

LEAS LIT

The Medford Leas Literary Journal



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Medford Leas Residents Association
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SENIOR CITIZEN'S GARDEN OF VERSES

(with apologies to Robert Louis Stevenson, R.I.P.)

The world is so full of a number of things,
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.
But the rush of the new is unfamiliar,
even crossword clues seem most peculiar.
With rap and high-tech accentuated,
no wonder we feel superannuated!
Oh, I don't like to go up in a swing,
up in the air so high.
Unbalanced on a little sling,
I clutch the ropes and fly.
Up in the air and over the wall,
'til I can see so wide.
Regrettably, I have a fall
and land on my backside.
Then I look *UP* at the Arboretum,
UP at the silo round.
Soon the ambulance siren will scream.
They'll get me off the ground.

I saw you toss the kites on high
and blow the birds about the sky.
Just lately I have felt your force,
and ran on back to stay indoors.
Age robs us of much strength and vim,
but if we're smart, we hit the gym.
And work out, though it is laborious,
so that the wind won't be victorious.



I have just to shut my eyes,
to imagine other skies.
I have stores of sunny scenes
like pictures saved from magazines.
When family and friends were there,
I can remember yesteryear.
It's what I did just yesterDAY,
from there my memory goes astray.
And when I need to know a name,
buried it will oft remain.
I know they're all inside my head,
but when I want them, they have fled.

We have a lot of parts, I hear,
that did not come in birthday year.
In fact, I'm hard of hearing now.
For hearing aids, big bucks allow.
If people only ceased to mumble,
I would likely cease to grumble.
Hips, knees, new lenses for eyesight,
teeth that stay in a bath at night.
We may not chew our meat enough;
like kids, we do not like it tough.
Nice mashed potatoes, puddings too,
welcome to our dining venue.

The children throw their naps away
and want to stay up later too.
I *LIKE* to go to bed by day,
even if I miss a thing or two.
My nap's at one – the break is great,
my eyelids droop again at nine.
Save bathroom visits needed late,
a lot of my time is spent reclined.
Midnight on New Year's Eve's a stretch,
so Quaker midnight reigns the Leas.
And dropping balls have met their match –
the magnet of pillows and fleece.

SO GOODNIGHT OLD-TIMERS – MAY YOU
LIVE OUT HAPPY, COMFORTABLE LIVES!

Joyce Linda Sichel

Swift purple grackle
sweeps up orange butterfly.
What a grand sunset!

Elizabeth Hicks

I'LL BE SEEING YOU

The rain had stopped and weak sunlight was trying to pull the clouds apart. The house was quiet with only the pendulum of the mantel clock swinging back and forth. The logs in the fireplace had just begun to flare up like red fingers. Norma and Robert sat on the couch, and on the coffee table in front of them, reflected in the dim sunlight, was a small blown-glass paperweight with a small purple flower inside. Looking over at Robert, Norma said:

“I enjoyed going to that glass blowing factory when we were in Leith, Scotland, and watching them make those paperweights. What skill!”

“I agree,” he answered.

“Robert, I'm going into the study for a while. I have some work I need to do at the computer,” Norma said as she got up from the couch. When she had left, Robert sat quietly, then gently picked up the glass globe, holding it in the light, remembering.

The bright sun was now low on the horizon. Robert noticed that Keith had a handful of dandelions. He wondered where he had found them.

“Hey, buddy,” broke through Robert’s thoughts, “get the Klim can and put it on the fire. It’s soup time.”

It's already got water in it, will do.

They both chopped up the dandelions. In the Red Cross parcel Robert found some cheese and some biscuits and an unopened tin of tuna. What a feast we are going to have, he thought, and it brought a smile to his unshaven face. Around them life in the Stalag hummed with activity. Some of the soldiers were washing clothes in some old pots, some were playing chess or writing letters home, knowing that they might never get mailed. As he stirred the soup mixture, Robert looked around and watched two German soldiers walking near the wire fence line while up in the guard tower another soldier looked down at them. At least no roll call, no *Raus!* no *Achtung!* today. Welcome to life in a POW camp.

Suddenly a British airman wandered by. His duty tunic was dirty and torn, with the RAF wings hanging by a thread.

“Hey, Kriege,* you want to eat with us?” Robert asked.

“Sure would, mate.”

Keith had unwrapped the dark bread. “I see we have company. Welcome to the party.” Robert sliced the bread and put it on the fire so it would be edible.

“Bread ingredients,” said Keith, “60% sawdust and 30% who knows,” as he poked the bread with a stick. Then he passed out the soup, scooping it into their tin cups. Poking the bread out of the fire, he handed it out with some margarine from the Red Cross parcel. The food, the conversation, seemed to lighten the mood of the three men. Nearby a Canadian soldier pulled a harmonica out of his uniform pocket and started to play.

The tune was sprightly and the British airman started singing,

*I don't want to be a soldier. I don't want to go to war
I want to hang around the Piccadilly Underground
Living off the earning of a highborn limey*

Both Keith and Robert joined in clapping and humming along. They were interrupted by the sound of rifle fire and shouting in German from the wire fence line. They all got up and ran to the fence. A Krieger met them and said:

“One of our guys was bartering through the fence with a Russian POW in the camp next to ours. His homemade spoon for one of our chocolate bars. The tower guard saw them and without even an *'Achtung!*” shot the Russian. Our guy was taken back to the stockade. What a lousy way to go.”

Robert, Keith, and the airman walked sadly back to their campfire. The soup was cold and the bread dry and hard. The mood had returned to Stalag time. The Brit turned to Robert,

“Thank you guys, it was good while it lasted.”

He then put his hand into his flight tunic and pulled out a small glass globe with a purple flower inside it.

It was my mother's, but I think she would appreciate you having it. Robert took it into his hands, holding it tightly.

“Thanks a million, and we'll be seeing you, Robert replied quietly.”

Norma had returned to the living room. Robert still sat holding the glass globe, with only the firelight filling the room.

“What memories are you thinking about? You seemed so far away, it's good to have you back,” she said. “How about a little music?” She turned on the radio, and singing filled the room.

*I'll be seeing you
In all the old familiar places
That this heart of mine embraces...*

Robert looked up at Norma as he put the globe back on the table.

He smiled, rose from the couch, and embraced her.

George Rubin

*Derived from *Kriegsgefangener*, prisoner of war.

PLEIN AIR

It took a while, but now he came unnoticed, unremarked. The first time that he'd driven up and stood his easel next to the chain-link fence, they'd been there in moments, one car inside, the other outside. "Can I have some identification, sir?" the big, unsmiling man had asked, but it wasn't a question. Al had handed over his driver's license and the guard surveyed it carefully, matching the wiry, dark-haired man to his picture. "This is a restricted area, sir," the guard handed back the license. His nametag said George Griffin. "You'll have to move on."

"George, please," Al remonstrated. "I'm just here to paint airplanes. I want to capture them at the moment of takeoff, with the scream of power and the transformation to graceful flight as the bulk becomes airborne. No one's ever done that. It's just me and my paints." His passion was apparent, and George's mouth relaxed a bit in the hint of a smile, but, "I'm sorry sir..."

"Isn't there someone who could give permission? I'm really quite harmless, just an artist." He handed him a business card:

Al Nusra
Plein Air Landscapes
Watercolors, oils and acrylics.
Call for a catalog. Commissions welcome.
213.555.9399

"Give him a break, George," one of the inside guards said. "He's not gonna jump on a plane goin' 180 knots." George relented. And so, it had been. Occasionally a car

would stop, and a guard would comment on the painting in progress, but pretty much he was left alone. He'd found the perfect spot alongside the place where most of the big aircraft flashed by, rotated off their nosewheels, their main gear barely kissing the concrete. His subjects were the giant 777s, engines large enough for a person to stand erect in the cowling, 787s, with their amazing plastic bodies. Sometimes a 747 or even an A380 would appear, impossibly heavy until it too left the ground. He learned to tie his canvas to the easel and the easel to the ground, so the wingtip vortices wouldn't whip them into the next state. He painted at dawn in watercolors with the sun flaming on the polished aluminum. He painted at night in acrylics with an airplane's lights and strobes and the burning glare of the engines appearing in garish streaks on his black canvas. When he ran out of paints, he went back to his car to get more of the one-and-a-quarter ounce tubes: alizarin crimson, cadmium yellow, cerulean blue, Chinese white. The airplanes were his target, but he took in the whole scene from the vent stacks of the fuel dumps to the sturdy grasses that withstood blast after blast of air and exhaust. He waved to the airport security guards and they waved back as they performed their scheduled rounds.

~~~~~

### *Ending 1*

At dusk one evening, he retrieved many fresh tubes from his car, a little larger than his usual colors, and a bolt cutter. He emptied the tubes into a small open box and mixed the contents, stirring carefully. Then he cut a



small hole in the chain-link fencing, slipped through and placed the box next to a fuel dump vent stack beside the runway. He inserted an igniter and to the igniter he attached a fine electrical wire. Unreeling the wire behind him, he emerged through the fence and connected a battery and a switch to the apparatus. As one of the giant planes came toward him, he closed the switch with exquisite timing resulting from long study and rehearsal. An instant before the plane passed him, the fuel dump exploded, sending flames and debris in a hundred-yard circle of death. The airplane ignited from the wheels up, the wing tanks exploding to add to the glare. With a huge noise and eye-searing light it became a fireball traveling through the air at 200 miles per hour.

Al painted, waiting for the guards and his martyrdom.

### *Ending 2*

At dusk one evening, the light failing, he placed the painting on which he was working in his car and squatted down to disassemble his easel and pack his gear. The moonless sky darkened quickly, and his work slowed as it became difficult to see even the silver paint tubes. Every so often a thundering plane swept by. In the sudden silence after a 737's passage, he heard something: grass rustling, footfalls, soft speech that he couldn't make out and then a rattle of the chain-link fence. He turned quietly, staring through the stygian night toward the airport. As another jet roared down the runway, its light illuminated two men wrestling with a bolt cutter, cutting through the fence. On their backs there appeared

to be heavy backpacks. Al turned cold and crept toward them. As another plane came by he pulled out his cell, dialed 911 and, his voice completely blotted out by the flaming engines, he shouted a warning that he couldn't hear. Hoping that the operator had made out his words, he again moved toward the interlopers.

Airport security, with George Griffin in the lead, was there in minutes. He knew exactly where to go in the miles of fence and he feared for Al. He and five others came running up the slight grade while another six guards approached from the airport side. Flashlights swept the area until twelve beams converged on pitiful piles of clothing, the unconscious men upon whom sat Al Nusra. George took in the scene: two men down, a partially torn perimeter fence, backpacks spilling out weapons and explosives. "What the hell?" was all he could manage.

Al shrugged. "Allahu Akbar," he said and smiled.

*Bob Edelson*

## CHANGE

Over the last century there have been very major changes in the way people work and live. We recognize changes that have occurred in nearly every aspect of life in a civilized society. This has certainly been true in my own life.

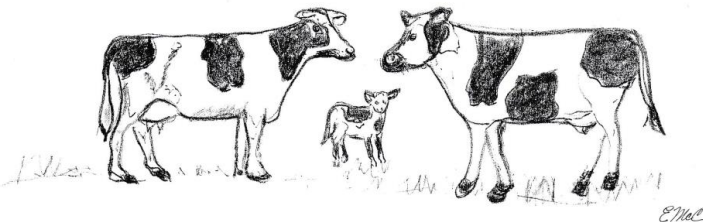
I think back to when I went to business school. We had manual typewriters. When I returned to work after having children, I had to learn to use an electric typewriter. Before I retired, the computer was a new experience to conquer. Lots of technology has come into use, such as fancy telephones that can tell you the weather as well as most anything you need to know. Now you can speak into a device such as Alexa and it will answer your questions. This is particularly helpful if you missed the end of a football game because you got a telephone call. Just ask Alexa and it will give you the final score. Also, the GPS gets us to where we want to be when we don't know the way and our husbands don't want to ask at the nearby gas station. Fewer weddings are missed because of the GPS, if we can learn how to use it. We keep having new technology available to us if we are willing to learn it.

I knew a very good private-duty nurse who had worked in Mt. Holly Hospital. (It is now Virtua Hospital in Mt. Holly.) When she became a widow, everyone thought she would return to nursing because she loved it. However, she didn't, because there was so much new in the nursing field and she didn't want to jeopardize her good reputation. Also, nurses whose RN certification

was earned in three years almost all went back to school to earn their bachelor's degree to be competitive in the workforce.

Farming, which has been an occupation since Biblical times and even before, has changed. Some 75 years or more ago, Guernsey cows were the preferred dairy cow because they gave richer milk than some other breeds. The housewife would like to see the cream on the top of the bottle when it was delivered at the door. Then we all became cholesterol-conscious and the Holstein became the preferred dairy cow. These black and white cows give more milk with lower butterfat.

The way they feed cows changed also. The nutrients in the feed became important. Not just any old grain would do. The amount of protein, carbohydrates, and other nutrients were important to keep the cows healthy and efficient in milk production. There was one cow that was the leader of the herd. She was sent out of the barn and led to the field of grass or alfalfa to munch away until milking time, when all the cows were brought to the barn. Well, this cow had a mind of her own. She did not like the field she was sent to, so she turned around, came back and stuck her head into the barn and bellowed as if to say, "There is nothing to eat in that field." So she was led to another field. All was well.



Today the cows stay in the barnyard and the food is brought to them in the form of silage. The theory is they won't use up energy walking to their food. Since there are no dairy farms in Burlington County, you won't see any cows out to pasture. People tell me they miss seeing the cows out in the fields. At one time there were at least one hundred farmers around here that had between a few to many cows. There were even milk bottling plants and home delivery routes in the area. Technology has changed so many facets of life, even for a cow.

*Irene Jones*



## ALIVE WITH MEMORIES

It's called the Kamp, spelled with a K as in Kape Kod Kamp. It is best known to us oldsters as the KKK, which came from the Irving Berlin song "KKK Katie." The founders named the wooden sailboat Katie, and we taught all the kids the song about the stuttering, lovesick young man. More recently, however, the three large letters "K" have been pulled off the stone fireplace and we no longer use the racist moniker.

The place is so filled with memories, I sometimes find it difficult to relax in the midst of them. It's a hundred-year-old wooden cabin on the shore of a pretty little pond in the middle of Cape Cod. It is owned by seven families, each of whom gets a couple of summer weeks' use. The unwritten rule is that you will leave the place spotless and be gone by noon on Friday, the sacred turnover hour. (Horrors, if your car is still in the yard when the next load of Kampers arrives.)

So, we seldom meet, except an occasional family representative who attends the annual meeting when the schedule is worked up, dues are assessed, and necessary maintenance is discussed. They are a tight-fisted bunch and little gets done in the way of big improvements. Back in the 1970s, the town of Brewster declared the outhouse no longer up to code, so we were forced to build a bathroom with running water, both hot and cold. Otherwise, I'm not sure I would return.

The cabin's condition is almost sacred, filled with mementos festooned about the walls and rafters. No one dares throw anything out. Someone, unknown, may

deem it precious. There are ancient, large, aerial photos of the adjacent bogs when they were worked for cranberries – we gather blueberries in them now. A large photo of the Harwich town hall, long torn down, reminds me of watching “Jack and the Beanstalk” from its peanut gallery with my kids. There are fifty or more brown paper cutouts of prize fish tacked to the ceiling complete with the weight, date and names of the proud anglers. The rafters hold furled sails, oars and paddles, many belonging to boats now extinct. In between are beautiful lanterns of the pre-electric days, when tending lamps was a routine chore. There are maps of the trails through the surrounding woods which have been blessedly preserved by the people of Brewster as a wilderness park, the saving grace to our privacy. The kitchen lean-to’s walls are covered with rusting gadgets, no longer used, amidst the newer plastic ones, and under the sink is a treasure of busted hardware available for creative fixer-uppers. The old green pump sits at the end of the cast iron sink. Its use now is only ornamental but I remember trying to brush teeth between lunges at the handle to keep the water flowing. It often lost its vacuum and always took several long, hard pumps to get a good flow going again. There were four or five old milk bottles adjacent, which were kept filled with water to prime the pump on arrival. It was a dreadful sin not to immediately refill those bottles for the next emergency. Can any of you remember how to change the leather flapper inside?

My husband and I honeymooned there, mid-century, and returned every summer if the Navy had positioned us on the east coast. The children quickly grew into the joys of Kamping. No phones, no



television, but total freedom with swimming, sailing and fishing, plus a cozy corner for a good read. There were excursions to the ocean beaches with cold dashes into the surf and campfires with hot dogs and marshmallows. Later, as teens in New England colleges, they would bring their friends down for a weekend and more would be inducted into the special world of Kamp.

The chain holding all the disparate groups together is the Log. Everyone writes a daily entry, starting with kudos to the last set of Kampers for the spotless condition in which you found Kamp – and your last entry is always, “#2 is off (*the hot water switch*) and so we leave after another great time at Kamp.”

My last visit was too cold for a swim in the pond. Instead, we spent a lot of effort carrying in wood to feed the stove. I read the current Log to find where others had shopped, where they had eaten and where they found the best bargain on lobsters. But the real joy was to turn to the old Logs where I could find entries of my own or of other family members.

Certainly, a lot of effort and care had been spent to keep the Kamp as it is. Thankfully, each younger generation picks up the load and carries on the traditions. There is talk of having a 100-year reunion next summer, but Kampers now number almost a hundred and there is hardly room for all. Maybe it is best that there is some mystery to the names. We read one another's Log entries and we sense the love that holds us all together in that funny little cabin at the edge of the pond. Perhaps that is enough.

*Edith Swallow*

## LEAVING TIME

**T**here was a languid sheen to the day, as though the morning mist had lingered past its leaving time just to go about the business of softening all the edges, blurring the borders between what is, may have been, and what is not anymore.

Jenny sighed as she went about her chores, noticing the heady scent of her prized “French” lilac bush as it streamed through the porch screen door on a soft June breeze. Wednesday was baking day, baking for five children born over fourteen years of marriage. Baking strawberry pies, baking dense loaves of bread, baking the milky sugar cookies the children loved.

And baking for Bill, because store-bought was too dear, even though, with Bill’s WPA superintendent’s pay, they could afford to buy luxuries when others couldn’t.

Up to her elbows in flour with no time to sit, Jenny thought about the way her life had turned out. She was a beauty when she was young, sixteen with flaming red hair, a temper to match, and suitors calling from miles away, as far as the county seat.

How she came to marry Bill, who had no chin and little hair, was a mystery to her. Jenny had decided on tall, blue-eyed James, who had full lips in a ready smile and thick blue-black hair. James often brought his family’s grain over the mountain to be ground at Jenny’s father’s mill. The miller’s daughter and the handsome young man began stealing glances, then finding occa-

sions to spend time in conversation, enjoying the natural laughter and quickening breaths that followed.

But Bill was a force to be reckoned with. Older, savvier to the ways of women, Bill came courting without subtleties or hesitation. Money was spent, trinkets were bought, and Bill took Jenny to the Methodist meeting in a spanking new Ford Model T. Soon Jenny was seen in Bill's company to the degree that it would have been very unseemly for the two not to wed.

The inevitable happened, the marriage, followed closely by the birth of a red-haired daughter. James left his home- lace.

Handsome and well liked, James was now broken-hearted. After a time, word filtered through the community that James was in exotic California, as far from Jenny and Bill as he could possibly travel.

And now? Now high-spirited Jenny was servant to a brood, each one louder and more troublesome than the last, and to a husband who pinched all his pennies until they squeaked, even as he spent his money with his cronies at the water authority, staying out all hours. He hadn't even managed to be home for the birth of his last two children.

Jenny slammed the oven door. Leaning on the doorframe for a bit of air, her attention was caught by her youngest toddling up the walkway from the garden. Chubby Ferne was clutching a muddy carrot in one hand and wiping thick streaks of dirt down her jumper with her other. The child's happy laughter ended as Jenny called out to her two eldest "Irene, Naomi, didn't I tell

you to watch that baby? Now, you two get in here and clean her up right this minute!”

At that moment, as a revelation from above, Jenny heard the radio over the children’s clamor. For the past few days it seemed all she heard on the radio was word of a bus for righteous local women who would be journeying to Temple, Texas, to hear that famous California lady radio preacher testify on *The Simple Truth*.

“There are yet a few seats on the bus for the most upright of women called to a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for edification in the right way of the Lord.” Once in a lifetime echoed like a chant, an unspoken truth. “Once in a lifetime.”

As though in a dream, Jenny moved to her closet shelf and pulled into her arms the expensive bolt of beautiful blue crepe de chine she’d hidden there months ago. It was high time to use this lovely, supple fabric for an elegant traveling dress.

Jenny was going west, west to Texas and perhaps, if the Lord willed, to California as well.

Thursday, washing day: scowling at her electric Maytag wringer washing machine, once the envy of all the young matrons in her town, Jenny now saw only another symbol of servitude. Eyes narrowed, intensely focused, her thoughts flew as fast as the endless washes: first the fine white linens, Bill’s dress shirts for his mysterious meetings, Jenny’s dainties, and the girls’ petticoats; next the heavy household towels, and finally, even heavier and dirtier, came Bill’s and the boys’ overalls.

Out of the tub, fed through the wringer, into the wash basket and out into the lilac-scented air to hang with wooden clothes pins. Hung “just so” because each item had its own way to dry.

Finally, the children were home from school! Irene was set about taking down and folding all the dry linens while Ivan and Glen were assigned the heavy baskets of towels and overalls to drag to the line. All three of the oldest and tallest children hung the wet, heavy clothes on the line while Naomi cleaned dandelion greens and watched little Ferne as she played in the shade.

Thus freed, Jenny began to fashion the lovely crepe de chine into a traveling dress with a matching capelet. A bit thicker in her figure but still beautiful, Jenny knew how to heighten her best features. She would trim the capelet with white rayon, the dress would follow the latest New York style, and the color would accent the blue of her eyes.

Hours passed as the children’s chatter and squeals faded, and it seemed only the strange light and scent of lilacs carried her along through her dreams.

Friday was marketing day and Jenny set off very early with little Ferne in tow. Stopping at Harner’s general store, she made short work of settling household accounts and placing her order for the boy to deliver later.

Now there was ample time for the real business of the day to begin;

Jenny had people to see and arrangements to make.

After her husband returned from his Friday night meeting, ate his ham and dandelion greens supper, and lit one of his horrid cigars, Jenny delivered her news.

“I’ll be joining the Methodist Ladies on the bus to Texas. I’ve been called to righteous edification, and there is no denying the Lord’s will, husband.”

Sputtering protests ensued: “The children! The household, my supper!

“A married woman traveling so far away, not at all dignified, off with a bunch of clucking hens. I forbid it!”

“Bill, the arrangements are all in order. Effie will handle everything. If you should happen to come home for supper, you’ll have a meal. You know my sister has just the one boy and will willingly tend to our house and hers.”

Jenny was now flashing her famous temper: “There will be no forbidding this trip; Bill, I leave in the morning. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

On Saturday morning five wide-eyed children lined up in the front parlor, quiet little church-mice for once. Before them stood their mother, beautiful as the dawning spring day, a fashionable hat perched atop her shining hair.

“Now, children you will be obedient, and you will mind your Aunt Effie.

“I’m leaving on a journey to the west. I am called to go now, and you must mind your father and your Aunt Effie while I am gone.”

Questions and objections tumbled from five mouths at once. Little Ferne cried softly.

Jenny turned, her back straight, head held high, gave her sister a quick grateful hug, and bid her husband farewell.

Clutching her canvas valise and smiling a secret smile, Jenny strode to her waiting bus in the softly scented morning breeze.

*Gail Romberger*

## SPRING – A STATE OF MIND

This year spring started on March 20, summer will start on June 21. That makes spring, with ninety-three days, four days longer than the winter we just suffered through. Hurrah! Everybody loves spring, so of course the longer it lasts the better. And thanks be to Planet Earth for slowing down at the right time to afford us that extra day of spring magic.



Sadly it's only an illusion. The earth plods along at a steady 66,600 miles per hour (give or take a couple, but who's checking?), no matter what our calendar says. The earth got here first and has claim to seniority, that's all there is to it. Trouble is, it spins as it goes and, at the precise moment it completes its orbit round the sun, it



isn't facing in the same direction it was when it started. It can't seem to get its routine quite right – right being how we humans define it, of course. At the completion of its orbit it's off by a quarter of a rotation. But wait, we can fix that: just add a day every four years, making up for those four quarters! Now we're almost there, except that after a hundred years we're still a wee bit off, albeit in the *opposite* direction. We can fix that too: three centuries out of four, including the present one, we don't add the extra day to the year ending in -00. In other words, three out of four *siècles* will miss part of their *fin*s. If that doesn't do the trick, at least no current *Leas Lit* reader will notice.

Why go into all this? Because the seasons don't change at midnight – not Eastern, nor Pacific, nor Myanmar midnight. Day and night mark the earth's rotation; seasons mark its orbital travel. They change when the earth has traveled a quarter orbit since the last change; at that time day and night are either equal or most unequal. The midnight closest to either event defines the *official* beginning of the season wherever you happen to be. In reality, though, seasons change continuously; spring doesn't push winter aside overnight.

So hold your hurrahs. Spring 2019 will be just one-quarter of the year.

Then let's forget about schedules and think of spring as a special time of year. Perhaps more special than the others, because it's a celebration of rebirth. After the dead of winter, rebirth is exactly what we need. Just think of frostbite, dry skin, flu, seasonal affective disorder, heating bills, and so on. Yes, we do appreciate the coming of spring.

But does everybody appreciate spring equally? I think not. One reason is that some – maybe most – of us see each season not only for its own character but also in contrast to the ones preceding and following. Depending on your personality, you may (1) be thankful winter's over, and enjoy spring that much more; or (2) live in dread of summer, which is creeping over the horizon even as I'm writing, and allow your enjoyment of spring to be dampened; or (3) find something of beauty in all seasons, and enjoy spring as one of four seasonal gifts. To help you reach this state of bliss, I refer you to a poem previously published in *Leas Lit*, June 2011, pages 22-23 to be exact. (It starts with a naked woman, so don't miss it.)

You might want to hold on to it, to help you through the less pleasant months.

Unfortunately I'm a born pessimist. Already I sweat at the thought of hot, humid, summer – which this year is ninety-*four* days long. Where is justice?

*Herb Heineman*

## SUMMER HAIKU

Hazy, hot, humid,  
Energating summer day.  
Ah! Cold lemon ice!

*Molly Gayley*

## MY HOBBY

I grew up in a small farming town in Germany. My father was a butcher and in our stable we kept our horse, “Fritz,” and two cows. A flock of chickens ran around the barnyard, often challenging me to find a new hidden nest in the hayloft where they had laid their eggs. At 12 years of age, I helped with the usual farm chores, which included taking care of all the animals. Although I was glad to be of help, it was a boring routine.



What fascinated me was the pigeons that were flying around and going in and out of a small covered opening in the roof of a neighbor’s house. Johann had

told me that he belonged to a club that arranged for owners of homing pigeons to jointly have their pigeons bused or shipped to various locations, often great distances away from home. There they were taken out of the crates in which they had been transported and turned loose at the same time. When Johann had some birds on such a flight, he and I often sat in his pigeon loft waiting for his first bird to return home. Leg bands identified each of his pigeons. When one arrived from where it had been released, it was “clocked in” and its arrival time was noted. Considering the various distances to its loft each owner’s bird had to fly, it was then determined which one came home first and won the race. Rarely did a bird get lost and not make it home. Usually the winner was awarded a small monetary prize.

Pigeons mate for life, and frequently owners make exchanges of offspring to introduce other bloodlines into their flock. I became the recipient of a pair of such offspring, a gift from Johann. He agreed to keep them until I had permission from my parents and had constructed a pen for them. With fatherly help, a hole that was protected from the weather was cut into the roof of the stable and, with boards and wire, I nailed together a pen that satisfied my neighbor. The birds arrived, got used to the pen, slowly ventured out onto the roof, went for a flight and came back inside. Chickenfeed and water were always there. All went so well that, with savings from my weekly allowance, I was able to buy another pair of older, already mated birds from Johann. Soon the little hen was sitting in a straw nest, laid two eggs within three days and began incubating them, being spaced routinely by her mate. Both eggs looked so very

little to me, but after about 18 days, two very, very tiny squabs appeared. They were well taken care of by both parents until they had feathers and could feed themselves. And that was only the beginning. Before long there were three little hens sitting on eggs, and in almost no time, I owned and took care of a dozen pigeons – and counting. I loved watching the activity, became familiar with “pigeon husbandry,” and spent a lot of time in or next to the pen.

And then it happened.

I was neglecting my school work and one day I came home with a flunking grade in music (which I would also flunk today). My father had tolerated all of my activities with the pigeons, but that was more than he could take. He gave me an ultimatum: “Either pigeons or gymnasium!”

A few days later, my pigeons were flying out of someone else’s loft.

And boy, did I learn a lesson!!

*Ernest Kaufman*



## SCHOOLTEACHERS REMEMBERED

No matter our mature ages and occasional memory lapses, we still remember schoolteachers from our youth. These teachers are usually the ones we had strong feelings about – whether positive or negative. Here are some of Medford Leas’ writers’ memories, and you may be moved to retrieve some of your own.



One of us remains enthusiastic about her teacher from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade in a small rural school, Mrs. J. “I just knew that every project she introduced, every bit of math help, or any book that she would choose to read aloud to the class was perfect. A born disciplinarian, she never raised her voice to obstreperous students. She encouraged each of us according to our needs and urged us

to be kind and polite because things went better in the class when we were. She didn't play favorites, berate us for bad behavior, or ignore us." Mrs. J. became that writer's role model for her own career teaching English.

Another of our writers was inspired by her English teacher (and department head) in a Philadelphia high school. In our writer's words, "I already loved reading, but her class made me want to read everything – not just the types of books I had liked up to that point. She was really from the 'old school' and taught us John Ruskin and other authors not on the usual syllabus. Her class made me want to become an English teacher." (And she went on to become an English department head as well.) That same writer also enthuses about her choir director, Mr. N. She remembers and writes, "We sang amazingly difficult music from Randolph Thompson's 'Peaceable Kingdom' to Verdi's eight-part 'Te Deum.' Later in life when I was singing in the Mendelssohn Club and we were starting to rehearse 'Te Deum,' the alto next to me said, 'It sounds like you've sung this before.' I said, 'I sang it in high school.' Her response was, 'You sang THIS in high school!'"

Memories of a special high school French teacher in South Jersey, Madame G., are still a strong motivator for another writer. "It appeared that reading in French was the goal, but it was taught to us from every angle. We illustrated vocabulary lists. We sang. There were actual novels with some level of thickness. *Des Pas sur la Neige* was the first one. What astonishment to find that it was understandable. I ate it all up.... Our enthusiasm woke her up too, and just for us she initiated a brand new French class. This was 1957 and way before the new



audio-lingual method. She pulled twelve of us out of the class of twenty-four and started a class in just oral French....Those lucky twelve who had two French classes truly ended up speaking. Ultimately I feel I became a citizen of the world. I owe much of my self-image and many of the joys of my life to Madame G. Thank you, dear teacher.”

Not all memories of our teachers are this fond, of course. Many are simply remembered for being there, perhaps their names, while others carry emotional baggage to this day. One of our writers had unhappy experiences in her parochial school. She writes, “Even whispering was not allowed. The first time, the teacher, a nun you addressed as ‘Sister,’ told me and the little girl I sat next to at the back of the class to come up front and bend over the teacher’s desk, because we were talking. I was very embarrassed. Then I was shocked when she hit me on my backside with a bollo bat. Why did she think hitting me would make me quiet?” This writer’s family later moved to the suburbs, where she attended public school and her teacher, Mr. L., never embarrassed her. She was even skipped a grade because she was a good student.

Another writer experienced so much stress in her first-grade class taught by Mrs. R. that she lost control of her bladder on the schoolroom floor. Many of our writers’ negative memories revolve around shame. That writer explains, “The whole year was not a success. Mrs. R. taught the class reading using the new ‘sight reading’ method, which the school I attended had encouraged. I was to learn words by having a picture of them in my

head. I was mortified that I was not learning to read. It was a terrible experiment with young children's schooling. They had (temporarily) dropped the proven method of learning to read by sounding out the parts of words (the method known as 'phonics'). My mother was also a teacher, and had to use phonics to teach me to read at home. Soon I became an excellent reader but I started behind and had to race to catch up. I thought I must have been stupid!"

Jumping, in conclusion, from first grade to college, one more of our writers has powerful memories of humiliation at the hands of a teacher. He writes about Professor F. "The junior project was our first hands-on engineering course. My partner Ira and I decided to build and calibrate a hot-wire anemometer to make accurate measurements of air speed in a small wind tunnel. We'd taken great care to write up our experiment legibly, comprehensively, and articulately. Our hand-drawn graphs were beautiful. I left for summer vacation confident in receiving an A. Two weeks went by before a brown envelope arrived. I opened it and was horrified to see a C scrawled on the cover page, together with the reason for the low grade: 'consulted advisor too often.'" As this writer's life continued, he became reassured that the professor had been wrong. "Every important job I'd ever worked on was a collaborative effort where not seeking help was the real, expensive sin. But, in the meantime, before experience supported me, I several times refrained from asking for help when it might have made all the difference. I even left my graduate program without completing my dissertation (until years later) because I

regarded it as a personal failing that I couldn't figure it out by myself."

So it became clear to our writers' group (and perhaps to you) that teachers, those older people who were not our parents or grandparents, potentially had great power to shape us. Many segments included here show that building a child's confidence with positive example and constructive feedback led to memories of talented teachers who were role models. But schoolteachers also potentially had great power to shape our self-image in negative ways, to leave lasting memories of nervousness, shame, self-doubt, and anger.

We hope that our readers' experiences and memories of their schoolteachers were mostly good ones.

*Writers Roundtable*

## ONCE-A-DAY, AS PRESCRIBED

**H**er therapist had been quite clear. “Once a day, Bianca. Do at least one thing each day that you want to do, but are reluctant because you feel that someone may disapprove. Do it anyway. Their approval can’t always be the deciding factor in whether or not you take an action. And try not to explain over and over. Just give a concise reason, if appropriate.”

“I know I’m a mess,” Bianca told Dr. Evans. “I can’t say no to anyone, and when I finally do say no, I feel so guilty. I apologize ’til I can’t stand the sound of my own voice. I’m miserable. And I know that it’s hurting me at work. People think they can walk all over me, and I’m not considered management material.”

“That’s why I’m asking you to accept this prescription for change,” Dr. Evans said. “We’ve talked this over, week in and week out, and there’s been no improvement. That’s why you have to do this.”

Bianca followed this prescription for a few weeks, with varying degrees of success. On day one she told a co-worker that she was not going to have lunch with her at the corner café, as usual. Despite Kathy’s cajoling, she smiled, stuck to her guns and ended up reading while she ate a sandwich in the park. It was a nice change from the typical gossip-filled lunch hour, gabbing about who deserved a raise and who didn’t, and her co-worker didn’t seem to mind.

Day two was a small “no” to a co-worker who asked to borrow money for the vending machine. This

person borrowed seventy-five cents on a regular basis, and never returned the favor or paid the money back. It was an easy “no.”

Day three was a biggie. In a department meeting Bianca brought up a well-thought-out plan for improving the flow of paperwork between the different persons who needed to review and sign off on contracts. A big discussion followed, she stood up for her plan and had a counter-argument for dissenters and eventually, her boss approved the plan and commended her initiative. It felt great to speak up, and to experience success.

After several weeks of “one-a-day,” Bianca’s ability to tackle big obstacles was tested. Her mother called on a Friday evening. “Honey, I hate to bother you, but I could use your help. Your Dad and I want to visit Aunt Sophia in Connecticut for a week. Could you house-sit for us? You know the routine – water the plants, walk the dog, and so forth.”

Bianca froze. She really wanted to say no, but was afraid she’d blow it. So she told a white lie. “Oh, Mom. Sorry. Somebody’s at the door. I’ll call you back in a few minutes.”

She needed time to think about what she felt, and what she wanted to say. House sitting would mean an hour’s commute to work, which would mean longer work days. Her car wasn’t reliable, which was one reason she took the subway. But she stopped herself, remembering Dr. Evans’s advice: don’t over-explain.

She called her mother back. “About the house-sitting, I can’t do it.”

“Why not?” Her mother asked.

Keep it simple, she reminded herself. Brief and to the point. “It just wouldn’t work out for me. Mainly because of the commute. Sorry, Mom.” She clamped her lips, fighting the urge to give ten reasons why she couldn’t do it.

She was surprised when her mother just said, “Are you sure? . . . Oh. All right. I guess Mrs. Norris across the street might help, or maybe your sister would come over. Or at least take the dog.” And when her mother hung up they were still on talking terms, no tension at all.

But it didn’t end there. That night, her sister Patricia called, extremely agitated. “You are the bitchiest sister ever. You know I have plans with Don. If I have to take care of the house and dog, it will just ruin everything. You’re the oldest; it’s your responsibility.”

“Excuse me. I did it last year, when the folks flew to London for a week. And the year before when they visited grandpa in Florida. Don’t you think it’s your turn?”

“You are a stupid bitch of a sister and I’m never going to talk to you again.” The phone was disconnected abruptly.

That exchange made Bianca feel on top of the world, and in the lowest pit, all at the same time. It was liberating to face people; tell them the truth about a situation, but it was disheartening to deal with their harsh negative feelings.

A few days later, on Sunday morning, Bianca's mother called, and she was crying.

"I . . . I've got some bad news. Your sister. . . she . . . she's dead! She was really upset last night, about house sitting. She yelled at me, said she was furious with you. . . You know her temper. . ." Her mother broke into sobs once again.

"Mom, what happened?" Fear was paralyzing Bianca's chest and she could barely breathe.

"Apparently she left her apartment, furious with all of us. It was late, and there was a light rain. She was heading north, along the reservoir. . . Bianca, her car went off the road, into the water by that sharp corner. They think she might have been drinking and done it on purpose. There weren't any other cars, or any skid marks. They didn't even find her 'til the next morning."

"Oh, my God. I knew she was upset but I never thought . . ."

"Oh, I can't talk about it anymore. This isn't right. Children shouldn't die before their parents."

Her mother burst into a fresh round of tears, and her father could be heard in the background. "Now, honey, don't cry so much. You'll make yourself sick."

Her dad picked up the phone, and said, "I'm sorry, Bianca. Your mother is in bad shape."

"How are you doing, Dad?"

“I guess I’m sort of numb. We’ll get through it, somehow. But it hurts . . . I’ll call you later, when things are quieter. We’ve got to make funeral plans and I’m going to need your help, especially if your mother is. . .”

“Sure, Dad. I’ll be there for you. Don’t you worry about that.”

When she hung up she collapsed into a kitchen chair. All she could think of was that because she had to speak up for herself it had led to this. And she thought of all the ways that she could have handled things differently. But it was too late now. No turning back the clock.

She made herself a cup of herbal tea and then made the call she knew she had to make. She dialed her therapist and he returned her call within an hour.

After she explained what had happened with her sister, Dr. Evans said, “I’m so sorry, Bianca. Sometimes there’s no one who knows you better than a sibling. Even if you had conflicts, you still had a lot in common. This will be a difficult loss to face.”

“And how do I do that? Do I keep on saying ‘no’ once a day? Sure, I had some minor successes, but when it really counted, that prescription let me down.”

“We’ll need to talk about that, and I do have an opening Monday afternoon, if you’re available.”

Part of her wanted to yell and scream at Dr. Evans, say, “It’s all your fault. If I’d just said yes to my Mom, Patricia wouldn’t have been upset. She wouldn’t have driven off the road, whether it was on purpose or a stupid accident. And maybe she would have finally grown



up, some day.” But she knew there were flaws in that logic, and she’d have to meet with him to figure it all out.

The week of the funeral was too awful to bear, and the first few months after that weren’t much better. Her mom and dad didn’t seem to blame her. They said, “We wish Patricia had gotten some help. We think she needed it more than you do.”

But it still took a long time for Bianca to forgive herself. Eighteen months after her sister’s death she sat down and wrote an important letter.

*Dear Dr. Evans,*

*I’m glad I came back to see you after Patricia’s death, and that I didn’t give up on our once-a-day prescription plan. I am now able to say yes, or no, without going into neurotic tailspins, as you are aware. The guilt still overwhelms me at times, but you’re right. I wasn’t the only person in this scenario. Patricia was responsible for her own actions.*

*Since we agreed to stop my therapy sessions, I wanted to add a little postscript to this saga. My company was recently bought out by a larger company. I fought for my department and my co-workers, and they asked me to be the new manager. And guess what? This time I didn’t say no.*

*Thank you for all your patience and skill. . . Sincerely, the new, improved Bianca.*

*Joyce Koch*

## **EMERGING...**

Shedding her brittle chrysalis

Languidly she employs

Her fragile magical wings

Poised in shimmering equilibrium

Above the indigo-shadowed abyss

*Gail Romberger*

## CHAOS ESCAPABLE

The rose that blooms in March will smell as sweet,  
But will it live through August's heat?  
The bee from hibernation stirs to feed  
Too late, for buds have gone to seed.  
The country shrinks, the seas submerge the coasts;  
Where vaunted mansions reigned, are ghosts.  
The tropics' maladies no more contained,  
Mosquitoes' bloodlusts unrestrained.  
From drought and famine people fly and fight  
And choose between the wars and flight.  
The geese, the knots, the birds that fly by time,  
Can find no food in deviant clime.  
The air coils hot and whips the dust to shroud  
The crops and leave them bent and bowed.  
From forest-sited cities, sparks ignite debris;  
Infernos blaze too fleet to flee.  
The conifers, the plants that live on high,  
Ascend the topmost hills and die.  
But some have more, the steppe and topsoil thawed  
There's food that springs where ice was lord.  
And we will flee the blackened plains and rend  
The wall Canadians defend.

The earth, the marble, blue no more:  
With algae green and red with gore,  
Now brown with desert, black with char.  
Our children cry, bewail the scar.

*Bob Edelson*