

# LEAS LIT

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## **KINDNESSES MULTIPLY: A True Story**

**I**n Syria there were very few jobs, so a young boy managed to put money together for passage to the United States. It was reported that you could make money in the automobile industry in the Detroit area, and he found employment there in 1912. Teenagers do grow up, so his next challenge was to find a wife. As was the custom in Syria, you had to have money to buy a wife and to get her to the country where you were living. This young man was sent information on a young lady who sounded appealing to him. He paid the agreed-upon price and sent money to help support her family and his family in Syria for eight years. Finally he had saved enough to go to Syria, met her, and they got married and sailed for the United States. When they reached Ellis Island, she did not meet the health requirements and was turned away. She had to go to France and try again to be accepted into this country. She finally was.

They settled down to raise a family. Five daughters came along and there was little extra money. When Christmas came there was no money for gifts. Unknown to them, there was in the area an organization that helped the poor. A knock at the door brought people with arms full of gifts for the children. The mother let the children have the dolls and toys to play with for a couple of weeks. Then she put them away for next Christmas because she was not sure there would be money in the house for presents then. The charitable organization came through again to make for a happy time.



*Dib Abdalla and his bride, Sara Abraham Abdousch*

The five girls grew up, and three married and had families of their own. The two that didn't marry held good jobs and took care of their parents for as long as their mother and father lived. They never forgot the kindness the organization had extended to their family

when they were young. To this day, these ladies in their eighties make doll clothes for this organization and give financially so that other children will have a nice Christmas. These two remarkable women have no children of their own, but are much loved by their nieces and nephews. The aunts hold big Christmas cookie baking parties with a house full of young people, then send everyone home with cookies, and box up some to be mailed to those living at a distance. They gave \$10,000 to each great-niece and great-nephew to start college funds.

One of the kindest things the two retired aunts did was help a niece who was pregnant but divorced. They told her they would take care of her baby so that she could get back to work. In fact, they took a course on how to take care of a newborn since they had not had this experience. What a wonderful gift this was! These two women helped their sisters' children and later helped great-nieces and great-nephews.

Now in their mid-eighties, these two ladies have made the decision to live in a retirement community where they are thriving on the many activities and volunteer work that enable them to give back to the community.

They love the visits of their nieces and nephews. You can see, there are many ways that kindness can be passed through generations. Some of the nieces and nephews give financially to the Old Newsboys' Fund of Detroit to repay them for what they did for the members of their family years ago.

*Irene Jones*

## THIS FINAL EXTRAVAGANCE

**H**ere I am, living in a retirement community. I'm almost seventy-four and life is slowly ebbing out to its finish. But, no! What's this? This life of mine is in fact experiencing a brand new beginning. Oh, my goodness.

When I came to Medford Leas I looked forward to learning to live by myself. It was going to be just me and my little ginger cat, which only occasionally made comments about things of interest. I wanted emptiness and space. There was a massive jettisoning of paperwork and things without meaning. Quiet solitude was the order of the day.

And then, the week before moving to Medford Leas, I walked down the hall with my friend Millie and heard the choir. "Let us sing together; let us sing together, one and all a joyous song." I peeked my head in the door and promised I'd be seeing them the following week when I was a resident. And for all of us when that week came, it was a new beginning.

The new choir director, with massive piles of strong white hair atop her lovely head, came in for the first time to lead the choir. She is the music director of Temple University Women's Chorus. Medford Leas had lovingly cared for her mother and this was Chris's way of giving back. We are so lucky to have her. She has led us from our simple rounds to old country songs, to wonderful four-part harmony singing out peace and reconciliation and caring. One night we were the "come

along,” as we sang to entice our fellow residents into an important meeting. I looked at us singing so competently and joyously together. We have become a good chorus.

And me. Have I changed? You bet. I’ve gone from hopeful recluse to a friend of the lead tenor, to becoming his fiancée and now his wife. We were married in April 2016. This plain little house daily acquires new signs of life. The porch becomes more joyful with wonderful new plants and pieces of furniture. A garden has sprung up in the back. The walls acquire memories of two families, not just one.

We are both old, he more than I, but our life together is brand spanking new. This is a time of joy, of new beginnings, of new possibilities. Life is good.

*Deedy Roberts*

## AMOUR CULINAIRE

You're all good things on my dish,  
You're the hollandaise on my fish!  
    Caviar on my canapé,  
    Brandy in my frappé!  
You're the glass of wine with my quiche!

You're the butter on my potato!  
You're the salt on my tomato.  
    The twist in my Dubonnet,  
    Cream in my café au lait!  
You're the icing on my gâteau.

You're the spices in my pâté!  
And I drink a toast à ta santé.  
    You're my love culinaire,  
    And I'm walking on air!  
Chérie, you're quite my tasse de thé!

Happy Birthday  
With love.

*John Pere*

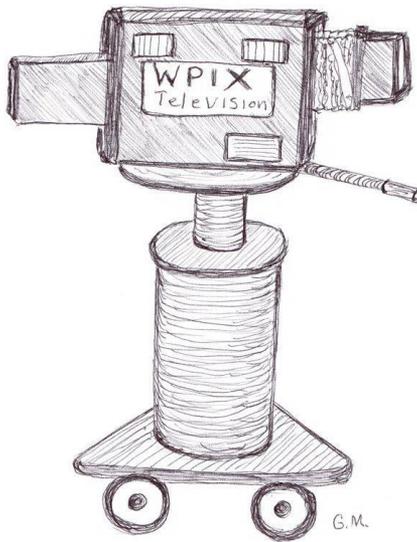
## BEHIND THE TV CAMERA

**W**ith the bright sun lighting up the window shade and the alarm clock playing “It’s Time to Get Up,” it was another day for my TV job. Well, when you are newly married and still in school, any part-time job helps. I dressed quietly and left my wife sleeping. Outside waiting on the sidewalk was Manny, always dapper with his wavy gray hair and his moustache recently trimmed. He smiled at me. I had to thank him for getting me this TV job, even if it was behind the camera.

It was only a short subway ride to Larry and Jean’s apartment. Their large living room on the tenth floor had floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the East River. The morning sun shone in like stage lights onto their large sectional couch and Persian rug. The WPIX television crew was already setting up their equipment. Jean, tall and thin with short blond hair pulled back behind her ears, lipstick and makeup in place, was all ready for the camera. Larry was still being assembled by his dresser and makeup assistant.

I must say, they always had a large breakfast spread for us, and that they were filling us up with a sort of “last meal.” Our hellos to them were perfunctory as we sat down to eat. While we finished our bagels and coffee, the camera director started his count down: “5-4-3-2-1.” Then he raised his fist and said, “Roll.” Larry, with a big smile into the camera lens, started his introduction: “Good morning and welcome to Jean and Larry, your favorite bargain hunters on WPIX. Well, early birds, we have a world of goodies for your home today!” The

camera moved over to Jean, “We know what your home needs, so here are some of the items. First, a new, exceptional rabbit ear antenna for your TV. It will give you the best reception anywhere in New York City. It is easy to install and it costs only \$19.95.” The camera shifted to a stand with the rabbit ears, then back to Larry, “Now look at this wonderful new shrimp deveiner. It will make your life in the kitchen so much easier. It’s only \$9.95,” holding it up high in his hand. “Please watch for the item numbers and the telephone call-in number on the bottom of the screen.” Manny and I finished breakfast as the program went on.



The front of the store on Greene Street in the East Village was stacked with U.S. Postal Mail bags. This was where we worked — doing the work that goes on behind the TV camera. The store was cold and damp. We carried the mailbags inside and dropped them on the coun-

ter. I turned on the lights as Manny turned on the radiator and steam began to hiss out of the floor valve.

“I wonder how many returns we have today.”

“So what else is new?”

It took time to sort out the broken and unused rabbit ears and shrimp deveiners. Manny read out the names and addresses and I put them down in our refund ledger. It was a tedious job. The counter looked like a warehouse for discarded trash.

“I’ll never understand why people buy these things in the first place. It just goes to show you what good sales people can do,” I said as I stacked the discards in the trash bin.

“I agree,” answered Manny. “A good showman can talk you into most anything you don’t need. Seems almost like politics.”

Manny sat down at the desk to write up the invoice and refund checks. Lunch was a needed break for both of us and the local deli had some good sandwiches that went well with a cold drink. I went outside after eating to watch this vibrant city in motion. People coming and going, totally unaware of the unimportant work we had to perform. It was early afternoon when Larry phoned us.

“Hey guys, a messenger is on his way with a list of new orders to send out.” Now it was our turn to begin packing for shipping. The hours passed, boxing, taping, writing labels, and stamping.

I mused out loud, “Well, New Yorkers, here are the greatest things you never needed!” Manny laughed as he stacked the outgoing boxes. Not long after, the U.S. Postal truck pulled up at the door and we helped load the boxes into the truck.

By now the sun was playing hide-and-seek behind the buildings as we locked up the store and headed to the subway.

“Care to stop for a drink?” Manny asked.

“Thanks, but my wife asked me to pick up some things at the grocery for dinner.”

“OK, see you tomorrow, same channel, same program,” he said with a smile.

As I headed toward the subway stairs I thought how commercial television will change us all dramatically in the future, but there would always be suckers out there waiting for the next big deal. The buildings around me seemed to nod in agreement as the sun set behind them.

*George Rubin*

## AMERICAN VALUES

**I**n the time of the Vietnam War, a number of refugees from Vietnam and Laos were resettled in towns in and around Philadelphia. Some families were given apartments in North Philadelphia off Roosevelt Boulevard. It was a rough neighborhood, so most of the traumatized refugees stayed inside their homes, bewildered and afraid. Unlike the families resettled in the suburbs, there were no sponsoring churches looking out for them.

I was working in Center City in the 1980s. Interested in cultures and migrations, I decided to volunteer some weekend time to the local Southeast Asian Coalition. The director assigned me to a family of five living in a North Philly row house and suggested that I be a “big sister” to one of the daughters. I was provided with the phone number and address but nothing more.

That Saturday, unsure of the family’s language skills, I telephoned. A teenager answered. Articulating carefully, I gave my name and said that I would like to meet her family. She listened to me bumble for a few minutes and then said in good English that I could come by that afternoon.

I found a thin, haggard father, a bright-eyed mother, and three young teens who had mastered competent English in the six months they had lived in America. Prior to their resettlement, the family had been surviving on the border of Thailand in refugee camps for years. English lessons, including information on what to expect in American culture, had been haphazardly provided. Once

in Philadelphia, the kids were enrolled in schools by the agency that settled them. However, the son and the younger daughter had soon dropped out of school. I should have “big-sistered” one of them, but I had no skills to help troubled kids. The older daughter had become the navigator and interpreter for the family. I decided that I could offer her opportunities she would not find for herself. Thus I met Vatsana, a sixteen-year-old enrolled at Girls’ High.

We started out with small excursions. I showed her the main library in Philadelphia and encouraged her to use it for her school projects and as a safe refuge from daily stresses. We went to the Academy of Natural Sciences. We took SEPTA trains to other parts of Philadelphia to explore the city.

When I was sixteen, a guidance counselor had encouraged me to attend a six-week summer course at Cornell University. It was for high school students but offered college-level material for which three credits would be earned. Students lived in one dormitory under close supervision. Coming from a family where my parents had interrupted educations, I found that this program provided the impetus to further my education after high school. I thought that perhaps Vatsana could profit from the same encouragement.

Vatsana and I went to the library to research summer school programs. Of course, she had never heard of such a thing but was enthusiastic. We selected a three-week liberal arts course at the main campus of Penn State and she applied. Vatsana’s delighted guidance

counselor promised her a full scholarship for the expenses, as well as real college credits, should she attend.

The acceptance letter came. We all sat in the family's living room and I tried to explain the details of the summer college program to Vatsana's mom, Chanmali. She surprised me.

“When it is time to go, will you take me along for the trip?”

“Of course,” I said. “It's a six-hour drive each way, so we'll stay overnight at the college. Other parents will be around, and we'll be given dinner and breakfast. After we leave, the kids will be well-chaperoned during their program.”

On the travel day, mom Chanmali was as excited as Vatsana. They both were waiting on their porch when I pulled up to their house on North Second Street. Chanmali had her driver's license but she was content to have me drive. She sat next to me and held the Pennsylvania map in her lap. As we traveled west, Chanmali gazed at the farmlands of Pennsylvania. She had many questions. What did they grow? How many months was the growing season? How long had people farmed here?

Once at Penn State, we sat impatiently through lunch. Vatsana and her mother then went off with the groups of parents and students for orientation while I settled for a rest.

The next morning after breakfast, Chanmali and I packed the car for the long drive back from State College to Philadelphia. But this time Chanmali wanted to look

at the Pennsylvania map. Before we left the parking lot, she asked me to show her how to use it. I pointed out how each type of road was marked, and what the symbols stood for, how exits were marked, and how to tell distances between them. She paid close attention. All the way home Chanmali matched the road signs with the map. She even asked me if we could get off the highway and use parallel roads which she had located. Of course we could.

Summer school went fine; Vatsana came home with three college credits and new friends from all over the state. But soon after Vatsana returned to high school for her senior year, she called me, very angry.

“What did you do to my mom?” she yelled.

“What do you mean?” I said.

“She hasn’t been home since we went to summer college! She stops in and does her laundry and off she goes again with our car,” Vatsana said.

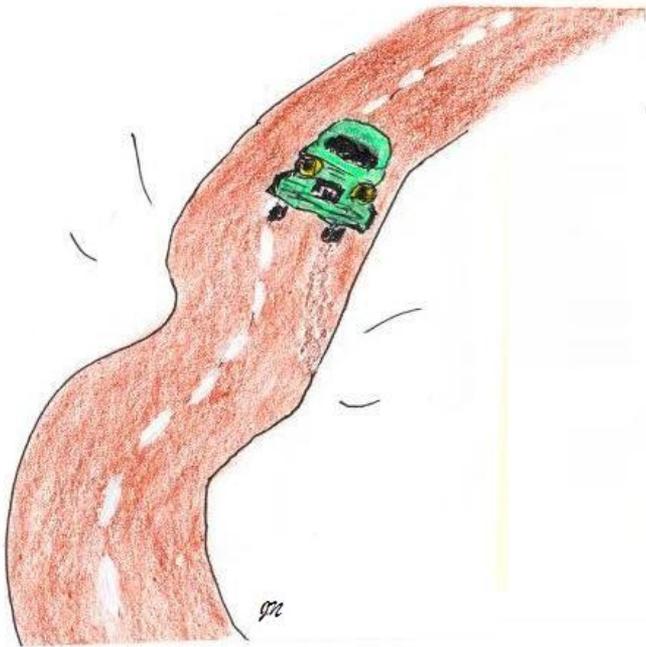
“Where does she go?” I asked.

“That’s the problem. It’s all your fault. You taught her to read a map. She takes the car and goes to Boston. She goes to New York. She went to Florida. Now she’s going to Baltimore.”

“Why?” I asked, stunned.

“It started with visiting relatives. But what she really likes is to go exploring. I want my mom home, Judy.”  
What does acculturation mean? I learned nice, sterile

academic definitions in graduate school. I did in fact help pass on the American value of a college education to Vatsana. I'm delighted about that. Vatsana got bachelor's and master's degrees and works in a school system with troubled kids. As for Chanmali, what culture traits do we unintentionally teach newcomers? Perhaps, much more than the content of language and culture classes, it depends ultimately on the deepest longings and frustrations of each newcomer's heart.



*Names have been changed to protect privacy.*

*Judy Kruger*

## THE DINER

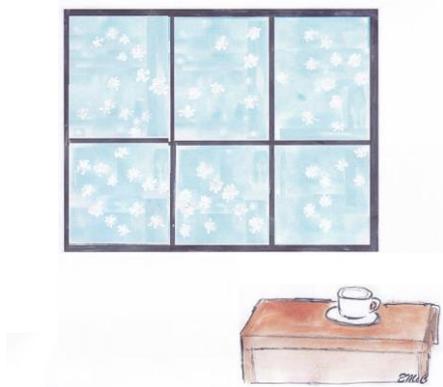
Sitting in a booth  
you listen to the talk.  
The neon bulbs in the window  
burn red and blue.  
The floor is swept.  
The grill is quiet.  
No smoke rising into the exhaust fan.  
The night people wander in and out.  
Some sit quietly sipping their coffee.  
You, the spectator,  
get up and leave behind you  
this warmth of human understanding.  
Open the door and go out into a cold yesterday.  
Life moves on.

*George Rubín*



Cherry blossoms twirled  
at my window. You fooled me,  
April. It was snow.

*Elizabeth W. Hicks*





## THE LADY IN RED

“**T**he Lady in Red, she goes to my head. . . .” I may not have the words quite right, but it makes no difference because my lyrics fit. This woman went to my head.

I saw her now and then at places and events where people dance. She stood near the band letting the music soak into every cell of her being. And she usually wore red, so of course the band would play, “The Lady in Red.” She had no partner, so she’d stand there and sway or dance, transporting herself and observers like me into and through the music.

She always danced alone. Occasionally brave men, and I wasn’t one of them, would approach and ask her to dance. She would smile softly, almost soulfully. Her negative response was so kind, so sweet, that the man asking her walked away mesmerized, even though he had just been rejected. And she’d keep dancing to the music, often with her eyes closed.

I want you to understand, she wasn’t one of the people that get out on the dance floor and want people to look at them. She was pretty much oblivious to the rest of us. She just wanted to dance. The joy on her face as she moved was something that intrigued me, or perhaps I should say, obsessed me. Joy is not an everyday occurrence, and isn’t that sad?

She often reveled in a fast dance and would plant her foot on the beat with abandon, especially when they played “Devil with a Blue Dress.” She might have been wearing red, but she clearly liked being the blue-dressed Devil with a mischievous smile. She’d stick to her square

four by four on the dance floor, feeling the music, making you feel it more than you ever did before.

I'd asked around. Who was she, why was she alone? The answers weren't helpful because no one seemed to know. The vague responses varied. "I think she teaches at the college. . . I saw her at the Finsters' Bar one night, and she was drinking alone. . . . One of the guys in the band says she's a cousin of . . . ."

It got so that I was looking for her all the time. I wanted to share in her joy; I wanted to know her secret. How does one attain such a level of inner happiness? I didn't have a bad life. Good job as the computer guru for my company, a great dog, a latte over the Sunday Times each week, with no one bugging me to do this or that. An occasional date with a pretty woman, nothing gripping. My life was good, but now I was obsessed with learning more about her and this elusive art of finding bliss.

I started constructing theories about her. She was new to the area and missed her home, her family, and . . . but I couldn't go any further with that. She was an alcoholic; someone said they saw her drinking alone in a bar. But that didn't fit. She only sat down when the band took a break and she didn't seem to be drinking alcohol, she didn't appear drunk. Besides, I didn't want to discover that her happiness came out of a bottle. . . . She was a . . . she was. . . I was stumped. I just couldn't figure out who she was.

Then I saw her at a wedding and thought now I'll find out who she is, what her story is all about. Actually I didn't see her until the reception. It was held at the Lan-

tern Pub, not a very fancy place, but the food was plentiful and the band was lively, drawing the young crowd to the floor for dance after dance.

Midway through the reception, as I was coming onto the dance floor, there was a momentary parting of the crowd and there she was. She was wearing another red dress and the band was playing, “I love rock and roll, so put another dime in the jukebox, baby.” She moved and stomped, but stomp is the wrong word. She was graceful, she gyrated, and she waved her arms, shoulders, and hips. It was the utter concentration and joy of being that got to you.

Once again I watched the less timid go up and ask her to dance and be rejected. So I decided on a different tactic. I left my table and went over to dance next to her, about four or five feet in front of her. Close enough that she wouldn’t be able to ignore me, but not close enough to be intimidating. By now the song was an oldie, “Smile.” You know, “Smile, though your heart is aching, Smile, even though it’s breaking, when there are clouds in the sky, you get by. If you Smile through your fear and sorrow, Smile and maybe tomorrow, you’ll see the sun come shining thru for you.”

Was this her secret? Was she smiling through fear and sorrow? I wasn’t going to ask. She deserved her privacy and I realized I may never know the answers to those questions, or all the other questions I had about the Lady in Red. I smiled at her and swayed, giving her respect and space. She smiled back, and at some point I started to feel my own joy in just being.

*Joyce Koch*

## HOLY IS THE MEETINGHOUSE

(patterned on “Holy as the Day Is Spent,” by Carrie  
Newcomer)

Holy is our meetinghouse,  
The walls, the floors, the facing benches,  
And we the people sitting here,  
Dreamers, fidgeters, seekers all.  
Holy is C..., so tiny and bright,  
Her hair wrapped up in a red turban,  
And Little Miss Priss beside her father  
Learning quietude, learning stillness.  
We wait, we wonder, “Will God appear?”  
“Will we hear his voice as we gather here?”

Holy are these floors and aisles  
And the spirits of seekers who walked on them.  
Holy are the great green urns  
Waiting for flowers to mark life’s passage.  
Each bride, each honored spirit adding to the light.  
Holy are the knife marks of little boy  
On the backs of the meeting benches –  
Tolt, Moritz and Cuthbert Hopkins.

Holy are the old windows dripping their aged glass.  
The sky, the clouds and the trees sag  
Under the Impressionist's brush of time.  
The walls receive light patterns, tree shadows dancing  
In their neat vertical frames.  
And through the aged windows  
A bird flies off to some important destination.  
And the old fir droops its sagging branches.  
Last week I saw a hairy bison hanging there.

We sit and sit and sit and sit  
Centering ourselves,  
Controlling our crazy wandering thoughts,  
Reciting Bible verses,  
Singing the hymns of childhood in our heads.  
Let it go. Let it go. Let it go. Let it go.  
Let the room be filled with the Holy Spirit.  
Let the old walls pull in around us,  
Sheltering and full of light.  
Let go. Let go. Let go. Let God.

*Deedy Roberts*

## MUSIC IN THE THIRD REICH: CARL ORFF AND *CARMINA BURANA*

To this day, classical music in the Third Reich is still a controversial topic. For many Germans, the musical tradition, starting with Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Wagner, and the popularity of German musicians, conductors, singers, and artists, formed the basis of cultural life, and was thus used by the Nazi regime for its propaganda purposes. Classical music was fully utilized by the Third Reich as a symbol of German greatness and heroism and consistently used as a propaganda tool. As part of the Nazi philosophy, there was also persecution of musicians of Jewish extraction and those in opposition to the Hitler regime. Although very few classical musicians were true believers in the Nazi creed of racism and extreme nationalism, many acquiesced either out of fear or a desire for career advancement.

Since it would evolve into an article of the length of a monograph to write about the classical musicians and their music in the Third Reich, the comments here will be restricted to Carl Orff and his scenic cantata *Carmina Burana*, particularly with respect to its performance by the Leas MusiCast on February 13, 2016, with the Berlin Philharmonic, under Sir Simon Rattle.

The composer Carl Orff still remains an enigma in the musical history of Nazi Germany and the postwar period. He was born in 1895, into an upper-class Munich family, and by the late 1920s he had become a significant figure in the modernist musical oasis known as The

League for Contemporary Music in Munich, which was founded in 1927 to present works by contemporary composers, such as Hindemith, Bartok, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and others. As a young composer, he also collaborated briefly with the leftist poet and writer Bertolt Brecht, the Jewish composer Kurt Weill, and the Jewish writer Franz Werfel, who were all to achieve great fame.

When the Nazis came to power, Orff, who was a quarter Jewish, felt very insecure and did not, either overtly or covertly, resist Nazi policies. By the mid-1930s he showed his loyalty to the regime by composing music for schools and by developing his own theories on music pedagogy. (I myself was trained by the Orff method.) Orff tried diligently to have his music policies integrated into the Hitler Jugend (Hitler Youth) and rejected his connections with leftist and modernist artists, thus emphasizing his strong appreciation of German folk music and customs.

Despite this, during the Nazi era, he was attacked by the *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* (Fighting League for German Culture, KfdK) as a “cultural Bolshevist.” Orff tried to redeem his reputation as a composer and loyalist by the controversial premiere of *Carmina Burana* in 1937. Despite his effort, the work initially received a stinging critique by the Nazi musicologists. Subsequently, through Orff’s contacts with high-ranking Nazi figures, the music was gradually deemed acceptable and became very popular. The very exotic sounds, sexual themes, and elemental melodies and rhythms demonstrated a kind of power that, together with its exquisite sense of beauty, ensured the work’s lasting popularity.

Nevertheless, Orff's place in music history remains controversial. He was placed on a black list for denazification, but with the help of an American friend he was able to clear his name, through fabricating a story of his involvement in the *Weisse Rose* (White Rose), the Munich resistance group of students and young intellectuals. (It is known that Orff never belonged to this group and had no affiliation with any other resistance organization.) After the war, Orff also tried to present *Carmina Burana* as anti-Nazi, but its history had been too compromised. His overall postwar stature was also reduced by his personal history of catering to Nazi demands and whims. Orff's attempted denial of his collaboration with the Nazi regime was not atypical of German intellectuals.

*Carmina Burana* is designated as a scenic cantata, based on 24 poems from the 11th and 12th centuries, later organized in Latin verse, with some parts in Middle High German and Old Provençal, and contains 25 clearly designed movements in total. Familiar topics, such as fickleness of fortune and wealth, the changing nature of life, our joy in the return of spring, and the pleasures and dangers of gluttony, drinking, gambling, and lust – an uninterrupted power of life – add to the constant popularity of this work, which began in the Third Reich, spread worldwide in the 1960s, and continues today, including being used as movie themes.

For your personal enrichment, and the answer to the question of music in politics, the penetrating and elucidating monograph by Michael H. Kater, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and their Music in the Third Reich*, Oxford University Press, 1997, is highly recommended. It is considered by many contemporary critics and music profes-

sionals to be the first, and most distinguished, record of musicians and music performers during the Third Reich and their at times forced cooperation or degree of collaboration with a hated regime for the purpose of survival.

*Hannelore Hahn*

## HAPPILY RETIRED

CRUNCH – CRUNCH – CRUNCH  
Hearing little acorns pop under my feet,  
treading with intention  
after a serendipitous step's revelation,  
Recapturing childhood's discoveries.

RUSTLE – RUSTLE – RUSTLE  
Shuffling through dry leaves, daring to jump on a pile.  
I might pocket pleasing treasures  
if I clear away some cover,  
a shell, a charm, a thistle.



TROMP – TROMP – TROMP  
Poking around in the woods, learning the sights,  
collecting pinecones and fallen boughs,  
to bring the outdoors in  
with my cozy slippers and instant fire.

PIDDLE – PIDDLE – PIDDLE

How wondrous to trade a lifetime's serious work  
for opportunistic enjoyments and unassigned books.

To have the time and luxury  
to follow that which beckons.

CREATE – CREATE – CREATE

To draw and color in unfamiliar ways.  
Maybe I'll press dried flowers tomorrow,  
or just write about them.

SPLASH – SPLASH – SPLASH

Kicking our heels in the pool last summer,  
ruffling the surface of the water and splattering friends.  
My pool noodle slipped away and I got a noseful.

DANCE – DANCE – DANCE

I step lightly homeward swinging my fanny pack,  
wait while a late-season butterfly  
considers alighting on my arm.  
I try yoga and line dance, experiencing my body anew.

SQUISH – SQUISH – SQUISH

Surprised by a November snow,  
I marvel at the country whiteness.  
No risky driving awaits me; I've bought good boots.  
I make tracks on the snowy grass before it has thawed.

LIGHT – LIGHT – LIGHT

Why, here's a snowball in my mitten, what fun!  
My arms lift like wings; could snow angels be coming?  
Come out to play; don't wait for your retirement!

*Joyce Linda Sichel*

## THE POWER OF CARPOOLS

When I started my new job I was married, had two small daughters, and lived in a rented house in Pennsauken, New Jersey. We had one car. On the days my wife needed the car, I took the bus to downtown Camden. In due time our son was born and we bought a house in Mt. Laurel.

A good friend of ours approached us and invited me to join his carpool, which consisted of another man and at a later time a fourth person. I gladly accepted the invitation. We all worked for the same company and we did not live too far from each other. Not only did it ease the transportation problem for my wife, but it also provided good company and conversation on the rides to and from work. This arrangement worked beautifully for twenty years. During that time we acquired a second car, but I stayed in the carpool for its convenience and its economic advantage and, of course, for the good rapport we had with each other.

Then a change occurred. In order to provide good health practices to its employees, the company opened a small fitness center on the premises for the use of its staff. It was well equipped with aerobic and muscle building machines. A shower room was also included. The idea was that employees would participate in a program suggested by the resident trainer, either after work or during working hours, causing one to stay longer to make up any lost time. I had no intention of joining that program. I had not done any exercise in over forty years

and I was not going to start at that time. Little did I know what was in store for me.

Both of my carpool buddies decided to join the fitness program sometime during the day and leave for home one hour later than before. Where did that leave me? I pondered my options and after thinking about this situation, I decided to stay with the carpool and reluctantly opted for joining the fitness center. I checked with my superior on the mechanics of being absent from work for an hour each day. We came to the conclusion that a 2 o'clock session would be manageable. So I bought gym clothes and found a gym bag and reported to the fitness center.

The trainer started me on warm-up routines and some light exercises. This went on for a few weeks and then the exercises became more taxing. After a few weeks of daily attendance I began to like what I was doing there. I grew into that program and felt comfortable doing it. I really started to enjoy the routine. After participating for six months, I was handed a T-shirt as a reward. With continuing participation, I later earned a sweatshirt and then an exercise suit. And through all this, the carpool was running smoothly, including the hour-later time of our trip home.

But changes were in the offing. Our family moved to Medford Lakes. This was too far for the carpool to pick me up. So I had to travel to work by myself every day. This was my golden opportunity to quit doing exercise in the fitness center and be home an hour earlier. But I did not even consider it. By now I liked exercising. It made me feel good. So I continued the daily ex-

ercise routine. Later, when I retired, I decided to continue with the program at a local gym and later yet in the Medford Leas Fitness Center. There was no question in my mind about this.

To this day I am still in an exercise program and I hope to continue it for a long time to come. After all, it has now been 36 years since my carpool forced me to join a fitness center. So why discontinue a good thing?

*Stefan Frank*

## DON'T SMILE UNTIL CHRISTMAS

This was the sage advice I was given by more than one seasoned teacher when I began my teaching career at Thomas Junior High School in South Philly in 1972. I couldn't imagine how I could possibly follow those instructions. I'm generally a happy person and love to laugh. How would I accomplish such a task? Frankly, in my first year I didn't even try. I knew I needed a lot of work on my disciplinary skills, but I wasn't sure what would work for me.



I began looking at the other teachers and their techniques. One history teacher, Mr Petry, had a glare which he used on students that seemed successful. I found out that at the end of the year, he required all his

classes to make Meanest Teacher of the Year awards and give them to him. They became very creative and made them in wood shop, metal shop or art class. At the start of every school year he told his new students that his reputation was grossly exaggerated, all the while hanging up his awards from the previous year. They also tried to crash his detentions, not misbehaving to get a detention, but showing up for detention even if they did not have one.

I observed Mr. Petry for several years while I honed my skills. I perfected my glare, even learning to roll my eyes without really knowing I was doing it. My main goal was not to be strict but to have order in my classrooms so that I could teach.

This plan worked pretty well, and even I was not prepared for how well. One afternoon I was reading a story to one eighth-grade class. Apparently, one student had put his head down on the desk and fallen asleep, and I hadn't noticed it. The person in front of him turned around and banged a fist on the desk, causing the sleeping student to pop up and look around as if he wasn't sure where he was. It struck me funny, and I laughed. The class first looked at me startled. And then all 30 eighth-grade students applauded. I was taken aback when I realized that not only were they not used to seeing me smile but had never actually seen me laugh.

I taught for thirty years in the Philadelphia School System, and in order to teach in better schools I moved around quite a bit. I taught in a total of eleven schools, and I had to prove myself all over again in each one since I was an unknown when I arrived. Even when I

became an English Department Head and arrived in a new school in that exalted position, I still had to establish classroom decorum wherever I went. There were times and places when I felt free to laugh and joke with the students, but I never lost my ability to corral a particularly recalcitrant bunch when necessary. Now that I'm retired, I can smile whenever I want.

*Doris Kabley*

## FOR GRACIE LANE

Her birthday falls on Christmas Eve  
Does she get twice the gifts or half?  
Baby Jesus had this quandary  
It drove his parents nearly daft  
They, sadly, gave him less  
The Magi gave him myrrh

Merry Birthday!

*Charles Perrone*

## WRITING FOR *LEAS LIT*

Resident and staff writers are encouraged to submit original manuscripts at any time for publication in *Leas Lit*. Each issue carries a deadline for submission. Manuscripts received later will be processed for the next one. There is no limit to the number of pieces an author may submit. However, no more than two by the same author, one in prose and one in poetry, can be included in any one issue. Additional works judged acceptable will be held over for the next one.

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