. Once they were well on their way and the group was in its stride, Isocrates picked up the thread of his response to Epistoles' recitation.

"Epistoles, I hear a metaphor in your line, 'that your storehouses may be filled with sustaining grain.' It could stand for that which we must learn: true knowledge. I doubt that you intended the use of a metaphor. But you can all see how effective it is, how it 'enlarges' the meaning of this short recitation...."

In that moment Isocrates stumbled, causing the group's concentration to change. They were ready to catch him before he fell. After that they carefully watched where the path led them, out of concern for their teacher.

Pelias suddenly pointed to something in the distance, interrupting their progress. "See the bright sunlight on the Acropolis?" he called out. The young men strained to see what caused his excitement. Because of his weak eyesight, Isocrates asked Pelias what he saw.

Isocrates was slow to understand Pelias' words. When he recovered, he said, in a voice filled with reverence, "It is the Temple of Athena Parthenos in all its glory, such glory I have not seen for a long time. Divine Athena makes the dead marble live."

The moment passed. They found themselves again on the stony path. They continued into the city, Isocrates expounding the lesson as they walked. When they were about to go their separate ways, he reminded them, “Tomorrow, at my door, we’ll continue our study of Hesiod’s *Work and Days*.”

*Chris Darlington*



## TUESDAY MORNING

I'm apprehensive as Tuesday approaches. That's my morning in Family Court, where I've been working weekly as a volunteer mediator for almost ten years – almost five hundred days. If I saw an average of two families each time – a conservative estimate – then I've mediated for almost a thousand.

Along with a handful of like-minded volunteers from Medford and Lumberton Leas and the wider community, I have the job of helping parents who live separately to work out a schedule for parenting time. Judges decide this matter for parties who can't agree, but they believe that if parents negotiate with each other it's better for everybody. One soon finds out, though, that parents who have parted because they can't get along, or who never shared a home, don't always work well together on behalf of their children. Personal issues get in the way, sometimes obliterating concerns for the children's welfare. If one believes, as I do, that the best place to raise children is a home with two parents who like each other as well as the children, it's easy to see most of the situations encountered in Family Court as sad.

Sadness comes in degrees. *Just plain sad*: Broken home with separated parents, or parents who never lived together, but who are able to negotiate a plan in a calm, respectful manner. *Sadder*: Parents who don't trust or respect each other, yet manage to arrive at a plan that neither one is happy with, because they don't want a judge telling them what to do. *Saddest*: Parents so alienated that no compromise is possible; their case must be decided by a judge.

In a class by itself – *Infuriating*: One parent, who has made no effort to communicate with the children for months or longer (and in some cases had no more than the biologically necessary relationship with the other parent to begin with – and may even need to establish his paternity), suddenly wanting parenting time – which promises, incidentally, a reduction in court-mandated child-support payments. The other parent, cynical and resentful, diagnoses the motive in a flash. The mediator avoids taking sides by pointing out that child support is not subject to mediation, that the parents must take their financial dispute before a hearing officer, *after* they have worked out a parenting plan – which is unlikely to happen, so they go before a judge first and are told how to divide their time. (Sometimes a judge is more optimistic and sends the parents back for another try at mediation.)

I estimate that about ninety-five percent of cases fall into one of those four categories.

Our work requires certain material tools: A private room with table and chairs. A conference phone in case one parent lives at a distance. A panic button to call a sheriff to restore order (which I've never pressed). Writing materials, including preprinted standard forms. A supply of tissues, which I regularly bring to court.

We also rely on behavioral tools: Ability to project neutrality even when one parent seems to be so obviously in the right. Willingness to listen to both sides equally – sometimes separately (in “caucus”) if a one-on-one conversation seems to offer a chance of progress. Remaining nonjudgmental. Authority to demand calm when discussion turns to quarrel. And common sense.

I had an inkling of what I was getting into before volunteering, and I hesitated for a couple of years after I had already started mediating in Small Claims Court. Family Court veterans had this advice for newcomers: *Don't get emotionally involved, or you won't survive. Their problems are their problems, not yours.* Easier said than done, and perhaps not even good advice. How is it possible to hear such sad stories; to picture the children, impotent victims in their parents' fights, sometimes not even wanted; to offer tissues to a frustrated, weeping parent; to call a sheriff to restore order; and *not* feel anything? I find feelings to be *requisite* for this work. An unfeeling mediator can't empathize with the pain on clear display, nor recognize the rare situations – the other five per cent – that temper the sadness with a different mood. Consider these:

Parents do not usually bring their children to parenting mediation, for obvious and good reason, but occasionally nobody's available to watch them. On one such visit, two young boys entertained themselves under the table, where the panic button was just asking to be pushed. In no time a sheriff came rushing to "help" me. Mother took care of the matter. Sorry, Officer.

On another occasion, the proceedings became so loud that a mediator *on the other side of the wall* thought I was in trouble, which I wasn't. That mediator pushed *his* button and referred the sheriff next door. (We do look out for each other!) With an apology for the ruckus I sent the sheriff back to his station.

One father came into the room, promptly helped himself to a fistful of the candy I'd put on the table, and started a quarrel with the mother, which she reciprocated.

ed. When he'd had as much as he could take (i.e., of the quarrel), he jumped up, knocked over the table, which landed in my lap, and stomped out. By the time I found the panic button I didn't need it anymore.

While it's not good to expose children to such scenes, in those cases where children were present the parents behaved as though aware that they'd be judged. One girl, three or four years old, sat comfortably on my lap doodling on paper I'd given her while her parents talked. On her way out I kissed the back of her hand and said, "Goodbye m'lady, nice of you to visit." She didn't know what to make of that, but I think her parents left feeling that court wasn't such a bad place.

A two-year-old blonde was less outgoing, keeping her face buried in her mother's sweater most of the time. Once in a while she stole a peek in my direction with an expressionless face. As the session wound up, she peeked again and smiled – as though she sensed things would be OK. Clearly the tone of her parents' voices conveyed what she needed to hear.

Human warmth does not come from children alone. A handshake and "Thank you for your time" are commonplace. The more expressive adults may even offer a hug. Such demonstrations are more than adequate reward for a mediator's efforts.

I find myself actually *liking* some of the people I'm there to help, even if they won't or can't help each other, and I'm sorry to see them go. They almost seem to belong together, but I have neither the qualifications nor the authority to counsel them, so I simply wish them well.

There was an aunt, who was taking care of a child because neither parent was competent to do so, who made such *intense* eye contact as she spoke with me and looked so absolutely *honest* and *trusting* that I barely restrained myself from giving her a kiss on the cheek. “What a good woman you are!” I felt like saying.

Some situations justify extra effort, even if unorthodox. In one session, the wife steadfastly looked at the opposite wall when addressing her husband except when she got really mad. Eventually she walked out, and he followed her into the waiting area. An alert sheriff sensed a potential problem and laid a gentle hand on the husband’s shoulder to keep him from following her to the elevator. I invited the husband back to the mediation room to vent and asked him whether he’d like to continue if I could get his wife to come back. His distress was obvious and he promptly agreed. Later that day I telephoned her at home and the moment I told her who I was she apologized for her behavior. She brought their child to the next session and the couple came to an agreement.

Parents like these still feel affection for each other. Others speak warmly to and of each other and even make jokes together; they are comfortable with each other at a distance. Recently a man openly confessed – after a session that almost failed – that he still loved the woman with whom he had been arguing, and she accepted his declaration without a hint of cynicism. I was moved to suggest that they hug each other as they left. They did, and he added a kiss, then another, for good measure.

These are satisfying experiences, even though the underlying sadness is always there. Is it worth my while and stress to keep going back for those five percent – and the frustrating other ninety-five? I used to wonder, but I don't anymore, because I've discovered a truth about myself: Every choice I make is motivated by self-interest. When I no longer sense that volunteering in Family Court serves my self-interest, I'll retire.

Meanwhile, perhaps I'm being *too* apprehensive as Tuesday approaches. It's a long shot, but I could end up with a child in my lap or one peeking out from behind her mother's sweater, smiling because, despite the separation, she senses that both her parents love her.

*Herb Heineman*

Wind-bent flower stalks  
strike adolescent angles  
all knees and elbows.

*Elizabeth W. Hicks*

