

LEAS LIT

The Medford Leas Literary Journal



Medford Leas Residents Association
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*Everyone has a special story to tell. But not everyone will write it down. Asterisks indicate stories that were dictated by the storyteller to Judy Kruger. If you have a great story and can't write it for whatever reason, contact Judy for more information.

BARNEY

When I was very young, our family consisted of Mom, Dad, my slightly older brother (by two years) John, myself, my kid sister (by eight years) Mary, and our perennial Boston terrier dog. Unexpectedly, our family suddenly blossomed by two unrelated grandparents. Mom's father, Day-Day died and Nana Day moved in with us; then Dad's mother died and Gramp Dennen also moved in. Nana Day was a sweet, fragile old lady who kept to her room and insisted on eating her dinners there, never realizing she was creating extra work for Mom by not joining us at the table; she wanted us to have dinner as a family, that is, without her.

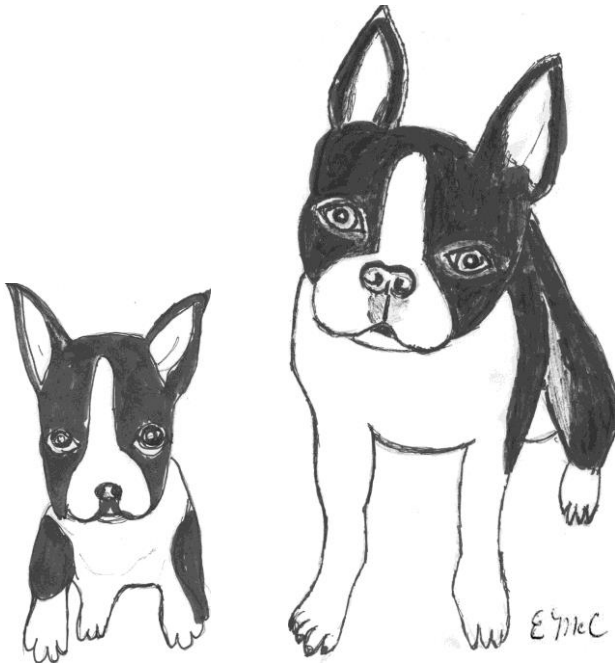
Gramp, on the other hand, was the congenial type who spent his time in his wicker rocker chair, reading Zane Grey paperback western novels and smoking his pipe or strolling around the neighborhood. If it was a pleasant day, he would sit on a lawn chair in the back yard and within five minutes a neighbor's dog would trot up to Gramp. He would pet the dog a few strokes, mumble a few words and then ignore him. The dog would stretch out beside him. Shortly, a second dog would arrive and go through the same routine. Then a third. And a fourth. In no time at all, Gramp had six or eight dogs lying quietly about him. The strange aspect to the array of dogs is that some of these dogs would snarl and avoid one another when they met in the neighborhood, but they seemed friendly when they lay side-by-side next to Gramp. When Gramp rose to come into the house, they always peacefully dispersed. Presumably, his

magic touch with dogs was an outgrowth of his early years when he bred, raised, trained and sold Boston terriers. But that was in a time before John, Mary and I were around.

Dad was not a parent who spent a great deal of time with his children; he was concentrating on his career. But shortly after the two grandparents settled in with us, he came home and handed me two tickets with a comment that he thought I might enjoy the event with a friend. They were tickets to the Annual Worcester Dog Show, which was a major weeklong event held at the Worcester Auditorium every year. So I called my buddy, Eddy Titus, and we planned on going on Saturday. We entered the auditorium and I was stunned to see a large photograph of my grandfather with the legend stating that this year's exhibit was dedicated to Barney Dennen in recognition of his many years as a breeder of Boston Terriers. First, I did not know that Gramp was respected as a breeder, and second, I had never heard him called "Barney."

Eddy and I wandered among the dogs and their owners preparing for exhibit until we came to the area where the terriers were concentrated. Here, of course, I was most comfortable. And I immediately began petting a Boston terrier, much like ours at home. Naturally, the owner immediately chastised me, telling me that the dogs should never be petted because they must be kept calm before being shown. I apologized and told him we had a terrier at home. He asked my name. When I told him, he asked if I was related to Barney Dennen. I said, "Yes, he's my grandfather and he lives with us." Well, it was like a dam burst. Every-

one welcomed us and made a fuss over us. Someone even gave me a dog's Blue Ribbon and asked me to give it to Barney.



When I reached home, full of excitement, I had a new perspective on “Barney.” He wasn’t just an old man sitting in his rocker, reading Zane Grey westerns. I secretly gave him his Blue Ribbon, which he tucked away in a bureau drawer. I asked Mom why Dad did not take Gramp to the dog show and she suggested I not talk about it.

Several years later, our country was deeply involved in WWII. My brother graduated from high school, immediately joined the Army, and fought in France. Barney became bedridden as his health

deteriorated. I graduated from high school on a Sunday and the next day enlisted in the Navy. I wound up as a 17-year-old radarman on a Navy troopship in the Pacific. Mom kept busy writing John and me saying that she was praying that we could get home before Gramp died. She quoted the doctor as saying that he felt the only thing keeping Gramp alive was his insistence that he would not die until John walked in the door, safe at home.

The war ended. John was assigned to occupation duty in Czechoslovakia. Barney continued to hang on by sheer willpower and Mom's tender care. And I continued to sail the blue Pacific. Finally John came home. Our home exploded. And then there was dead silence. Because there was the Barney of old. Fully dressed. Coming down the stairs. Tears streaming down his cheeks. He hugged John and said, "Now I can die." Dad and John helped him back up the stairs and into his bed. John stayed with him a while.

Two days later Barney died.

I have often hoped that Mom found the dog's Blue Ribbon and pinned it on him in his casket. I never asked her if she did.

Walt Dennen

LIGHTNING: A MYTHIC TALE

This is a story telling the true source of lightning. The gods' truth!

Shamash was the immortal Sun God of the land of Uruk of the great Assyro-Babylonian civilization. Things were going along pretty good for being a god, even with all the requests he couldn't fulfill or being blamed for events of which he had no knowledge. However, one day, in a dreadful moment of short term memory loss, he forgot he was immortal. A panic attack overcame him. Who would take care of him in his old age? He reasoned that the only person capable of the care he would need would be a loving daughter. Therefore, he created a beautiful woman and called her Kachiakatie. He created her immortal like himself. That's what gods do.

To show his great pleasure in his daughter Shamash planned to give Kachiakatie the finest necklace of gold and lapis lazuli. His plan had one flaw. She failed to take care of him. She certainly was not the loving daughter he had hoped for. Kachiakatie loved traveling around the world to distant places, getting away from her father. This world traveler also changed her costume periodically – alternately svelte or corpulent – disguising herself, hoping to hide from Shamash. For example, in the old days her garments befitted a place in a castle, a palace garden or a vender of priceless goods along the Silk Road. Nowadays (remember, she is immortal) one would see her wearing a bikini on the French Riviera, a burka in the Middle East, a sari in India, a grass skirt in Polynesia, etc. Shamash was not happy.

Kachiakatie was quite clever. But not clever enough to fool Shamash. He discovered she was an inveterate liar. There's nothing worse than an immortal, inveterate liar. This predicament called for drastic measures.

Shamash called a session of his council of five lesser gods. With much bowing and many apologies he told them about the disobedient daughter he had created. To control Kachiakatie and supposedly stop her lying, the council demanded an all-powerful necklace be made. His council of gods commanded the necklace must be made of strands of the finest and purest hair of one thousand toddlers (the Innocents) from around the world. Shamash asked how was he to collect the hair? His council of five gods shrugged their shoulders, indicating a total lack of empathy, typical of lesser gods.

The only way Shamash could bring together a thousand toddlers from around the world, he reasoned, was by boat. He commanded that a boat be constructed one acre square, six decks high. Yes, a square boat. For the curious this boat is described in the ancient poem, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, written about 2700 B.C.E. It tells a story about Uruk and the exploits of one of its mighty kings Gilgamesh and his beloved friend Enkidu.

A floating boat needs water. Lots of water. Shamash caused a Great Flood in order to float the boat to collect the toddlers. Because Ocean is so vast, this Great Flood didn't seem to bother most people. The flood came and the boat sailed. She went around the world, collecting toddlers. Shamash provided one hundred humans to care for the children. He did this because he

knew the immortal gods are not known for their parenting skills.

Tubboat (the name the toddlers christened the boat) gathered up the two-year-old ancestors of the Gaelic, Celtic, Nordic, Slavic, Bantu, Semitic, Indic, Han, Polynesian, Inuit, Mayan and Aztec peoples, to name a few. This was the first and last time the peoples of the Earth came together in peace, ironically, to stifle a wayward daughter.

A strand of hair, whether red, blond, brown, black, etc. was taken from each toddler. This finest and purest hair was woven into a beautiful necklace for Kachiakatie. It was far more beautiful than a gold and lapis lazuli necklace. Everyone was happy. Shamash was the happiest of all. Before the necklace was presented to Kachiakatie, the toddlers were returned to their mothers and fathers. Because the parents did not miss their children, no compensation was offered for their hair.

Shamash ordered Kachiakatie, recently returned from one of her world travels, to his temple in Uruk. With much mumbo-jumbo – with lights, scantily dressed dancing girls and music performed by a steel pan band – he placed the one-thousand-strand-of-the-finest-and-purest-hair-of-toddlers necklace around her neck. Because of its power, as hard as she tries, even today, she can not take it off. As if that weren't bad enough for immortal Kachiakatie, the necklace has a large key attached. The key is made of a degraded base metal and is named Lionkey. When she is apt to stray from Shamash's temple or tell some story beyond the truth, the Lionkey turns bright gold and emits bursts of sharp, jagged light which can be seen for miles. All the people on



Earth call this phenomenon lightning. That's what humans do.

Kachiakatie continues her deceptions, with attempted escapes and numerous disguises with Lionkey's inevitable magnificent displays (social sensibility precludes a discussion of the mythic origin of thunder, lightning's companion). To this day the people of the Earth remain fascinated with Kachiakatie, fascinated with those flashes of light in the sky. Up in their palatial sky resort,

the gods raise their wine glasses, saluting their success. They sing with gusto: "All Hail, All Hail, All Hail Fascination!"

Whatever it is, it's time to say, Kachiakatie and the flashing Lionkey "live happily ever after."

Chris Darlington

AN EARLY LESSON

As a preschooler, I was entrusted with what I thought was a very adult errand. My mother's instructions were that I was to take the envelope, which contained a note and a ten dollar bill, to the corner grocery store. I was then to give it to Mr. Sam, who would supply me with the necessary items and change.

When I returned home a while later, my mother searched the bag I gave her, counted the change, read the list, and asked me where the hamburger was. By this time I was becoming fidgety when I answered "I don't know, mommy." She went through the same steps once again, becoming angrier as she checked each item. "Are you **sure** you don't know what happened to the hamburger?" Once again came the reply: "Uh, no mommy."

So, off we went to Sam's grocery store. With me in one hand and the grocery bag in the other she was in the process of working herself into quite a state. She ranted about what a dishonest man Sam was, and how could he even think to cheat her – such a good customer? Well, by this time we were nearly at Sam's door; my knees felt like jelly and my hand hurt from being squeezed so tightly. Just steps before we entered the store, I wrenched my hand free of hers and turned on the waterworks.

"Mommy," I sobbed, "will you **promise** not to punish me if I tell you what happened to the hamburger? Please? Please?" "All right she said – what did you do?" "Well, you see, uh, uh, well, when I came out of the store . . ." "Go on," she urged. "Well, there were these poor, hungry little cats . . ."

I waited and waited for the barrage that never came. Suddenly, she smiled and said, “It’s good that you fed those poor, hungry, little cats. But what you didn’t know was that I was going to use that hamburger for our family dinner tonight.” I felt so terrible then that I almost wished she had punished me instead.



“I think I have a solution,” she said. “From now on, when you go to Sam’s grocery store on an errand for me, take some of the coins out of your piggy bank so you can buy a can of cat food in case you should meet up with any of your ‘friends’ again. It will be much better for the cats and for us, too.”

Well, that event happened over 70 years ago, and I am **still** feeding (indoor) cats. I do, however, make sure that I have enough hamburger in the house.

Joanne Thomas

MACHINES DON'T LIE

My mother, Rosl, as a young woman of 26 years, gave birth to me, a healthy boy. I was her second child. Everyone was very happy about this healthy boy, although some considered my arms and legs too thin and compared me to a frog, which was not appreciated by the proud parents. Nevertheless I grew up as a usually happy and smiling child. I entered school, came to the United States, more schooling, jobs, World War II, army service, more jobs, marriage and children followed in logical order. I was now in my late forties. I was of medium height; I had very dark hair with a sprinkling of gray. I was slightly ambidextrous but also slightly uncoordinated, especially when I needed to do fine tool work or catch a fly ball. Then I developed back pains. I visited a chiropractor. This doctor had very advanced ideas. He tested me and frowned. He tested me again, including a test with a machine. He turned to me and asked, "Have you ever been left-handed?" I was surprised and vehemently denied ever having been left-handed.

I went home to my family and told them about the allegation. Everybody laughed about it. They had never heard of anything like that. A few days later my mother called on the telephone. My wife answered and in the course of conversation mentioned the chiropractor's remarks. The phone went silent for a minute. "This is a story I cannot tell over the phone," said mother. She then arranged a get-together. The family was intrigued and puzzled. What was the mystery? At the meeting, mother told the whole story of what had happened and how she had meekly surrendered to the grandmothers and turned her child from left-handedness to a form of

right-handedness. When I was an infant, it was noted that when some object caught my eye, I reached for it with my left hand. The grandmothers were appalled. A left-handed boy was a disgrace to the family! What could be done about it? Well, they came up with an ingenious plan. Whenever mother carried me in her arms, it should be done in such a way that my left arm was immobilized. Pressing the boy's arm against her breast made it impossible for the child to move it. This program went on for quite a while. Although mother herself was left-handed, she let the grandmothers persuade her to follow the proposed routine. When she told the story, she was embarrassed by her role in this endeavor. Consequently I grew up right-handed having no idea of the intrusion affecting my body. Could I perhaps have been more ambitious, more studious, more outgoing or more self-reliant without that change? Who knows?

When they heard this story, my family was surprised and somewhat upset. How could this have happened to the head of the family? It was unheard of! They eventually absorbed the information and often used it as a conversation topic at family get-togethers.

I returned to the chiropractor for more treatments and repeated my mother's story to him. He remarked, "See, my machine was correct, it never lies." This is a true story...it *proved that machines don't lie*.

Stefan Frank
as told to Judy Kruger

ROOM SERVICE

The clock loudly announces 8 am. We shower and dress. Downstairs, breakfast is waiting on the table. Toast and jam followed by hot coffee. Before long a black cab stops at the front door. With hugs and goodbyes to our hosts, we're off to the Morden Tube Station. After arriving in central London at Euston Station, we board the Inter-City train to Birmingham. It's quite sunny and warm when we alight at Birmingham New Station. After a short taxi ride we enter the oval at Woodbrooke.



Let me tell you a little about Woodbrooke. It has been a Quaker study center since 1903 and continues to provide a place for theological studies. Formerly this Georgian estate was the home of George Cadbury, the chocolate manufacturer. It is situated in the Selly Oak suburb and surrounded by other colleges, with the University of Birmingham nearby. All of these institutions find Woodbrooke, with its enormous library – really two

large libraries – useful. The general library is a theological collection with significant sections on peace, conflict resolution, environmental issues, and gender and inter-faith studies. Alongside sits the Quaker library with its research on antislavery and economic justice, among other issues, all in magnificent mahogany bookcases. This is the second largest Quaker library in Europe and one of the major world libraries of Quakerism, and the conference rooms are a focal point for education and postcollege studies.

On our arrival we are greeted by the staff. We are to be working here as “FIRs” (Friends in Residence). Our accommodations overlook the beautiful garden and maze. The garden has over 200 trees and shrubs. In the Chinese garden all of the plantings are from China, including a large dawn redwood. Then, it’s on to indoctrination. We are introduced to the head librarian, who explains our duties as to when to close the library to research students and where and when we can leave it open to residents. Then on to the head chef, who explains that the lunch is a two-course, sit-down meal in the dining room. As FIRs we act as hosts to all the guests at meals, including opening grace and closing announcements. Other administrative staff members explain our duties in specific detail. I must say we have a busy schedule ahead. Conferences are using the facilities constantly. We have to be sure they have the right rooms, chairs, and at times an afternoon tea service. When guests arrive for an overnight or longer stay – there are about 100 rooms – we have to see to their luggage and be sure they have a badge and key for their room.

In the evening with the rush of the day finished,

we gather for Epilogue. This is a short quiet period that may include poetry, music, and silent worship. It may be the end of the day for our guests, who will have a cup of tea and biscuits (cookies) before bed, but we FIRs have to be sure that every conference room/office and front door are locked, drapes in many rooms closed, and all lights out.

Tomorrow is another day and we start all over again. Time to learn the alarm system, which is complicated, but I know we will get the hang of it. We soon find out that we are the backbone of the community. The permanent staff goes home at the end of each day but we FIRs are ever present, making sure that every guest has a badge, an alarm clock, phone cards, access to email, telephone, etc. Most of all, they need our emotional support and a friendly smile.

Every night the FIR on duty has an active mobile (cell) phone by his or her bed in case of emergency. One night after midnight our mobile rings. A student cannot find her key to get back into the house. With a flip of the coin we decide who will put on a robe and go down to open the front door. Then, gently of course, the student is admonished to *always* carry her key.

Every few days a new conference group arrives and participants have to be directed to their appropriate rooms. After a few hours of this you feel like the “lollipop man/women” (known in the U.S. as a school crossing guard) directing people every which way. The quiet hush that falls at the end of the day is wonderful.

Occasionally our job as FIRs takes on a serious note. One Friday evening an Irish Quaker is leading a discussion group when he becomes quite ill – sick

enough that we need to call for medical help and an ambulance to take him to the hospital. His wife is called and has to drive down even though she is pregnant and expecting in less than a month. We later learn that after a short stay they both were able to return home. We breathe a sigh of relief.

After six weeks it's time to leave. We feel we've learned a lot about running a hotel, with room service included. It's been busy and at times exhausting and exasperating, but also rewarding and refreshing. You can't forget the beautiful people you've met and the rewarding reminder of other people's lives. They spoke every language and were from every culture. The "Woodbrooke experience" has made loving your neighbor a reality.

George Rubin

THREE ÉMIGRÉ WRITERS AND THEIR LIVES

As Nietzsche said, “One becomes what one is.” Hence one cannot escape the earliest impressions and memories of one’s life. I have been re-reading some works of Franz Werfel, Stefan Zweig, and Thomas Mann which had made a deep impression and shaped my world view. All three authors were born at the end of the 19th century and began their literary careers during the period after the First World War and the beginning of the Third Reich. Each one was persecuted by the Nazi regime, and his works were banished.

Franz Werfel (1890-1945) was born in comfortable circumstances in Prague, but his family was Jewish. He befriended other Jewish writers, such as Max Brod and Franz Kafka, and enjoyed early critical success. He also lived in Leipzig, where he had contact with German intellectuals Martin Buber, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Else Lasker-Schueler. He wrote poetry and plays on topics of mythology and religiosity, incorporating parables and allusions to the occult.

Serving in the Austrian Military Press Bureau (WWI) in Vienna, he met his wife, Alma Mahler, widow of Gustav Mahler (a fascinating person in her own right). Subsequently they both had to flee for their lives. The Nazis burned Werfel’s books, and after the Anschluss in 1938, he and his wife went to the south of France. Following the invasion and occupation of France they were rescued by the Emergency Rescue Committee in Marseilles, directed by Varian Fry, a great American hero. They crossed the Pyrenees on foot and boarded a ship for New York, as did other emigrants such as Thomas

Mann, Max Reinhardt, and Erich Wolfgang Korngold, to find refuge in the United States. Werfel lived in California, where he died in 1945.

His most important works are *Verdi: Roman der Oper*, *Jesus and the Carrion Path* (poetry), and the play *Juarez and Maximilian*. His most popular novel, *The Song of Bernadette*, and his final play, *Jacobowsky and the Colonel*, were both made into movies.

Stefan Zweig (1881-1941) as a person was very complicated, intriguing, and startling; and his work in part reflected this. He is probably most famous for his death. He and his second wife went into the bedroom of their rented house in Petropolis, Brazil, and took a large dose of barbiturates. When the news of their suicide broke, it made world news. President Franklin Roosevelt attributed their deaths to “the problems of the exile for conscience’s sake.” Zweig had led a very restless and itinerant life (from Vienna to Berlin, to Brussels, to Switzerland, United States, and Brazil) and was proud that his wealth had permitted him to lead his existence as he wished until the end.

If one wants to understand his change from a functionary in the Archive Office in Vienna after World War I to an idealistic pacifist, one should read his partly autobiographic *Die Welt von Gestern* (*The World of Yesterday*), which depicts his struggle to evade the Second World War. His short stories are famous for their content of humiliation, sense of strong emotion, intensity of sexual temptation, and the free play of dreams and reality. His sense of morality is somewhat dated, but it gives us an understanding of his characters and their turmoil. His characters are powerless in their course of action and are

defeated by their own weakness. *Compulsion*, one of his wartime novellas, mirrors patterns in his life and shows his ability to create characters that are homeless wanderers and individualists, never finding rest wherever they are.

Stefan Zweig's popularity in this country is on the upswing since two new biographies have appeared, and the very popular movie *Grand Budapest Hotel* is based on his life.

Thomas Mann (1875-1955), whom many consider the greatest German writer, was born into a family of wealth and stability in northern Germany. His move to Munich and his marriage to Katharine Pringsheim, daughter of a prominent, culturally influential Jewish family in Munich, brought him into the Munich literary scene and was the beginning of his renown.

During the First World War, he supported Kaiser Wilhelm II's conservatism and attacked liberalism, but in 1923, he called upon German intellectuals to support the new Weimar Republic. He had given a lecture in 1922 that developed his defense of the Republic based on his readings of German romanticism and Walt Whitman. This placed him on the liberal left with democratic principles.

By 1930, Mann had lectured in Berlin, appealing to reason and denouncing National Socialism. His encouragement of resistance by the working class, direct attacks upon the Nazis, and earlier interpretations of Wagner made him persona non grata. As he lectured abroad, he decided – with the encouragement of his son, Klaus – not to return to Germany, and settled in Switzerland.

The Nazi regime formally expatriated Thomas Mann and his family in 1936, and he continued his resistance. He became an American citizen in 1940 and with his family settled in Santa Monica, California. During the Second World War, Thomas Mann taped a series of anti-Nazi radio speeches in the U.S. which were sent to Great Britain. There the BBC transmitted the *Deutsche Hörer* (German Listeners) broadcasts, hoping to reach BBC listeners in Germany.

After the war, he frequently revisited Europe. When he finally returned to Europe, he settled near Zürich, where he died in 1955.

Some of his major works that are still read, taught, analyzed, and commented upon are *Buddenbrooks* (for which he received the Nobel prize), *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain), *Joseph und seine Brüder* (*Joseph and his Brothers*) and his masterpiece *Dr. Faustus*.

Despite their persecution by the Nazi regime, all three authors always felt the German-speaking culture of Europe was their culture. Historical research into these authors and their stance toward Nazism is ongoing and contributes to a contemporary dialogue in Germany where the horrors of the Third Reich are not, and will never be, forgotten.

Hannelore Hahn

TRAVELS WITH JAY

I just love being on the road in America. I love the freedom, the excitement, the chance meetings, and having all these experiences that wouldn't happen at home. Freedom and adventure!

This year I left Medford Leas early in the morning on a beautiful mid-April day. I drove west to Gettysburg for the first night. The second night I was in Hancock, Maryland, a lazy river town along the Potomac.

When I woke up, I started driving west. An hour later I arrived in Cumberland, MD, out in the western end of the state. Cumberland has always been one of my favorite towns. It is a really historic place, with narrow winding streets, a great Main Street, and mountains all around.



One of the things I love to do in Cumberland is walk along the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal towpath. It's a good place to get out of your car and enjoy the air and the mountains. I spent about an hour and a half walking on the trail, feeling lucky to be alive.

When I got back into town, I enjoyed a meal at a local diner. It was packed with Cumberlanders and tourists, people talking to each other, having good food, a place of happy bedlam.

On the other side of town is a museum I have been to several times before. It's devoted to the history of canals in America. The museum has fascinating pictures and descriptions of the Chesapeake & Ohio as well as others such as the Delaware and the Erie Canals.

After a couple of hours there, I walked out into what was still a beautiful warm sunny day.

I found my rental car. Unfortunately, a tire was completely flat.

I always rent a car on my road trips. I knew nothing about where the spare tire or the jack was. Oh my goodness, I thought, this is not a good thing!

On the other side of the parking lot was a nice-looking young couple in their early 20s. The man came over and said, "Sir, it looks like you've got a problem." I explained that I had rented the car in New Jersey, and that I had no idea how to change the flat on this particular car. He said "Don't worry, Sir, I have everything we need in my truck." He brought all his tools over and set to work.

He jacked my car up, took the flat off, and put on the spare tire, all in about fifteen minutes. While he worked we had a conversation about America in 2017.

When he finished my tire I asked, “How much do I owe you?”

“Forget it, it’s just all part of the day,” he said. He and his girlfriend got on their bicycles and rode off to enjoy their personal adventure on the tow path.

I sometimes think that what you wear says a lot about who you are. The young man had been wearing a shirt that said “US Marines.” My impression of the Marine Corps went sky-high. They are not only fighters, but people who will drop everything to help a senior citizen in distress.

This kind of experience happens so often to me on my road trips. America is a special country, full of incredible scenery, history and, most of all, caring people.

So, that’s Cumberland, Maryland, on the third day of a memorable road trip.

Jay Wilder
as told to Judy Kruger

LOOSE CANDY

Enticing are the sweet aromas that
waft out from candy shops on promenades
and fresh-made sweets in holiday markets.
Loose candy mixtures sold by their bag-weight.
Can you resist your favorite chocolate pieces?

Nostalgia may draw you to shops where clerks
gather the treats you point at through glass cases.
The bulging sack is weighed, the sale completed,
and out you go with your taffy and fudge.

The penny candy store in my memory was clerk-served.
Sixty-five years ago it stood opposite
the elementary school that was torn down decades ago.
A dim, cool, narrow shop after the brightness of the
street.

Pointing to what I wanted,
the proprietor's big dirty hands
moved knowingly over his naked stock.
Did I choose sugar buttons on a strip of paper,
to be scraped clean from their mooring?
Or the molded red wax lips of a Lolita?
Pink marshmallows pocketed in chocolate twists?
Voluptuous orange peanut shapes
of unbearable sweetness?
Licorice whips for playing through the eating?
Or small wax bottles that gave up their dew with
the snap of teeth?



Maybe I chose them all,
with coins in my pocket
for the smells of promise.
An “I” less skeptical of
promise then, however
unwholesome the con-
summation.

I wonder now if the own-
er was a pedophile,
perhaps also selling
pornography
and taking illegal bets for
a numbers racket
in a room behind the
candies.

Where were the health inspectors, the detectives?
To require sanitary standards, stop the gaming,
see crime, wash the shadows with fluorescence.
In those days, officials rarely tried to protect
children from neighborhood corruption,
and parents of that generation didn’t hover nearby.

But we’ve already re-imagined our pasts into Americana,
where only sweet indulgences are remembered.

Joyce Linda Sichel

PURPLE FEELING

Purple is a feeling unsuppressed,
Unleashed in life it tumbles out of blue,
And readily it seeks a noble quest;
Purple is a passion, not a hue.
It hides in black, it cloaks its deepest shade,
Lilacs hide in perfume and in spring,
Of bold magenta sunsets can be made,
And royal robes become more than a king.
Now yellow can be lovely in its way,
Green and blue so cool and so reserved,
Brown so sad, red so warm and gay,
White so pure, orange so unnerved.
But purple is the color I would be
Because there is no other quite so free.

Doris Kabley

FORTUNE COOKIE PREDICTION

It was the same man. He stood near me in the translucent bubble car on the London Eye, the slow-motion gigantic ferris wheel. Two weeks later he gave me a hand as I was climbing the train steps at Saint Pancras Station in London to take the Chunnel. He bumped into me at the patisserie in Paris, and we both ended up with coffee hands. Now he was fifteen feet from me as I headed toward the entrance of Versailles – just me and my shadow.

I pulled out my Nikon and stopped to snap a posed human Statue of Liberty. I dropped a few coins in his cup, and he started declaiming, “Give me your tired, your poor, your. . .” That gave me an opportunity to surreptitiously observe this man. He was a little older than me, maybe mid-thirties, distinctive. He was fairly tall, good looking with sharp planes on his face, a professional man. I took a photo of Liberty and was able to catch my shadow on the right side, just a precaution.

He kept looking at something on his phone, then at me. What was that about? He appeared to be following me, and I couldn’t imagine why. He wasn’t good at surveillance if that was his game. Out of the blue, I suddenly remembered a fortune cookie prediction Sally and I had laughed about at the end of our last dinner before I left for Europe. “A stranger will bring important news.” We joked about it, but now I had the shivers.

So far it had been a successful and uneventful trip. I was traveling through Europe for the next six months taking photos for a travel book I’d been commissioned to do on unique places to visit. I’d been to a bed and

breakfast near archeological sites in Norfolk and was heading to a top-notch restaurant on the grounds of a hog farm south of Lyon that served fantastic bacon and pork dishes (of course it sounded better in French). I hadn't broken up with a boyfriend, didn't have any enemies that I knew of, was an average person, so why was he interested in me?

I turned away from Liberty and saw that my tail had moved off, so I decided to enjoy Versailles. I strolled outside after the tour and was treated to baroque music on loudspeakers while all the fountains sprayed arcs of crystal drops in the air. I could picture Louis XIV, his wife, and the court parading around on a lazy afternoon. All too soon it ended, and I headed to the train station for my return to Paris.

Finding I had a forty-five minute wait, I bought my ticket then crossed the street to a small café, sat at a sidewalk table with a *caffè latte* and a *croissant* straight from the oven. There he was again, standing, staring at me. Enough was enough. I said, "Do I know you?"

He asked, "Do you mind if I sit down?"

I was leery but said yes. He ordered a *carafe* of house red and two glasses, which was presumptuous, but I wanted to see what would happen. He fidgeted with his phone. I sat silently until the wine came. He poured two glasses and said, "*À votre santé.*" I didn't drink but waited for an explanation. He took a big gulp of wine, then placed his phone on the table in front of me.

I stared at a photo of a young woman with little girls, twins about two years old. The girls looked somewhat like pictures of me when I was six, but I didn't have

any from a younger age; my mother told me they'd been lost in a fire. The woman had medium blond hair like me. My hand and voice started trembling with underlying fears. I said, "Who are they?"

He spoke in a gentle voice, "You look very much like the young woman, don't you? One of the twins could be you; the other could be your twin."

I laughingly said, "I think I'd know if I have a twin."

"What's your earliest childhood memory?"

"Who are you? Why should I tell a stranger anything personal?" This man was starting to bug the hell out of me.

"My name is Philip Dunbar. What's your name?"

"I'm. . . I'm Celeste Robinson." He reacted with surprise but tried to control it.

He continued. "I'm a lawyer from Chicago. I'm taking a well-needed vacation in Europe and then I saw you. I feel you're important to a client of mine."

"I don't understand."

"It's a complex story. Can I take you to dinner in Paris? I'm honest, trustworthy – we can even dine in your hotel or nearby if you prefer. I just don't want to start this now and have the train arrive."

"Alright," I said. "I don't want to turn down a free meal with a decent looking man."

"Ah, I see you've a sense of humor; you'll keep me on my toes. That's good."

I gave him the name of my hotel, and we agreed to meet in the lobby at eight that evening. We went our separate ways on the train, and I was left to wonder what this was all about. I couldn't call home; there was no one to call. My mother had died three years ago, and I had no siblings, never knew my father. Did Philip Dunbar know something I didn't? Of course, the idea of a twin was ridiculous.

I dressed carefully for dinner in my one and only little black dress and heels, which meant we couldn't walk very far. I felt I needed armor to protect me from something, I wasn't sure what. But I'd been on my own, even when my mother was alive, and I'd learned to be strong. Just thinking of her made me sad. She was a loving woman, but she often suffered from depression and wouldn't get help. She treated me like a princess and loved me thoroughly. I didn't like the fact that we moved all the time, but otherwise she was a good mother, did her best for me. Enough of the past, I grabbed my shawl and purse and took the elevator to the lobby.

“Hello, Mr. Dunbar.”

“Call me Philip, please. I thought we could go to this lovely restaurant around the corner. Their food is quite good, I hear.”

“That's fine with me, and call me Celeste.” Again his face clouded up when he heard my name. Why?

We went to the restaurant, which was rather classy, and selected a seven course French dinner. I even tried escargot. Several times I tried to get him to discuss the business at hand, but he insisted we should enjoy the cuisine and then talk.

After dinner Philip finally got to the story I'd been waiting to hear. "If you are the person I'm looking for, the information I have is going rock the foundations of your world." Now he was scaring me. "Nan and Roger Wilkins were a wealthy young Chicago couple who lived in a mansion with his mother and their two-year-old twin daughters."

As he talked he showed me several pictures of a happy young couple and their twin daughters on his phone and ended with the one of the woman, Nan, and her two little daughters I had seen before. "Roger was killed in a sailboat accident during a storm on the lake. Nan was so distraught she started drinking, and fell asleep with a lit cigarette. That wing of the home was totally destroyed. The police identified the bodies of Nan and one daughter, but the bodies of the nanny and the other twin were never found."

"Nan's mother is a client of my firm, and recently I was asked to head an investigation to see if the other twin could be found alive. This woman is now eighty and still hopes to be reunited with her granddaughter if possible. I was taking a break from the stress of work, not expecting to satisfy Mrs. Wilkins' prayer, when I saw you in London."

I realized I'd been holding my breath. "What was the name of the granddaughter who died?"

"Claire."

I felt a tingling in my brain, my body. "What was the name of the other granddaughter?"

"Celeste."

Joyce Koch

TONE POEMS

Muffins

“I found a wonderful recipe for muffins, would you like to have it?”

She smiles a genuine, a charming, smile at me, at last.

So many words now said never unheard.

So many thoughts unspoken always visible.

Between us a gift crafted in her tightly controlled hand.

I meet her eyes.

“Thank you, mom,” I say.



On an anniversary

We shared a life.

May apples in spring
The lake frozen with winter
Welcome clamor of cicadas
Long murmuring sunsets,
soft laughter

We built a garden.

The line in my palm curves,
moves on, not We.

Gail Romberger

HALLELUJAH!!!

The great hallelujah day has finally arrived in the southern or high numbered courts. We had listened with great interest when at a mid-winter Community Conversation it was announced that by summer all units would have the new HVAC installed. Some envy had arisen, I must admit, as we heard tales from our northern court friends who spoke with joy of the long promised new HVAC. “Oh so quiet ventilation and heating,” they opined, although a few did mention the challenge of the accompanying programmable thermostats. The multipaged directions and options seemed more of a challenge than an aid.

The simple joy of quiet heating and ventilation. Although the old unit ventilators would remain in place, their silence would be a wonderful blessing. We would be spared the need to adjust the TV volume which seemed to be on blast, whenever they cycled off. Such a boon.

The first sparkle of hope occurred when we saw PSE&G installing the yellow gas line beside our roads and beneath our lawns. Our spirits really began to rise when the large grey gas meters were installed at the end of the courts, followed by new hot water heaters and all sorts of electrical panels. We noted with considerable interest as new openings were cut in the ceilings of both the storerooms and trash rooms at the ends of our courts and folding stairs installed for easy access to the attics above our apartments.

The footsteps and banging above our heads provided further encouragement, for we knew the crews

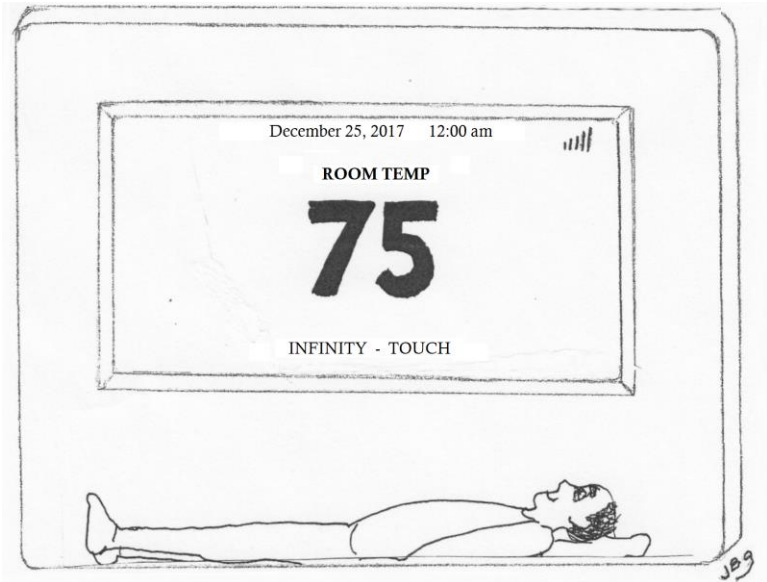
were now installing the wiring and ductwork to service both heating and cooling and adding additional insulation. A few extra loud bangs did stop us in our tracks and make us wonder if a shoe might suddenly crash through our ceilings.

Our spirits soared when two workers appeared and began cutting holes in our ceiling and installing vents. The great day was coming ever so close. They were so very careful and neat, laying out drop clothes on the floor beneath each opening to catch any dust and bits of ceiling plaster they might create. To my surprise, the cuts were circular, although the covers were square, because the ducts to the vents were also circular. I watched with complete attention as a large neat square was carefully drawn on the ceiling, then cut for a perfect match for the return grill, which would house an air filter to remove dust and dirt. Such precise work, all completed in just two hours.

Finally, a thermostat was installed on the wall beneath the return grill, which showed both indoor and outdoor temperatures. Surely the operation of the new HVAC was imminent. To our sorrow the magic moment would not occur for a few weeks.

You can imagine our delight when Mike appeared at our door and announced he was there to turn on the system. We told him the temperatures we wanted for day and night settings and watched as he deftly tapped images and arrows on the thermostat. With a broad smile he said, “this is a condensed version,” and handed us a multiple set of directions for operating our new system.

Much to our annoyance we soon found we had misjudged our temperature settings and time changes. Little did I realize that setting the night temperature for 10 pm meant that at 9:15 P.M the system would begin lowering the temperature to reach the night setting by 10. Despite seven years of college, undergraduate and graduate, my education was insufficient to master the simple little electrical box on my living room wall. A degree in electrical engineering or computer programming would have served me so much better. Thank goodness for Mike, who returned on the sixth day and made the requisite program changes to my futile series of changes.



So wonderful, peace, quiet and comfort. Thanks Mike.

The “Infinity” Control Thermostat has been aptly named, permitting an infinite number of programming errors, despite seven pages of condensed directions. I have been studying them. Dare I make a few tiny adjustments? Or should I heed the advice of my neighbors who have found “manual” the best setting and make adjustments each morning and evening, when they see fit?

One final “Hallelujah” will be said when I have mastered the thermostat.

John Sommi

PERSPECTIVE

On a priceless summer afternoon a friend and I met for lunch and a bit of shopping. Choosing to eat our salads on the patio while we people-watched in the light August breezes, we shared some gossip, confidences and eye-rolls as dear friends will. Salads too ample to finish were left on the table with a tip and we were off to shop.

My plan was to purchase 15 totally useless party favors, as it was my turn to host the monthly “lunch bunch” meet-up of friends new and old from the tri-state area. Pat was looking for a swim suit for her upcoming vacation as well as gifts for her nearly constant Christmas shopping

Laden with several bags, we made our way through the outdoor shopping mall to visit a few toy and curiosity shops. As we entered a downscale shop, a clerk who seemed to be in perpetual motion greeted us. Every new arrival was directed to the “extra extra deep discount” shelves in the rear of the store. The young man, the sole employee in sight, made his way to each person to offer assistance. After he’d approached all shoppers he asked himself, aloud, “What else, what else, can I get out of the stock room?”

While my friend busied herself in the back of the shop, I asked our clerk for eclipse-viewing glasses. “They make glasses for that?”

“Yes,” I replied, suppressing an oh-so-superior eye-roll with great effort.

“I guess they make something for everything these days.”

I shrugged an answer.

I overheard him as he rang up a sale, “We’ll give each of you boys your own bag.”

Telling the brothers’ parents separate bags are a good idea to prevent squabbles, he made his presentations with a flourish. Happy parents and happy boys left the store as my friend appeared at the counter with the fresh flush of a successful bargain hunt lighting up her face.

I began to pay more attention to our clerk while he helped my friend with her purchase. He was older than his quick movements and speech implied, perhaps 30 or so. My overall impression was rust: flat lusterless hair in bangs, a complexion no longer smooth with youth, rust-colored teeth, knit shirt a shade achieved by many washings. He was compact and short but not slight.

As Pat presented a mall coupon and many treasures from the discount area, the young man asked for her email address in order to save her an additional five dollars. To achieve this saving he asked to use her smart phone. A continuous patter flowed throughout the transaction. Send this, tap that, text this code to that number, “May I do it for you? There, you’ve saved five dollars and don’t worry, they won’t bug you with three emails a day.”

“You know,” he said in his South Jersey accent at his North Jersey speed “people don’t always say yes. If somebody asked me do I want to save five dollars, I’d say yes all day.” Then, with no bitterness in his voice at all, “but what do I know? I’m an eight-dollar-and-fifty-cent-an-hour employee.”

Later, after I returned to my airy tree house on Woodside Drive and fed LilyMay her premium grain-free cat food mixed with life extending prescription medication, I turned to the packages on my kitchen chair.

I had enjoyed a lovely summer afternoon with a dear friend and made the following purchases: 2 pairs socks, \$12.00, 15 utterly silly fidget spinners and 15 brightly colored bags for their presentation, \$59.51, for a total of \$71.51. Seventy one dollars and fifty-one cents divided by \$8.50 equals about 8.4 hours work as a toy store manager, not considering taxes.

How many similar jobs must the toy store manager hold to stitch a life together?

How could I ever be so condescending, so very small?

Gail Romberger

This hole in the sand –
I keep emptying the brine
but back it rises.

Elizabeth W. Hicks

REMINISCENCES OF GRANDPARENTS

How wonderful to have had special relationships with the generation now mostly gone. As one of our Writers Roundtable writers recounted, "I was five when I went to visit him [Grosspapa] every afternoon and we would walk around the dining room table, which was his only exercise. I encouraged him to lean harder on my left shoulder while holding his cane in his left hand." Only his beloved granddaughter could persuade him to take his daily exercise. Most grandparents are remembered as loving presences in the writer's life. One of the group described it as "having someone warm to hold you as you sit in the rocker on the porch." Another writer remembered being allowed to arrange combs in her grandmother's thick white hair. One of us remembered cuddling up to her German-speaking grandma who taught her little prayers and songs. "We had so much fun together that these are the best memories of my childhood. I truly felt loved unconditionally." Recalling his maternal grandmother, a writer was left with "good memories of her warmth and the good times I had on my visits with her."

One writer reflected that while many grandparents used to live with their children and grandchildren, that is uncommon today. Which of our grandchildren or great-grandchildren would describe *us* as "the center of [their] universe?" One writer described such a relationship; her grandmother introduced her to Quaker meetings and "was always available to talk to me after school since she lived next door for about fifteen years of my life." Others' grandparents were part of the family from birth as well, and exerted major influence through the writers'

teen years. “Granny read to me by the hour, sharing her enthusiasm for language from the King James Bible to modern literature, and was never too busy to listen to my complaints and set me straight on what was really important in life.”

Writers with grandparents in distant places happily re-lived train and driving trips, extended family reunions, and presents arriving in the mail. Those visits had been rich in tales told by grandparents of life before we were born – such as oft-repeated family stories of when the writers’ parents were young. One writer recalled that her family would drive summer after summer “all the way back to Wilkes Barre from New Jersey to gatherings of my father’s family. There I could watch my grandparents and dad be with their parents and siblings, children and grandchildren. I could talk to everybody and stay watched by them in turn. It was where I learned about my best place in the world outside my home.”

Our grandparents’ generation had hardships, some of which we witnessed. Our families told about others. Many confronted the Great Depression, world catastrophe, wars, and illness – especially the flu pandemic. Some had to move their families to find work. There were the grandparents we never knew. One writer’s four grandparents were “slaughtered by the Nazis in Poland,” and another writer’s grandmother died in Auschwitz, leaving the writer with memories of her grandmother’s love in childhood and deep regret that this grandmother would not leave Czechoslovakia with the rest of the family before it was overrun by the Nazis. Those writers were left with a sad void where memories of grandparents would otherwise be.

Some grandparents were simple country people where milk came from the family's dairy cows. Others had backgrounds of varied ethnicities, which contributed color to the writers' recollections. Special foods are associated with grandparents in our memories, with aromas that can be summoned back. Cabbage soup, chicken and beef stews were such dishes, as were certain pies, cakes, and cookies. One of us remembered German-Jewish foods, like soup dumplings called "kreplach," lovingly prepared and served to her one grandchild. At the grocery, the smallest baby peas were selected for that same lucky tot. Another writer remembered that her grandmother "could always find us a snack."

Not all of the writers' memories were as benign though. Expectations for children were enforced in many of the grandparents' homes – being quiet and polite, eating everything on your plate, going to church, visiting the cemetery, experiencing punishments at a grandparent's hands. One of our writers remembered that "my father's father was neither happy nor well. I don't recall having any fun with him, and he certainly did not get along with my mother." Remembered conflicts between parents and grandparents were not uncommon. Our present perspective as the older generation allowed us to analyze some family conflicts that as children we had not fully understood.

On the whole, however, special positive bonds with our grandparents live on in our memories. Some of us are even grandparents (and great-grandparents) ourselves. We can only wonder how the future generations will remember us.

THERE IS NEVER SILENCE

Here in our writing group
We busy ourselves with this task of writing.
The hum of the refrigerator,
The clock striking 10:30,
Carl's low laugh,
Papers turning, passing cars,
My pencil pulling across the page,
Denise's pencil, sounds of erasers,
And oh yes, this perpetual tinnitus.
I long for silence. Where is it to be found?

If not as we sit here writing,
is silence to be found in the forest?
The chut-chut-chuttering
of squirrels on their high branches,
Ah, Mr. Blue Jay spies me
"Thief, thief, thief!"
Down at the edge of the forest
the neighbor's children
Splash and laugh in their pool.
Scuff, scuff, scuff, I climb a steep hill.
"Thunk" goes my cane.
Deep breaths in-out, in-out as I near the top.
And the tinnitus, always the tinnitus;
There is never silence.

Edith Roberts

AUNT EULA'S DREAM

My mother was the sixth of twelve children who grew up in rural north Texas in a lively, loving home. The second of the twelve was my Aunt Eula, whose hazel eyes were always beautiful and wise to me.

When I was about fifteen and Aunt Eula was about forty-five, we had opportunities to talk alone while the rest of the family visited at family reunions. When we two were together, we talked about many things. Somehow we kept coming back to what might be called coincidence, but seemed to be examples of extrasensory perception, or communication without speech.

Aunt Eula remembered a situation that occurred when she was a young teacher in a public elementary school. The school was too far from her family's home for her to visit her family except on school vacations.

One day she received a letter from her family, telling her that her beloved maternal grandmother had died. The letters said that the funeral had already taken place, that it had been very lovely, and that the family reunion was very warm and especially well attended. The event had been a great success.

Eula was devastated. She had felt particularly close to her grandmother and could not imagine that she wouldn't somehow have been notified of her grandmother's death and of the funeral. Why no notice to her at all?

Little by little she became obsessed with this burning grief, but also self-pity and outrage that she had missed out on an important family event. In particular,

she had not attended the family reunion, with Uncle Jake recalling amusing events in their lives. Eula's obsession grew until she was thinking all the time of the loss of her grandmother and that no one had told her.

There was at that time a new system called the Platoon System. Children moved from classroom to classroom, while the teachers remained in their own classroom with the books, maps, pictures, and other supplies that they liked to use, without having to carry them around to other classrooms.

Aunt Eula said that even in the two or three minutes she had to prepare for the arrival of each group of children, she just could never get the awful thoughts of her exclusion out of her mind.

One night she went to bed really tense and upset. That night she had a dream in which her grandmother appeared in flowing white garments, flying through the air, and said to Eula, "I know you are terribly upset. Come with me and I'll show you how everything was."

They flew together to the church. The viewing was before the service. Eula's grandmother noted the purple color of the special funeral flowers. And then they flew to the burial site.

There Eula's grandmother pointed out the rectangular grave, which had been dug and was empty. She explained that this was the first grave in that part of the country where silk-like material was used to line the grave. Eula said that the casket would be placed on this white cloth, the cloth would be folded over the casket, and then dirt would be replaced on top.

Next they flew by the grandmother's house. Aunt Eula's grandmother pointed out all the relatives at the house after the funeral. Some were rocking in chairs on the front porch, others were wandering around the house chatting. Her grandmother showed Eula some relatives for whom it was unusual to travel long distances through the wide spaces of Texas, even for important family reunions.

Aunt Eula awoke feeling at peace for the first time in weeks. She had, finally, a warm sense of being included and loved. She rolled over and went back to sleep. She would continue to have these feelings for months.

In due time, following the school schedule, Aunt Eula returned to her family home, where people tried to tell her about the events of the death and funeral. Eula interrupted them, saying, "I know." The family laughed and ridiculed her, as she had not actually been there, and no one had had a chance to tell her about the funeral.

There was one thing, however that nobody could explain. Eula's grandmother's grave was the first local grave in which the white cloth was ever used. It had been a new fashion coming in. There was no way Eula could have known about that.

All of this had taken place many years before Eula told me this story, but she still remembered it vividly.

When I think of my aunt, I remember those times when we felt uplifted, loved, and content together. Somehow, Aunt Eula's dream had conveyed these good feelings to me also, and I cherish the peaceful memories to this day 76 years later.

Nannette Hanslowe
as told to Judy Kruger

WRITING FOR *LEAS LIT*

Residents of both campuses, as well as staff, 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, at most two by the same author, one in prose and one in poetry, can be included in any single issue. Additional works judged acceptable will be held over for the next one.

Authors' names are removed immediately on receipt of the manuscripts. Therefore the editors do not know whose work they are reviewing. This system is designed to ensure that personal feelings about individual authors do not enter into evaluation of their work.

A flyer headed *Attention Writers!* contains instructions for submitting your work, as well as contact information if you have questions. It is distributed by house mail to all residents and staff twice a year.

If you have a story to tell – true or fictional – or a sentiment to share, but are not confident in your writing skills, do not let your hesitation stop you. We want to hear from you. We can help!

