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*A
SONG
OF PEACE*

*WHISPERING WINDS
THROUGH THE TALL FIR TREES
PIPING OF BIRDSONG ON THE BREEZE*

*THE SIMPLE GIFT
OF A HEARTFELT KIND GREETING
LAUGHTER OF FRIENDS COMING OUT FROM THE MEETING*

*WISE FOLK CONVERSING, COOL VOICES OF REASON
WE OFFER OUR PRAYER IN THIS MAGIC FILLED SEASON*

III

III

*AND ON EARTH
PEACE, GOODWILL TO ALL*

Edith Roberts

LAUGHING IN THE FACE OF AGING

What Else Can We Do?

There isn't a day that goes by that I am not compelled to look in the mirror. There is no other way to put on my eyeliner or fix my hair. The woman looking back at me shows a face that has survived some real tough life experiences. And when I smile at her victories, I feel joy and a sense of gratitude.

On the other hand, I still do not understand where the years went and how much longer I have to look in the mirror. I hope someone will remember to put on my eyeliner when I close my eyes for good. Until then, I will continue to laugh at the silly things we do or forget to do.

I was my grandparents' caregiver. My mother had long ago escaped to Florida and avoided family drama. Since I adored my grandparents, I had them brought to New Jersey with all the right papers. I had their power of attorney. I was the one they depended upon.

My grandmother – Nana Rosie – was so loving. I never saw her angry at anyone! In the old days, she just sat in her chair, reading her love stories and cooking for get-togethers. She was a good cook. I also remember her standing with a can, collecting money for a charity. She was around fifty. When I think of all I continue to do at my age, I smile. When she moved to New Jersey, she went quiet. She would not speak to anyone – not even me. I think she had enough of my grandfather's stories. I painted her nails and fixed her hair.

Once my grandfather was in the nursing home, I often found him at the door of their room. “Where were you? I’m sitting alone waiting for you.” I would reply, “Pop, there are so many people here who would welcome your friendship.” Pop reports that they are all old. Other times, he would call me with any excuse. The bills I brought from the bank were “dirty.” He was always shaving down his false teeth and asking me to take him back to the dentist.

While he could be a curmudgeon, he was also funny. He told wonderful stories of his life, like when he first saw my grandmother; he turned to his friend and said, “She is the one for me.”

Pop would talk about the boss who “did me dirty.” He would say, “He got his, he’s dead now.” I couldn’t help myself when I blurted out, “Pop, they are all dead now!”

I remember the day the nurse called me. “Paula, your Pop wants you to come.” I stopped at the Viennese Café and brought him ooey-gooey desserts which he loved. When I got to his room, he was lying in his bed, naked, with his hands across his chest! I asked him, “What are you doing?” His answer was, “I’m going to die today.” Pop would say anything just to get me there. Pop died a few years later at age 103. He had all his marbles and knew how to play them (me?).

Now that we are moving toward the end, there are lots of us, at our advanced ages, who forget. I heard one woman who planned a card party in her apartment. Her guests arrived and she was nowhere to be found.

My girlfriend told me that she had put her lip liner on her eyebrows. We find it more and more difficult to remember where things are.

So, who laughs last? I won't know. What I do know is that I am still putting on my eyeliner and I smile when I look in the mirror and see that I'm still here.

We survived the difficulties in our lives and had delicious moments of joy. I wonder if there is another chapter ahead. I'll be ready with a smile if there is.

Paula Susan

RACHEL

“**M**om,” said Lauren, “do we know anyone named Rachel? She’s sent each of us a separate letter. I definitely don’t know her.”

Millie regarded the two hand-addressed business envelopes in her daughter’s hand. “Maybe it’s some kind of a promotion,” she mused as she took hers. “I think there’s a new salon opening up next to the Dollar Store. Maybe the owner thinks we’ll be attracted by the personal approach. Open yours and see if there’s a coupon.”

Lauren tore hers open and shook out two photocopied pages with a yellow sticky note attached to the outside. Underneath, it she read, “Application for Vote by Mail Ballot.” Looking at the message on the attached note, she remarked, “And there’s a note telling us not to miss any future elections. It’s signed Rachel, too.”

“Just junk mail then,” said Millie, tossing her unopened letter into the kitchen trash can.

Craig stopped his motorcycle beside his mailbox. “Might’s well get the mail now,” he muttered. It was his birthday, and his older sister Brenda never forgot to send a card. Plus she put a crisp \$20 bill in it every time. She took her big sister duties very seriously. Under the ShopRite flyer, Craig found a hand addressed envelope but not the card he had anticipated. This was legalized. From someone named Rachel. Rachel, Rachel? Had he met her somewhere at a party? A bar? But why would she write to him? Nope. Nothing good could

come of this. He crumpled both mailings, shoved them in a pocket, and roared up the driveway, disappointed that Brenda had forgotten him.

When he pulled his usual AARP mailing and his bank statement out of his mailbox, Emilio noticed another envelope of the same size, but this one was addressed by hand and didn't have a little plastic window. The return address was unfamiliar, but it wasn't printed on the envelope. It could be a personal letter after all. He'd lost track of many of his nieces and nephews, and their children were always getting married. Maybe one of them was getting in touch. They knew he wasn't on social media. And sometimes they'd invite him to a family reunion. He hoped that any event would be nearby. He didn't travel much since Connie died, and that last invitation wanted him to come to Columbus, Ohio! No way he'd manage that.

Tearing open the envelope at his kitchen table, he was surprised to find not a family communication but an application to vote by mail. And this wasn't even a presidential election year. Besides, he was sick of Republicans and Democrats, always going at each other. They were probably all crooks anyway. That Rachel sending out these letters and handwritten sticky notes should save her money and get a hobby!

Michael was watching for the mail truck. He expected several journals in the mail as well as the usual advertisements. Most of the latter he recycled, but he did like to read the alumni tours brochures from Penn and fantasize about traveling again to Japan or St. Petersburg. He was not disappointed with what he found

today but curious about the envelope addressed personally by Rachel, a person he did not know. When he was back at his desk, he took out his letter opener with the hippopotamus handle and neatly slit the top of the envelope, withdrawing An Application for Vote by Mail. Whoever the sender was had attached a sticky note exhorting him not to miss future elections.

Michael wondered about the writer. What were her politics? He noticed the disclaimer: “Labor donated and printed by volunteers. Not authorized by any candidate or candidate’s committee.” The cover letter with the application was very thorough and contained significant information such as New Jersey does not have an “off-election year.” Though he would not vote by mail as long as he could make his way to the firehouse to vote in person, Michael decided to go the ATNJ Education Fund website and check out the organization. He set the ballot application aside to pass on to a friend who might need one.

Keisha had just gotten Jamie to sleep in his crib and prayed he’d give her a few minutes’ peace. She saw Emilio, mail in hand, walking up his driveway and decided to get hers. Not that she expected anything special, but she liked looking at the catalogues and circulars. She clipped coupons with the best of them and gloated over her savings. Slipping on flip flops, she took her walk with one ear open for any cries from Jamie.

Her haul at the mailbox included ShopRite, Costco, and The Humane Society. They never gave up; she last donated in 2012 when she was in her save-the-puppies phase. On the bottom of the pile was an enve-

lope addressed to her by hand. The return label was unfamiliar, but she was intrigued enough not to throw it away unopened.

Jamie was still silent, so Keisha settled down on the couch with a cup of tea and opened the mystery letter. “Vote” caught her eye, as did a sticky note urging, “Don’t miss any future elections. Vote by mail! Rachel.” Keisha unfolded the two sheets and read the first page. She had voted in 2016, but then she’d moved to Ohio, married Keith, moved back, and had Jamie. She hadn’t paid much attention to politics. She’d come back to her former address, and she’d kept her maiden name. So was she still on the voter rolls? The letter provided information about ways to find out. She did want to vote in 2020, and with a toddler next year, what would be easier than a mail-in ballot? She read on and then went searching for a pen.

Kathy Riley

NOVEMBER NIGHT

Half-moon high above
Leafless tree branches reach out
Catch it in their web

Molly Gayley



APPROPRIATE EDUCATION

The city in which I grew up had three divisions of public school education: grammar school, kindergarten through sixth grade; junior high school, seventh, eighth and ninth grades; and high school for the remaining three years through twelfth grade. The grammar schools were small neighborhood schools within easy walking distance, the junior highs a conglomeration of three to five grammar schools, and the high school that enrolled everybody who did not go to Catholic High School plus students from the surrounding townships, which did not have their own high schools.

I found the transition to junior high school quite an adjustment. Boys and girls were assigned separate “home rooms” where we started our day; then we went off to different rooms for our classes instead of remaining in the same room all day. However, there were certain classes to which we were all assigned irrespective of our separate schedules, namely “Home Economics” for girls and “Shop” for boys. One hour per week girls went to Cooking for one semester and Sewing for the other, while boys’ semesters were divided between Woodshop and Metalshop. No rationale was offered for these required courses (or any other course we took for that matter). However, I assume these subjects were considered appropriate education for girls, who would grow up to become housewives and have need of these skills, and boys, who if they did not grow up to build things, would at least be required to fix things.

Accordingly I reported to my first semester's cooking class with some anticipation since I had heard that seventh grade was concerned with the preparation of breakfast, eighth grade lunch, and ninth grade dinner, and students got to eat whatever they had prepared. I confess that my memory of these classes is somewhat hazy. I do remember, however, that during the first class we did not cook anything, but were introduced to the dangers of gas stoves, which we were never allowed to light because they were dangerous monsters with pilot lights whose burners and ovens were lit with a match. When we were going to cook something, the teacher lit the stove.

As far as practical skills were concerned, they were not much realized since meal planning and shopping were not included. The teacher announced the menu at the beginning of the class, the ingredients were all present when we arrived, and the stove was lit for us when anything had to be cooked. For the life of me, I can't remember how we spent 15 weeks on breakfast preparation. I can remember learning how to make French toast and poached eggs, but the rest is a blank. It's even worse for lunch and dinner. I have almost no memory of any of those meals. Once we learned how to make "aspic," which turned out to be fancy Jello, and once I was faced with a mountain of vegetables to chop, but whether these events were associated with lunch or dinner, I don't recall.

When the first semester was over, we switched with the other group of seventh grade girls. Sewing class was a completely different experience, and one of which

I have a great many more memories. It was presided over by the formidable Miss Mathis, who had been in charge since the school was built, according to popular theory. Once again each year had its principal concern. In seventh grade we were to make an apron; eighth grade, a blouse; ninth grade, a dress. We were allowed to pick our own patterns and fabric (subject to approval). Again the first class of the year was devoted to the equipment we would use, but this time we would be operating it ourselves. There were about ten sewing machines in the classroom, all treadle powered. Before we could begin, we had to open the machine to learn its various features and how to wind and install the bobbin. Then we had to learn how to thread the machine. At this point we were instructed about how dangerous the needle was and how we must never get our fingers anywhere near it.



This statement generated a general feeling of unease with each of us vowing to avoid that needle like the plague. It was quite a while before we were exposed to this danger, however. First we were instructed about laying out material on a table. Next came the critical action of pinning the pattern to the fabric so there would be adequate material to construct the whole garment without “piecing.” Only then were we handed the scissors and allowed to start cutting. Subsequently we began the advanced operation of actual sewing. The various adjoining parts having been approved, we took our garments to the machines and began sewing, each seam “on the tippiest edge” according to instruction.

The first few passes at the sewing machine were supervised by Miss Mathis, who stood next to us and struck a ruler up and down on the machine in front of the needle in order to prevent our fingers from being punctured. For those students who seemed particularly at risk she continued to preside over their sewing practice with the ruler throughout the semester. Needless to say, this practice occasioned so much anxiety that at least one person in any given semester managed the fateful encounter. I avoided that experience but operated the treadle very slowly so that I could control the passage of my material under the needle. For this precaution I was rewarded with a sharp rap on the knee with the ever-present ruler and instructions to “treadle faster.”

At every stage in the process we were required to take our garment to Miss Mathis for approval before progressing to the next. If we did not meet with approval, we had to pull out the stitching and do it over. This

procedure ensured that the whole semester would pass before our garments were finally completed.

Somehow we all survived our excursions into domestic accomplishments. My mother, a skilled seamstress, felt that all of the sewing procedures were unnecessarily complicated, but did not intervene in any way. She made over the ninth-grade dress and passed it on to my sister. I have no recollection of ever wearing any of the garments that caused me so much anxiety and effort over those years. Unfortunately, when I was finally in charge of a household of my own, none of my encounters with junior high school home economics proved useful except for the French toast and poached eggs.

Ruth Gage

SPRINGBOKS

The road stretches ahead of me, brilliant in the noon-time sun, somewhere in LA or maybe Long Beach. The air is clean and fresh with a hint of salt. Occasionally, I can see the glint of wind-whipped water to my left. The road is empty, no other cars at all, as I drive my silver Toyota Avalon. How did I get it out here from New Jersey? I don't remember a journey. Oh well, it will come back to me. I smile and open my side window a crack to get a little more fresh air and I hold my speed at an even 50 mph. I glance at my driver's-side mirror and see something coming up on me, fast.



No, there are several objects. Wait, there are a dozen or more, beige, brown, organic, leaping. Then I am amid them. Impossible! A herd of springboks is racing by me! One jumps over my car, the muscles of its hindquarters flexing violently under its taut hide. I see one fly into the air at my side. It hits the windshield a glancing blow and is swept aside as the glass explodes. Shaken, I slow, pull over and stop as the antelopes flee from me. Not a shard of glass remains in the frame. Miraculously,

I am unhurt, even though my hair holds many sharp nuggets. My hair? Thick enough to hold the particles? What the hell...?

Dreams have been the object of scholarship and superstition since people could recount them. They are not the province of humans alone. All mammals, birds, some lizards, cuttlefish (!), and the champion, at 8 hours of REM sleep a day, the platypus.¹ Some people believe that dreams augur the future. Freud said that they reveal unconscious wishes. Some think they are nothing but random neural twitches. A middle course is that they are stimulated by concerns in your waking life. I must go with the latter. All my life, I've been worried about being caught in a springbok stampede...in Los Angeles...in my car.

I pull into a giant parking lot as empty as the boulevard was. Surrounded by chain link, it is wedged between two branches of the freeways. I have to inform my insurance company right away, so I decide to leave the unsecured car where it is and walk to the best place from which I can report it: my medical doctor's office. In an instant, I am approaching his work place. The building is a gigantic corduroyed concrete cube, ribbed, windowless, and massive. The cube sits on a lower concrete structure inset from the block above, with one set of glass entrance doors. It reminds me of those seventeenth-century overhanging houses that gave pedestrians a shot at avoiding the contents of the chamber pots being emptied from the second-story windows.

¹The dream information in this story is paraphrased from Healy, Ben. "Bad Dreams are Good," *The Atlantic*, April 2019. 23.

It used to be said that most people dream in black and white, but this has turned out to be a cultural artifact peculiar to people who grew up with black and white TV. The subjects of dreams are culturally dependent and, except for sex, have wide diversity. Surprisingly, sex-related dreams account for only eight percent of the panoply and that number holds for both men and women. A frequent theme expressed across cultures is anxiety: witness my antidorophobia.²

Dr. Moyes, to whom I report my accident, last crossed my conscious mind forty or more years ago. He was my PCP and the first doctor I had ever selected, in fact, my first PCP other than my father. The last time I saw him was when he informed me that he was “firing” my then wife: not a happy memory. But I am not there for medical care, I am there to start the repair and reimbursement process for my car. I am in dreadful fear that they will “total” my eight-year old auto. We’ve specially outfitted it so that my wife, Jane, can rest in the back seat; it was hard to find a car in which she could stretch out. With this additional fillip of anxiety, I awaken and for good or ill retain the entire fragile structure in my mind.

Another theory of dreams is that their purpose is to prepare you to respond to threatening situations. As a result, I feel that I have been through a rehearsal of the inevitable time when, by doctor’s orders, I must replace my car with an Impala.

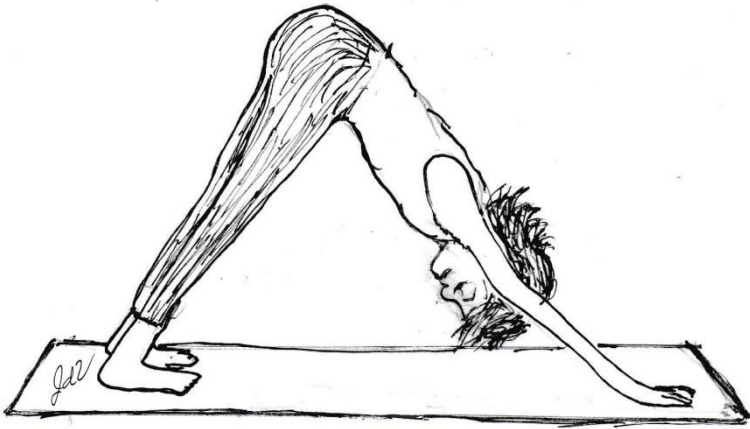
Bob Edelson

² Fear of springboks

YOGA SAGA

Two friends coerce me,
“You’ll love it!” they say.
But doubt overwhelms me
As in tree pose I sway

Downward dog? What a name!
Wrists strain. Hamstrings burn.
Next forward to high plank,
For a child’s pose I yearn.



Stand, fold. Thumb and finger
Surround your big toes.
Then straighten legs slowly,
Touch knees with your nose.

At last, down to the floor
But no rest is in sight.
First we sit cross legged,
Then twist left and right.

On our backs, do three bridges.
If it's your practice, do wheel.
Rolling back, grasp both knees
And sit up on your heels.

A few deep, cleansing breaths –
Close your eyes. Go within.
Roll down, stretch legs out
My savasana* begins.

Kathy Riley

*The final pose of any yoga class, Corpse Pose, also sometimes called Final Relaxation Pose.

WE KNOW

He came one afternoon
To a vegetarian table
With red wine and short sleeves.
We two talked and talked
Because we know each other.

Among words now grown meaningless,
He said, I have fallen in love
With someone in town.
I did not ask who
Because we know each other.

The western light became the light
Of meaning (love loves twilight?).
My heart, my heart, what did it say?
From that moment, did he know that
I know what he had said, for me?

Words were again spoken and spoken.
The light disappeared.
The afternoon, the evening, gone,
Except, "I have fallen in love."
We know and we remember and we weep.

Chris Darlington

COUSIN SALLY

Cousin Sally was born in 1904 in Hickory County, Missouri, near the “Pumly Tar” River. My mother, who had eight names, was also born in 1904 in Hickory County near the “Pumly Tar.” Mama started out with six names, but then she was adopted and later she married, and that added two more. Cousin Sally also changed her name. She started out as Helen Beck, but changed it to Billie Beck when she went into show business. By the time she became famous her first name was Sally.

When I asked Mama how to spell “Pumly Tar” she explained that it is spelled “P-o-m-m-e-d-e-t-e-r-r-e,” which means potato in France and is pronounced “Pumly Tar” in Hickory County.

When I asked Daddy how I was related to Cousin Sally, he explained that Grandpa Tatum was preaching when there was a fight outside the church between Bill Beck and a romantic rival and that Bill Beck won. After Bill Beck got out of prison he married the girl, and they had a daughter Helen who was Cousin Sally when she grew up. I still wanted to know how we were related, and Daddy said that it was because Grandpa Tatum (who had three names: Landrine Jehu Tatum) was preaching at the time of the fight outside the church.

Cousin Sally did some silent movies, but she had a lisp and couldn’t do sound movies or radio, so she switched to dancing and became really really famous at the 1933 World’s Fair in Chicago.

I met Cousin Sally in 1967. She came to Pittsburgh on tour, so of course I went to see my famous cousin perform. She was still dancing with ostrich plume fans just as she had done thirty-some years earlier in Chicago. After the show I introduced myself and told her that my mother was also born in Hickory County, Missouri in



1904. She said yes, that was when and where she was born. I didn't tell her that we are cousins.

If you want to know more about Cousin Sally, you can look her up on Wikipedia, where there are many facts that I never knew before. She was arrested several times in Chicago, once after riding a white horse pretending to be Lady Godiva – Cousin Sally was pretending, not the

horse. She was also arrested in San Francisco, where a judge decided to go and see her show, and then he cleared her of all charges.

You'll find her at wikipedia.org/wiki/Sally_Rand.

Maggie Heineman

TAG SALE

Finally, after a cold, rainy start to spring, the first Saturday in May was balmy, all you could hope for. The residents of Peony Street had at their last potluck decided that they would hold a giant tag sale on the first beautiful Saturday in May and today was it.

Tag sale. Yard sale. Jumble sale. Elaine learned a new name each time she moved to a different state for her job at IBM. But the purpose of those sales was the same: to send one's unwanted household items off permanently to someone else's home.



Elaine had just made herself a waffle, which she only did on Saturdays, because Saturdays were for leisurely tasks followed by some time outdoors, weather permitting. If only she had someone to share Saturdays with, Elaine thought, swiping down the old waffle iron — where had that come from, anyway, was it from her

grandparents' kitchen? Old tools were so much better made. Old books, too. Maybe she'd head to the library today and stop at yard sales on the drive over.

Peony Street bloomed with yard sales this morning. On the first block, Elaine counted four households that had set stuff out in their driveways. Amazing, she thought, that you could tell so much about the people just driving by. Here was the home of someone very well organized. All their sale items had been set out so tidily on four old green Army blankets. The homeowners sat in two beach chairs with a small table between them for collecting money. Elaine parked her car and strolled over to that house.

Unusually, the books were high-quality literature, all in good condition. The rack of women's clothes, while too small for Elaine, looked like it had come straight from a dry cleaning service. Kitchen items were shiny clean, undented. How nice. Instantly, she got a good feeling about this tag sale.

"Are you moving?" Elaine asked the bearded man in the beach chair.

"Nah, I just told my wife she had to get rid of a lot of her stuff," he said.

Elaine caught the woman's eye. They exchanged an understanding look.

The man got up, said "Hey, take it all! Everything!" and went grouchily into the house.

“He doesn’t like my stuff and I’m beginning to think he doesn’t like me anymore either,” the woman said.

Elaine sat down facing her on the warm driveway. The woman was about her age, lovely, and looked way too sad for a gorgeous May morning. “I’m Alice,” she said.

They looked deeply into each other’s eyes.

“I have to get out of this house,” Alice said to Elaine.

“Yes, I see that you do,” said Elaine, “Just grab what you need and let’s go.”

In five minutes Elaine and Alice were driving out of Peony Street in Elaine’s car, windows down, breathing in the fresh, new, blossoming air of May, and both were filled with all the heady sense of spring’s exuberant newness.

II

It was getting close to Thanksgiving and Christmas. The mornings were cold. Elaine slipped out of bed without waking Alice and went to gather up eggs and cheese and chives for an omelet. She put the coffee on. In the cabinet were seventeen mugs. On the counter was a mixer, a blender, and about every other kitchen tool imaginable. Elaine could barely find room to mix up the eggs. In the cabinet were more dinner plates, salad plates, soup bowls, ice cream sundae dishes, dessert plates, juice glasses, water glasses, and glasses for wine and for mixed

drinks than needed for a party of fifty. In a drawer was silverware for fifty. Another drawer held enough dish towels to clean up a spring flood. Elaine sighed deeply and made a decision.

“Alice, breakfast is on!” she called.

As they ate, Elaine raised the subject that had been on her mind for quite a while now. “I think we need to have a great big tag sale on the first warm, sunny spring Saturday,” Elaine said

Alice sighed. “Yeah, I know. Stuff just seems to accrue to me.”

Elaine gently agreed, then privately thought that the incessant shopping and accumulating was just the tip of the iceberg.

The truth was, the two of them were just not a good match at all. It had become apparent that even core values didn’t overlap much. Certainly daily habits didn’t. Even their friends didn’t seem to mesh, once introduced. But both being kind women, they had never figured out how to discuss this, although it seemed that they had each come to feel the same way.

Alice and Elaine spent the morning planning their yard sale for the first warm, sunny day in May.

III

After the holidays, they began to use the guest room to store items for the upcoming Peony Street yard sale. Elaine felt better to see part of the problem getting resolved. It was a bit harder for Alice, as she genuinely

enjoyed collecting but knew things had to go. A lot of things.

The neighborhood had decided on a date and a raindate for the street's big tag sale. Notices went out to all the local papers. The kids made posters and stapled them illegally to poles. Those markets that still had community bulletin boards had posted the Yard Sale notice. It went online under the town's Events category. Everything was done to make the annual sale a success.

On a lovely May Saturday morning, Alice and Elaine ate a hurried breakfast of cereal and set up Alice's blankets in the driveway. The extra items were beautifully displayed, only there was so much more to let go of at the house.

Along came the early birds, as they always do, antique hunting, book hunting, who knows what they might be looking for.

Around eleven, the phone rang. Alice ran inside and answered. It was her sister in Philadelphia. She was calling from Jefferson Hospital with a sudden and serious infection. Would Alice please come to her? She was alone and felt just terrible.

Alice told Elaine that she'd have to miss their tag sale. Of course Elaine said that she could handle it.

Alice took off for Philadelphia, where she would spend the entire day waiting for her sister to be seen, tested, diagnosed, and finally treated.

When Alice came home, all the yard sale, tag sale, jumble sale items had been taken. The driveway blankets had been picked up, washed, and put away. Inside, the house was tidy. Airy. Almost empty, in fact. So much more than the tag sale items had shifted to other households.

On the kitchen table was a note. “Dear Alice, Our tag sale was a big success. Here’s the money we made. I’m leaving with this very nice woman I met in our driveway at the tag sale. Love and thanks, Elaine.”

Judy Kruger

CLOTHING MEMORIES CAN HELP UNVEIL THE PAST

You don't have to be a dressmaker to have vivid memories of clothes from your past. How you and your family were dressed at various times and places come to mind, often prompted by photographs. And with those images, details about people and events from your life are expanded. Memories of clothing don't have to be limited to visual pictures. You can re-experience a fabric's feel and even have sensations of pleasant or unpleasant aromas in your memories of clothing.

Do you remember your best outfits from when you were a child? How about school, prom, or graduation clothes? You probably remember exactly what you were wearing on your wedding day. How did your family dress the babies and young children? Did your mom sew your clothes? Where was the sewing machine set up?

My memories won't be yours, but let me offer some illustrations. I remember sitting in a porch glider with my cousin Terry (who had special meaning to me). I was still a young girl wearing a sheer cotton dress in muted pink and green plaid with a delicate white lace collar. The scent of summer and the ocean was all around us out in Sheepshead Bay. I still love the color combination of pink and green.

In my memory I always see my mother in bright primary colors or black and white. Even her housecoats, which all mothers seemed to wear before jeans and slacks for women were accepted, were bright and patterned. She liked to shop at the department stores on

New York's Fifth Avenue for her clothes. She preferred fabrics with a rather firm "hand," like embossed piqué, and they often had ruffles. We wore mother and daughter matching sundresses in the brightest colors she could find. Her white and royal blue dirndl (full, gathered skirt) had very eye-catching royal blue tassels at the hem. She would wear it on our Jones Beach day trips with her pretty friend Thea and the friend's son, Roger, who was my age. We were a jolly, colorful group, and again the sea air was in our nostrils and chests.



When I was a preteen, I wore a lilac and white "polished" cotton shirtwaist dress with subtle stripes and puffed sleeves. I preferred to have no starch added to my clothes that would have to be ironed. I had patent leather "Mary Janes" for dressy occasions. I liked to have matching shoes and purses to make "ensembles." I wore white cotton gloves like most well-dressed girls, and had a white rabbit muff to warm my hands, which was furry outside and satiny inside; I did *not* like my fur neckpiece, which had the head of a small feral creature clamping the furry tail.

While my mother took me shopping, only now do I realize that my own taste was always much like my

grandma's, who lived with us. She went to her sales job at Lord and Taylor dressed in lavenders, blues, aquas, and deep pinks. Her dresses and blouses were often flowered or had subtle designs, which she almost always accessorized with matching costume jewelry. I remember the scent of her powders and colognes when I unscrew her fancy dressing table bottles (which are mine now).

As another creature entirely, I went through my awkward teenage years at the beginning of the rock and roll era. I wore the trendy, long and tight wool "straight" skirts then, with large cotton "bobby socks," which were always falling down like a concertina. I can still feel the rough suede when I cleaned my "buck" shoes and visualize the two-tone "saddle shoes" that came in navy-and-white or brown-and-white, take your pick. Boys and girls wore pink oxford cotton shirts and string ties. I also wore the "de rigueur" felt circle skirt for lindy-hop dance parties. I can still feel my sticky fingers from gluing on felt appliqués in contrasting colors – usually themed for seasonal holidays.

From my younger adult years, I particularly recall the expensive maternity suit my mother bought me – houndstooth in vivid colors, red and black. It was wool (or mostly wool) since I was my most pregnant in the winters and the nappy fabric was woven tightly. I can almost smell the wet wool odor when it rained. Under the jacket and skirt, I wore a flaring black cotton knit turtleneck, which I really liked. My mother also shopped for her grandchildren, buying high-end winter jackets and party outfits. I can picture bringing each son in a knitted navy double-breasted suit with short pants to

friends' birthday parties. (One wore it after the other as a hand-me-down.)

From the times our family went on Christmastime cruise vacations (all four of us in one stateroom with bunks), I dared to wear a women's tuxedo suit I had bought myself for dinners. It had a rather straight skirt with a very high slit on one of my thighs. The lapels were silk and the suit was a fine black worsted. I felt good wearing it. Even the children had nice tuxedos bought at a long-defunct discount store.

Dude ranch clothes had a great feel, and we all liked to vacation with horses. The original stiff "blue jeans" or "dungarees" were no pleasure, since it took many washings for them to be comfortable. But I loved the feel of soft flannel shirts and the curly off-white linings of the denim jackets. I dressed the two boys just like me, all from Sears or Montgomery Ward. Even if they were already in business, we hadn't heard about Land's End or L.L. Bean yet.

These days I wear lots of Bean clothes and I am a good customer at the Medford Leas thrift shop. That way I can wear other people's memories, and it feels good to be clothed in attractive mysteries.

So what are your clothing memories? Would they help you remember more about your past life and connections? Was your clothing infused with perfume or mothballs used for summer storage of woolens? Those smells can evoke strings of memories.

And men also remember details if they try.

Joyce Linda Sichel

PLASTIGLOMERATE¹

Strings of orange fill a crevice
In the black, black rock
As it cools by the sea.

Under the beach campfire
Where the coals were white hot
Sand and shells are matrixed
In taffy-green goo.

Where the wildfire ran
Through trash dumps and houses
The burned ground is lit by
Resins, milky white and shiny red.

Colors synthetic
Ephemeral intentions
Persist geologic
When the makers have been
Recycled.

Bob Edelson

¹ Inspired by: Giggs, R. "The Earth's Deepest Secrets,"
The Atlantic, July 2019. 36-38

REFLECTIONS ON THOSE THINGS I NEVER KNEW

I'm sitting at my father's desk. It is in his dental office, where he worked for over 50 years. He had died suddenly and now, being his only child, I have the responsibility of selling his dental practice and also going through and sorting out all his personal papers. I remember all the good times as a young boy: going with him to Brooklyn Dodger baseball games at Ebbets Field and the hike to Floyd Bennett Air Field to watch the planes, especially the bombers going to England just before World War II. He had a quick athletic stride that carried over from his track running in high school competition.

Now I'm faced with a job that is not easy. There are patient files, documents, check books, bills and many letters. One of the first things I discover is an old folder with a marriage certificate. It is dated 1921, Greenwich, Connecticut. Which means that my mother and father eloped almost two years before their official marriage. I smile to think how strong and deep their love must have been to have defied both of their families in taking this step, which was quite unusual at that time. I wonder now why they never told me about it.

I open another drawer of his desk and there are all his financial statements. Some go back years; many are as recent as a few days before he died. Most of them I discard after checking and going through the stubs. Again I'm faced with something I never knew. Dad never

had Social Security and never paid income tax. I double-check and recheck all his records. Again I'm faced with something that was totally unknown to me. I ask myself, "Why?"

Our family's housekeeper, Rose, had told me about a woman that had been a good friend to my father, especially after my mother's death. He saw her regularly at dinner parties. They went to the theater and played bridge together.. There were in his checkbook receipts for jewelry and gifts that I knew must have been for her. But in my search through all his personal papers, nowhere could I find a name, an address, a phone number. I was was never able to tell her that he had died. As I sit here, I ask myself, did she wonder why he never called, or did she call and get no answer?

His office is quiet, and only street noises come up through the open windows. As I sit here, I try to absorb and process all the things I never knew.

I remember the last time I saw him. Sitting in front of a blank TV screen, in his bathrobe, his eyes unseeing. On the table beside him was a letter addressed to me. In some way this letter is the closest he had ever been to saying anything about his personal life to me. The contents of the letter says that there is a small insurance policy he has left for Rose, and to be sure that I do not give any money to my aunt, if she asks, that she has been entirely reimbursed. I'll never know what the money was for.

I sit at his desk for the last time, alone. I think about my own reluctance to ask questions. Was I afraid

to know more about his personal life, or was I so self-absorbed in my own life that I didn't want to know? Is this the way a son, an only child, says goodbye to his father? What was I afraid of? I think about this as I reflect on my own openness to my children and how I want to be remembered.

George Rubin

A NATURE WALK

Lately I haven't been spending as much time outdoors as I should. The indoor habit probably traces back to the summer, because I don't tolerate heat well, and laziness has perpetuated it through the balmy days of fall, which has always been one of my favorite seasons.

So I surprised myself when, one recent Saturday morning, I felt like getting out of the house. At breakfast I found myself sitting opposite the leader of fortnightly trail walks on the Medford campus. Every time she prepares to go, she wonders out loud whether anyone will show up.

"What's the minimum turnout you need to do this walk?" I asked.

"One," she answered. "Do you want to come?" I hadn't been going on those walks, so my affirmative answer must have come as a surprise to her too.

Four more showed up, so the six of us set forth, single file, follow-the-leader. Conversation was sporadic; silence reigned. I had no desire to talk, being satisfied to commune with myself. I don't know what I expected, but I soon lost myself in my surroundings. Above and beside me were almost-bare trees of various kinds. My co-walkers identified them, but their identities meant nothing to me. Their size, structure, and shape were what intrigued me. On the ground were leaves, hundreds of thousands of them, in their characteristic shapes by which I should have been able, but didn't care, to tell what kind of trees had dropped them. What caught my

eye were their colors, from green through yellow, orange, red, to brown, and the very fact of their different shapes. They all did the same thing during their lifetimes, yet they carefully guarded their differences, to be shared only with their unborn siblings.

But differences aside, these leaves welcomed us hikers in unison, crunching softly, uncomplaining, under our feet and softening our impact.

No wildlife made any appearance. Even birds were silent. So I was reduced to imagining the scurry of squirrels and the song of birds I couldn't come close to identifying even as I marveled at their exuberance.

Notably absent from my thoughts were the details of tasks I must accomplish, relationships I might have damaged by neglect, doubts about my competence at whatever I had volunteered to do, anxiety about my looks, anxiety about my weight, anxiety about my health, anxiety about my age, anxiety about the future of the planet, anxiety about not doing what's expected of me, anxiety about *everything*.

For about an hour I was at peace.

For about an hour I had to remind myself that I am a nonbeliever.

I wouldn't have had that experience if I were constantly immersed in nature. Like other wonderful sensations, too much exposure dulls their wonder.

So I'll stay indoors most of the time and venture forth occasionally for that special treat.

Herb Heineman

WATER PLAY – A SHORT SHORT STORY

Sandy crawled to the shore, exhausted. Mark had suggested a cruise to the Bay – unexpected thoughtfulness. When they were at the inlet’s widest spot he pointed and said, “What’s that?”

She looked, then felt him whack her overboard with a six-pack. Beer in hand he raced away, laughing. She had swum poorly, but persistently, and rested now, squinting toward the bay. Somehow, he’d pay. Call the police? Something more subtle? Hmm! Boats do have accidents.

Joyce Koch

Writing for *Leas Lit*

Residents of both campuses, as well as staff, are encouraged to submit original manuscripts for publication in *Leas Lit*, which is published in June and December.

Twice a year, a flyer (***Attention Writers!***) soliciting submissions is distributed by house mail to all residents and staff department heads. It contains instructions for submitting work, a deadline and contact information for questions. Manuscripts received after the deadline will be considered for the next issue.

Authors' names are removed immediately on receipt of the manuscripts so that the editors do not know whose work they are reviewing. This system ensures that personal feelings about individual authors do not influence the evaluation of their work.

There is no limit to the number of pieces an author may submit. However, the same author may have no more than two pieces – one prose and one poetry – in each issue. Additional works by that author that are judged acceptable will be held over for the next issue.

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!

