

# LEAS LIT

*The Medford Leas Literary Journal*



NUMBER 40    DECEMBER 2020  
PUBLISHED CONTINUOUSLY SINCE 1998



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Writing and Art at Medford Leas  
Published by the  
Medford Leas Residents Association  
Medford Leas, Route 70  
Medford, New Jersey 08055  
609-654-3000

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Publication of Leas Lit is made possible by support  
from the Medford Leas Residents Association  
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## BLACK LIVES MATTER

I am John Martin Rubin  
I am six feet tall  
I was born in 1967  
I am African American

**T**hese are some of the specifics for our adopted son, but they don't begin to tell the whole story. My wife Margery and I had the experience of having Howard Alexander, a black student from Montgomery, Alabama, living with us for more than two years (*Leas Lit* #39 June 2020 "How to Make Your Family Grow"). We then gave serious thought to adopting an interracial child and started the procedure. All of this came to a halt when Margery found that she was pregnant. Unfortunately, our daughter Amy was born with an untreatable birth defect and lived for only 18 months. How do you try to face the future after the death of your child? We all grieve and recover in individual ways. Our way was to begin again with the adoption procedure that we had put aside.



Mi.Rubin

I remember the day our case worker called and informed us that there was a 7-month-old baby boy up for adoption who seemed to fit our family profile. It was springtime and our family, Marge and I with our son Tony and daughters Rita and Laura, piled into our station wagon and drove into New York City. At the adoption office there he was,

lying in a crib, very cute and smiling. When we changed his diaper, a fountain rose up and our children laughing said, “Mom, Dad, let’s take him, he fits right in.”

As I look back now, John surely did fit into our family. It was at a family gathering that we decided on his name. John – for the former President John F. Kennedy, Martin – for the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. We had a celebration on the day of our final court appearance, including all our neighbors. In our white neighborhood, the residents completely embraced John. I still remember when one of our neighbors was showing his house, with the thought of selling, the people looking at the house saw John playing outside with his friends and they said to the owner, “I didn’t know this was a black neighborhood.” His answer, “Don’t worry, it won’t rub off.” I always admired his response.

As John began to grow up, our interracial adoption became newsworthy. A story with photographs appeared in the Long Island newspaper *Newsday*. Then we were on ABC network 6 o’clock TV news. When a full TV crew and reporter came to our house, everyone on our street came to watch. Shortly after that we received a call from the David Susskind Show, a weekly interview TV show. They set a date for us to appear. The day of our appearance for the show I was in Washington on a vigil line in front of the White House to protest the Vietnam war. I made it back to New York with less than a minute to spare.

Slowly the outside pressure of publicity faded, and a sense of normalcy returned to our home. Love and affection between parents and siblings took over. To say

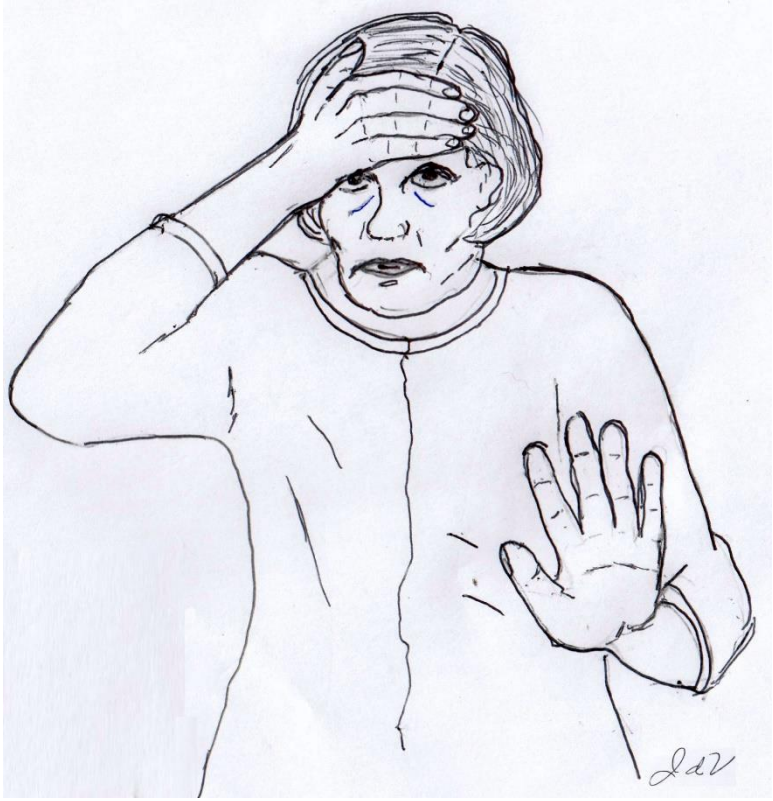


John was spoiled is an understatement. Then Marge's mother called. She and her husband lived in West Palm Beach, Florida. They had invited us to come down for a visit. Marge thought this was great as we could show off our new addition to the family. When Marge shared our news, we were quickly "UN-invited." "You can't bring a black baby down here," was the emphatic message from her mother. Marge was so distraught by this she left it up to me to handle a multitude of calls from her sisters. It took a long time before things calmed down, and we never went to Florida with John.

The years went by as John grew up, attending high school, where he played the violin in school and in the all-county orchestra. In college he was on the baseball team. He has been following his own life career, which has had many twists and turns. John is married, raised two children and now has two grandchildren. Today he lives and works in Massachusetts, near the New Hampshire border.

This story is not finished but there is one recurrent theme of love and support. What we undertook so many years ago when we adopted John has only created in us and our family a stronger understanding of equality and worth. John enriches our lives in ways that are not measurable. Marge has commented to me that we have no regrets as to what we did. We know firsthand the uncomfortable truth of racism.

*George Rubin*



## A DUBIOUS GREETING

My father once told me, "Take care what you say.  
Even innocent phrases may cause some dismay."  
I recently thought of my Dad's sage advice  
On my way to a meeting one Saturday night.

In a hall here at 'Leas' I chanced to engage  
A dear, sweet old friend I'd not seen in an age.  
"How are you?" I asked. (An old standard greeting)  
But my dear friend's response gave my words a new meaning.

She commenced a long discourse of her health woes to date.  
Which began with the fact that she'd put on some weight.  
"The doctor has warned me my pressure's too high.  
I've got hearing aids now and a sty in my eye."

"Arthritis has stiffened the use of my legs so,  
And my back gives me trouble – I think it's lumbago."  
She went on and on 'bout her myriad woes.  
It seemed she was ailing from her head to her toes.

I was sorry to learn of my friend's sad travails  
But did I deserve all the gory details?  
Her lamentings continued (Oh, look at the time!)  
My meeting's now over, and I'm out of my mind!

I've stood here for hours! My poor back is aching!  
I'm chilled to the bone and my body is shaking.  
But I soon found a way to say my goodbyes,  
Then went back to my home with tears in my eyes!

I know, you'll remind me: It's a MedLeas tradition  
To swap detailed stories of our poor health conditions.  
Yet, Dad's words are looming. The warnings come through.  
Instead of "How are you?" just "Hi, there!" will do.

*Harry Forrest*



Robert A Taft Carillon

## THE CARILLONNEUR<sup>1</sup>

On a pentagonal island defined by the spokes and grid of streets a few hundred yards from the U.S. Capitol building nests the tower of the Robert A. Taft Memorial and Carillon. It rises, the glowing tan of Tennessee marble, in a small copse that includes a few Yoshino cherries, so that in spring, with the green grass, it is a monument that anyone might crave. With its 100-foot tower on a 15 foot-base, it is an honest instrument in a political city. Its sound comes not from monstrous speakers but from twenty-seven cast, ground, and tuned bells. Most of the time, its melodies are generated by clockworks. However, it has a keyboard of a sort, “fingered” by rapping “batons” with the side of a hand, and foot pedals that sound the big bass bells, and it is played by a human, the carillonneur. The carillonneur rarely swings the bells, though with some carillons that is an option. Instead, he uses the much less massive clappers to generate the sound. The Carillonneur of the Capitol is the Taft Memorial’s maestro. He is under contract to the Congress and among occasional duties, he is bound to give an annual July 4<sup>th</sup> concert that begins at 2:00 pm.

Save for a very few mighty pipe organs, a carillonneur plays the largest musical instrument on earth. The challenges of playing, though, are different. A pipe organ may have a tonal range of seven or more octaves and a

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<sup>1</sup> Several online sources were used as references for this story, including: *Wikipedia*, the website of the Architect of the Capitol, [AoC.gov](http://AoC.gov), and *The 7 Most Endangered 2014: Carillons of the Mafra National Palace, Portugal* <http://www.europanostra.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/7ME-2014-Portugal-Report.pdf>

dynamic range from a bird's trill to a passing jet engine, and while the "standard" or "concert" carillon has at least four octaves, its dynamic range cannot achieve that of a pipe organ. It is still an expressive instrument whose volume is controlled by the strength of the carillonneur's taps. The Taft carillon has just over two octaves, so its musical selections are limited. The player, sitting a story below his bells in a stone cylinder, cannot hear what his audience hears. Timing is tricky; a bell doesn't just stop ringing when you release the "key." Reverberation is one of the charms of bells sounding, but it can be confusing for the ringer. Because of all this, a carillon music score designates the number of octaves required and sometimes the lowest or highest bell pitch needed.

Throughout the world, there are perhaps 500 carillonners, half of them in the United States. Every year, many of the carillonners from the US, Canada, and Mexico, plus a sprinkling from other countries, get together at the annual Guild of Carillonners in North America Congress.

"A Congress site will have at least one large carillon for recitals and may include other carillons which are nearby. Congresses include business meetings, recitals by invited artists, and formal and informal gatherings."<sup>2</sup>

What follows is a made-up story about a fictional player of a real national treasure. Let us call him John Smith, a name as anonymizing as his occupation is obscure. With only 27 bells, he is a small player in a land of giants, but he is a still a bit arrogant. He hides a mild

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<sup>2</sup> *The Guild of Carillonners in North America – Congresses.* [www.gcna.org/congresses](http://www.gcna.org/congresses)

contempt for other players with their little timpani or their tiny tubas. Perhaps the carillon attracts introverts to its internal mysteries; in any case, John Smith is one, so he does hide his condescension toward musicians of lesser scale. For John, the GCNA Congress is exquisitely painful. He yearns for the company of those who can understand the effort and exhilaration of his occupation, but even while he roams the congress' rooms and spaces, he thinks of the cozy place from which he hammers the tons of brass to make music. This year he is on a mission. He's heard that the 53 working bells of the 103-bell carillon of Portugal's Mafra Palace, the largest carillon in the world, are under the command of a new carillonneur and he wants to meet him. He must be quick and deft. In addition, Mafra, though famous in John's world, has been in bad repair. It is undergoing restoration and only the fifty-meter-tall south tower portion of it is or will be playable. Portugal is not a rich country and though the EU is helping, part of the magic that the new carillonneur must wield is a mad ability to raise funds and apply them to a very difficult task. Not only must massive bells be delicately moved, refurbished, retuned and returned, but their wooden frames and the clappers and the works that move them must be rebuilt. Yes, John wants to meet that person.

For the first time in many years, the congress is held at the Washington National Cathedral, convenient to home for John. Dinner on the first night is a time to be casual, kick back and renew old acquaintances. It is a small community, so the recognition of a new member, even from another country, is an occasion. Carillonneur training is long; from piano, to organ, to carillon is a journey requiring desire, persistence, and love. Carillonneurs seem

to be long-lived, and carillons few, so a newly minted maestro getting his own bells demands recognition. This carillonneur is the congress' keynote speaker, honoring them as they honor him with a talk on "The Restoration and Characteristics of the South Tower of the Great Carillon at the Mafra Palace, Portugal."

John is surprised to see a small figure stride to the podium as the host introduces Maria Belo Delgado, newest of the world's carillonneurs and master of the world's "newest" carillon. She gives a fascinating portrayal of the history of and modern revisions to the storied bell tower. She discusses the range of music that it can handle, exceeding four octaves. She closes her talk with an invitation for any carillonneur to visit, any time. She is very proud of her bells.

John is charmed and churned. He is entranced and envious. He tries to speak with her, but she is the center of attention and he doesn't want to bother her. The dinner is over, and she is whisked away before he has even the chance to nod at her. And so it goes. When word has spread through the conference about this new star in the bell-ringers' firmament, John, with his shy way, has little chance to engage her for so much as a moment. She is surrounded in every session and every luncheon that she attends, and John departs the GCNA Congress with the hope that he might meet her next year when her fame has cooled. He returns to the Taft and starts preparing for July 4th.

At 6:00 pm on a beautiful spring day, John is at the practice keyboard. This is a console identical to the real one but attached to an electronic sound system that



mimics the bells. Though the cherries are in bountiful blossom and the sky is a flawless blue, and the sun is mellow and soft in its hint of twilight, John in his windowless tower is happy. He is absorbed in *The Stars and Stripes Forever*. He is trying to arrange the four-octave piece for his two-octave instrument without making it too bland or seesawing too much in pitch. Despite the cool evening, he sweats with the effort and the passion as he bashes the batons and floors the pedals. He is well into “a duck may be somebody’s mother” when the outside door swings open from a light knock that he cannot possibly hear. He senses someone enter and ignores them as the ersatz bells crash into “now you may think that this is the end, and it is!” Smiling and slightly deafened, he swivels toward the door, and there she is.

John’s smile morphs into open-mouthed surprise, looking like the “wow” emoji as he turns into her smile. He does not know it, but smiling and still into the music, he is almost handsome; the shyness is obliterated by the music, but it returns with a rush. He can barely recall her name as he stutters a greeting. “Miss...Delgado! What are you doing...? This is such a surprise. Welcome to the Taft. How can I...” He sputters on for almost too long as she tries to answer.

“Mr. Smith.” She has a lovely accent, like Spanish with a tang of Russian. “I’m sorry we never meet at the congress. I hope that I visit is all right. Washington has so many carillons to see, and I was told how well you play with the two octaves only.” Was she a bit sly there? Was she humble-bragging with her four and a half? He doesn’t think so. She seems reticent, maybe embarrassed to catch

him in the throes of playing. She must know that consuming joy of creation, the feeling of being in complete control of your mighty instrument.

“Please, please, come in,” he says. “Would you like some coffee?” He gestures toward his little coffee machine. “I keep it for my early morning practices.”

She nods and he waves her to the shabby easy chair in the corner, the only seat other than the bench from which he plays. He makes the coffee strong, guessing that’s how the Portuguese drink it. And they talk. For hours. About subjects only carillonneurs know.

*Bob Edelson*



## THE BALLOON

On a recent birthday some friends presented me with a birthday balloon, a standard model with “Happy Birthday” inscribed on both sides as well as other appropriate decorations and a streamer of yards of brightly colored ribbon. I found a nice corner of my living room to park it in and deposited it there. However, this arrangement did not work out well because it turned out that this particular balloon had social propensities. It rested in its spot for a brief period and then started exploring. It would stay home for a while and then wander off to inspect the pictures on the walls, the contents of my bookcase, or the tops of the kitchen cabinets. When returned to its designated spot, it might rest there for a time or resume activity. Although it habitually occupied a space right against the ceiling, the streamers did not, so they might be trailing across me at any point in the balloon’s travels. A couple of times it greeted me at the entrance of my living room when I entered in the morning, but it never invaded my bedroom.



To my surprise, the balloon's original degree of inflation lasted a couple of months. During this time it continued in its various activities; it especially enjoyed times when the patio door was open. On these occasions, it might indulge in a little dance around the living room. After a while, it did begin to lose helium, which caused it to discontinue contact with the ceiling and circulate on a lower level. This new status gave it an opportunity to inspect lower shelves in my bookcase and the top of my desk, but it did not lose its mobility. Hardly noticeably it became thinner and thinner over time.

When it was about shoulder height, it occasionally joined me for dinner, hovering just above the back of the opposite chair at the table. Sometimes when I was reading or working at my desk, I became aware that the balloon was soundlessly looking over my shoulder. It was principally addicted to the rear of my recliner, but I think it was more likely static electricity that kept it so enthralled.

When the balloon was reduced to about knee height, its activities began to diminish noticeably. However, nearness to the patio door when it was open did occasion a flurry of local activity, but the exploratory trips became almost non-existent. It appeared to enjoy looking out the patio door, and if I sat anywhere near it, the balloon would come and join me. I found myself wondering how long it could last given its already extended life span. It *was* gradually losing buoyancy and almost imperceptibly sinking. One morning I walked into the living room and did not see it at all, and I thought it had finally met its demise. But no! It was wedged under an end table, and when I freed it, the balloon arose

Lazarus-like and sat on the couch. From this post it gives an occasional benign nod, but its traveling days are obviously over.

As of this writing the balloon has been my companion for four months and nine days and is still sitting on the couch. I have no idea how long it will continue to survive. It certainly has proved an ideal roommate. It does not have to be fed, clothed, bathed, or walked. It has maintained a constant cheerful demeanor, frequently even being quite entertaining. The only occasion when there was any difference of opinion between us was when it first arrived and I thought it should be relegated to a particular spot, but the balloon did not. Once this issue was resolved, we got along famously with each of us following our own particular agenda. I suspect when the balloon finally becomes completely deflated, I will miss my little roommate.

*Ruth Gage*

## GREAT AUNT HARRIET

Once there were three sisters, all born before 1880. Grandmother Florence had her kind and precious smile. Great Aunt Hannah was the fierce guardian of the family home. And then there was Great Aunt Harriet, a young mother and happy wife widowed all too soon.

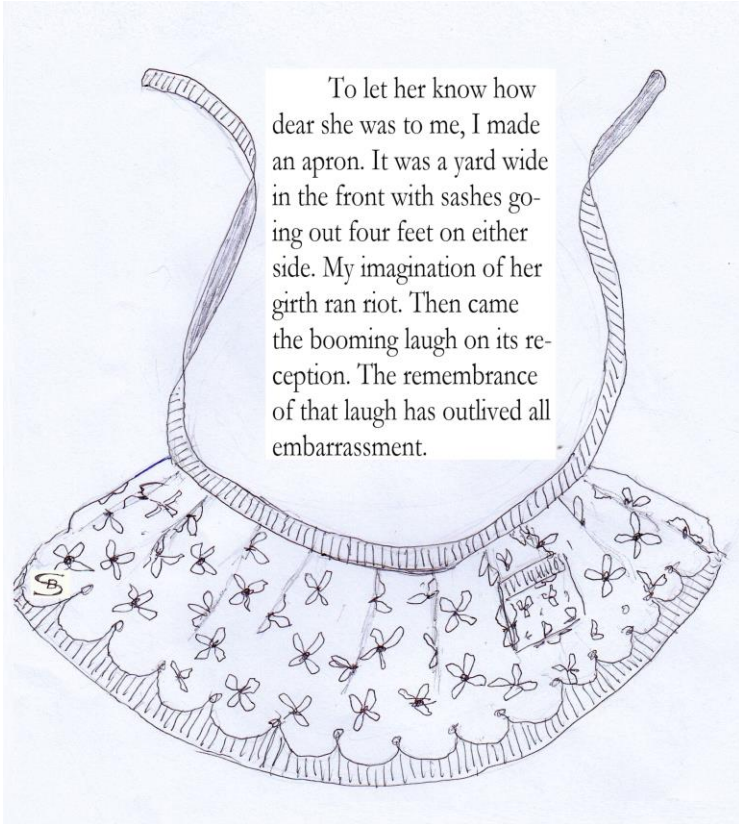
Aunt Harriet's life radiated her strength. The house of her widowhood was a small home on Potter Street. It was unique with its lean-to kitchen, circular staircase and tiny rooms. There was a pull chain toilet, the water tank high on the wall. The house had withstood hundreds of years of living and was in itself a picture of bravery.

The Aunt Harriet I knew was a self-invented woman. Harriet of the booming voice and the enormous girth. She was electrical, creative and hugely welcoming. Aunt Harriet was the one who made things happen. There she was in her late eighties and her every act was designed to show the world that she was just fine.

And oh, she was a painter. There was the red canoe lying on the shore of a Pocono lake and there was a leafless tree with the dark snow-covered house. There were golden paths through scrub pines and yellow forsythia in an old green crock. On and on her pictures went. The paper birch shared space with the brilliant orange-leaved oak. In my mind's eye I still see her there at her easel, filling her life with color.

And then came the primeval call of the Pine Barrens. Out from Haddonfield she would come joining the coterie of fierce protectors of the Rancocas Creek. They called their gatherings Aunt Harriet parties. Aunt

Harriet, behold today the abundance of our Pine Lands. You helped with that. And her answer: “Oh rapture! Oh joy divine!”



And I remember too our big family Thanksgivings. After an enormous meal there were always games which included everyone. We'd sit around totally stuffed from far too much eating, hilariously roaring ourselves through endless silly circles of laughter.

Oh, I was proud of her. She was the jolliest person in the family, but all shows must come to an end. When

I was a teenager, I took my friends to meet her. There she was sitting in her armchair, cold and stern, not my “life of the party” aunt. Her legs were wrapped in white surgical bands, painfully splayed out in front of her. Our wish to see her pictures was not to be satisfied. We were allowed only to peer into the next room. Gone were the tables and chairs. It was only just before she was to be moved into a home for senior citizens. There on the floor of her old Haddonfield home hundreds of her paintings stood their last stand, leaning back in their frames in the empty dining room....all untouchable. Where was their creator, my dear Aunt Harriet of the booming laugh?

The show was over but oh, how hard for a child to understand.

*Edith Roberts*



## NAMES

What is your name?

Rather, what are your names?

**W**hile the movers were lugging my possessions into my new home at Medford Leas eight years ago, I suddenly decided that I wanted to introduce myself as Judith. Why? I had just that week hit the minimum age to come here and had realized on the contract-signing visit that the people I'd now live with were generally quite a few years older than me. It's awful to stick out in a crowd, especially when it is to become your own crowd. So I decided to use my formal name Judith. I had been Judy (except in seventh grade Judi or Judy Ann) but only Judith on official forms.

So I began to introduce myself at Medford Leas as Judith. But as soon as someone actually called me Judith, it sounded wrong. Within days I was back to Judy and have been ever since. And now that there are about six Judys at the Leas, *and* I am eight years older, I'm fine with my name.

Was there a time when you would have liked to change your first name? After college, when I had to fully support myself on my own, Judy seemed like a frivolous name. Perhaps I should change it to a more serious one because names are the first words potential employers see on a resume. Maybe Laurel? I called my parents for advice. They objected strenuously. Even though Judy was a pretty generic name after the war, they had put thought and negotiation into their choice. I had no

right to dishonor it. As to their names, I soon made the mistake of asking each of them separately if I could call them Chuck and Hazel. Each reacted with horror, “My name is Dad!” “My name is Mom!” And so they remained the rest of their lives. My siblings, too, having undergone the same experience, also referred to them even behind their backs as Mom and Dad, never Chuck and Hazel.

A librarian I knew had hated her first name since childhood. It was Hortense, a pretty ghastly name, in fact. One day there was a shiny new name plate at her reference desk. Proudly, she told me that on her fifty-fifth birthday, she went into a Camden County office and filed for a name change. She chose Elizabeth, the name she had wished for all her life. Too bad it took so long to claim it.

What are your nicknames? In elementary school I was, naturally, Judy Cooty. To my dad I was Judy Ann Potato. Why? I have no idea. My sister’s nickname was much worse: Robin Suzanne Bright-Eyes Linda Kootchie-Koo We-Love-You. May she never read this essay.

Also never to be mentioned are those loving, sweet, embarrassing nicknames given to us by our partners in love. Amen.

I was thinking about names because of the pandemic. After so many months, I cannot remember who you are when I see you. I may remember that you work in the Wellness Center or that you live on the south side of the campus, or that you are a wonderful artist. We

forgive each other. But as soon as possible, and if you can remember, call me Judy, and if I can remember, I'll call you by your preferred name too.

*Judy Kruger*



## ZOOM DOGGEREL

When did you begin to zoom?  
How do you like it in the room?

As the appointed hour is looming,  
Technical snafus leave me fuming.

Where is that email invitation?  
Power cord plug's a complication.

In the waiting room I wonder,  
Do they discuss me while I blunder?

Now I'm in, but the screen's too bright.  
Block the video! My hair's a fright.

Can't see him and she's on mute.  
Screen goes black – I must reboot.

Zooming with family, colleagues, friends  
Will it stop when COVID ends?

*Kathy Riley*

## GOOD FOR US!

**H**ave you made the big switch to a smart phone? Even if your grandchild can use it better and quicker, good for you! And good for us! We are the first cohort of seniors who have risen to the basic demands of an electronic society.

I have switched from hand-written address books and datebooks. Have you done it yet? We should be proud of ourselves if we're able to list social contacts and appointments on an electronic device. Perhaps you read your email on one of these devices, like a large tablet. Maybe you log on to the Medford Leas patient portal for test results and prescription refills. You might even read newspaper articles and do a little research on your tablet or laptop computer. (It is less expensive than subscribing to the newsprint *Philadelphia Inquirer*.) Maybe you are using the Medford Leas private website for apartment repair requests, friends' email addresses, information and entertainment videos. I'll bet that many of you have started to keep family photos in a collection on your smartphone. Well, all that is really impressive!

Are you pleased with the kind of ring your smart phone sends out? If not, you can change it and also make it louder if needed. At places where ringers must be muted, I bet we're more careful than young people. In the future, everyone's smart devices may quiet themselves at the theater, a concert, lecture, important meeting, or religious event. But, for now, they still depend on us.

Living through a pandemic has pushed us to master further skills. Most meetings now take place in a virtual environment to avoid potential transmission of illness. We can be treated by telehealth online by having a video conversation with a doctor or nurse. The Zoom application (branded program) just seemed to spring up for electronic meetings to replace meeting in person. Even though it still trips some of us up to find a meeting or initiate one, many (perhaps most) of our independent seniors can click a meeting link and get included. I think that's progressive!

Don't apologize if you get something wrong. Seniors who had jobs in the information technology field and drove to work using a GPS are near at hand and willing to help you. There have been classes here for using iPads and Alexa, and (before Covid-19) we had resident counselors who had office schedules to help us solve problems with our devices. We still have Medford Leas Information Technology employee experts.

I don't like it when phones, tablets, and even smart televisions talk back to me. It reminds me of George Orwell's *1984* or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, prophetic books from the last century. But among Google's *Assistant*, Apple's *Siri*, and Amazon's *Alexa*, they can be helpful. You may have been given an Alexa device that will do tasks for you, depending on what the device is connected to.

The truth seems to be that smart devices are weaving themselves into our lives. Just like the rest of the age groups, many in our generation have learned how to conveniently text on these devices. Text doesn't only

mean words on a page or in a book anymore. You text (a verb) by typing short notes and memos to colleagues, friends, or relatives. If you want to participate in social media (like Facebook) you must learn how to post text or photos for numbers of people to read. It is a skill for quick, informal messaging that is not too hard to master. Many of us have learned to do it, although most teens have mastered it better (with many abbreviations and rebus-like signs). In fact, some have been carried away with it. While I was having a counseling session in the past with one teen, she was texting under the table to someone. And a distracted texter rear-ended me with her very weighty vehicle. Also texting with off-color words and pictures (called sexting) is causing scandals for some prominent people.

Although I wish that there wasn't so much to learn, considering what they can do, smart devices' benefits outweigh their challenge. The modern world is easier with small computers we can take along in our pocket or purse, get our email from anywhere, call for help instantly if needed, send and receive brief messages to check on relatives, read something, and get some companionship. Reducing our isolation through our devices and telehealth services with helpers in far-off places has been a real boon during the Covid-19 pandemic. Other experts can be consulted remotely through the computer and even through a very satisfactory multilingual online encyclopedia (Wikipedia). I wouldn't even be trying to do the *New York Times* crossword puzzles any more without its expert help. (I don't usually admit that I'm weak on clues about popular culture and sports.)

Let's stop apologizing about our generation being slow to catch on and be proud of what we have mastered. We will almost certainly have future opportunities to learn more and become more comfortable in this exciting world.

*Joyce Linda Sichel*





## HAIR

**N**o, this is not a post about the musical. Specifically, I'm thinking of the hair on my head. What got me started was this? I was going to the cleaners that is conveniently down the street, but I didn't want to walk as it was rainy and slightly cooler than I'm comfortable with. So I drove. And in driving I saw two women walking. Obviously, the cool temperature didn't bother them.

Anyway, the one woman had what used to be referred to as a "French twist" in her hair. That means that her hair is long enough to pull back to a kind of ponytail, then wrapped around itself and clipped in place: Like having a hoagie roll at the back of her head. Okay, maybe that's a bad picture, but the only one I can come up with at the moment. It isn't unattractive, and in fact her hair had lovely golden highlights amidst the predominant brown, but I recognized the style from days gone by.

The other woman I saw in this short drive was walking her dog. Well, the dog was walking her, to be precise. Yanking and pulling her along as if he (the dog, I assume it was a he, I didn't stop to notice) had an appointment and she (the walker) was keeping him from getting there. She was exasperated and frowning the whole time I glimpsed her, but her hair was, well, exquisite. It was blond, long and flowing (wispy even!) about her unhappy face.

I haven't had long hair in at least 40 years. *Yikes!* I just re-read that. But I guess it's true. I got a shag cut in my twenties and just kept cutting it and cutting it until now it's the length it is. I have gone to the same beautician for the last 30 of those years. She is wonderful! A great listener, a great sharer of stories, a great laugh. And most times she is great for somehow doing something with my hair that makes it look good at least for the day or two after it's cut, but usually I'm satisfied for longer than that. However, last time, in a rare instance, I came home, washed my hair and hated the way it looked.

Hair for women is a very personal thing. If their hair looks good, they feel good, usually. And if their hair isn't quite the way they want it, then lots of things don't seem to be going well in their lives. I suppose this is vanity, but maybe it is just the way I'm programmed or something. But when I dislike my hairdo (and if that isn't a 50s word, I don't know what is), then I feel like I don't look my best and I'm grumpy about it. The problem is that my hair is short. So I can't "French twist" it, or ponytail it, or anything else, except gel the hell out of it and come out looking like a punk or an old lady trying to look like a punk – which, of course, is what I meant to say, but it came out wrong. So I will have to wait to get my hair to look the way I want it to. I will have to wait for it to grow out.

I hate waiting, pretty much for anything. But hair takes *forever* to grow. And in the meantime, I'm looking at myself in the mirror and disliking what I see. I even began toying with the idea of getting hair extensions. However, since I am not rolling in money, nor do I even

know where to start for this particular process, I will have to possess myself in patience.

The funny thing about all this is, I will let my hair grow for a while longer before going back to the beautician, and by then the bangs in the front will be stabbing me in the eye, or the sides will be sticking out because of my glasses or something, and I will tell her to “lop it all off” (and yes, I have said that to her). Luckily, she understands and will do something wonderful again and I will be happy about the way I look when she is done. But for now, I think I’ll just avoid the mirror, brush out the spiky parts and wait for it to grow. Heavy sigh.

*Cynthia Page*

## ARBORETUM WOES

**T**he Medford Leas Arboretum is legendary and beautiful. Created by founder Lewis Barton for the Medford campus in 1971, it expanded to Lumberton when that campus was created. The Lumberton Pioneers talk of watching trees, shrubs, and meadow grow from the construction site. Residents have always been involved with nurturing them. The story goes that the landscaper in charge of planting trees on Woodside Drive bought up the stock of two nurseries that were going out of business at the time and took whatever trees each had. This accounts for the variety in front of our homes.

This past summer, residents of Cluster 4 met most days at 5 pm, suitably masked and distanced, to catch up on the events of the day. We sat in front of those units shaded by maple trees. Their thick leaf cover shaded us, even on 90-degree days, providing patches of coolness. Five of us, however, do not have stately maples. We have winter king hawthorns. Planted at the same time as the maples, none has reached anywhere near a second story roof. They are decorative, flowering in spring and producing red berries in the fall. The leaves offer little shade, however, and they have thorns. Serious thorns.

Navigating those thorns to fill bird feeders is tricky business. In spite of that, I also have planted annuals and perennials in the bed at the tree's base. I often allow volunteers – holly, buttercups, mystery plants – to grow there as well. I worry that some may be invasive, but I'm a sucker for things that bloom. When I weed, I do so on hands and knees to avoid the thorns. My neighbor

suggested that I do some informal pruning, but it was a hot day, and I feared the wrath of the arborist whose job it is to prune the tree. He prefers to leave those low branches.

One morning, I had windows open in the loft to catch breezes (yes, there were a few) and was working at my desk while enjoying them. Then the lawnmowers arrived in the front yard with their buzzing machines. A tall man pushing a large mower was circling the tree. Suddenly he stopped, turned off his mower, and began scratching his head and arms and readjusting his bandana. I felt sympathy. It was hot in direct sun and that mower was heavy. Then he turned back toward the tree circle and exclaimed loudly and clearly, “You would plant *this* in your garden?”

I called out, “Which one do you mean?” thinking he might have spotted something noxious and wanting to know what I should pull out. He had earphones and could not have heard, though he paused for a moment. Then, “F\*\*\* you,” he growled, fired up the mower, made one more pass giving the tree a wide berth, and departed.

*Kathy Riley*



## TREES

post-Joyce Kilmer

I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree that wants a mountain high  
To seek in cooler air to vie;

A tree that weeps to God all day,  
And stares around in her dismay;

A tree that may in Summer wear  
Some emerald borers in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain.  
Who can't be sure it will again.

Fools like me can sing this chorus,  
But only God can move a forest.

*Bob Edelson*

## ATTACHED HOUSES

**A**n attached house is a single-family house which shares at least one common wall with another house. This arrangement has been common in North America in various kinds of communities for the past 300 years and in much of the rest of the world for far longer.

My experience of living in an attached house began when I was three years old. That was when my family moved from a small, detached house in a small town to a row house in a mid-size city. This row house was attached on two sides. This meant that I could not go outside to play on the front porch and find my way to the backyard while staying outside. Family lore says that I was not a happy child and that the family doctor was concerned about my failure to thrive. He recommended that my family find a nice open, airy house in the suburbs.

My good parents moved us to a lovely colonial-type house with lawns and trees which delighted me. I thrived. But, alas, a few years later, the 1930s economic depression caused my father to take a large cut in his income. He could no longer afford this house. The solution was to move back into the city to a less expensive house. This was another row house.

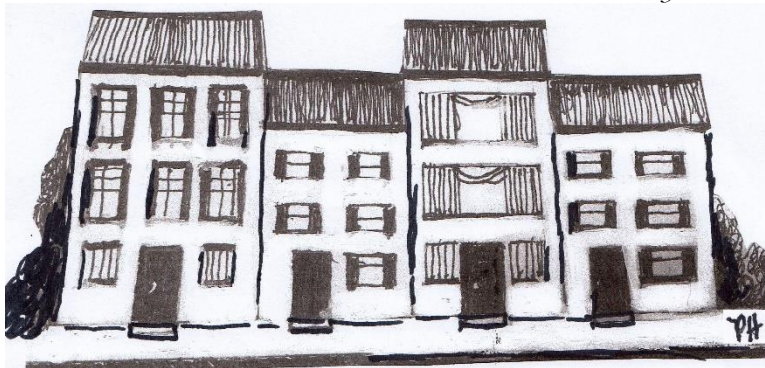
This row house was situated in the middle of a whole block of houses. Although I was a few years older, there was no way I could find my way outside from my front door to my back door. This made me anxious and even a bit angry that I couldn't access the back of my house from outdoors. Having a large park across the

road in front of the house was no solace. However, I managed to thrive. Family economics improved and we again moved out to a suburban house surrounded by greenery.

Housing was not a priority interest in my life until I got married. At that time, work and study dictated our geographic place for living. Our first home was a third-floor walkup apartment in the city. We were attached on both sides and below. It was tolerable because we viewed it as being very temporary. When we reached the point of being able to make real house decisions, we chose free-standing abodes.

When it was time to consider retirement living, we found the perfect housing architecture – single family housing units which are attached on both sides. This arrangement has economic and environmental advantages. My whole attitude has matured. Having neighbors on the other side of a common wall is comforting. I feel safe and secure. I'm happy to be here at Medford Leas where everyone living independently lives in an attached housing unit. And I am attached to my neighbors.

*Betty Preston*





## REFLECTIONS ON LIFE IN THE PANDEMIC

**D**uring the past six months we have been living under the regulations and restrictions of Covid-19, the pandemic that is destroying lives, livelihood, and democratic institutions not only in this country but worldwide. We are witnessing the elimination of political, social and human connections and feel totally helpless. The question remains, how are we able to preserve our integrity, moral values, and commitment to assist others?

My upbringing during and after World War II makes me very sensitive to the current rhetoric and political upheaval. During the present difficulties I have tried to find strength and nourishment in personal connections – and in music and literature, as I did when growing up.

Now as then, death is ever-present on a personal level and in society. I have lost one cousin in Argentina, three friends in Huntsville, Alabama, and two close friends at Medford Leas during the epidemic, and words of sympathy do not adequately express the grief and sorrow.

At this time, my first obligation is to my family on three continents. Phone calls, Zoom meetings, and WhatsApp keep us all connected and sharing at least some of our thoughts and impressions. Locally, the members of our Cluster 6 stay in contact via emails, short conversations, and a larger gathering at the beginning of September. My out-of-state friends in this

country are very supportive and inquisitive about how life in this community is continuing. I inform them that we are well taken care of, we have excellent medical attention, and here in Lumberton are able to take long walks on campus and in the woods.

In addition to these personal connections, music is my lifeline. I listen to the daily Metropolitan Opera broadcasts via streaming – one different opera per day, from Handel to Thomas Ades. The various recitals from Europe strengthen my appreciation of favorites, such as Beethoven’s “Diabelli Variations,” played by pianist Igor Levit from Munich, as well as other spontaneous events from his living room.

Furthermore, the Metropolitan Opera is organizing a different recital by a world-renowned artist every month as a fund-raising event. The money is shared by the artist and the Met. The first international gathering was by Jonas Kaufmann from a small library in a Benedictine monastery near Munich. In all of this, I feel comforted by being immersed in familiar, beautiful music.

I enjoy keeping up my language skills by reading and rereading works in Spanish and German. An important work for me is García Márquez’s “Cien años de soledad” (Hundred Years of Solitude), which entwines tales of time, memory, and love. The novel shows the magic of the author’s writing and his voice shows the influence not only of Borges, but also the reach of Kafka (one of my favorite writers).

The contemporary German writer Daniel Kehlmann has written an internationally acclaimed

novel, *Tyll*, which is now available in English and which presents us with a mysterious figure from the Middle Ages. The book describes vividly the flight of Tyll and his experiences throughout the Thirty Years' War, exploring philosophical questions of existence then and now – questions of renewed importance to many of us now.

In order to escape the present-day reality, I read two books on Mozart's life and his musical oeuvre. The first book, *The Mozart Family* by Ruth Halliwell, focuses on political, social and religious life. It explores the creative imagination during Mozart's life in Austria and his travels as a child prodigy. The book is beautifully written and makes clear how difficult life was for a creative genius. The second book, *Mozart* by Maynard Solomon, is a beautifully written and absorbing narrative of Mozart's life. It does, however, make Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's father a villain.

All the books have in common the important existential themes of reconciling ourselves to our tragic ending and finding inner peace. Questions of solitude, significance of existence, duties and responsibilities as human beings, and our search for fulfillment in life are revealed and discussed. Now especially, these issues are of utmost importance and relevance.

Personal contacts and immersing myself in beautiful music and books have helped me draw on my inner strength and remain hopeful for our future social, political, and personal life.

*Hannelore Hahn*



## 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!