

LEAS LIT

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CONTENTS

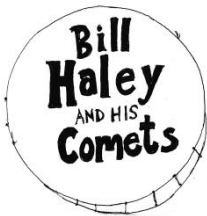
Let's Rock and Roll	<i>Chris Darlington</i>	1
The Most Challenging Job I Ever Had	<i>Joyce Linda Sichel</i>	5
Star Traveler	<i>Chris Darlington</i>	10
A Memorable Study	<i>Joanne Thomas</i>	11
Northward, With Baggage	<i>Gail Romberger</i>	13
Long August Eves	<i>Judy Kruger</i>	16
Philadelphia Weekend Workcamps	<i>Edith Roberts</i>	17
The Flying Clerk	<i>George Rubin</i>	20
Whitecaps	<i>Bob Edelson</i>	24
The Smoke Table	<i>Stefan Frank</i>	25
Unforgettable Vermont	<i>Paula Susan</i>	27
Unwelcome Visitors in Lumberton	<i>Kathy Riley</i>	31
A Christmas Carol	<i>Bob Edelson</i>	35
Untitled	<i>Elizabeth Hicks</i>	39
Alarm Mystery	<i>Janet Siler</i>	40
More Miles, More Discomfort	<i>Joyce Sichel</i>	42

LET'S ROCK AND ROLL

Pitman, New Jersey, has always been a quiet, small town with tree-lined streets. One of New Jersey's Methodist camp meeting grounds, Pitman Grove, had been established here in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As a consequence Pitman has been a "dry" town. It is quite prosperous, a comfortable place to live, having Rowen University next door in Glassboro as one of the large local employers.

I arrived at Pitman High School (the building is still used as a middle school) in the early 1950s, having attended my first three years in a much larger school. I was accepted and I flourished. Talent was nourished, something I had not experienced in my former high school. As my senior year progressed I knew something was different.

Someone in Pitman had their ear to the ground, listening to the approaching heavy beat of the rock and roll train. Into this wonderful mix of conservative, small-



town charm Bill Haley and His Comets band was invited to give a concert at one of our student assemblies. The time he performed at Pitman in the fall of 1952 Bill Haley was the music director at a radio station in Chester, PA. This was before his rise in national populari-

ty. To further put the concert in perspective, 1952 was before the national emergence of Elvis Presley, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and other rock bands.

We filed into the auditorium in our usual home-room order, weekly announcements were made and then Billy Haley and the Comets came on stage. The group of six young men literally jumped to “Rock Around the Clock,” “See You Later Alligator” and other renditions. It was my first experience of high-energy music. I had heard so little of it but it seemed just right. Unlike the subsequent years in the rock and roll movement the Pitman girls did not dance in the aisles or scream at the top of their lungs, drowning out the music. After all, these were Pitman’s reserved and polite children.

This was not the last Pitman would hear from Bill Haley.

In February 1953 the Junior/Senior Prom Committee began planning for the annual high school prom. It wasn’t long before the whole town got involved. Over the years the town’s people had become increasingly aware that the town had an issue with prom couples. After previous proms some of the couples would drive to Atlantic City for an overnight stay. To solve the issue plans were proposed. Some suggested an all-night prom, keeping the couples in town. The junior/senior classes would have to agree to the plan. Not to disappoint their parents and further jeopardize the prom, the students agreed. The prom became a massive undertaking, both organizationally and financially. And the plan included another appearance of Bill Haley and the Comets.

I had missed out on the prom in my previous high school. This would be my last chance. Being unable to dance didn’t seem to stand in my way. I found a date, rented a tuxedo and purchased a corsage. Transportation was provided.

Each couple (there were about thirty couples) was assigned a car with a chauffeur. The chauffeur-driven cars picked the couples up at their homes and shuttled them from venue to venue. The first venue was a traditional prom in the high school gym. We had a DJ with the usual prom king and queen. Dancing continued (not mine) until about 11 p.m.

We were chauffeured to the next venue: the Broadway Theater (the Broadway is still showing movies and used for stage productions) for a viewing of a first-run movie, "From Here to Eternity." Before the showing, a master of ceremonies, a radio personality based in Wilmington, Delaware, brought each couple up on stage for an introduction.

After the theater experience (about 2 a.m.) we were chauffeured to the next venue, a local country club. One of the main rooms was furnished and decorated to create a cabaret. Couples sat around tables, drinking soda and eating snacks, listening to music provided by Bill Haley and the Comets. Some of the couples sat out on the country club terrace, trying to imitate Hollywood chic.

About 4 a.m. chauffeured cars lined up once again. The next and last stop was breakfast at the Episcopal Parish Hall. Along with several of my fellow prom goers I sat with members of Bill Haley's band. I remember having a conversation with the band's drummer. After breakfast, about 6 a.m., we were driven home.

At the time many of us characterized rock and roll music as a short-lived fad. Little did we know. According to some rock and roll historians Bill Haley was one of the first if not *the* first to introduce rock and roll music to

the world. We at Pitman High, among other teenagers, were at the very beginning of the worldwide phenomenon. Nearly 65 years later I can still say, "Let's rock and roll!"

Chris Darlington



THE MOST CHALLENGING JOB I EVER HAD

There it was – a typical one-room schoolhouse! It was a small red brick building with a peaked roof. I still remember seeing it for the first time. I was two hours from home, having had a long subway ride to lowest Manhattan, then a ferry trip to New York City's fifth borough, Richmond (Staten Island), and then a railway ride to the southernmost point on the island. I was proud that I had made the trip on my own from the upper Manhattan apartment in Washington Heights where I lived with my parents.



The New York City Board of Education had assigned me to my first teaching job. It was at Public School #1 on Staten Island in an unincorporated rural

village called Tottenville. I was to be the school's only teacher. Looking back, I can see that they must have had trouble filling the position because it was so far out. On that late summer day, I carried a small suitcase filled with teaching materials of the period – primers, fresh copy-books, pencils with erasers, a heavy pencil sharpener, a large bottle of ink, nibs, nib holders, a large map of the world, pictures, and sundry other items I thought would proclaim my competence. I was making a trial run to find my way and to time the trip. I needed to start work the very next Tuesday – right after Labor Day – at 9:00 a.m. Ten students were expected, ranging in age from first to eighth grade. I hoped that I would find the school clean inside, but I had also brought some cleaning products and I intended to fix up my classroom.

I should introduce myself to you since I am telling you the story of my first job. I am Lily Horner and I was twenty-three years old that day. It was 1931, the time of the Great Depression, and I was very grateful for the job. My father's printing business had already failed and my mother had never worked outside our home. My mother came from a big family and we needed their help with suitable clothing for me. My parents were very proud of me in my long skirt and shirtwaist blouse, the first college-educated professional in the family, facing life independently as an adult. Well, I wasn't quite college-educated. Teachers were trained in special teacher training schools that only later became state teachers' colleges or were absorbed into universities. I had attended what they called a "normal school" for two years after high school to prepare me for this vocation. (The school where I attended became Teachers' College of Columbia University years later.) I earned my diploma in June

1930, but it had been hard to find a job in a crippled economy. My father had become very sick after the stock market crash. I phoned the Board of Education many, many times and explained how much I needed a teaching job. Finally they called me! I put away all of my flapper dresses, garters, beaded purses, and phonograph records that I had enjoyed so much with friends and cousins just two years before. All of our jewelry, inlaid furniture, and other valuables were sold to whoever could still afford to buy them.

On that trial run to where I would work for the next two and a half years, I was going to a place where I had never been. But they were reopening as many rural schools as they could, even though the depression continued. I was already weary and queasy from the ferry trip since I wasn't used to boats. My half-hour train ride from the ferry terminal on the Staten Island side had further jostled me badly. I learned that I had passed through Richmond Valley, but that Tottenville was named for the Totten family who owned most of the land to the south. There was a bell tower to call the children to school and the building had letters carved into it saying "Tottenville School." The neighborhood residents were proud of this building put up in 1878, so that classes could move out of the Tabernacle Methodist Church. The "new" building would keep operating until 1943!

There was a coal stove for heat, but it hadn't been lit because it was a mild September day. I was told that a local man would keep it lit during school hours on cold days. Other than that convenience, the inside of the building was a shambles – with debris, cobwebs, and thick blankets of coal dust. I had brought dust cloths and

there was a wet mop that I badly needed. I found the well behind the building from which we would get our water. And yes, there was an outhouse too, so this city girl learned to sit on a board with a hole in it to do her business. (That part of Staten Island wasn't yet connected to municipal services.) It was pure country. I worked hard to clean and arrange a classroom on that day I was there alone. A few local people stopped by to help a little and give me advice.

Perhaps they thought that I looked very young, but I had made lesson plans for each student listed in my attendance book. Being a new teacher in any classroom isn't easy, but this was going to be the largest challenge I had ever faced. Labor Day was over and Tuesday came. I boarded the ferry at 7:30 a.m., having been awake since 5:00. I was happy to meet another new teacher who had just been assigned to a school a few miles closer than my own, and we talked a lot about our situations that first day. What did we want our students to call us, for example? We decided on Miz Horner and Miz Adams. She would continue to be my good friend for years to come. We shared our books and our notes on teaching techniques and classroom discipline. We didn't have much trouble with discipline because these country people expected their children to behave or they would intervene. The parents told me that their children would help them with the autumn harvest for two weeks in later September, so we would close the school temporarily then.

On some days, winter weather would prevent me from making it to school, although the ferry usually ran in all conditions. I was making progress with most of the students and I had the older ones helping the younger. I

found that I most liked to teach reading, and it was the subject where most of my students started behind in grade level. For almost all of my future thirty-five years of teaching, I would teach first grade, the year when schoolchildren first learned to master reading. I would teach only in urban schools after this period, but Staten Island was where I had my earliest satisfaction turning my students into readers.

A coincidence happened much later in my life when I had one of my grandchildren stay with me while his parents went for short vacations. He loved ships of all kinds, and, when he stayed with me in New York City, the Staten Island ferry totally satisfied his interest. It was the same basic ferry fleet taking us back and forth that I had become familiar with so many years before. For him, it was an exciting cruise. If you live long enough, life has a lot of adventures.

Joyce Sichel

This story is dedicated to my mother, Lola May, a wonderful teacher whose experience this really was.

STAR TRAVELER

*for Nicholas Sapolsky, at 4 years old (2006),
a grandson of Nannette Hanslowe*

His is an all-consuming poem.
He walks among the stars:
With each star, a line,
With each constellation, a verse.

Does he have a million stars, all his?
The gods are jealous of his counting.
Step by step, he finds his way,
Walking his own universe.

Hear me, stars, be patient and wait,
His poem will come for you!
Steady he walks. With each star-step,
His verses grow ever brighter.

Stars, you will know this dear poet
By his own constellation:
Father Wisdom, Mother Love
And Older Brother, ever caring.

Chris Darlington

A MEMORABLE STUDY

During the first five years of my life, I enjoyed being an only child. Not too long after that, my brother came along and shortly thereafter, my father was charged with the duty of overseeing the nightly homework assignment of his favorite daughter.

At the time, there was nothing I desired more than my father's approval, even more so now that an annoying "interloper" had become part of our family. One of the reasons was that I now had to pull this screeching, screaming child on a sled and take him for walks in his stroller, which did nothing at all to satisfy or quiet him. Not only that, but although I was still my father's "favorite daughter," I was no longer #1! Needless to say, I wasn't too happy about all that.

These nightly oversights of my homework that I initially looked forward to soon became something to dread. Back in the 1940s, nuns in parochial schools taught the Palmer method of handwriting. Students were required to scratch out an infinite number of repetitive circles and right-slanted "I"s in order to arrive at an acceptable form of handwriting that most everyone could identify as a product of a Catholic school education. Well, that in itself was responsible for causing a major rift between my father and his favorite daughter.

I would write my assignments, and my father would scan them when I finished. Not once, not twice, but several times my efforts would be torn to shreds, followed by the comment "Too sloppy. Do it over." There were many tears and many rewrites (which is

where I first learned that tactic), and the same process continued until my father was satisfied with the latest result.

Throughout the following years, continuing on through high school, I still sought my father's approval of my school work. If I earned a mixture of 85s and 90s in grammar school, or As and Bs in High School, the comment was always, "Why aren't they all 95s?" or "Why aren't they all As?"

I didn't realize until many years later why my father was so demanding when it came to my grades. He was born during the Great Depression and had to leave school during the fifth grade in order to help support his family of seven siblings. His main objective was to make sure that his children received the education that he was never able to achieve.

I realized then that I always did have his approval (although he never once saw a college grade of mine) and that I was still one of his "favorite daughters" after my two sisters joined our family.

Joanne Thomas

NORTHBOUND, WITH BAGGAGE

Jason glared at the road ahead, his knuckles white in a death grip on the wheel, weaving now left, then right, late again, always late. Just like always. Always.

His early memory flooded in all unbidden: Mom jams his feet into his shoes, yanks his zipper, red-faced, her eyes flashing with frustration and something more, “Hurry up, you stupid kid, you’re making me late again!”

Rage pulsed like a familiar tide as he heard his young self – crying, howling with the pain of his abandonment. He’s thrust into a dingy livingroom, the door slams and Mom’s gone without a word. Some kids look up through the thick cigarette smoke, and then ignore the screaming boy. “Jase, shut up. I’m watching my show!” the sitter yells louder than the TV, even louder than the boy’s inconsolable wails. Nobody notices him.

Jason rode the bumper of the woman ahead in the passing lane, flashing his lights in full fury. “*Dumb b____, making me late. I’m gonna be late. Stupid b____!*” His Jetta blew past the little knot of traffic but not before Jason saw the woman make a smiling gesture his way. He swallowed, his throat dry, blinking away sudden hot tears of pure rage. “I’ll show them. One day they’ll all see.” The Jetta hurtled on through space and time.

Suddenly, and moving very fast, a black Jetta was bearing down on her. Lights were flashing just inches from her bumper, she could make out a young man’s flushed face in her mirror. Adrenaline sent its timeless fight or flight command. Accelerating to 80, then 85, Roselynn passed the cars on her right and maneuvered

into the slow lane. While the Jetta roared past she smiled, let out a long breath and made the universal gesture for “*after you.*”

“After you, Buddy,” she said aloud, “You’re obviously much more important than I am.”

Suddenly she found herself deep within a memory: a tearful young girl high-stepping her way across a back porch with the satisfying bang-clap of the wooden screen door still ringing in her ears. She pauses to take in Skippy’s wiggling wagging doggy comfort.

“I’ll show them!” she snuffles into Skippy’s warm fur.

Not this time! This time she isn’t going to cry herself out leaning against Skippy’s doghouse. This time she is going to run away.

Rosie crosses into the orchard, passing by her favorite climbing tree. It will be too easy to find her there. She finds a tree deeper in the orchard, climbs to a comfortable branch and settles in to wait. “*They’re gonna get really really scared. They’ll look everywhere. They’ll be so glad I’m not dead they’ll never be mean to me again.*” She’ll show them!

Rosie waits. Brilliant colors light the sky at the end of the orchard. Bright reds and crimsons, vivid pinks fade gradually, the breeze stops, the dogs in the village above no longer bark. There is a hush as the sun sinks to the other side of Rosie’s world. Fascinated, she watches as reds transform to purples, then fade to grays. The breeze reappears, much cooler now, sounds return, different from day sounds. Insects make a staccato clamor,

weaving a blanket of noise in the growing darkness. Smells are danker, colder, wormy and mysterious.

At home, windows glow as lights came on, but Mother and Daddy aren't outside looking for her. Rosie hears sounds in the tall grasses she knows are slithering snakes: she read Kipling. Uncomfortable now, she shifts on her branch, her eyes stinging with the effort of holding back fresh tears. A big night-flying bug grazes her cheek and tangles in her hair. Frantically the child brushes the buzzing insect away and slides down the tree trunk, skinning the palm of her hand.

Damp with sweat in the cool air, Rosie carefully makes her way past the snakes in the tall grass, through the orchard, over the mowed tractor path to Skippy's house. She gives the hopeful dog a desultory pat, then crosses the driveway, across the porch and quietly, carefully closes the screen door. She hears the TV in the family room. No one notices her absence. She's not important at all.

Rosie enters her room, turns on the light, and, flung across the bed, is instantly immersed in the adventures of *The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew*.

With a slight shake of her head and a movement of her shoulders, Roselynn found herself once more north-bound on the turnpike. "*Whatever made me think of that?*" she wondered as she drove on.

Gail Romberger

LONG AUGUST EVES

Long sun-laden months of summer, when I finish my afternoon rest, feed the kitties, consume chilled soup and the remnants of the big mixed salad, and still the long day's eve stretches out for hours, then I, a morning person, but now rested and the evening calls out, throw on some sandals and go to see who is about, finishing up their dinners, or hanging around in the passageways for one last chat before going home to the television news, and often on my brief evening perambulations there are surprised cries of "Judy! What are you doing out?" from those whom I almost never see in the light of morning, and they tell me their day's story as if I were some rare visitor, and this way I learn of a trip to the sea to be embarked upon the next day or an ill neighbor who is better today or the dinner shrimp that night were especially good or someone's granddaughter is about to start college next week or do I know a pet sitter nearby or I wish I could wear my hair that short or have you lost weight or how Brownie puppy is doing with his obedience class or Susie in the Garden Room is Tia's sister who worked there last summer and full of the rich day I am content to stroll home taking in the late summer garden scents and the pink and grey skies through which the summer sunset throws its long light to send me, satisfied, evening-nourished, back inside to rest.

Judy Kruger

PHILADELPHIA WEEKEND WORKCAMPS

Workcamps changed my life. They took the small-town, self-centered girl and turned her into someone with a modicum of guts and the beginnings of a wider perspective.

David Richie, who in the thirties had participated in workcamps in Scandinavia, brought the idea to Philadelphia in the 40s. He called them Philadelphia Weekend Workcamps. They were sponsored by the Quakers and were a vigorous attempt to bridge the racial and economic divide. The dream was that if people could just get to know each other there would be a kinder and more peaceful world. One of the more immediate goals was to learn the skill of making do with less. We suburban teenagers learned to toast our bread under an open broiler keeping vigil over it so that it not burn. We learned to thin down our mayonnaise so that it stretched just a bit further. A small quantity of turpentine cleaned multiple brushes by having six or more open cans of it. We swished our brushes from the leftmost can towards the right into progressively cleaner containers. Thrift mattered.

My parents had been very frugal, but they had been rich indeed. They had an intact marriage and my father had a job. Our house was large and comfortable with a good-sized back yard on a safe, pleasant street. My eyes needed opening.

We workcampers worked wherever Dave Richie could find people willing to put up with us. We weren't

the latest, the best or the brightest. We were an embarrassment to the neighborhood and having us come to the door could prove dangerous. One day my efforts included painting a refrigerator. I should have known that a can of Ajax would have been more to the point. One kitchen had peeling wallpaper. When we peeled it back further huge colonies of cockroaches were revealed. Would those homeowners have been better off never to have met us?

The ones the workcamps helped were we ourselves. We learned to be outgoing through silly games such as the naming game: “clap – clap, click – click, my name – your name.” We learned to paint, a skill which proved very useful and a great thrill to my mother. Most of all we learned of life beyond our bastions of privilege.

And we learned about injustice. Sunday was the visit to the magistrates’ court. In those days poor people committed petty crimes just to get warm food and a cot to sleep on. Those were the days before serious drug abuse.

My greatest delight was discovering a welcoming Baptist church with a primarily African American congregation. I had never been anywhere except my own little Friends Meeting. Surprisingly our meeting had some pretty good hymn singing, but it was nothing compared to the singing in that Baptist church. Wow! What a never-to-be-forgotten experience.

Where did it all lead? Did it lead to a life open to other cultures, to a marriage outside of South Jersey Quakerdom, to years spent teaching in Camden, to the

need for justice and for doing what is right? I know it led to my belief in the importance of community, including this group with whom I now sit writing. So much has come from those first steps into the big city. Thank you, David Richie.

Edith Roberts

THE FLYING CLERK

Our DC-3 aircraft taxied slowly to the end of the runway. Tony Caruso was in the pilot seat with Ed Cross next to him as co-pilot. I stood between the two. The twin engines were making a steady roar. Tony turned to me. “OK give the hydraulics a pump, we’re ready for takeoff.”



I reached down to my right and pulled the lever handle once, then twice. Tony pushed the engine throttles forward. We began to move slowly at first. Then we gained airspeed and became airborne. I looked out of the pilot side window and saw Newark, then part of New York City, disappear under the clouds. We climbed to 8,000 feet and the plane turned west heading to Kansas City, MO. Behind me in the cabin on the two long benches were 20 soldiers going home.

“Tony, Ed, I’m going back and check on our passengers.” I said, as I left the cockpit and went back into the cabin of the plane. It seemed very quiet with little conversation. Many of the men were asleep. I

checked to be sure they were all buckled in. Cupping my hands over my mouth I gave a yell to be heard over the engine roar, "Time for sandwiches and drinks, guys. We have a long flight ahead of us." I got a silent nod from some or an OK. I was looking at the faces of combat veterans; they all had the necessary 70+ points for discharge. How much they must have changed in the last 2-3 years. These boys of yesterday were now men filled with memories and experiences they will never forget.

I distributed the food and drinks and returned to the flight deck with food for the two pilots. Tony had turned over the control yoke to Ed. We were cruising into a bright red sunset. Our DC-3 was just too slow to keep up with the setting sun. The sky had now turned a deep purple and slowly the horizon turned from blue to black, as if a window shade had been pulled down over the sky. Tony reached over and switched on the outside wing and tail lights. I did a final check of all the gauges and returned to the cabin. I checked on our passengers and collected any leftover paper or cups. I took a seat near the cargo door, strapped in and closed my eyes.

I thought about my being on this plane. After my own combat days flying on a B-17 bomber in Europe I had asked for reassignment, when I returned to the States, and was deployed to the Air Transport Command (ATC) at Ft. Dix, NJ. My listing was "Flying Traffic Clerk" or, to most, a flying steward. I was responsible for the trip manifest, whether it was passengers or cargo, also the fuel load, hydraulics and the gauges on board. I was an essential partner for the two pilots. Though based at Ft. Dix, we flew out of Newark airport.

My reverie was interrupted by Tony's voice in my headphone. The hours have literally flown by. "Tell everyone we are on the final approach for landing." I made the announcement to a bunch of tired faces and I was greeted with smiles and a thumbs up. These men were almost home. They exhibited a sense of jubilation and anticipation. It had been a long time after all these years away from home.

I returned to the flight deck, standing between the pilots, as the lights of Kansas City and the airport came into view. Tony announced, "Wheels down, and give me hydraulics." I hit the control switch and pumped away. The wheels and flaps came down; Tony pulled back on the yoke as Ed pulled back the throttles. The plane touched down. Tony's feet hit the brakes and we taxied and parked at the ATC terminal. I headed back to the cargo door, released it and the ladder to the ground. I stood aside as the soldiers disembarked. Out of the darkness on the field, family and friends surge forward to embrace their loved ones. It was a scene I had seen over and over, but it got to me every time. I could feel their emotions, the sense of love and relief that closed around every one of these families.

For the three of us it was time for a late dinner in town. We discovered a small Italian restaurant where we let the beer and whiskey flow along with the food. After dinner we took a taxi to the small hotel near the airfield that ATC used for the air crews. We quickly fell asleep. My alarm clock announced very loudly when it was 7 a.m. After a shower, then breakfast, it was back to the airfield. Our DC-3 was sitting, ready, on the tarmac. Tony and Ed did a walkaround inspecting the plane.

Tony said, “We have only cargo going back, but check the manifest for weight and see how much fuel we need.” With everything in order, I climbed aboard, and checked. The cargo was secure; I went forward to the cockpit. I was again standing between the two pilots.

“Give us our oxygen masks,” Tony announced. I handed the masks to Tony and Ed, and then turned on the oxygen valve. Most of the pilots I had flown with used the oxygen to clear their heads of a hangover after a night of drinking. Trust me when I say no one wants to fly with a drunken pilot. After about five minutes Tony told me to turn off the oxygen and he called the control tower for clearance to take off. Again, as if by rote, I checked the altimeter, compass setting and the other gauges, and of course pumped the hydraulic system. We took off and turned east on our way back to Newark airport. I stayed up in the cockpit as there was nobody to talk to back in the cabin. Through the window I saw the clouds begin to thicken and darken and by the time we circled Newark it was raining. Our approach and landing was rough and bumpy. We pulled up to the terminal and Tony cut the engines. I was glad to unhook my parachute harness, knowing I didn’t have to use it. In the ATC office I wrote up the flight report and then got into my car for the drive back to the barracks at Ft. Dix, thankful that I had the next day off.

There are days when I missed being part of a B-17 bomber crew. But I enjoyed being part of the air force that was bringing these war-weary soldiers home. For many of us that time in combat is over and we can only hope and pray, in the future, it will not come again.

George Rubin

Whitecaps,
Like children, run
To shore, stir the sand with
Tiny palms, and leave with dirty
Britches

Bob Edelson



THE SMOKE TABLE

Although my parents were nonsmokers, they provided smoking materials for their guests. My father was a non-smoker out of conviction, and my mother had a throat condition, so she couldn't smoke. This was in the 1920s and 30s and it was the European custom then to provide cigarettes and cigars to guests. For this my parents had what they called a smoke table, which consisted of a round metal plate approximately two feet across with a rounded edge. It was decorated with red flowers and had a gold and black background. It had an arrangement of wooden legs which could be folded so that the smoke table could be stored in a drawer or on a shelf. The contents of the smoke table consisted of a humidor box with fine cigars, a plain box with low-quality cigars, and a little box of mixed cigarettes which my mother bought according to the color of the package. It also contained a tree of ashtrays, wooden matches, and a strike post for the matches, as well as a cigar clip to remove the ends of cigars. The cigars were furnished by Uncle Richard, who had a cigar factory. The fine cigars were for guests, and the low-quality ones for everyone else.

This smoke table presented a constant attraction to me. I was thirteen at the time. Some of my classmates smoked already. Not at school, which was smoke-free, and not at home, but on the streets. One day when my mother was out shopping in the city, I decided I would try smoking a cigarette. The maid was in the kitchen doing what maids do. I took a cigarette with a cork tip and tried to light it. I had problems striking a match and holding a cigarette at the same time. I took my first

inhale of the cigarette and I immediately spat it out. It was awful! Acid and acrid, and scratching the throat. I couldn't understand how anybody liked smoking.

So, what to do with my cigarette now? There was a stove in the living room which heated the entire apartment through stove pipes which were laid across the ceilings of the various rooms. The pipes carried the heat from the stove, which was about four and a half feet tall and two feet square. It was decorated with figures from the Roman Pantheon fire gods on three sides. It would fit x-shaped coals in through the top and the ashes came out the bottom. I quickly threw my cigarette and the match in the stove so nobody would ever know.

One day I found a half-smoked cigar on the ash-tray which the maid had not yet had time to clean up. It was left over from a party the night before. I decided I was going to try the cigar. Maybe it would be different from the cigarette. I was mistaken! The smoke from the cigar was much worse than that of the cigarette. The cigar quickly went into the stove to get rid of the evidence of my smoking.

When mother came home, she went into the living room and said, "I smell smoke, I wonder why?" She decided it was leftover smoke from the party and opened the window to freshen the room. It was then and there that my constant attraction to the smoke table evaporated, and I made a decision to never smoke again, and I have kept that promise to myself for the rest of my life.

Stefan Frank

Stefan Frank died in 2018. This story was submitted by Suzanne Frank as recorded by Judy Kruger.

UNFORGETTABLE VERMONT

I happily remember trips to many parts of the world. China with dancing in the park and standing on the Great Wall. Italy – meeting the Pope was a highlight. Having my suitcase (with dirty laundry) stolen a low point. And Egypt – being ogled by the men in Cairo and a boat ride down the Nile.

However, what stands out in my memory is a summer vacation in Vermont. We anticipated that having uninterrupted time together would be delicious. My husband was a research scientist; I was a trauma and relationship specialist. We needed a break. How could it be anything else but wonderful? Vermont is so very beautiful, and we were going to visit old friends. Two are famous artists. And we were going to be together.

We brought food, clothing for the cool nights, bug spray, and, most important to us, our Scrabble set. Our car was stuffed.

We had done research online and what sealed our choice of a particular apartment was a piano, as well as a DVD player for our movies and our favorite West Wing series (remember that?). Fallback entertainment was our Scrabble, and a bottle of wine to provide a warm glow on those cool nights. The bug spray would protect us during the day on our hikes into beautiful territory.

With great anticipation, we left the sweltering heat in Philadelphia. However, after hours longer than our GPS indicated, we arrived in sweltering heat that sucked the air out of the whole Northeast. Vermont was mockingly awaiting us.

We were greeted by our host, who appeared to be a left-over hippie from the late 60s. The macramé necklace and group hug clinched it. Meeting his wife confirmed our impression and we were certain that she had made the necklace.

Once inside, things did not improve. We discovered that the piano and DVD player were downstairs from our apartment in our hosts' living quarters. The wife said she loves to hear the piano. (We suspected false advertising.) There was more to come.

To get to our "love nest" we climbed a very long, narrow staircase to a made-over attic. The eaves took up most of the room and were obstacles for moving around. We banged our heads frequently, but luckily neither of us came away with a concussion.

The large window was useless for bringing in air, but the hosts did supply us with a very small oscillating fan. While we played Scrabble, our sweat-drenched bodies were cooled for brief moments by weak air from the fan. I like a hard mattress. Ours was on the floor and could have been great to sleep on without the oppressive heat.

As we were ready to take off on our day trips, one of our hosts would come out and chat; it was a challenge to avoid them. They were very friendly (hoping, perhaps, for our return visit the following summer?), but our interest was in being alone.

I am bug and tick phobic and, one day, readying for a hike, I coated myself with bug repellent. My partner, saying he was not as sweet as I, insisted he didn't

require bug protection. Out we went. A few feet into the trail, he spotted a yellow box. Expecting information about the hike, he inadvertently dislodged a large wasps' nest and really pissed them off. As they swarmed around him, he swatted and swatted, until he swatted his costly hearing aid. We tried for over an hour to find it on the forest floor, but no luck.

While this was going on, I had escaped being stung; he was covered with stings. Nevertheless, we continued our hike. As we were ascending a field, I felt a bad twinge in my back and, as the pain increased, admitted the discomfort. Shortly after, we entered a small town where a restaurant relieved our hunger and a chiropractor relieved my back.

Later, preparing a light meal in our tiny kitchen, I felt a warm burning sensation on my thigh. I had just experienced my own sting. The culprit looked like a small airplane, and my brave partner squished him in the sink.

Calls to my secretary reminded me that she was working in our beautifully appointed home where the rooms are air-conditioned, the ceilings are high and the closets are walk-in. I felt strange relaying to her that my ankles were swollen beyond belief and that, despite a recent shower, my body was dripping in perspiration.

We did have some fun visiting museums and hearing wonderful chamber music. We attended a master class, saw glass blowing and visited our artist friends. But the heat followed us everywhere.

On the way home, the GPS directed us to a different, much longer route and we drove through torrential rains, hoping we would make it home safely. We did; unpacking was not a chore, and my kitchen looked like the most beautiful kitchen I had ever seen. Our bed welcomed tired, yet air-cooled bodies.

Next year? Well, Paris sounds nice.

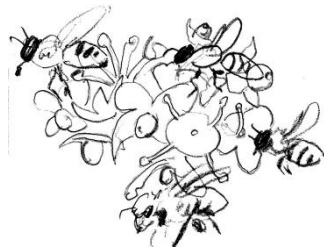
Paula Susan

UNWELCOME VISITORS IN LUMBERTON

It was perfect – finally. All the 2 a.m. mental furniture-moving sessions had gotten the six sofas into the right places. Thanks to the Friends of the Library Book Sale, the remaining books could be put on shelves rather than concealed in battered, unlabeled cardboard boxes. Construction of the upstairs bath and closet was complete, the large loft shade fixed, and towel rods strategically placed. Costco shelves (on sale) made basement organization easy and inexpensive, and the track lighting that had challenged the ingenuity of Jorge, the electrician, worked beautifully. Even the measuring cups had finally turned up, and she was beginning to feel as though she could cook again. The Big Move had been conquered. As she basked in the warm Monday sun, she succumbed to the hubris of self-satisfaction and thought how much she would enjoy showing off her new home.



Buzzing inside a loft window interrupted her smug reverie. What looked like a yellow wasp was there, trying to escape. Feeling benevolent, she took a bit of scrap paper and carefully corralled him, carried him down to the sunroom, and released him out the door. She was not surprised to see half a dozen of his little friends circling above the deck; warm weather brings out bugs.



An hour or so later, seeking craft supplies in the unfinished back basement, she heard buzzing again. “Flies,” she thought, looking up at the fluorescent light.

But what looked like more yellow wasps were clustered there, their numbers growing. Closing the door and turning out the light to contain the critters, she looked toward her sliding door, where wasps both inside and out beat themselves against the glass. Some had already expired on the rug.



She retreated to the first floor, carefully closing the door behind her, and saw that the wasps were now in possession of the sunroom as well. Clouds of them on the deck outside beat themselves against the windows.



Because the inside doors did not close tightly, any wasp wishing to get into the living room could wriggle through the space between them. This was serious.

Thinking, “This is why I moved here, so that I could get help immediately,” she hurried into the kitchen and scabbled in her Medford binder to find Debbie Farley’s number. Debbie had proved most useful in getting rid of construction scraps, dispatching workers to hang pictures, having the essential closet rod installed. Without a doubt, she could take care of this new problem.

Debbie promptly answered her phone. No one could come over that day, but someone was already scheduled to come to Lumberton next morning to look into another insect issue. As soon as the temperature dropped at sunset, the wasps would calm down. Since they were neither bug-phobic nor allergic, she and her husband could survive the night.

Now, however, she was curious. Exiting through the garage, she walked around the house and peered cautiously under the deck. Here the insects were swarming

into a gap in the foundation at the top of the steps, buzzing madly. Intrigued, she decided to revisit the basement. First, however, with her trusty iPad, she filmed a short video of the invasion, complete with buzzing, since she was the only witness to the scene.

Back inside, she carefully opened the door at the top of the basement stairs. No wasps coming up. She crept downstairs. Most of the wasps by the sliding door were dead or dying, but the recessed lighting panels were full of them, and she could hear loud buzzing in the dropped ceiling. From there, they could easily come up into the main floor through vents and cracks.



Another call to Debbie was definitely in order. Again the response: no one could come to Lumberton that day, but someone would be there first thing in the morning. Debbie was alarmed at the magnitude of the infestation and sympathetic but reiterated that the insects would sleep when it got dark.

After an uneasy night in which there was no wasp action, she checked the sunroom, finding many dead insects that she left as evidence of what had happened. There were no wasps outside the window or under the deck. A cold night and cloudy morning had stopped them. She went to the fitness center, leaving her husband in charge.

Upon her return, he sent her downstairs where, instead of the exterminator in a Hazmat suit that she'd hoped for, there was James with a can of Raid. "That will not do it," she said, to which he replied, "No. And they are honey bees, a protected species that we can't

spray.” When she looked closely at the bodies, it was clear that she had misidentified them. James collected a sample and photographed the light fixtures and dead bugs. He also noted the crevice through which they’d gotten in and sent all the evidence to Debbie.

Walt and Ron arrived an hour later. Armed with a ladder, a flashlight, and a spray substance to plug the bees’ entrance hole in the foundation, they made a thorough search of the space between ceiling and floor above. The few bees that flew out were shooed away



through an open window, but most of the swarm had died. They had followed their queen into what looked like a paradise, but it had become a death trap. Even a trained beekeeper would have had difficulty rescuing them. It was a sad day for the arboretum. Ironically, there were beehives next to the community gardens within about 300 yards of her unit. The swarm was that close to safety when they chose to detour into her house to starve and die.

Kathy Riley

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Carol Dingle entered her office and slammed the door behind her. She threw her purse into the guest chair and dropped onto the protesting spindle of her Herman Miller Aeron. That damned kid! Well, she'd asked him, "What do you want for Christmas?" She had nobody to blame but herself.

"I want a Zackafuser, Mommy! A red one with the special gyro and the short wings."

"You don't want that, Sweet Pea. Everybody's gonna have one of those. I want to get you something special. How about a drone or a racing car?"

"No, no, Mommy." He raised an imploring face. "I saw it on TV. It's so great. And Joey has one. I want one just like Joey's. Pleecease."

She'd wanted to say, "I don't have time for this shit." But how could she say that to her only child? She wanted to say, "Go ask your father for it." But that worthless piece of... Well he wouldn't be interested.

So this morning, when she'd come into work, she'd put all of her accounts aside, refused to look at her flooded email box, put her iPhone on "stun" and searched for the thing on Amazon. Sold out. Walmart. Backordered. Toys "R" Us. No wonder they were bankrupt. eBay. Plenty of offerings, highest bid was at \$575 with 19 hours still to go to the end of the auction. Buy it now for \$1,000, it said.

She glanced at her emails and could see in the previews that her clients were getting a bit testy over her silence. “Don’t you people have kids? Don’t you know that Christmas is coming?” she shouted to the echoing walls, then grabbed her purse and headed out to “lunch,” smiling and waving to her coworkers and avoiding eye contact and conversations as she ran for the elevator.

Carol had been doing most of her shopping online forever. She’d forgotten how far apart the stores were and how sweaty, loud, rude, and demanding the crowds were in this season. She went from store to store, getting increasingly desperate. Nothing. Finally, attitude and credit card well in hand, she headed for FAO Schwarz and it was...gone, closed, out of business.

Returning to her office, Carol felt very anxious about the extended period that she had been out of contact. She had to get this over with! She gulped and reopened the eBay site. She was well paid. \$1,000 didn’t scare her, but for a toy? She typed in her search term, “Zackafuser” and the reply was “**0** results for **Zackafuser**.” She blinked and checked the spelling: **0** results... They were all gone. Every last \$1,000 one. She stared at the screen for a moment thinking, “Well, that problem is solved,” but she felt bad as she turned to her long-delayed work, guilty on two fronts.

By Christmas Eve, Carol was feeling very blue. Under the tree was a beautifully wrapped, deluxe radio-controlled drone with advanced artificial intelligence programming that she knew Johnny didn’t want: a really expensive toy that would be a disappointment. Johnny was in bed, probably still awake in his anticipation. She sat staring at the gas log, sipping a glass of wine. The

phone jarred her from her brown study and she checked the caller ID: John Carroll. Oh no, what did he want? She answered, already angry, with an iron “Hello.”

“Hi Carol.”

“Hi Carroll,” she answered back with the old joke before she could help herself. “What do you want?”

“Would it be okay if I dropped in tomorrow? ...Just for a moment,” he added, sensing her hesitation.

Well, he was Johnny’s father, after all, though for all the help he gave... “All right,” her tone was still steely, “just for a moment.”

“Okay, ...ah... thanks, 9:00?”

“Sure.” She hung up the phone and stared at it. 9:00, right, Johnny will have been up for hours by then, playing with his new toys and pretending to be happy. Family life is overrated, she thought as she prepared for bed.

At 8:55 a.m. the outside door signal sounded, and she buzzed her ex-husband in. In a few moments he appeared at her apartment door, heavily dressed, his cheeks red with the cold. She ushered him in, bending away from an attempted kiss as he said, “Merry Christmas. Where’s Johnny?”

“In the living room.” She didn’t respond to his holiday greeting.

“Hi Johnny, Merry Christmas! Come give me a hug.”

Johnny hesitated, sensing his mother's antipathy, then advanced for a perfunctory embrace.

"I've got something for you," John said, trying not to sound wounded.

Johnny took the proffered present and sat on the floor to open it. He grabbed a loose piece of the gift-wrap, tore off a large strip and froze. "Mommy! You tricked me! Daddy got me a Zackafuser! That wasn't a very nice trick." He tried to pout around the delight, gave in to joy and pulled out the toy: red, special gyro, short wings and all.

"John, how did you...? I searched everywhere. How did you even know?"

"Father-and-son communication," he laughed, "aided by my brother-in-law. Remember? He's a Walmart executive."

"Thank you so much," said Carol and, for this moment at least, they were at peace, as they watched their little boy.

Bob Edelson

At surf's edge, ebb tide
leaves its secret messages
in runes of sea grass.

Elizabeth Hicks

ALARM MYSTERY

It was almost midnight on a Friday when the downstairs smoke detector alarm sounded. We were both asleep in our bed. My husband awoke, got up and went to investigate. He didn't smell any smoke; he didn't see anything amiss in the hallway, bathrooms, second bedroom, kitchen, great room, sunporch or garage. He went up to the loft and found everything satisfactory. He came downstairs; checked for heat at the basement door, which was cool; went into the basement and all was fine. He went outside and couldn't find any problem.

Unable to find anything wrong, he came back to our bedroom and awakened me. He said the smoke detector alarm was periodically sounding and wondered if I could smell any smoke. I got out of bed and went through the house and also found nothing,

My husband then called the Medford Leas front desk to report the problem. After a few minutes' discussion, the decision was made to disable the smoke detector and they would send out someone in the morning so that we could get back to sleep. Cautiously, my husband got the step ladder out of the garage to remove the battery, though we didn't have a 9-volt replacement available. With the two of us working together and only using the first two steps of the ladder, he managed to open the smoke detector and remove the battery. We then replaced the ladder in the garage and went back to bed.

In the morning, Jim arrived with a new battery; replaced the battery and cover on the smoke detector; could not find any other problem; and left. We all

hoped this would not happen again and did not have any plausible explanation as to what caused the alarm to sound. If this occurred in the future, we might need a new smoke detector.

That same day at 4:00 p.m. the alarm again sounded. We were happy that at least it wasn't the middle of the night. Again, we both did the house check and found nothing suspicious. However, as I came out of the kitchen into the foyer at the front door, I noticed my husband's new cell phone screen was lighted.

Yes, the alarm mystery was solved. He had just purchased a new phone and had placed it on the table in the hallway just beneath the smoke detector. Neither of us knew that the phone was programmed to alert the owner when flash flood warnings occurred in our area. The phone alarm and the smoke detector alarm seemed to be the same to us, especially since we had not heard the smoke detector alarm before. We have subsequently learned how to disable the alarm on the cell phone when weather alerts occur.

Janet Siler

MORE MILES, MORE DISCOMFORT

I became a million-miler
and a far more grumpy flyer.
Squashed into narrow middle seats,
my short legs doubled into pleats.

Feet on top of my big briefcase
in underseat “personal space.”
Three hours or more, confined by strap,
with texts and binders on my lap.



Studied to treat brains chemically
to cure more problems mentally.
Bound for West Coast beachy magnets,
to stay indoors at Marriotts.

Taught by doctors of pharmacy,
not hostile like psychiatry.
Who had their own guild interests,
we were just interloping “guests.”

Running with bags through airports late,
to the farthest possible gate.
I flew by night, flew out early,
my waiting patients getting surly.

Psychopharmacology,
wasted years you turned out to be.
And after all that misery,
it's business class or none for me.

Joyce Linda Sichel

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!