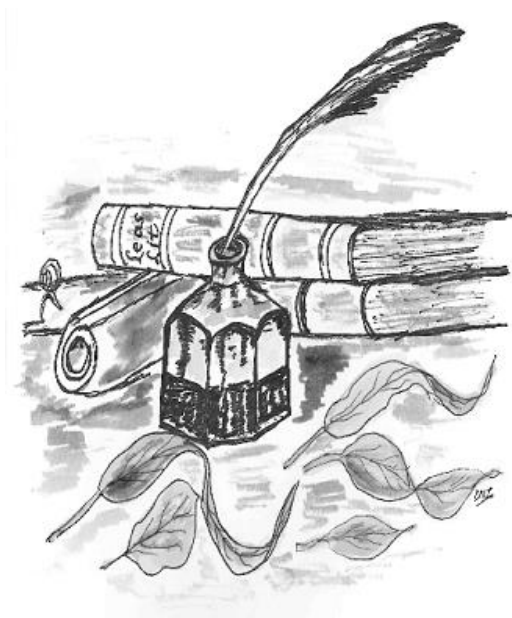


# Leas Lit



ORIGINAL WRITING AND ART  
BY RESIDENTS OF MEDFORD LEAS

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## CONTENTS

Rain	<i>Edith Roberts</i>	1
Driving Rain	<i>Bob Edelson</i>	3
Untitled	<i>Elizabeth Hicks</i>	6
Misunderstood	<i>Joanne Thomas</i>	7
The Russians Are Here	<i>George Rubin</i>	12
Resistance	<i>Ruth Podolin</i>	18
Windows	<i>Edith Roberts</i>	22
A Trip to Remember	<i>Jack Osborn</i>	24
Voiceless	<i>Stefan Frank*</i>	26
One Got Away	<i>Joyce Linda Sichel</i>	29
My Romance with the New Jersey Turnpike	<i>Kathy Riley</i>	31
Pride Manhattan	<i>Chris Darlington</i>	34
They Square Danced Then	<i>Joyce Linda Sichel</i>	38
What Mother Said	<i>Sandy Heath</i>	41
Isaac Newton	<i>Eric Hahn</i>	42
Funny How Life Turns Out	<i>Joyce Koch</i>	47
Untitled	<i>Doris Kabley</i>	53

\* The asterisk indicates a story that was dictated by the storyteller to Judy Kruger.





## RAIN

Listen, listen, listen, listen,

Listen, listen to the rain,

The beautiful rain.

Raindrops falling, dripping, tapping,

Dripping, tapping on the pane.

The warm spring rain.

Wets the earth, the trees the grass.

Peaked roof sends gutters flowing,

New flowers growing.

Yellow mackintosh, waterproof hat,

Boots in puddles splishing, splashing,

Bold thunder crashing.

Sun comes glinting through the clouds,  
Arching rainbow, purple, blue,  
Rich golden hue.

I'm dirty, wet and full of life,  
Muddy cheeks and muddy smile,  
Full of cockeyed style.

*Edith Roberts*





## DRIVING RAIN

**T**he south of Florida lies flat as the hand of God, with two great highways running north like ruler-straight arteries. Under an azure sky flecked with cotton-ball clouds, the sun-shimmered air raced by me as I headed up I-95 toward Cape Canaveral, my brief vacation over, and a few workdays ahead. I thought I was driving fast in my rented car, but 18-wheelers, distant in my rear-view mirror, were upon me in an instant, their wake rocking my car from side to side. I stayed to the right and let them have their way with me.

Florida is a very long peninsula and a straight highway is hypnotizing, so I was not sad to notice a dimming of the harsh light and an apparent cooling of the air made evident by the disappearance of the shimmer and the mirages that made the road look wet. The reduction of eyestrain was welcome, and the sky had become much more interesting, banishing the drowsiness of the featureless road and sky. Above and in front of me the lower portions of the clouds were brilliantly white and rather than the cotton-ball scraps, they had become enormous swelling things, blocking much of the sky. At their tops, dark anvils had formed, lowering over all the world. It looked like I was in for some rain. I anticipated it, the cooling, the soothing sounds. Experimentally, I opened the window a crack and turned off the air conditioner, but the wind noise in the speeding car and the high humidity were unpleasant, so I closed the window and restarted the air conditioner.

It had been a long time since I had driven in more than a drizzle. In Southern California, my home, the first

rain of the season made for quite dangerous driving. All summer, oil drops from the cars bake into the road and the first rain lifts them up, creating a slick surface that can undo the unwary driver. But Florida was not California. Rains were frequent; there would be no oil film. It would probably be like driving in the Northeast, where I was raised.

The sky got darker and there was an eerie green atmosphere. Tiny flickers of lightning were visible very high in the clouds. A few drops of water splattered my windshield and I turned on my intermittent wipers and my headlights. In the fields to the side of the road, a gray curtain appeared to be advancing toward me and a gust of wind made me twitch the steering wheel to stay in my lane. Another 18-wheeler roared by, blinding me for a moment as it whipped up the water on the road. I upped the windshield wipers to a continuous slap, screech, slap, shrieking on the drying windshield as the slop from the truck was conquered. Then it began to rain. I had never experienced rain before.

The gray curtain reached me, and it wasn't a curtain – curtains sweep by; this was akin to driving into a lake. The road disappeared. The lane markers, the concrete, the shoulders, the metal barriers at the limits of the road, were gone. There were no soothing sounds, a thousand hammers were pounding on the roof. If I'd shouted my dismay, I wouldn't have heard it. I advanced the wipers to full speed and they sloughed off sheets of water without improving visibility at all. The wind pushed me around so that I yanked the steering wheel against it, never knowing what lane I was in or whether I was even on the road. I had to slow down. That would at

least diminish the apparent speed of the gushing, blinding waterfall through which I was driving. And I thought of the 18-wheelers coming up behind me, no more able to see me than I was able to see or hear them.

Frightened, terrified, I pulled toward the shoulder. My tires crossed the warning strip – I couldn't hear it, but I could feel the new vibration. Front right over, back right over, front left over, back left over. I was on the shoulder. I slowed slowly, fearing a skid, fearing a vehicle coming from behind, fearing finding a vehicle stopped in front of me. I halted. Without the speed of the car, I could see a bit through the water. I was no longer blind. I edged over toward the metal barrier to get as far off the road as I could. I gave a sigh of relief. A truck hurtled by in the right lane and my heart blasted my chest wall. I scrunched down to wait it out.

In twenty minutes it was over. The rain disappeared, the sun came out, the evil clouds looked friendly again. I started the car and resumed my trip with a new humility.

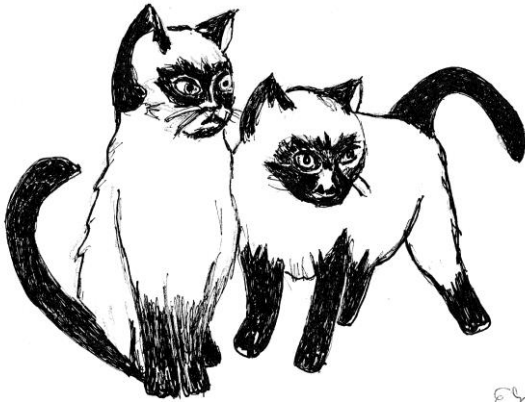
*Bob Edelson*

Trees down in the storm  
helter-skelter. Thunder's back  
playing at jack straws.

*Elizabeth Hicks*

## MISUNDERSTOOD

**M**y brother and I are two fun-loving Siamese cats who were born in the same litter a few years ago. Not only do we have a sweet disposition, but we've also been told we are very handsome. Since we were kittens, we've lived with this lady in a very nice house. We think she's old because from what we can tell, the rest of the neighborhood seems to be made up of older people, too. Since we never go outdoors, we have to look out the window to "read the paper." We always see only old people walking their dogs and we wonder if they are as confused as we are, because this lady that we live with just doesn't understand us.



Now we lead some *really* boring lives. There's nothing to hunt here – no mice or bugs, or any fun things. We think most bugs won't even try to come in here because she's always yelling and they must be afraid of her. Once in a while, she will scream that she sees a "stink bug" and run around till she catches it and flushes it down the toilet. So we don't get to chase anything that

moves. Aside from being well fed (with tasty treats added twice a day), and having access to most of the house, the rest of our daily routine consists of sleeping, more sleeping, grooming ourselves and taking care of our bodily functions while we figure out some “cat things” to do. That’s really a challenge when you consider that we’re penned in here and we walk around so close to the floor that we can’t see much of anything at all. It’s enough to make us stir-crazy!

We are naturally curious and, to try and make life interesting, we do things like looking into closets and opening doors to places that are off limits to us, such as her bedroom, the sunroom, the garage and the basement. We’ve been really successful at this exploration project of ours, to the point where she has come up with some new ways to see that these places remain off limits to us.

One of the first incidents was when we pushed through the doors to the sunroom. I guess she doesn’t want us out there because it’s where she keeps most of her precious plants, which is why we like to nibble on them. After tasting several nice big leaves that did not agree with our stomachs, we found a great big seashell that held a whole lot of these tall, prickly plants with needles sticking out of them. Did that ever hurt when we pulled them out of the shell, but it was fun even though a few other plants got in our way and made a big dirty mess all over the floor.

After a few more times of sneaking into her bedroom, pushing open the basement door and prying open the door from the kitchen into the garage, **locks** began appearing on these doors. Most of these locked doors

were successful, but not all of them. When we began to *throw our bodies up against the door*, in an attempt to force the door open, she declared all-out war! We heard her say something about a “battering ram,” but we don’t know what that is.

First came the **water pistols**, which were in every room. After we first attacked the doors, she would chase us all over the house, screaming and drenching us in the process. We enjoyed the chases, but she tired quickly and soon moved on to another tactic.

Next came the **metal cans** about the size of a soda can. She would place one of them in front of every door we tried to open. When we went near the door, the can would give off a loud hissing sound and spray a lot of some kind of liquid on us. That was almost enough to scare the fur off our bodies! It was also very successful because we absolutely **hate** anything that hisses because it makes us think of snakes (ugh!), and the only liquid we like is the water that we drink; we never wear it.

So, what do two athletic, healthy and bored felines do for exercise and recreation when we’re barred from investigating half of the house? Well, for exercise we have one of those cat gymnasiums that’s carpeted and has a fairly high spot for viewing. However, we’re eating more than we’re exercising these days (not for lack of trying) so we’re topping the scales at around 15 pounds each and that gym was made for smaller kitties. When we’re having one of our crazy cat races, at top speed all through the house, and we jump and land on the cat gym, it doesn’t always stay upright. And does she ever yell when it hits the floor! It’s even a louder yell than the time we were on one of our runs through the house and

we landed on the dining room table and skidded right across it, and that big glass and metal candle thing came down right along with us. That noise brought her on the fastest run into the room that we've ever seen. Maybe she likes exercise too.

After the introduction of the spray cans we toned it down a bit and went on to quieter escapades. One time when she was looking all over the house for me, she finally came into the kitchen calling and calling until, all of a sudden, she looked straight up in the air, and there I was looking down at her from the top of a kitchen cabinet. She bellowed and carried on like I was doing something wrong. All I was doing was showing my brother a new jump exercise where I leaped from the floor, to the counter, to the refrigerator top and then to the top of the cabinets. I wasn't knocking anything over or into any mischief, but I had to come down to stop her screeching. It hurt my ears.

There's one more thing we do that upsets her too, but I can justify that just like the things I've mentioned. When we "battle," we're not really fighting. Since we are both males, there is such a thing as being the alpha cat. This means that one of us is dominant. (He tells the other one what to do and gets the largest portion of the food.) Since we are from the same litter, the urge to be the alpha is strong in each of us and the only way to settle that is to switch roles every so often. Therefore we do a little play acting by howling, biting, scratching, pinning each other down like it's a wrestling match and repeating the process several times until one of us gives up. We do this routine whenever we're really bored while she runs around yelling at us to "STOP IT" at the top of



her lungs. (For two quiet little cats, this sure is a noisy place at times.)

We don't know why she carries on so much about every little thing we do, but I think you get the idea. We are just two sweet, Siamese brothers trying to amuse and entertain ourselves while satisfying our insatiable curiosity, who happen to live with an older woman who just doesn't understand us.

For fear of becoming suddenly homeless, we must remain anonymous.

*As understood by Joanne Thomas*

## THE RUSSIANS ARE HERE!

### Day One

January in New York City can be cold. As I turned up the collar of my coat against the biting wind, I quickly entered the warm lobby of the Edison Hotel. At the reception desk I asked for the room of Evgeni Fyodorov. With a quick call and a nod from the receptionist, I knocked on the door of 1105. Evgeni opened the door and I was greeted with a firm handshake and a smile. He was a big man with deep dark eyes and a small white beard. He escorted me into his sitting room and with deeply Russian-accented English said, “So, George, you are from the American Friends Service Committee, so tell me what our plans are for today.”

“First I must say, it is wonderful to meet you. I have read about your scientific expedition to Antarctica and that you are a distinguished member of the Soviet Presidium. It is an honor to have you and your group from the Soviet Peace Committee here in the States.”

“Thank you, but our group needs to know what you have planned.”

I replied, “We have a reservation for dinner at a French restaurant for our entire group. It is one I’m familiar with. Then we have tickets for the Broadway show, *A Chorus Line*.”

“That sounds excellent. I have the address and we will meet you at the restaurant at 6 pm,” Evgeni replied.

At the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) office I had time to review the members of the group I was to host at dinner and the theater. They were all part of a Soviet peace delegation. Their itinerary for this trip covered most of the USA. I understood that this was a reciprocal visit for an AFSC visit to Moscow in the previous year.

The bright glow of the chandelier lights and the set tables beckoned us out of the cold and the wind. When I entered with the other volunteer, Jane Nicklin, who was chosen because she is fluent in Russian, our Russian guests were already at the table and a vodka bottle was being passed around. We both shared the warm welcome we received from our guests. I then introduced Jane to the Soviet delegation. At the head of the table sat Evgeni. Next to him was Sergei Golyakov, a tall man with a pleasant smile, the associate editor of *New Times*, a Soviet weekly of world affairs. Oleg Kovtunovic, with his long white hair and beard, was a professor of Oriental studies. Next to him was the loud and boisterous film director Stanislav Rostocki. Sitting next to him quietly was the interpreter for the group, Andrei Melvil, head of the Institute of US-Canada Studies. Iliia Orlov, short and stout, is a dentist and also the head of the Union of all Christian Baptists in Russia. At the far end of the table were the two women with the delegation, Zoia Malkova, Director of the Institute of General Pedagogy and Psychology, and Natalie Vail, who also is an interpreter. They both greeted Jane very warmly. I knew they were happy to see an American woman with us.

The dinner went well, but when I looked at my

watch I had to tell the group that we needed to leave for the theater. But as the vodka toasts continued this became harder to do. In desperation I asked Evgeni for help. He immediately stood up and said loudly, "Our host said we must go, so, comrades, we must go!" This quieted everyone. Hats and coats were retrieved and we spilled out on to the sidewalk. Jane and I decided that two cabs would be enough. We hailed them and split up our group and told the drivers are destination. It was a short drive. When my cab arrived at the theater we all got out, but there was no second cab. The show was to start in less than ten minutes. I paced up and down in front of the theater in exasperation and to keep warm against the biting wind. Then suddenly, with a screech of tires, the second cab stopped at the curb. Even before Jane could open her door shouts of anger emerged from inside the taxi. When the door did open the delegation spilled out with loud shouting and, I later understood from Jane, a lot of Russian cursing.

"Jane, what happened?" I asked.

"The cabby happens to be a Russian immigrant, and we practically had World War III coming here. He called them all KGB agents. The Russians yelled back that he was unfaithful to his native land. This went back and forth, getting louder and louder, until he pulled over to the curb and stopped the cab. I told him that we needed to get to the theater. Finally we were on our way again. I'm glad it was only verbal."

Finally, with tempers cooled, I hurriedly escorted everyone in to the theater. We had to shuffle past many in the audience as the show had already started. I took a deep breath of relief and settled into my seat. It was a

pleasure, the music was beautiful, and the acting was superb. As the first-act curtain came down Evgeni turned to me. “We are all very tired and need to go back to the hotel,” he announced.

I was a little surprised, but we all got up and headed back to the hotel. I went with Evgeni to his room to discuss tomorrow’s agenda. He first needed to call *Pravda* to update the trip. Then I returned to my room and put my feet up on the bed, reviewing all the events of the day and regretting that I would never see Act II of *A Chorus Line*.

## Day Two

Outside my hotel window the sun shone down on a cold windy Broadway. I knocked on Evgeni’s door. He was dressed for the winter weather with a fur-lined coat and large fur hat. The two of us went down to have breakfast in the hotel restaurant. Over coffee Evgeni said, “I’m sorry that we had to leave the theater so early last night, but after having been to Philadelphia and then to Princeton University, followed by coming on to New York City, it was too much to do all in one day. I know that the plans for today will be a little easier, yes?”

I nodded. “We only need to be at Riverside Church by 11,” I said as I sat back leisurely sipping my coffee.

New York is a very quiet city on Sunday mornings, and the delegation’s trip to the church was uneventful, with time to spare. Walking into Riverside Church is entering one of the most beautiful, a neo-Gothic edifice, the tallest in the US with magnificent artwork, carvings, and stained glass. This cathedral is often called the

“Rockefeller” edifice, as he was the major financial benefactor. We were greeted by William Sloane Coffin, the senior minister, wearing his brightly colored robe. He escorted us down the aisle to our seats in the front of the cathedral. The service began with music from the church’s great organ and the choir singing songs of peace. I watched the faces of our Russian guests and they were totally impressed by the grandeur and beauty that surrounded them. Coffin began his sermon speaking Russian, with a translator for the congregation. He spoke of the hope for world peace for all humankind. At the end of the service Ilia Orlov asked William Coffin if he could visit the organ loft and see the magnificent instrument. “I’m not only the head of the Baptist Church in Moscow but also an accomplished organist,” he told Coffin.

“By all means,” Coffin replied.

We all climbed to the loft and were greeted there by William Swan, the church organist. Orlo sat down on the organ bench, rubbed his hands together, and began to play. We all stood and were mesmerized by the playing. First Bach, then Russian church music by Rachmaninoff. It was a wonderful concert. Then, with hugs and handshakes, it was time to say goodbye to our hosts and Riverside Church. It was a short walk to the Church World Services Offices, which house some of the world’s most beautiful and precious Russian icons of past tsarist dynasties. Everyone was amazed and appreciative that they were able to see this glorious collection, and it showed in their faces and their smiles.

After our lunch together, it was time to say goodbye. With honest and genuine affection we hugged,

knowing that our short journey together was over. I watched and waved as Evgeni, wearing his large winter coat, smiling through his white beard, disappeared into a crowd of New Yorkers on this sunny afternoon. Following him was Ilia Orlov, a small gentle man and a wonderful organist. Then Andrei Melvil, our interpreter with those piercing blue eyes, and the rest of the delegation soon melted into the bustling crowds. I stood alone for a few minutes holding in my hands some of the small gifts they had given me.

Today, as I reflect back on that meeting, I ask myself, did we accomplish anything toward world peace and understanding? I have no definitive answer.

I only know that for a short time what divides us in culture and language seemed to vanish, as we embraced each other as human beings trying to keep this planet alive.

*George Rubin*

## RESISTANCE

Watching Ken Burns's documentary of US involvement in Vietnam recently brought back memories of how painful those years had felt on a personal level.

During the early 1960s, I was up to my ears with caring for a baby and a toddler and working with Mike to begin his veterinary practice in our home. It felt as if our country's involvement in Vietnam crept up on me. It was largely through my younger brother that I became aware of what was happening there, as he protested in Washington, DC, with fellow Earlham College students and dealt with notices from Selective Service. Once aware, protesting and resisting took on a life of its own for me. I retain vivid memories of those years.

Foremost, because it was repeated often, was riding down I-95 through Maryland, on my way to Washington, in a bus filled with fellow protesters. In front of us, following us, and parked at rest stops along the way were many other buses heading for the same protest. Sometimes there would be a sign on the side of the bus, identifying the group or expressing the sentiments of its riders. The caravan of buses increased in number over the years, as the war and awareness intensified.

Once in Washington and immersed in the sea of hundreds and hundreds of protesters, I would experience an almost indescribable sense of energy and exhilaration – to be with so many others who were as distressed about Vietnam as I was, and who were speaking out in this way. The manner in which this renewed me, at a time that I so often felt alone in my discouragement and horror, kept me coming back over and over. Be-



sides registering my opposition and urging a change in US direction, these protests allowed me to retain a sense of integrity while being part of a country that was doing these unconscionable things in my name. Standing openly against the war allowed me to live with myself.

At the end of the day of protest, there was the long ride home, threading our way through the jumble of buses, exhausted but deeply satisfied.

Three of these DC protests carry special memories. At one, a large group of us stood on a grassy slope across from the White House, silently and prayerfully holding our signs. Immediately next to us stood a small group of neo-Nazis in their brown garb; they were anything but silent. That counterprotest felt surreal. Looking back on it, I am struck that, since it was peaceful, it did illustrate the freedom to protest that we all have, even, or perhaps especially, when we so starkly disagree.

Another time as we marched we had to slow down to a single file, to get around a barrier. A man with a large, professional-looking camera was crouched down in front of us and a little off to the side. He snapped a picture of each protestor as we passed in line. We assumed he was from the FBI, gathering material for our files. By that time, we were aware of how much effort the FBI was putting into investigating, infiltrating, and intimidating the peace movement. Someday I plan to request my FBI file through the Freedom of Information Act, just to know how they perceived and recorded my activities.

One afternoon in 1963, Linus Pauling, the two-time Nobel Prize winner, protested with us in front of the White House. That evening he entered the same

White House as an invited guest for the formal dinner honoring that year's American Nobel Prize winners. He had received the Nobel Peace Prize for his peace activism. (His earlier Nobel Prize had been in Chemistry.)

Not all the protests were in Washington. Some were local. Of those, the one I remember most clearly was at City Hall in Philadelphia. I went with my close friend, Bev Sigel, when we were both eight and a half months pregnant. It was a beautiful spring day, and we were packed tightly together, listening to speakers, in the large crowd that swelled and overflowed around City Hall. When we returned to South Jersey that afternoon, the bus dropped us off on Route 38, but on the opposite side from where our cars were parked. We still laugh about how ludicrous we must have looked – two young women with very large bellies, dashing through the rush hour traffic to get across the highway. A few weeks later we each gave birth to daughters, one day apart.

For his veterinary hospital, Mike purchased drugs from a number of pharmaceutical companies, one of which was Dow Chemical. We became aware that Dow produced napalm, the gel dropped by our planes onto villages in Vietnam, causing terrible burns to the people. After we had talked it over, Mike agreed to no longer purchase drugs from Dow. I wrote letters to their corporate office explaining that because of our opposition to the Vietnam War and the use of their napalm there, we would no longer order from them. Later, at a veterinary conference, their representative who had been assigned to visit Mike monthly told Mike he'd been afraid to call on Sterling Veterinary Hospital because of my irate letters.

A telephone tax was instituted at some point for the explicit purpose of helping finance the Vietnam War. We refused to pay it. With each telephone bill payment I'd enclose a letter stating we were subtracting that portion in opposition to the war. The telephone company did not seem to care, and our service continued uninterrupted. However, when we began to get threatening notices from the government, probably the IRS, our accountant DID care. Eventually, we stopped withholding that tax, as I no longer had Mike's support in doing this.

As the war dragged on and intensified, I grew increasingly agitated, and couldn't resist expressing how I felt in any way I could. I remember going to social gatherings and arguing with other guests about Vietnam. I would get so passionately invested I'd end up in tears of frustration. Certainly, I was a hostess's nightmare!

The two things I learned from those bitter years of US involvement in Vietnam were:

First, to be cynical about what our government tells us is the reason for its military actions and to question reports about how a war is going. The passage of years has confirmed how much we, the public, were misled about what was happening in Vietnam at the time of our involvement there.

Second, that while resistance is for the express purpose of changing the behavior of our country, until it does and just as important, it maintains my own sense of integrity. When something is being done in my name that I believe to be egregiously wrong, only by resisting in every way I can, will I be able to live with myself.

*Ruth Podolin*

## WINDOWS

I find curious the etiquette for window closing in my daughter's little suburb of Strasbourg, France. Rue des Petits Champs is not bucolic as the name implies. It is an unpaved alleyway of four quite friendly houses clustered together. The alley is about as wide as a car, with three feet to spare on either side. Our neighbors' windows are right there, staring us in the face.

How do the French handle their windows? How do you live your life when you might possibly serve as a very convenient television screen for the house opposite? You are on your computer; you're reading, cooking, eating. You're "public, like a frog." What you do is put "forward blinkers" on your eyes. You gaze at the lovely red geraniums lining the edge of the house, but stare unseeingly on the windows right there before you. The one exception is at the rising and setting of the sun. Those are the hours when the *volets* open and close.

If one were walking blindfold down the streets of France, one would know the hour by the opening and closing of the shutters. It's then that you greet your neighbors. There's a whirring from the *volets* across the street or a clatter from ours and then "Bonjour, Madame." "Bonjour."

Our neighbors' *volets* are chestnut brown and composed of inch-wide horizontal slats which draw up into some hidden recess above the windows. We have gray *volets* much like American shutters. They have diagonal strengthening slats on the inside. A four-inch-high iron man hangs at the sides of the windows. In the morning

you lift him forward to hold back the great heavy shutters. Your windows are now free to receive the daily adventure of the little street.

“Clatter, clatter,” “whirr, whirr,” and the day begins. The papas go out for baguettes. The neighbors sit quietly having their breakfast, concentrating only on the table there in front of them. Off goes one neighbor to his distant teaching job in Ammerschwihl. Little children come to be babysat across the alley. There are new toys, visiting friends, shopping trips. The daily weather drama is seen. There is a blooming of wisteria and lavender in the spring and great healthy geraniums in the summer. Fall follows with its reds and golds. The nearby street has its car noises and steady pedestrians.



The day ends when maman comes home from work on her bicycle. The time has come to close the *volets*. The latest dollies will be held up. There is a lovely gentle feeling of neighborhood and then a little wave from the neighbors' children. “Bonsoir, Madame.” “Bonsoir.” The *volets* shut with their whirr or their clatter and we are once again enclosed in the safe little circle of family.

*Edith Roberts*

## A TRIP TO REMEMBER

**D**uring the late fifties we were living in Parma, Italy. I had work responsibilities there and in Western Spain. Travel time to and from the latter was less by way of Lisbon.

On a scorching hot August afternoon I flew from Lisbon to Milan dressed in slacks and short-sleeved shirt. After a mad dash by taxi from Malpensa Airport to the Central Railway Station I was able to catch the express train from Milan to Trieste with a stop in Verona. The train was moving as I boarded a coach, panting from running with a heavy suitcase. I entered the first car with a compartment having an empty seat, and sat with relief to recover my breath.

This was observed with great interest by the other occupants of the compartment – a beautifully dressed couple with three teen-aged children. Not a word was spoken. Soon thereafter the conductor arrived. “Biglietti per favore!” The father produced their tickets. I told the conductor I need a one-way fare to Verona. (For a small premium, tickets could be bought after boarding.) I paid for it, and he left.

“Signore, you speak Italian!” Italian ladies are sometimes very curious, especially about strangers. “May I ask where you are going in such a hurry?” I explained that I had a ticket to that evening’s opera at the Roman Arena in Verona. What I did not mention was that my wife and friends were driving from Parma to Verona, where we would meet for an early dinner before show time. “And from where did you come?” “Lis-

bon.” “Lisbon in Portugal! You must love opera immensely to have come so far! But you will not be admitted to the Arena dressed as you are!” I explained that I had appropriate clothes in my suitcase and I would shower and dress at the Verona Railway Station. (Cubicles for that purpose were available in many major Italian stations.)

“Signore, will you please to join us in our *riscontro*?” Out from under the seats came containers of formaggio, prosciutto, panini and vino. It was a snack that I thoroughly enjoyed, and remember to this day. “Which opera this evening?” I replied “*Aida*.”

“How well do you know the music?” I answered, “Not as well as I should.” “Would you like us to sing some of the choruses?” I replied “It would give me great pleasure!” So they did, beautifully, with all members exercising their innate love of and talents in music. All too soon, the train slowed for Verona. The ladies shook my hand and the others gave me the *abbraccio* and all waved from the train until I lost sight of them.

*Jack Osborn*

## VOICELESS

In 1935, the Nazis had been in charge of Germany for two years already and were increasing their persecution of the Jewish populace. Mr. Gephardt was the German teacher for the third level. He was a veteran of WWI, where he lost his right leg below the knee. It was an ugly sight when he took off the prosthesis. When it hurt, he took it off in class. He was a good teacher and a dyed-in-the-wool Nazi. Can you imagine his feelings having a 13-year-old Jew-boy in his class? He must have been upset and angry. I was the only Jewish student in the gymnasium (university preparatory high school). I got along fine with my third-level classmates. As a matter of fact, they prevented me from being beaten up. During recess in the gymnasium yard one day, the sixth-level students decided to beat me up, but my classmates formed a ring around me so that the older students couldn't reach me. Then the bell rang and recess was over. Mr. G showed his feelings by not calling on me during the class. He also didn't let me recite German poems that the class was working on. On the other hand, my written work was always marked "sloppy" with remarks like "incomplete," "you don't know what you are talking about," etc. I never received an A for my essays, usually a B or a C.

Mr. Gephardt once gave the class an assignment: "Write about what you did on Mardi Gras." Mardi Gras was a school holiday, seven weeks before Easter. It was celebrated by children of all ages and some adults by dressing up in costumes like a witch, a princess, a policeman, a pilot, and so on. Some of the kids walked the streets of the neighborhood to compare the costumes.



Others had private parties at their homes and a lot of them played games on the marketplace next to the medieval city hall. There were stands around the marketplace selling additions to costumes and some of them sold old costumes. The traditional food for Mardi Gras is jelly donuts, which were well represented by fryers along the streets.

I decided, or rather my father decided, not to participate in the celebration because if they found out I was a Jew the crowd might beat me up or even kill me. Or I might end up at the police station as a disturber of the peace.

I had just finished reading an adventure volume of Karl May. I was now looking for something else to read, so I looked in my father's glass-enclosed bookcase. I came across a volume of Shakespeare plays in German translation. I knew who Shakespeare was, so I looked through the volume. I came across the play *Julius Caesar*. That was it! He was my hero in history class. So I started writing about the play. I wrote about the warnings of the sage and of the pleas of his wife not to go to the senate, but Caesar ignored them. Then we have the scene of the senators discussing Caesar's possible plans of becoming emperor and putting an end to the people's republic. When Caesar arrived, the discussions were heated and Caesar made the senators mad. They attacked him with their knives. Each senator pushed a knife into Caesar, including Brutus, his friend. This gave voice to the famous saying "Et tu Brute!" I wrote all this and I thought it was good. I showed it to my father and he agreed.

When Mr. Gephardt handed out the papers, he had a false smile on his face when he came to me. He

handed me the paper and I expected a good mark but instead it was an F with the remark, “You are too young to understand Shakespeare!” I nearly burst into tears, being hurt and humiliated by that remark. I couldn’t go to anybody about it. The dean, the father of my friend Walter, a Catholic, was being forced into early retirement because he didn’t follow the Nazi guidelines of education. I couldn’t ask my father because being a Jew he had no voice. He also was being forced into early retirement because the judiciary did not want a Jewish judge on their roster.

I was thinking there might be more than one reason for him to give me that grade, but not quite as important as being a Nazi. I know he hated the English. He mentioned it often enough in class. He probably hated Shakespeare for being so popular in the civilized world while Goethe, his favorite German writer and playwright, fell far behind Shakespeare. The fact is he had made a direct hit on me. Which I remembered for the rest of my long life.

*Stefan Frank*

## ONE GOT AWAY

A family of characters,  
let's give them roles in a screenplay.  
An ensemble of nine siblings,  
except the one who got away.

French immigrants from World War I,  
the eldest son, Maurice, was tall.  
But the rest of the clan were short.  
Was his papa the oddest ball?

His nearby sister Bella's son,  
a chess-master of minor note.  
Since no one else played chess at all,  
they never read the book he wrote.

Coquette Jeanne kept her French accent  
long beyond her loss of reason.  
Like Blanche DuBois, a fading belle,  
her men and cash never broke even.

Ferd, always ill, sired one daughter,  
a Russian fellow-traveler.  
Avant-garde author of eccentric plays,  
no job to be blacklisted outa.

Most were middling attractive,  
but their integrity was poor.  
Tech was a nasty engineer,  
and Bob, a dishonest broker.

All the younger boys had boxed.  
I think their brains were damaged.

Explosive, angry guys they were,  
their widowed mother hadn't managed.

Young Alan was a spiteful man,  
traveled selling ladies garments.  
His wife kept house in Kentucky  
and he wrote "lettres beligerantes."

Adele loved ballroom dancing,  
she and Eddie were a duet.  
They ran an insurance business,  
selling to dancers in their set.

Pierre, the one who got away,  
had no contact ever again.  
The reasons have been lost with time,  
but must have mattered then.

He came as a merchant seaman,  
but we know little history.  
In Dallas he kept oil firm books,  
and had a Texas family.

Was he a nicer man at all?  
I admire his going to Texas.  
I wish I'd met my cousins there,  
but to search this late would vex us.

You've guessed by now this little play  
depicts my father's family.  
With uncles and aunts long gone now,  
only memories of idiosyncrasy.

*Joyce Linda Sichel*

## MY ROMANCE WITH THE NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE

If someone had told me a decade ago that I would be extolling a ninety-minute bus ride on the New Jersey Turnpike, I would have scoffed in disbelief. I was a dedicated train rider, and my few bus experiences were hot, crowded, and vaguely sick-making. These days, however, one of my favorite things is taking the Academy bus from exit 5 on the Turnpike to the Port Authority Bus Terminal early on a Wednesday morning. I target the 7:45 bus, the last of nine that serve commuters from 4:50 am onward. Driving from Lumberton, I allow about twenty-five minutes and generally have time to buy a ticket (\$29 round-trip), though I always have a spare should I be running late. Parking is included. I choose a spot I can remember and then make my way to the bus shelter. Regular commuters mark the order in which they have arrived with a row of items on the curb – umbrellas, water bottles, suitcases, and once even a ballpoint pen. I put my backpack behind the last item. Generally the bus is not full, but the custom of marking one's spot persists.

Because this bus originates in Westampton, we can see the driver walk out of the station across the street, go to his bus, open the rolling gate, and drive through. He gives the bus a final check, walking around it very deliberately. Sometimes it looks as though he's going to kick the tires. He does not look in the direction of the eager, often chilly riders. They have to wait.

Climbing back into the bus, he (or occasionally she) steers it over to the waiting area. We queue up and

climb on. Usually, there's a spare driver going in. He sits in the front passenger seat and jokes with the driver, who says good morning to each passenger and recognizes many regulars. On this run, he is unhurried. If a last-minute rider drives into the lot, he waits for her. This happened to me once, and I was extremely grateful. The next bus at 10:45 would have been too late for me to get to my meeting.

Once I've settled into my window seat about half-way back on the driver's side, I begin to look for familiar landmarks. From the bus window, it's a different highway and because I'm not driving, I can watch the horizon, notice weather patterns, read billboards. There have been spectacular sunrises, fall foliage, and deer. There have also been construction sites and huge warehouses. Some details are beautiful, some not.

The southern leg of the journey to exit 9 seldom has traffic, and we speed along on the left in the truck lanes. We generally reach New Brunswick in less than forty minutes, a time I have never beaten when driving. What a pleasure not to have to worry about speeding tickets. I always keep an eye out for the Raritan River and remind myself of when I used to see it every day.

The industrial northern half of the journey can be trafficky. Sometimes the backup begins at the Carteret exit, sometimes at Newark Airport. If it's the latter, I watch to see if the planes are landing roughly north to south and see how many I can distinguish backed up in their landing patterns. I watch for the skyline of Newark, knowing we're making progress. Then it's over the Passaic River and into the wetlands, where there are al-

most always some seagulls and quite frequently swans and herons.

The last bit into the Lincoln Tunnel is always slow, but the designated bus lanes help a great deal. The southbound traffic is far heavier, and we benefit from “the zipper,” a traffic convention that allows vehicles from two merging lanes to alternate going into a single lane. There’s little horizon or wildlife here, mostly just litter and weeds, but I peer out the window anyway, always amazed by how adroit these bus drivers are and how they seem to enjoy their work.

In the dark tunnel, passengers bestir themselves and prepare to disembark. As we emerge into the city daylight in a canyon of tall buildings, the driver performs another miracle move – crossing four lanes of traffic and diving down into the bowels of the terminal. The poorly lit maze leads us to gate 5, and I have completed my journey in relative comfort and security.

Not every trip is as tranquil, but especially on off-hours during weekdays the service is far better than I would have believed two years ago. I hope to be a frequent rider for many years to come and am grateful to other Lumberton residents who recommended it. Who knows? I might even be able to lure some of my New York friends out to South Jersey now that I can tell them how to get here.

*Kathy Riley*

## PRIDE MANHATTAN

Jerry sat on a bench on the edge of Ruppert Park just far enough beyond the traffic noise coming from Second Avenue. He liked this particular bench – in fact, he often jokingly said he owned it – because of the large hydrangea bush nearby. This time of year the hydrangea was covered with large balls of flowers of the deepest blue.

He was waiting for a friend, Tom. Jerry had sent him an email asking him to meet him in the park. He did not have to say where in the park; everyone knew about “Jerry’s bench.” While he waited for Tom he relaxed and enjoyed the warm sun and the wonderful hydrangea. His mind pulled him back into the past, his past. This seemed to be his mental MO the latter years of his long life.

He had been a photographer for forty years working on the Upper East Side. He lived and worked for many years out of a walkup apartment on East 88th Street off Second Avenue. Fortunately the landlord installed a small elevator a few years ago. At his age that was a gift from the gods.

Being a professional photographer – mostly self-taught – brought him in contact with many of his neighbors. He started his photography business doing portrait work and in later years making videos in various media. He was lucky to have two of his images published in *Redbook*. He did bar and bat mitzvahs, kids’ birthday parties, graduations and, of course, lots and lots of weddings, including many of gay couples. The latter he liked the best and took care in how he did the work for the



gay community, his community. He was just getting used to referring to the “LGBT community” or using the full acronym “LGBTQIA.”\*

“Hey Jerry,” someone yelled from the end of the block. The figure moved slowly and, even though his eyesight wasn’t as good as it once was, Jerry knew by the man’s gait it had to be Tom. When Tom came close, Jerry patted the seat next to him, inviting him to sit down.

“What made you bring me all the way from the Bronx?”

“I wanted to get you out of the house.” Jerry laughed, thinking to himself, What a feat I pulled.

“That’s what my wife said, get out of the house.” Tom was a recently retired civil engineer for the municipal borough, living in University Heights and well into his second marriage. He had a combined family of seven children and now twelve grandchildren. It was when Jerry did a video of Tom’s second wedding that the two men became friends. “This is not the first time you both are right. Thank you, although you don’t deserve it. And it’s a beautiful spring day to come down to the ‘Golden Island.’ I haven’t seen or talked to you since the New Year. Much too long!”

“I know. I feel guilty about being silent.”

“I have a feeling you didn’t bring me down here for a chitchat.”

\*Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual

“Well, that too, just to catch up. But my main reason is to ask you a favor. I’m not good with the phone anymore.

“To bring you up to speed, I’ve been posting a series of vlogs – for your info: short subject videos on the internet – about issues of interest to gay seniors. Bob Schenk saw my vlogs and emailed me an invitation. Bob, a man I’ve never met, is one of the coordinators of the New York City Pride Parade, taking place at the end of June. He wants me to march with a contingent of LGBT seniors. The last time I was in a Pride Parade was twenty years ago.”

“Twenty years ago is about the time of Margie and my wedding.”

“I’d love to do this,” Jerry faced Tom, “but I need help and I thought of you. Would you be willing to go with me? I couldn’t march more than five blocks, at most. It would mean a lot to me just to be there one more time.”

“You know I’m not gay. I’d feel very uncomfortable marching with a bunch of gay men.”

“It’s not like that. Sure, there are bare-chested young men, taking pride in who they are. But that’s a small part of the parade. Most of the parade is made up of the wider gay community of all races, lesbian and gay married couples with children. There are proud parents of LGBTs, grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends. It’s people publicly supporting the people they love.”

“I don’t know. I’d have to ask Margie.”

Jerry's brain was racing ahead. "I have an idea. Bring Margie along. She loves the city. She would enjoy herself and we three could make a day of it, with lunch on me. Besides, I haven't seen Margie in a long time."

"You know, I think it would work. Jerry, you could always persuade me. Email a reminder with date and time. Then we can fill in the details later."

"Thank you, Tom, it will be a great day, I'm sure."

The two men talked for some time, happy in the fact that their friendship meant so much. Then they decided to walk down Second Avenue to a little sandwich place for lunch.

*Chris Darlington*

## THEY SQUARE-DANCED THEN

**H**is arm was poised in wait for hers. “Allemande left,” the caller sang, and country music filled the hall. When all eight in the square knew the sequence of steps and the dance figure that was coming, it was like playland. They wove around the square, gripping alternate hands for the “right and left grand.” The women encountered each man in turn as they circled the square, often with mutual smiles. The men to prize were reasonably attractive, moved smoothly without bouncing, didn’t grab roughly, didn’t have sweaty palms, and didn’t make a pass.



Even plain-looking women could be appealing in a scooped neck blouse, bright colors, and short skirts (if their legs permitted). “Swing your partner” was probably the most popular step for the dancers, whirling in ballroom position into a pleasant disorientation. Even the

back-to-back “do-si-dos” learned as children became opportunities for more waist-holding swings. The women’s billowing skirts lifted to show pretty ruffled petticoats, with the stiff ones swishing and the soft nylon ones whispering.

The real Western square-dance callers were usually lanky and twangy gentlemen in expensive boots, Western-style jackets and string ties. The best of them had libraries of songs, music and dance steps memorized. Some even had fans who would travel to dance where they were calling. There were whole resort weekends devoted to square dancing with special callers. But usually dancers were part of clubs with a biweekly dance schedule and group visits to other local clubs.

It was wholesome enjoyment for the most part. The dancers were so absorbed in what they were doing that there was little time for depressed moods. Dancers didn’t usually drink alcohol before a dance, since the squares were depending on them. It was great exercise. Flirtation was usually harmless. The dances were inexpensive. It was a supportive, sociable activity where club members would reach out to those who were ill and provide each other with needed transportation. There were a lot of pledges of allegiance and gospel songs in the mainly white, Christian, middle-American milieu.

When regional square dance conventions were major events many years ago, scores of squares were a panorama to see from the overhead balconies. It looked like a huge Broadway musical. Vendors would sell glittering dance clothing, shoes, and accessories in booths near the dance floor. The costume-like outfits were fun for people to wear and it set their activity apart.

Square dancing survives mainly in snowbird resorts on the Gulf Coast now, and perhaps at USO dances and the like. Dancers aged out, there were new, more popular activities, and some thought that square dancing was “corny.” Younger people no longer wanted to spare the time for sequences of classes and the frequent dancing needed to keep up their skills. Perhaps the activity will be rediscovered someday because so many people enjoyed it so much.

At the end of a dance, the women would pull off stiff petticoats and tight elastic cummerbunds for the drive home. They would cover up with small hand-knit travel capes to accommodate their puffy sleeves, wish all goodnight, and drive off in pick-up trucks alone or with husbands. Back to life’s realities, but they had a great time to remember.

*Joyce Linda Sichel*

## WHAT MOTHER SAID

On a cold first day of spring, 70 years ago when I was 13, my mother probably said, “Go outside, dear, and find someone to play with. You can build a snowman, a castle, or even throw snowballs at each other. If you can’t find anyone, you can always please your dad and shovel the walk.”

So, just now, I did what my mother told me to do and I went for a walk through every single court at 3:45, both sides in most cases, looking for someone to play with, and with the exception of two women talking in court 6 and someone waiting for his spouse at the nearby intersection, not a single person was out of their apartment to play with. I only saw one maintenance man to help, as I had done 12 years ago in Bridlington, during a storm, when Bill Murphy saw me working and later rewarded me by paying for a broken door, which would have been at my cost. But this time there was no need for help, so I headed home.

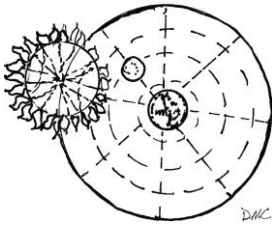
My mother might have said, after listening to me, “Go upstairs and write something.” So I have, and I hope she is happy. Always do what your mother says. Oh, by the way, the whole adventure to get some exercise took all of 35 minutes and now I can go back to my well-deserved nap!!!!

*Sandy Heath*

## ISAAC NEWTON – FATHER OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY

Although both mathematics and technology were well developed in the ancient world of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, there was little correlation between the two disciplines. For many centuries, people had been observing the planets and stars in order to understand their motions. The Greek philosopher and mathematician Ptolemy devised a system that was both compatible with Aristotelian philosophy and able to track actual observations and predict future movement mostly to within the limits of the next 1000 years of observations. His theory was that the planets and the Sun rotated around the Earth.

However, in 16th century Poland, astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus, based on observation, proposed a model of the solar system that had the Earth revolving around the Sun. The Copernicus model wasn't completely



correct, as astronomers of the time struggled with the backward path Mars sometimes seem to take, but it eventually changed the way many scientists viewed the solar system. Using detailed measurements of the path of planets kept

by Danish astronomer Tyche Brahe, Johannes Kepler developed his three laws of planetary motion. These laws are: planets move around the sun in elliptic orbits; the Sun is in one of the two foci of the orbit; and a line segment joining a planet and the Sun sweeps out equal areas during equal intervals of time.



Born in Italy, Galileo Galilei is often credited with the creation of the optical telescope, though in truth he improved on existing models. He created a telescope in 1609 that could magnify objects twenty times and enabled detailed studies of planetary surfaces. However, none of these great scientists could explain why the orbits of the planets were as they observed.

Isaac Newton, the true revolutionary, was born in 1642, the year of Galileo's death, and from a young age showed interest in education. When the Great Plague closed Cambridge University, where he was a student, for two years starting in 1665, he spent the long months locked up at home studying complex mathematics, physics, and optics. By 1666, Newton had even laid the blueprints for his three laws of motion.

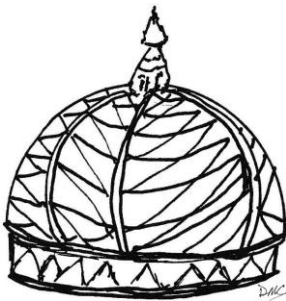
What Newton didn't understand up to that point, and would spend the next two decades studying, was how those forces related to the paths of the Earth, Moon, and Sun – a concept he called “gravity.” Newton dove into the study of gravitational force in the 1670s and '80s, and the result of Newton's studies was the *Principia*, his seminal work published in 1687 and considered by many as the greatest science book ever written.

Across the pages of the *Principia*, Newton breaks down the workings of the solar system into “simple” equations, explaining the nature of planetary orbits and the pull between heavenly bodies. In describing why the Moon orbits the Earth and not vice versa because the Earth is so much heavier, the book literally changed the way people saw the universe. In contrast to the earlier astronomers, who fitted their observation to known mathematical functions, Newton showed that orbits of

the planets were the result of the universal force of gravitational attraction. The force that a body exerts on another body is proportional to its mass and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them. He also showed that outside the surface of the Earth, the attraction of the Earth, assuming it to be a uniform sphere, acts as if all the mass were concentrated at the center and therefore changes little with altitude. Using the new tool of calculus, he needed many years to prove this. For example, at an altitude of 50,000 feet, gravity has only decreased 0.5 percent.

If we jump from a table, the attraction of the earth pulls us down. We also pull the earth up to meet us, but since the mass of the largest person is much less than that of the Earth, it doesn't move much.

Brunelleschi's dome of Florence Cathedral, completed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, is still the largest masonry



dome in the world, showing the engineering skill of this great architect. The techniques he used were centuries ahead of their time, and this octagonal dome was a true masterpiece of structural engineering, carefully designed to spread the load without creating stress. As far as we

know, the architect did not use explicit calculations in designing his masterpiece.

The monumental change since the time of Newton is that scientists have used mathematics to help us understand the physical world, and much of our daily life today is defined by the interaction of mathematics and

technology. The electrical and heating systems in our houses are based on the size of the house and environmental factors such as climate. Bridges and large buildings in vast numbers are designed using mathematics, and these are only a few examples of the interaction of mathematics with technology.

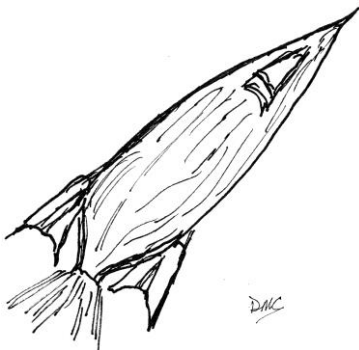
Another example is the development of heavier-than-air flight. Two hundred years after Newton, the problem had not yet been solved, despite many advances in technology. The Wright brothers had a good working knowledge of math and science as well as a lifelong interest in building a flying machine. They understood Newton's laws of motion about forces and torques and had the skill to build the required hardware. They believed they could solve the problem of flight. They knew that they needed to generate enough aerodynamic lift to overcome the weight of their aircraft by using the airflow from the propellers. They initially used the known lift and drag coefficients of their time to design their wings. However, after building the world's first wind tunnel, they modified their design and the previously defined lift and drag coefficients. This approach of design using mathematics, building a prototype, testing it, and making modifications if required, even before the first flight, is still utilized in airplane design today.

In space flight, Newton's calculus and his understanding of planetary gravitational attraction allow us to design trajectories to orbit the Earth and send vehicles to the Moon and distant planets. A space mission also requires many facets of modern technology such as accelerometers, gyroscopes, computers, and telemetry as well as engines and structure. However, both the planning

and mission stages depend heavily on Newton's laws. The effect of changing gravity as one departs Earth and either goes into orbit or leaves Earth's orbit to be affected by the gravity field of the Moon or other planets determines vehicle performance requirements in any mission. A payload never leaves the gravity field of the Earth, but due to distance, that attraction diminishes to insignificance as the payload enters the gravity influence sphere of the Moon or planets.

During the mission, accelerometers send signals to the flight computer, which calculates the actual trajectory based on Newton's calculus and his understanding of the physical world, which says velocity is the integral of acceleration and position is the integral of velocity. By comparing actual to desired parameters, the flight computer can issue commands to the actuators to enable the desired trajectory. Newton's universal gravity laws are used in the planning phase, while his calculus is used in the mission.

*Eric Hahn*



## FUNNY HOW LIFE TURNS OUT – A SHORT STORY

Martha looked around the classroom. “Speaking Up” was the fourth workshop she’d attended at the all-day conference in Virginia Beach and she’d learned so much. She hoped to be just like those sophisticated women she saw around her: strong, independent, not a doormat like she’d been all her life. They spoke up for causes, went on marches in Washington, DC, and picketed representatives’ offices. She wanted to be that kind of person.

She’d try one day at a time. One day of speaking up and being strong. No more being a doormat. The plan was inaugurated at eight-thirty the next morning with a call from a neighbor.

“Hi, Martha. Want to go to WalMart in Pocomoke?” Betty asked. “We could get there by ten, look around the mall for a while, and then have lunch at the Olive Garden.”

Martha gripped the receiver firmly, and said, “No, thank you. I don’t feel like shopping today. Sorry.”

“Oh, come on. It’ll be fun. I’ll drive.” Betty urged.

“No, thanks. Besides, your driving is rather . . . ah, well, erratic.”

“What? You’re kidding, right? Do you want to drive?”

“No, I’m sorry, Betty. No shopping for me today.”

“Well, okay. I really hoped to get out. But, maybe next week. Catch you later.”

Martha felt like a million bucks. She’d spoken her mind, and gotten the results she wanted. Terrific.

When she answered the phone an hour later, she decided she’d reached the next level of the experiment. The game was getting tougher. It was her daughter Mary Beth, whom she loved, but had to admit was a pain in the ass. She was a first-rate complainer and now that Martha had been widowed her daughter tried to boss her around. This call would really test her new assertiveness skills.

Mary Beth got to the point. “Mom, I was wondering if you’d watch the kids this weekend? Rick and I want to go to Richmond. You know, for a weekend get-away.”

“Mary Beth, I’m sorry I can’t help you out.”

“What’s the matter? Don’t you want to see grandchildren?”

“Of course, I do. But they’re a handful and I don’t always have the energy to deal with them.”

“A handful? It sounds like you’re saying my girls are difficult.”

“They are certainly energetic. I love them, but . . .”

“Well, you always seem to be willing to watch Margaret’s kids. Why not mine?”

“Your sister doesn’t ask me very often.” (And her kids are well behaved, she told herself.)

“I’ll make sure I don’t ask you for anything, for a long time. You’ve always treated me like a second-class citizen. Dad would have told you to help me.” Her daughter slammed the phone down.

She was right; her husband would have told her to help Mary Beth. But that domineering man had died of a heart attack last year, and at the age of sixty Martha was trying to stand up for herself. But now that she was taking control of her life, what was she going to do with it? She grabbed her camera and her purse. Today she’d go wherever the whim took her. She’d take photos, possibly to use for future paintings. Maybe she’d pick up a seafood lunch at Wachapreague and eat it on the dock. And she might even have a beer with it. This was liberating.

She started up her six-year-old Taurus and headed over to Route 13. The day went quickly as she flew around the Eastern Shore, but Martha didn’t exactly fly since she was usually driving the speed limit. The fall sun would be good until about five-thirty, so she’d have plenty of time for scenic possibilities.

She left the town of Oyster and headed down the Seaside Road around four o’clock. The late afternoon sun slanted through her windshield, so she pulled down the visor and put her sunglasses on. It also led her to slow down, and now she was ten miles below the speed limit. Life was good and she was in no hurry.

But the blue truck on monster wheels was in a big rush. Mr. Monster’s brakes squealed as he pulled up be-

hind her slow-moving car. After a moment he beeped to get her attention, clearly wanting some action on her part. The old Martha would have pulled over at the nearest possible lay-by. But she reminded herself of the experiment, stared resolutely ahead, and crawled on down the road, not looking for any pull-off spot on this narrow lane with three-foot ditches on each side.

The truck followed silently for several minutes, no horn honking. Had he decided to accept Martha's pace? The answer became clear when they rounded a bend and the road widened. With a roar of horsepower the truck pulled up beside her. And it stayed there. She looked over and saw him grinning at her, a wicked smile. Then he pulled up a rifle and pointed it at her. Her mouth dropped open, terror invaded her body. He took his time, building the suspense. Then he mimed shooting her, and gave her a wink.

Oh, he was just joking. Her palpitating heart slowed down. What a relief!

But something of the new Martha broke through the surface. How dare he scare me like that? Who the hell does he think he is? Then she did something that she'd never done before, it had not been her way. She gave him the finger, an angry finger at that.

The smile left the young man's face, and he shook his head at her, as if to say, "Naughty, naughty." Then he swiped the left front fender of her car and took possession of the road ahead. The surprise move sent the Taurus skidding off, plowing into the ditch, wheels spinning and ending up at a forty-five degree angle, nose down. Then silence.



For a minute Martha sat in the car, stunned, with the exploded air bag pushing against her chest. It took a moment to realize she was alive. Then she froze, aware of the monster truck's squealing brakes, then running steps. The young man's concerned face appeared in the driver's window. "Are . . . are you okay? Anything broken?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Sorry. Temper got the best of me."

"Can you help me get out?"

"Yeah. But you should probably wait for the police and EMTs. You might have something wrong. I'll call them." He contacted 911 and gave the location of the accident, and ten minutes later the State Police pulled up, followed by an ambulance.

After helping her out of the car the EMTs examined her and said she appeared all right but for bruises. The State Police questioned her about the accident and she said, "No, it wasn't the young man's fault. I'm sure I got anxious at the size of that big truck passing me and I wobbled." She wasn't sure why she was letting him off the hook, but he had seemed concerned about her. She thought there was a good side to him, despite the Police trying to tell her Billie Joe was a "bad one."

The next morning Martha sat over coffee after breakfast, glad she wasn't as sore as she'd expected to be. There was a knock at the door, which was surprising at this early hour, and there was Billie Joe. He was smoking, shuffling back and forth, and didn't make eye contact when she spoke. "Well, you're out early, young man."

“Couldn’t sleep, cause of what happened. Why didn’t you tell the police it was my fault?”

“We all make mistakes. If you put out that cigarette you can come in and have a cup of coffee.”

Martha poured coffee and put out fresh muffins. Billie Joe said, “Sorry. I didn’t really deserve your help yesterday. My brother said I need to make it up to you. He’s right. How can I help you?”

Martha was surprised, pleasantly so, and didn’t know what to say.

He said, “Do you have a car to use till yours is fixed? I could drive you places. I don’t have to drive like a maniac.”

Martha smiled. “Yes, calm driving would be helpful. Maybe you could take me to get a rental car.”

And that was the beginning of an unusual friendship that started with Martha wanting to stand up for herself. Billie Joe drove her places when she didn’t want to drive, fixed a leaking kitchen faucet, and trimmed the hedges in the front yard. Of course, Mary Beth said he was after her money, but he never took a cent. He wasn’t much of a talker but they got along pretty well. And Martha encouraged him to improve his life through courses at the community college.

Funny how life turns out sometimes!

*Joyce Koch*

No one noticed that spring did not come this year;  
No one complained that grasses did not grow,  
They did not care that flowers did not appear,  
And no one saw that the temperatures were low.  
No one noticed that Easter brought more cold,  
With snow on July fourth they did not care,  
And day upon day more winter did unfold,  
As each limb of each tree remained bare.  
The people kept on paying heating bills,  
They shoveled paths in the recurrent snow,  
And never flickering an eyelash at the chills,  
They went about as if they did not know;  
But if one noticed that spring did not come,  
The fear of being different made him dumb.

*Doris Kabley*



## WRITING FOR *LEAS LIT*

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