

LEAS LIT

The Medford Leas Literary Journal



June 2015

Number 29

LEAS LIT STAFF

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

MEET THE WRITERS
for Tea and Talk in the Holly Room



WEDNESDAY, June 17, 2015

Come and exchange ideas about writing

CONVERSATION AND REFRESHMENTS at 3 pm

PROGRAM at 3:30

Moderator: **Ruth Gage**

Panelists: **Roberta Foss, Joyce Koch,
Joyce Sichel, John Sommi**

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THE WHINNY AT MY WINDOW

For Cathy, keeper of horses and hummingbird feeders

At the phase of the green moon
I'm awakened by soft voices.
In the dark before dawn
I hear a whinny at my window.

How do tiny horses gain the
Height of my upper story
Window? Wings? Of course!
Tiny Pegasus of the Fountain!

Down one story, in
Broad daylight, ravenous
Pegasus-like hummingbirds
Drink from the nectar Fountain.

Every morning brings a new day.
But I still hope, I wish,
I yearn, not for the day's rebirth.
I listen in the warm predawn for

The whinny at my window.

Chris Darlington

HARRY'S TREE

My oldest brother, Harry, was the missing person in our family much of the time. As a teenager Harry got into so many scrapes that my father shipped him off to a military academy. The discipline did him little good because he later dropped out of college without a degree. He ultimately became a fine draftsman of quality office and laboratory furniture.

Harry shared with us all an abiding love for Battle Point, the site of our Ontario summer cottages. When he appeared, strange things might happen. The wings of a dead owl found in the woods would be tacked to the ceiling of our loft, or we would learn about his Canadian friends at Red Kennedy's Tavern in Blind River. (There were separate entrances for Ladies and Gentlemen.)

When Katie and I got married, Harry was my best man. It was Harry who took Katie for her first and only flight in a small airplane.

There was a magnificent white pine towering above Battle Point's skyline. Observing from our little cabin, we loved the constant flow of crows, ravens, and smaller birds that perched on her dead lower branches. Then one summer when we arrived the tree was missing. A winter storm "had done her in." There she lay on her side leaving a vast hole with her giant root system towering high into the sky.



*Dave Lewis stands between the dead roots of the fallen tree and
Harry's Tree which replaced it*

Then and there Katie and I decided to transplant a new “pinelet” in that hole. We nurtured her through the hot summer months. We named her Harry’s Tree in honor of a brother who loved the place as we did, and who died in 2001.

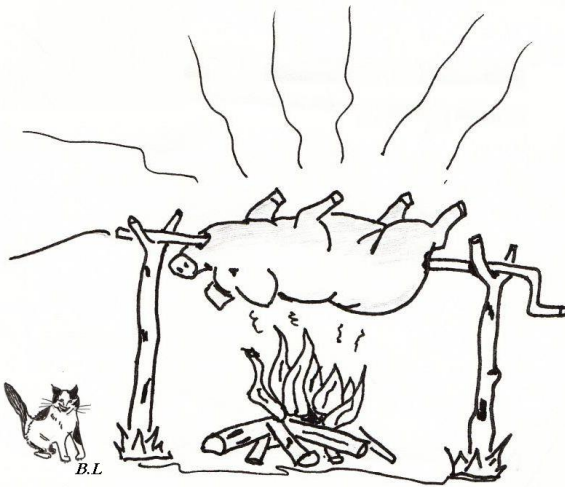
And we who have moved seventeen times in our lives together hope that our ashes will find Harry’s Tree to be our final resting place.

Dave Lewis

THE BEGGAR AND THE BAKER

The beggar stood before the brazier
Drawn by the essence rising
From the crackling, spattering piglet
Skewered, turning, hissing.

He had in one hand a petty coin,
the other, a piece of bread.
The petty coin sufficed to buy
Of that pig not a shred.



He held the bread above the vapor
Rising from the roast,
Hoping thus to lend some flavor
To his piece of toast.

He raised the bread to eager lips,
The baker cried, "Stop thief."
You've got to pay for what you've taken."
The beggar gaped in disbelief.

A guardsman came to arbitrate,
But he too was perplexed:
"This matter is beyond my ken
I'd rather judge be vexed."

They made their case before the judge
Who listened with reserve.
He eyed the beggar, transfixed the baker:
"The law, it must be served.

"It's clear the bread some flavor gained.
He must be paid, in kind."
He dropped the coin so that it rang:
"Your payment, Sir, the sound."

Charles Perrone

WEDDINGS

In high school I was good friends with Mary, but that was it. There was no romance. It would have been impossible. She lived in Amityville on Long Island while my domicile was the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The distance would have killed it in the attempt. Besides, she was engaged to Bob, who worked as a mechanic in a garage in Brooklyn. I met him once when he came to pick Mary up. When introduced, he looked at me suspiciously to check out if I had designs on his fiancée. He was about 5 feet 9 inches tall with a round face and straight brown hair and brown serious eyes. His mouth was generous and his slightly protruding nose gave character to his face. He wore spotless bib overalls covered by a shiny leather jacket. He must have come directly from work.

The couple had a problem. They wanted to get married but there was disunity between the families. Mary's father was a minister and wanted to perform the ceremony. But Bob's grandfather was also a minister and he wanted to do the vows. *What to Do?* The discussions went back and forth without any final solution or agreement. Then Bob came up with a brilliant idea. *Let's Elope!*

Doubts and worries were expressed whether that was the right way to deal with the problems between the families. Still, the couple finally did decide to go ahead with the elopement. Bob was to drive to Connecticut to scout out the different ways this could be done. He made reservations for the following Saturday. Upon his

return he told Mary they needed two witnesses to the ceremony.

Mary decided she wanted me and her friend Rosalie. Rosalie was a schoolmate, always friendly and smiling. She was of small stature and always wore colorful skirts and blouses. She had a tangle of dirty blond hair, a pointed chin, green mischievous eyes, and a perfectly curved mouth. She lived in a large orphanage on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and took the subway to school each weekday. When her mother died her father could not take care of his two daughters and put them in the orphanage. Then her older sister got married, and Rosalie decided to move in with them. However, there was only one bed! When the brother-in-law began to make advances, Rosalie moved back to the orphanage. Rosalie and I agreed to be witnesses.

Saturday Bob picked us up at our respective subway stops. He was driving an old sedan, borrowed from his workplace garage. Mary was already in it. She wore a dark dress and silver necklace, and her hair seemed freshly curled. Bob wore dark pants with a long-sleeved blue polo shirt and his shiny leather jacket. Rosalie was in her usual skirt and blouse. We all wore windbreakers.

We drove north along the Hudson River. Our destination turned out to be a colonial structure with an orange roof and green shutters. A big sign in front proclaimed "Justice of the Peace Roy Decker Takes Care of You." We were met at the front door by the wife, a very thin woman in a blue dress. After a few minutes' wait to let the previous group leave, we met the justice, who led us to a large white-painted room with many bookcases filled with books, all with black bindings. There was a

large black desk under the window with an enormous chair behind it. An arrangement of folding chairs occupied the front of the room. Finding all papers in order, the justice made Rosalie and me sit in two front chairs and Mary and Bob stand in front of us.

Putting on a judicial hat, he informed us that under the laws of Connecticut he was authorized to perform marriage ceremonies and he did so in a very efficient manner. It was over before Mary and Bob knew what hit them. But they kissed and everything was all right. Rosalie and I signed the marriage certificate and Bob paid the justice's wife, who then appeared with a tray containing four tiny orange glasses filled with an aperitif to celebrate the marriage. We drank and left just as another laughing group came in.

Our wedding lunch consisted of hamburgers, Coke, and apple pie. When the proprietor realized this was a wedding party, he came over with a plate of four big cookies. As I remember it, we each paid for our own lunch.

Bob drove us home, the trip lasting two hours. He let Rosalie off at her subway stop and then did the same for me.

Somehow the school found out that Mary was married. She was called to the office and was told not to return. According to the rules of the Board of Education of New York City at that time, married persons could not attend regular classes. So very soon Mary found a job as an agent-in-training at New York Life Insurance.

When her family found out, they were dismayed, but they found a solution for their problem. They would

give the young couple a church wedding. Mary, wearing a silk shantung dress, was escorted down the aisle by her father. When they reached the altar, her father left her there and walked to the microphone. He proceeded to give a laudatory speech about Mary and Bob, stating how suitable they were for each other. He continued with their achievements in life and went on to more appreciation. 'Twas a great paean! When he finished he joined his daughter at the altar. Some people clapped. Now it was Bob's grandfather's turn to shine. He stepped forward in his priestly investiture and started a leisurely wedding ceremony.

All Problems Were Solved! A delicious wedding luncheon was served, followed by dancing. All participants had a good time.

Guess who was not invited to the celebration: The two witnesses! I later learned about the wedding ceremony through correspondence with Mary. No explanations were asked or given. Maybe we were an embarrassing reminder of the elopement; maybe we were just superfluous.

Stefan Frank

TOO BUSY TO STOP LIVING

It was early January when Mrs. George decided she had lived long enough. She was caught in the bleak period following the flurry of Christmas and the beginning of a new year. Really now, she had been around for eighty-six years, quite a respectable age. She had enjoyed a happy and useful life, raised two talented and successful children, and even had an essay published in *The New Yorker*, an achievement any struggling writer would be proud of.

After Stanley's death a few years ago, she had rallied for the sake of her children, Stanley Jr. and Victoria. But, truth be told, Stan and Vickie, both supportive and loving, lived at the ends of the earth. Now, Mrs. George prided herself on being computer-literate. Stanley had guided her onto the bumpy Internet Highway, and she could send an email with the best of them. But it wasn't the same. She was lonely.

Mrs. George decided to take matters into her own hands. She gave herself four months to prepare for her demise. Yes, May would be a nice month to "check out." But first she must get her affairs in order. She began to make a list.

1. *Straighten Up My Underwear Drawer.* She shuddered thinking of her "tatty underwear." An embarrassment to herself, let alone her children picking through her well-worn garments. Perhaps she might replace a few pieces. She smiled to herself. Why not? She might even go to Victoria's Secret.

Redo My Garden. Plant a pink dogwood and pull out that rhododendron that died during the winter. I've always wanted a pink dogwood. Smiling, she added that.

Glancing at the stack of books on her bedside table, she thought, “Goodness, I’d better get busy and read these so they can be returned to the library.

2. *Read Books and Return to Library.*

Catching a glimpse in the mirror, her hands flew to her hair as she tried to tame a few unruly locks.

3. *Get New Haircut and Perm.* Might as well go out in style.

4. *Clean Out and Organize Closets.* I’ll donate to the Second Time Around Shop anything I haven’t worn in the last five years.

5. *Throw a Party.* Invite all my friends. I could make my special chocolate cake that everyone enjoys. No need to worry about cholesterol now!

6. *Buy a New Dress for the Party.* I’ll splurge and find something extravagant. Maybe I’ll go visit Vickie in Hawaii and we can go shopping together. I certainly can find something unusual at the Ala Moana Shopping Center. Yes, that’s what I’ll do. She paused. It would help if I lost a few pounds. She added Fitness Center to her list.

7. *Fitness Center.*

Perhaps if I visit Vickie in Hawaii, I’ll just continue on to Japan and spend time with Stan. I’ll go in April when the cherry blossoms are at their best. What a lovely time of year.

8. *Travel Agent and Tickets.*

The days began to tick by as she made her plans. Her house became fresh and orderly. Her garden prospered and bloomed with extra loving attention. Mrs.

George had a sparkle in her eye, a new hairstyle, and a trim figure that attested to her conscientious visits to the Fitness Center. As she packed her suitcase preparing for her trip to Hawaii, she hummed happily to herself.

The phone rang. It was her friend and neighbor, Margaret Johnson. “Oh, Gladys, I’m so glad I caught you before you left. Do have a lovely time with your daughter and son. But, Gladys, promise me you will be back by the end of May. Our vigil with the Environmental Restoration Society is scheduled for the 31st and we need you. Those meadows and woods will all be torn up by the developers unless we do something. All that beautiful land wiped away! And Gladys, did you know that right at the edge of the woods there is a large clump of pink lady slippers? We’ve got to save those lady slippers!”

“Now calm down, Margaret. Your blood pressure will fly out of control. Of course I’ll be back. We’ll do what we can even if we have to transplant those lady slippers ourselves. And they call this progress? Ripping up land to build a bunch of row houses? Now, I have to go, my taxi is at the door,” and Mrs. George hung up.

Bustling about, gathering up her coat, her purse and her her tote carry-on, she brushed against the clutter of papers and books on her nightstand. A slip of paper fluttered to the floor and remained unnoticed. It was her to-do list. Without a backward glance, Mrs. George hurried down the stairs and out the front door, too busy to give a thought to stop living.

Edith Pray



G.M.

FRONT OF THE HOUSE

Patriotic flags are flying,
banners flutter in season's prints.
Whirligigs and wind chimes moving
give still façades some homelike hints.

House fronts with man-made adornments
along the residential streets.
Picket fences, elves, ceramics,
wrought iron, statues, bas-reliefs.



They announce our views or whimsies,
builders' trends or owners' pride,
overlooked among the scenery,
when we pass by foot or ride.

Paint-chipped stable boys still waiting
for coming horse and carriage chores.
Flamingos stand one-legged pink
from Florida to northern shores.

Striped awnings, wagons, summer toys
in flower beds and round the trees,
with plaster bunnies, squirrels, frogs,
and grazing sheep facsimiles.

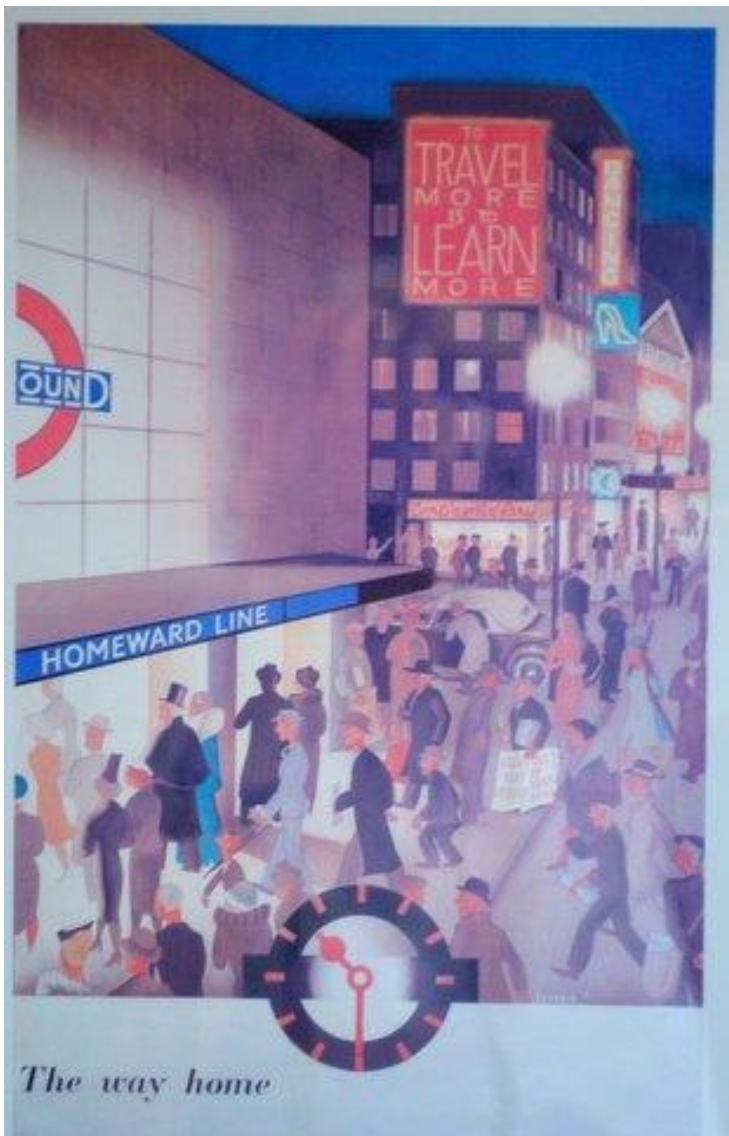
New tastes, pretensions come along,
with sculptures of artistic shape.
Art deco and chinoiserie
enhance all levels of estate.

Trappings of autumn – pumpkins, corn,
begin to show at summer's end.
All the while the weather harshens
and Christmas lights come out again.

When winter covers all with snow,
conifer wreaths outnumber leaves.
Birdhouses are repaired or made,
feeders appear from branches, eaves.

House fronts persist or change with time,
driven by the dwellers' reasons.
When nature's backdrop changes again,
We'll add our marks through future seasons.

Joyce Linda Sichel



The way home

Margery Rubin

WHERE IT'S WARM AND BRIGHT: STORIES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Elephant & Castle

There is something romantic and exotic about some of the station names. As the escalator glides me up to the exit, and with a touch of my Oyster Card (as London's fare card is called), I am out on the street. In front of me is a busy roundabout and I see a red double-decker Number 40 bus stop to pick up passengers on the way up High Street and then on to London Bridge. I start walking up St. George's Road past quiet houses and tall lofty trees. There in front of me stands the Imperial War Museum. Once the Bethlem Royal Hospital, the large high dome reflects the sun's rays, as do the 15-inch guns from the H.M.S. Resolution that guard the entrance like silent sentinels. When I enter this massive edifice I am struck by the stories it conveys. The first is of war as reflected in British history, especially World War I. I view a large layout of the battlefields and trenches. Around me are tanks, planes, uniforms, gas masks, and endless articles of war. I take time to read the letters from wives, sweethearts, and family to their loved ones at the front. There is a story of a canceled wedding, which will never take place. Above my head, flying in place, is a tweet (carrier pigeon) headed west.

I always take the lift to the fifth floor and work my way down. Each floor is a page of history. Here is another story as I enter the World War II rooms, with many mixed emotions. The Blitz exhibit is a large dark room representing an air raid shelter. You hear the air

raid siren go off and experience the vibrations of falling bombs with dust all around you. There is a burning building and the cry of a child, before the all clear rings out. I leave that floor with a group of schoolchildren and their teacher and see in their faces the same fear that their grandmothers and grandfathers experienced so many years ago.

It takes both time and courage to visit the Bergen Belsen Holocaust exhibit. This was one of the first concentration camps liberated by the British Army. The sign in front says it all, "This exhibit is *not* recommended for young children." I always stop on every floor to view the paintings and photos of war.

The Imperial War Museum conveys to me the Madness and Futility of War.

Outside again, I slowly walk back to Elephant & Castle. The sunlight still reflects off the trees and a magpie flies by. I remember what London looked like during the war, shattered and broken. Now in the warm bright sunlight it is bustling and alive. I take the Tube (nickname for London Underground) home.

The Tube is the public rapid transit system that serves a large part of greater London. It is the oldest in the world, having opened in 1865.

Marble Arch

The Tube is crowded and tall people have to bend their heads slightly due to the curved ceiling of this Central Line car. I get off at the Marble Arch station listening to the announcement, "Mind the Gap." Once outside, I find Oxford Street filled with hurrying crowds.

This is a busy shopping area with department stores (one of my favorites being Selfridge & Co.), food shops, and specialty stores of every kind. The roadway is filled with the usual double-decker buses traveling through central London. I turn to the right and head up Edgeware Road. I can see Marble Arch, the large nineteenth-century structure designed by John Nash, which was once restricted to royalty but is now open to public passage except on royal holidays.

The crowds have thinned out as I walk up Edgeware. I notice more Middle Eastern shops and small groups of men sitting outside the cafés smoking their water pipes and conversing.

I turn into Church Street and take time to walk through the outdoor market. The stalls are filled with food, jewelry, clothing, and every type of home essential. I pass mothers with their children and old men picking out ties, shirts, hats, also diapers and socks. Teenagers hold up jeans and T-shirts. It's a wonderful, diverse hodgepodge of people.

Again I return to Edgeware walking north. The street now is very quiet. I am surrounded by beautiful old Georgian and Victorian homes.

I have reached my destination, Maida Vale and "Little Venice." Here the street follows a canal that flows through London to Regent's Park and on to Camden Town. Elegant homes overlook the canal, many occupied by famous artists, writers, government officials, members of parliament past and present, and even the business offices of the BBC. I take the footpath that runs along the canal. The water before me is filled with the famous Narrow Boats. Each of these long crafts is beautifully

and colorfully decorated with bunting and balloons. Bright flowers and plants sit atop the deck. Some even have laundry drying on the rails. I have picked this day because it is Boat Festival Day. Little Venice is filled with booths, games, and even puppets, especially Punch and Judy shows. Everyone seems to enjoy living in and on a Narrow Boat. It is a very special community. I watch as a flotilla of boats, led by Father Neptune, proceed, all aglitter, up the canal and on to Camden Town. I know I will return and ride on one of these crafts up the canal.

It is time to leave, so I walk to the Warwick Tube Station and take the Bakerloo Line back to my flat. Home, to where it's warm and bright.

George Rubin

PRINSENGRACHT 263: A MONOLOGUE

Prinsengracht 263. Amsterdam. That was the address of our last home. My memory is seared with the thought, true or not, that my life started and ended there. It was the last place of our threadbare hopes, a hiding place for branded Jews. A stopgap. Forced temporary accommodations. Only until the war ended, we said. This hiding place was full of small, nagging terrors. But not all our time at 263 was spent in deep unease, thanks to Anne.

I was named Peter Van Pels. I was an ordinary Dutch teenager who lived all my short life in Amsterdam. I was a happy kid, more shy than most. I did not have many friends. And being an only child, I was content to be indulged by my parents. I was forced by the Nazis to attend a Jewish school. I wasn't a particularly good student like Anne Frank.

My parents were non-practicing Jews. Our religion was our being immersed in Dutch and Western cosmopolitan culture. Therefore we considered ourselves more Dutch than Jewish. To the German occupiers we were more Jewish than Dutch. That's because all the past woes of the German people were blamed on the Jews. To remove the stigma, the Jewish people were cause for their extermination. From the perspective of the adult residents in our hiding place, much of Europe lived by that agreed-upon lie.

We suffered the privations of all the Dutch people after the Germans took over our country. But we Jews were given "special treatment." Among all the other indignities we suffered, we had to wear a yellow Star of

David with the Dutch word “Jood” written in the middle of the star. The yellow star was sewn on the upper left side of our coats. It was mandatory that it be clearly seen in public at all times. It was another target for abuse.

Before we went into hiding, to “escape” deportation, there must have been a lot of planning, thanks to Mr. Frank and his office staff. They worked very hard and long to bring our hiding place of five rooms into a living space, making it as comfortable for eight people as circumstances allowed. I had nothing to do with the planning. For the safety of the group we did what we were told to do. I was grateful when Mr. Frank gave me a very small room of my own, made smaller by a stair ladder leading to the attic storeroom above. I brought my cat. Mouschi became a source of vexation to the adults, but to Anne he was a source of delight.

Even in our hiding place we lived exposed – another contradiction. The Nazis took away our privacy even while we survived behind closed doors. Our helpers took a bit of our privacy, too, yet they knew how precious it was to us. For example, they knew what we ate and how much, what toothpaste we were using, what brand of cigarettes my father was smoking and how many, etc. We were always on the verge of losing our sense of worth. However, every little act of kindness freely given by our helpers reassured us that we were worthy human beings. I shall not forget our angel, Miep Gies, the “face” of our four Dutch helpers. I was amazed how much Miep carried to our hiding place in those two plus years, all for our survival and at great risk to herself.

During the time in our hiding place Anne befriended me. I do remember that. We talked and we were together often. She read short sections from her diary. I knew then that she was a good writer. I regret that I was too shy to tell her what I thought. If the world could know her writing, I could wish for nothing better.

Someone has said: “Art is to finish that which never got finished or to fix that which never got fixed.” No artist can ever “finish or fix” what happen on August 4, 1944. That was the day we were “liberated” from our hiding place. I knew the life we had been living was at an end when I saw Anne’s diary and all the loose pages of her writing litter the floor at the hands of the Gestapo. We were all stunned by what we witnessed. We stared at the all-too-familiar book and pile of writing paper on the floor, until someone shouted, breaking in on our silent fear, “Start packing, you have five minutes!” I have no memory of events beyond that scene.

In all our privation, isolation and suffering I remember Anne’s smile. Yes, I remember Anne’s smile most of all. It is the one lasting gift she gave to me. I have all eternity to be grateful.

Chris Darlington

HYMENOPTERA, HEADWEAR, AND THE HEREAFTER

A Modern-Day Fairy Tale

Queen Apis the Fourteenth was worried. One of her workers had reported that the developers were there again, barely a year after the township, by the slimmest of margins, had turned them away. Naturally the drones pooh-poohed her worry. But what did drones know? They were lazy, unconcerned, and only interested in one thing. Apis knew whom she could trust. Yet she needed to be absolutely sure, so as not to alarm the whole colony unnecessarily.

Unfortunately she was confined by tradition to her cell – an elaborate one, to be sure, with enough royal jelly to last her for life – in a supremely happy hive. So, with apologies to the messenger, whom she was loath to offend, she sent out two more to confirm the sighting. The moment they crawled back in, Apis knew she had not been misled. The girls were clearly sad, all of their eyes downcast, their wings drooping almost to the floor of the hive.



Developers, according to apian lore passed from queen to queen, were there for one reason: to destroy, reshape, and deface (“beautify,” they called it!) the landscape. Queens Apis the Eleventh and Thirteenth had received reports from nearby townships during their reigns: farms giving way to high-rises, paths to paved roads, meadows and trees to close-cropped lawns, quiet to noise, the scents of nature to exhaust fumes.



And beehives were always the first to go. As if the carefully planted flowers and trees didn't also need pollinating. Such shortsightedness! So typical of the corporate mentality: uproot, build, sell, pocket the money, and move on to the next act of despoliation.

Mr. and Mrs. Honig, who owned and lovingly nurtured Queen Apis's hive, had participated in one township meeting after another to block further residential or commercial development. They didn't want their legacy of farming plowed into the ground forever; and they also loved their bees, the more so because they had been unable to have children. But then, maybe calling it quits was for the best, so that their nephews and nieces wouldn't fight over title to the farm. The bees were aware of their owners' valiant struggle and saw to it that the Honigs' honey jars were never empty.



So far the farm had survived, thanks to the collaboration of other beekeepers, but Apis was afraid that, later if not sooner, their way of life was doomed. Those commercial interests were insatiable – and they had money, whose lure none of the bees understood.

Then the unthinkable happened: Mr. Honig had a massive heart attack. Despite the best efforts of his doctors, the devoted care of his wife, and all the extra honey the bees could make, he died.

The bee colony was silent. Not a buzz was heard for a full twenty-four hours; no bee left or entered the hive. But Apis realized that mourning alone was not enough; she wanted to honor her owners with a substantial gesture. So on the second day after Mr. Honig's death she convened the colony, and was greeted by the

heartwarming sight of more drones than had ever shown up before.

A robin, struck by the unprecedented inactivity of the hive, watched anxiously from a tree.

“My dear children,” Queen Apis began, “we’ve spent many happy summers here, but I fear the good times are over. Now that Mr. Honig is gone, who’s to advocate for us? Can Mrs. Honig continue to run the farm alone? Won’t she be tempted to sell out and retire?”

A mournful buzz arose from the assemblage as the meaning of their queen’s words sank in. “O what shall we do?” they wailed in unison.

Apis knew that her leadership would be tested, and when her worst fears came true she was prepared.



The hive would have to go, and her beloved children would have to find other homes – facing she knew not what obstacles. So she assembled them once more and told of her plan.

“The Honigs fought bravely for us year after year. We owe them our appreciation.” She called on the worker who had first warned her of the invaders’ appearance and directed her to sit at her feet. Next she took an unprecedented step and called for a volunteer drone. All the drones eagerly waved their wings, hoping they’d be called on. What could their queen possibly have in mind that required the service of a drone? Each vied with the others to satisfy her.



Apis was moved to smile at the drones’ willingness to come to the aid of the family, although the ambiguous

meaning of her smile escaped her happy volunteers. After a while she picked one and directed him to sit next to the worker. The buzzing ceased as she held up her wings for silence.

“This is your mission,” she began, addressing the two chosen ones. “It may take time and I don’t want either of you to fail because you’re exhausted. So spell each other when necessary. You must command Mrs. Honig’s attention non-stop.”



“But what shall we say to her?” the drone asked. This was not what he had expected, but still he felt honored.

“It’s a simple message,” Queen Apis answered, “and once she truly hears it, she’ll fill in the details of her own accord. Above all, be persuasive.”

Apis explained, and both her subjects nodded understanding.

She then summoned another worker to inform the robin waiting in the tree as to her intention. With a mixture of sadness and understanding, the robin also nodded his head. That same day he took council with his flock and asked for the perpetual commitment of them and all future generations, for they would eventually be called to duty – for countless years to come.



At the funeral service Mrs. Honig wept bitterly – for her husband, for her farm, which she knew she could not maintain alone, and for her beloved bees. But she too, like Queen Apis, knew that tears alone would not be enough. She must do something to keep her husband’s



memory alive after the shock of his loss had abated, not only in her mind but also in the collective minds of all who had known him.

The headstone on his grave would not suffice; every other grave in the cemetery had one, and they all bore such predictable, unimaginative inscriptions.

But what could she do? She was too tired to think.

Once home, she removed her bonnet and was greeted by an eerie silence. So this is what loneliness felt like! Was she experiencing a taste of the rest of her life? She undressed, lay down, and went to sleep.

The next morning found her somewhat refreshed, but the expanse of unoccupied bed next to her reminded her that her life had changed forever. With a deep sigh she got up, made herself breakfast, and turned her mind to the practical necessities of living. All the flowers left in her living room would not feed her; she needed bread, meat, and milk, among other supplies. So she donned her coat and bonnet and set out. On her way to the market she became aware of a thought buzzing around in her head, but she couldn't make out just what she was thinking. She even found it hard to focus on her shopping.



Silence returned after she removed her street clothes at home, but she couldn't think what to do next. If only she could bring order out of her confusion!

That afternoon she decided to visit the grave and place some of the donated flowers on it. A wind had sprung up and she needed a head cover, but no sooner had she tied her bonnet than the buzzing began anew.

Oh well, she thought, at least it was better than total silence.



As she approached the cemetery, she suddenly stopped in her tracks. Without warning, a plan had materialized in her head. Feeling as if relieved of a heavy load, she resumed her walk with resolute step, brushing away a tickling sensation on her cheek as she went. She deposited the flowers, wiped away more tears – and stopped again. Something else had changed: she no longer heard the buzzing!

Back at the hive brother and sister reported on their mission. “Well done,” said Apis. “Let success be your reward, and don’t fall to arguing whose voice was the more persuasive!” The drone gave the worker’s wing an affectionate squeeze as they promised to be faithful to their queen’s command.



On her way back from the grave, Mrs. Honig wrote a check and handed it to the man in the office. “Give this to the manager and have him call me right away.”

She was barely home when the phone rang.

“Mrs. Honig, this is Chris Everrest, the cemetery manager. I just stopped by the office and Joe gave me your check. That’s an extraordinary gift! I don’t know how to thank you.”

“I’ll tell you,” answered Mrs. Honig. “You know the path that leads to my husband’s grave?” Before he could answer, she added, with breaking voice, “Our grave; it’s mine too, you know.”



“Yes, I do, Mrs. Honig. And I hope it’ll be a long time before you claim your half.”

“That path is pretty bare on both sides, don’t you agree?”

Everrest didn’t answer right away. Was Mrs. Honig unhappy with the way he managed the cemetery? Should he defend his grounds plan, and risk irritating a donor? He disciplined himself and decided not to challenge her.

“I suppose it is.”

“I’m not criticizing the cemetery,” Mrs. Honig went on, as though sensing his anxiety. “I just have an idea, and I’m willing to pay to have it implemented. That’s what the check is for. It’s postdated, in case you didn’t notice.”

Everrest covered the phone while giving a sigh of relief. Then he said, “Anything I can do will be my pleasure. What did you have in mind?”

She told him. After a moment’s thought he said, “Come into the office. Let’s talk.”

That fall a group of gardeners planted a young male holly next to the path, some twenty feet from Mr. Honig’s grave. In due course it produced flowers and attracted bees, which went about gathering their pollen. No one had ever seen so many bees around a single tree. People wondered why and where they came from, and why they seemed uninterested in the other flowers in the cemetery. Mrs. Honig wondered too, but she had an idea

that she was embarrassed to share with her friends, lest they laugh at her.

For shortly after her husband's death Mrs. Honig had indeed sold the farm. The pain of severing the last connection to her old life was eased by the developer's generous offer. On top of that, an acquaintance living two miles away bought the hive intact and relocated it out of harm's way. The bees, from queen to drones, shed sweet tears of gratitude and vowed to follow Mrs. Honig anyplace they could serve her.

Mrs. Honig was at peace and unafraid of death; she had done her duty by her husband and her bees. As fate would have it, though, she lived another ten years, during which the holly grew into a sturdy tree casting a comforting afternoon shade on Mr. Honig's grave.

Inevitably, Mrs. Honig's day came and she was laid to rest next to her husband. That week the gardeners returned to plant a female holly across the path from its predecessor. It too gained stature with the years and produced flowers.

Queen Apis the Twenty-first convened her colony. "Now you know where to take the pollen; you don't have far to go."

Next summer all the queen's workers, ignoring flowers closer to home, commuted daily to the cemetery. Here they shuttled back and forth across the path near the Honigs' grave, carrying pollen from anther to stigma. The result was a spectacular proliferation of red berries in the fall, which fed flocks of robins during the snowy winter that followed.

The birds dropped the seeds in places far and near to germinate. Within the cemetery boundaries the sprouts were cut off, in the course of routine maintenance, as soon as they broke ground. On its outskirts natural forces permitted uncounted numbers to grow. Generation after generation of hollies followed.

The cemetery is a quiet place. Visitors, undistracted by noise, muse as they read headstone inscriptions, noting dates and wondering about the lives and times of the deceased. They admire the plantings. Some are curious about the pair of hollies. One such visitor, meeting another on the path, asked:

“Do you know anything about these trees? They seem to be the only ones in the whole place. They’re nice.”

“Oh, you mean the Honig Hollies,” the stranger replied with a smile.

“What a peculiar name!”

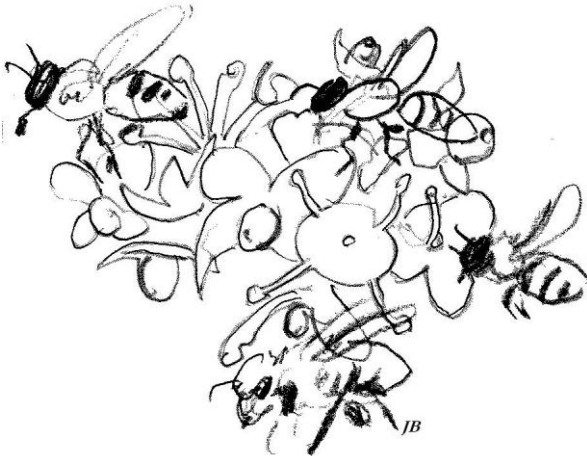
“The Honigs – you see their names on that headstone – made a generous gift to have them planted. They didn’t say anything about having the trees named, but Chris Everrest, the manager, told me that he liked to think of them as the Honig Hollies. In fact, he plans to tag them with their names, Mr. on one side of the path and Mrs. on the other. You should see the birds picking the berries in the winter. It’s a beautiful sight! So much life in a place supposedly reserved for the dead. Then, in

the summer, the bees constantly buzz back and forth. I'm not afraid of them, and I've never heard of anyone being stung; they seem happy just doing the job Nature assigned them."

The birds and the trees were doing their assigned jobs just as conscientiously. No living person remembered the events that brought this team together, but less than a stone's throw away Mr. and Mrs. Honig rested in blissful peace, because they knew.

Herb Heineman

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Far away, grumbling
in August's stubborn heat, it's
cranky old thunder.

Elizabeth Hicks

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*Rumble
of
Thunder*

RF