

LEAS LIT

The Medford Leas Literary Journal



NUMBER 39

JUNE 2020

PUBLISHED CONTINUOUSLY SINCE 1998

LEAS LIT STAFF

Bob Edelson
Roberta Foss
Ruth Gage
Herb Heineman
Maggie Heineman
Kathy Riley
George Rubin
Joyce Linda Sichel
Joanne Thomas

Illustrations by Roberta Foss, Harry Forrest,
Janet de Vry, Eileen McConville, Marilyn Thomas

Photograph by Diane Symcak

Cover illustration by Dorothy Cebula

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

© Copyright remains with author

Publication of Leas Lit is made possible by support
from the Medford Leas Residents Association
Activities Fund.

CONTENTS

Love in the Time of Covid	<i>Joyce Linda Sichel</i>	1
The Artillery Sergeant	<i>Harry Forrest</i>	5
Good Morning, Count	<i>Cynthia Page</i>	8
Fall, Falling, Fallen	<i>Bob Edelson</i>	12
And You Thought Dragons Didn't Exist	<i>Edith Roberts</i>	17
How To Make Your Family Grow	<i>George Rubin</i>	19
I Need Repair	<i>Bob Edelson</i>	22
Below Expectations	<i>Kathy Riley</i>	24
Down at the End of the Street	<i>Edith Roberts</i>	28
Spring	<i>Molly Gayley</i>	29
Self-Isolation	<i>Kathy Riley</i>	30

LOVE IN THE TIME OF COVID

I get up as late as possible to compress my waking hours. But “uh-oh,” I need to get up and moving. I wash my hands singing an Edith Piaf torch song, “La Vie en Rose,” lasting 20 seconds (I clocked it). How many times can a person sing “happy birthday” twice to themselves? I throw on some house clothes that are not freshly laundered. (Remember Johnny Cash singing about his “cleanest dirty shirt”?)

I am fortunate to have chosen Medford Leas (M.L.) television and I.T. service because it is exercise time on our private channel 15. First class of the day is starting at 9 am and I am full of energy. Fitness Director Ken is already showing the equipment we’ll use. (I borrowed some from the Fitness Center.) He is smilingly demonstrating our warm-up moves. He is so nice and kind that I think I love him (platonically). We are working on our “glutes” today (a funny word I didn’t know before), but apparently, I am defining these muscles that sit above the hamstrings. The left one hurts from all the prior classes that must have also been working on them. It pings to remind me that my body is probably changing for the better. However, I have a stash of chocolates among other snacks delivered by Amazon (like the old “Wells Fargo Wagon” from *The Music Man*), so I’m not sure about that. It is bad enough to be home near the scale, but who wants to weigh in?

Ah, breakfast time. Cold cereal is left in the cupboard from the Coffee Shop a week or so ago. I eat the flakes slowly because they’re swimming in the Coca Cola

I ordered yesterday from our Dining Services (definitely love them) and delivered last night by another kind employee who smiles at me. O.K., I probably love him too. Of course, I washed my hands after accepting the paper shopping bag handle from him.

After breakfast, I call my sister, but she listens to the news a lot, which I don't want to hear more about. I now limit my BBC news program to one half hour. They seem to be the most reliable about what they tell us, and I enjoy their accents anyway. Perhaps I love them too.

Oh, it's time for the second exercise class of the day with young body-builder and M.L. fitness instructor, Jonah. He is so cute when he smiles; I know I love him, even though he makes us do some awful contortions so that we get a really good workout. All done, so I achingly get into the shower which I can make last *20 minutes* by carefully conditioning my hair and examining all of my new bumps and bruises. I am again reminded of the rather new bump which I think is a relapse of last year's skin cancer. I have put off trying to contact any of my specialists because they are probably at home or treating others who are a lot sicker than I am. I still worry about getting ill, one way or another. I keep my distance from other humans, according to the Covid-19 guidelines. But I am waiting not-so-patiently for a hug when I need it and to hug all of those I realize I love.

It's time to check my email. I have never gotten so many communiqués from M.L. Our Administration covers every detail these days about what is allowed and how to do it, as well as what is no longer acceptable for residents. One email suggested that we could happily fill

some at-home time by cleaning our apartments. I don't think I love them as much. I get emails about scheduled MLRA activities that are now canceled or "electronicized."

I know that we are really lucky to live at M.L., where management and employees are still here taking care of us. I ate delicious scallops last night (yes, I love Dining Services), the rain will stop one of these days and I can go out again to see the new spring bulbs and buds. The campus is particularly beautiful and many of the courts are in exceptional bloom. There are still weather-proof places where we may go, besides skimming the inside walls of the courts. A fifth person just arrived in the Willow Room where I had been scanning old *New Yorkers* for the cartoons and cute little drawings for about two hours. I wish we still had communal jigsaw puzzles to do, but I accept their removal for safety. I feel obliged to follow the instructions that limit the Willow Room to four residents, and to go back to my apartment. I pass neighbors at the newly recommended 10-foot distance and I'm trying to treat even my grumpiest neighbor with kindness, although I do not belong to the Friends.

I "attend" my church through Zoom, a new electronic communication method developed by techies (some of whom I love, but most are 14-year olds). Speaking of kids, I'd better check in on my grandkids, of course using Face Time. I still stubbornly refuse to participate in Facebook, but I'm getting closer since we are all getting starved for company. There are probably a lot of posts I am missing that would amuse, divert, or otherwise provide fun. Postperson Bob still comes with maga-

zines and dog biscuits for non-humans – he is very friendly and lovable.

But I normally pursue real interests – art, writing, and reading. The muse has not touched me much lately. I glued up one collage that looks like a scrapbook page from a vacation. Rather than reading a non-fiction book club assignment from which I could learn about the origins of the Texas Ranger lawmen, I have read several easy detective stories on my Kindle. Back at the ranch, it is time for the third class of the day on channel 15. We are doing “gentle stretching and light guided meditation,” which I somehow still feel in my left glute. We are supposed to picture a beach, which is nice. But opening my eyes reminds me of all the scared New Yorkers who are going down the shore in New Jersey for protection from illness. I hope the cabins are winterized, so that they can also stay home and protect the year-rounders.

At home so much, I look around at the relatively minor problems in my apartment (which will have to wait quite a while for skilled hands). I’ll bet even Debbie Farley (whom I also love) is working from home and finding spots that need maintenance. Well it’s 4 pm at last. Until a juicy chicken breast gets delivered (did I mention that I love Dining Services?), I will play a game on the computer which I normally play around a table with three other people. Then it’s time for adult soap operas and televised police shows. It’s early to bed for me, so that I won’t miss the first exercise class tomorrow. I hope that your days are as exciting as mine.

Joyce Linda Sichel

THE ARTILLERY SERGEANT

Sergeant Angus MacAteer, the Scot cannoneer,
Was under the weather one day.
On the evening before he had partied galore,
Guzzling Scotch by the gallons, they say.
His head, it was pounding and everything 'round him
Was spinning and causing him trouble.
Through his bleary red eyes, and to his surprise,
He seemed to see everything double!

Although it was painful and rather disdainful,
He reported for firing range practice.
The noise was head-splitting! He thought about quitting!
It was worse than a skull full of cactus!
But, his duty was calling (though he found it appalling),
So he stuffed cotton deep in his ears.
That diminished the booming but what was still looming
Was the fact that his sight was unclear.

Then his aide showed him orders
that came from headquarters
Which established the arc of each shot.
He wasn't rewarded by a vision distorted,
And misread the instructions (a lot!).
Other batteries aimed high, sending shells to the sky,
MacAteer's gun aimed lower instead.
It went off with a boom and the cannonball zoomed
And blew General Baines out of bed!

Now, Angus' miscue exposed a sore issue:
Baines was bedding his red-headed maid.
So, his wife now discovered that her man had a lover
And vowed, "He'll have the devil to pay!"
But, Baines blamed poor Angus for all of the anguish



And had him thrown in the stockade.
“I’ll send him, by God, to the firing squad
For my woes from his damned cannonade!”

At Angus’ court-martial his judge was so partial
He ruled MacAteer free of blame!
“The reason,” he said: “He just damaged a bed
Never touched General Baines or his flame.
I’m in awe of his skills that nobody got killed.
I can’t find that the Sergeant’s at fault.
The real culprit here is a bartender, I fear,
who served him bad Scotch (single malt!)”

So that is the story in all of its glory
Of our drunken ol’ friend, MacAteer.
Here’s to him, and God bless him!
For he’s learned a great lesson,
He’s sworn off of Scotch – just drinks beer.
And what of the General and his cute servant girl?
He’s dumped her and she’s run off with Angus.
Baines is back with his wife who gives him much strife.
“Yet,” says he, “We’ve no Angus to bang us!”

Harry Forrest

GOOD MORNING, COUNT

In the dim recesses of my earliest memories I remember waking up to the sound of big band music. At the first fluttering of my eyelids it sounded slow, funereal, and melancholy. From my bedroom, which was directly atop my parent's room, all one could hear of the music was a flat sounding brass instrument and a classic stripper drumbeat. It made my spirits sink. "Geez," I would think, "what a way to start the day." By the time I made my way downstairs to eat breakfast, the music was in the kitchen. Oh goody, I get to eat with Glenn Miller.

My father listened to this kind of music night and day. For him, there was no other kind. He had little tolerance for rock and roll or classical music. The former gave him a headache, the latter put him to sleep. Whether morning, noon or night his station was playing the "real oldies" not of the '50s or '60s, but the '30s and '40s. His little tolerance for any other kind of music made me dislike his preference even more.

But as is so often the case, as I got older, I began to broaden my horizons. Opening my mind to other kinds of lifestyles, philosophies and yes, even music. It wasn't until I attended college that I really began to appreciate "his" music. Attending a community college, I had the advantage of living at home. As I labored over homework in the evening, my father's music played in the background. The Count, Duke and other assorted "royalty" held court in our living room. I began to recognize some of the tunes and found they weren't half as depressing as they seemed in the morning. In fact, some

of it was downright romantic, even more lyrical than the ballads I heard on the local rock stations. I found myself liking what I heard. The more I listened, the more attuned I became to their sound and cadence. Of course, it's true that if you eat broccoli enough, you probably become accustomed to the taste. But I wasn't finding his music all that hard to swallow. I began to listen throughout the day, not just the evenings, tuning the car radio to accompany me on the drive to college and back.

No matter when my father and I were tuned in, my father's cigarette smoke filled the room, giving it that bluish haze movie studios try to emulate in their bar-room scenes. I would squint while writing my essays, he would squint while doing crossword puzzles. Second-hand smoke was not something anyone thought of in those days. He smoked, we inhaled...

The only sound emitted between the two of us was his occasional cough or groan from the lounge chair as he shifted his weight from right cheek to left. We even had a specific way of communicating about this music. We didn't discuss the merits of it or the way the music evolved from the '40s to the present. We simply listened. And in our listening, my father would try to teach me the value of its particular rhythm. He rarely spoke of lyrics, although that was primarily the reason I listened. He was not a lyrical person. He listened for the rhythm.

Dad had a knack of mimicking many of the songs and could make you believe you and he were up on the bandstand with all the assorted regulars. When Buddy Rich was pounding out a number, my father could pound out a duet with him on the lounge arms.

If Lionel Hampton was dancing on the vibes, Dad was right there, following his steps. And if Harry James blew a note, Dad could trace it through the air and knew just where it would land. The thing was, all this was a reflex action. It was almost always accompanied by a “listen to this kid” in a raspy, excited voice, his eyes shining as if they had found some long lost treasure.

I wonder if that was what it was like for my dad. He knew those songs, of course, from hearing them all his life. But they seemed a part of him too. I think it must have been like finding a cache from long ago and examining it over in his mind, finding he could re-live the discovery. He wasn't excited because his daughter was listening; he was excited because, for just a moment, he found a piece of himself that had been lost for years.

When my first child was born and I was home all day, I found myself listening to “his station” in earnest. Considering that most of my generation was listening to rock and roll stations smattered with an occasional '50s or '60s oldie, I felt somewhat out of touch with their preferences. But it was difficult to reconcile the screeching of guitars and blaring cacophony of the rock music with the mellowness of Mel Tormé. How could Madonna compete with Ella Fitzgerald? I honestly liked this music now and could find companionship with these singers and their songs of the past. But more important, I found a new companionship with my dad. He and I could discuss the songs – he the rhythm, me the lyrics – and share something that none of my siblings could. It was rare that my father shared things and this was one time I could be sure of being heard. Once in a while, he would forget we were listening to the same station and

accuse me of having no taste in music, launching into a tirade against that “yappin’ ya ya stuff” (as he so fondly called rock). My ego would be bruised, and I felt as though he’d forgotten a bond between us that seemed important, at least to me.

When my father became very ill and confined to bed, the radio was next to him on the nightstand. It was usually on, but the songs sounded hollow when I sat with him. They were not full of beat and rhythm. They were sluggish and tiresome. Needing to talk of things other than the medicine and the illness, I asked him questions about the music. I specifically remember asking him about the theme song to the movie *Picnic*. The tune was frequently heard interwoven with *Moonglow*. I never realized that the two songs were separate. Having never heard them that way, I asked him whether the songs were made together or separately. In his best teaching tone, he explained that, yes, they were two distinct songs, *Moonglow* written before the *Picnic* theme. I was surprised to hear that there were even words to the *Picnic* theme and a singing sister team had recorded it.

A few weeks after that conversation my father died. My mother asked my sister and me to help take his clothes, knick-knacks, and other oddments of existence from the drawers and closets so she wouldn’t have to do that by herself. As I drove in the morning to the house where I was first introduced to big bands, swing, jazz, Dixieland, and even pop music, a song came on the radio which I had never heard before: the *Picnic* theme, without *Moonglow*, sung by the McGuire sisters. I’m glad I finally heard it, even though it was during the morning.

Cynthia Page

FALL, FALLING, FALLEN

Autumn arrived with a splash and a thud. The canopy, so green and fragrant through the summer, crinkled into color and plummeted with the mercury. Little death: the sticks remained, rattling like bones in the brisk wind. The dead leaves skittered across the street forming astonishing drifts. There was a smell like burning: dry, sharp; as though the leaves insisted on suttee in fires banned long ago.

The backyard of our new home sloped sharply down from the house, starting with a small, weedy lawn. Further down was a grove, almost an orchard, of a couple of dozen denuded oaks that looked like spiky pegs thrust into the ground. I say new house only because it was new to us. It actually dated from the eighteenth century and its original use was obscure. It had certainly not been a dwelling, the rooms were too irregular and idiosyncratic for that, with juxtapositions of small, low-ceilinged spaces next to high-ceilinged, echoing areas. To provide for a modern family, major restoration was needed, and we looked forward to investigating the ancient building and instigating creative destruction.

Though we had been surrounded by New England leaf color, our yard was drab. The oaks just turned their leaves brown and kept them hanging for much longer than those of their more colorful cousins. Eventually, the new leaf drop fell on the old debris on ground that hadn't been cleared in years. It was a trash heap. I looked at the mess and thought about our children enjoying mild toboggan runs when the snow arrived. I could cut a shallow ditch or two between the obstacles to guide a

sled to the bottom of the slope where a flat portion would temper the speed to a safe stop. First, the trash would have to go, but the task was formidable.

I recruited the kids, seven to seventeen, and we started cleaning up. We went through a box of leaf bags just clearing the base of the lawn where the cover was thin and crackly. Then the pickup got serious. The leaves were stratified; the top layer of the newly dead gradually wettened and thickened with corruption into mulch and then into soil. The big, puffy leaf bags, light as air, now became flat and heavy and the work arduous. We broke for lunch and then continued, though now just Sara, our oldest, and I worked while the younger kids played. We were sweaty, hot and tired as the sun got low in the sky. I stood leaning on my rake and decided to call it a day when it appeared to me that we were uncovering some rocky strata that would require rethinking the plan. I bent down to toss aside a grapefruit-size white rock made tea colored by the leaves. It was not a rock. I flinched as I recognized that I held a small, perfectly formed skull. With effort I resisted the visceral urge to fling it away. I set it back where I'd found it and calmly told the kids that we were done for the day. They should clean up and get ready for dinner. Then I called the police and awkwardly explained to my family what I'd found. The reactions ranged from fear to disgust to "Can I go see!?"

By the time the officers arrived, cordoned off our backyard, and began examining the site, it was almost dark. The state of the remains did not justify lighting the area; clearly there was no urgency. They were back in the

morning, this time with shovels, forensic specialists, and a backhoe in reserve, but they started gently, searching for the rest of the bones of the baby whose skull I'd found at the base of one of the oaks. Borrowing my rakes, three other officers widened the cleared area, throwing the debris aside indiscriminately. Our work of the previous day was rapidly eradicated. From beside the baby's remains, they extracted rotted pieces of wood: perhaps the relics of a tiny coffin. Then, at the base of another tree some ten feet from where the baby lay, came a shout: more bones, these of an adult. My God! This place was our new home! Was our backyard a charnel house? Had we been preceded by a serial killer? Now that a pattern had emerged, more corpses were being uncovered, each at the base of a tree. Feeling panicky, I approached the detective in charge. "What's going on? What happened here?"



The detective looked at me and smiled. “We’re just finishing up. It’s time to call for help. Don’t worry though; let me show you something.” He led me to the place where I’d made the original discovery and pulled a small, flat stone into a vertical position. They’d cleaned it up a bit, using my garden hose to wash off its surface. There in clear block lettering was carved a simple message:

Thomas Leonard Eldritch
October 1822 – February 1823

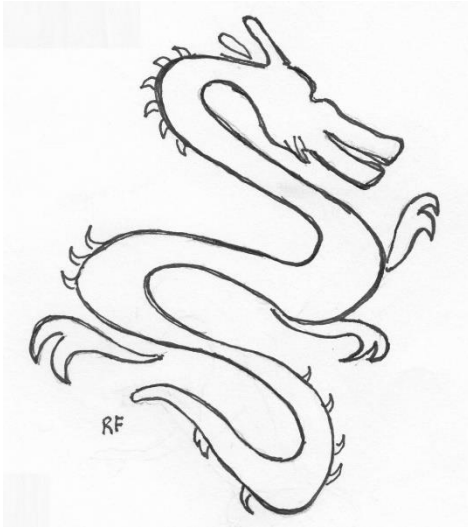
He took me to another tree, a great grandfather of an oak, and showed me another stone, this one held in the tree. The oak had engulfed it in its bark and hidden it below the leaf debris. All I could read was a date, 1754. “I think what you’ve got here is a graveyard. I don’t know if it matters or if the site is important, but we’ve called for an archaeologist to assess it. We’ll be leaving in a few minutes. Please, don’t touch anything. There’s no crime been committed here that we can see, but there are laws that protect certain historical sites. We’ll just have to see what the archaeologist says.”

I admit to some relief that my home had not been the site of a massacre, although I begrudged the indefinite loss of my backyard and thought about resale value. But the archaeologist, Dr. Leanne Foxworthy, settled me and my family down right away and through the months that she and her team have been working, she’s been patiently fascinating our kids, explaining what she’s found and what it means. She believes that the house was probably occupied for a hundred years or more by a small Christian cult that planted an oak sapling at the

head of each grave of its members. Where they came from and what happened to them is unknown, but Dr. Foxworthy hopes that her research will provide some answers. It's not clear yet whether the graveyard can be removed, but it's even possible that our resale value will increase because of the historical interest the house and land have gained. We'll see. In the meantime, my kids are enjoying terrorizing the neighborhood children with their very imaginative ghost stories.

Bob Edelson

AND YOU THOUGHT DRAGONS DIDN'T EXIST



There it was. It was green and gray. It did NOT belong. The monster was dangerous, and I was terrified. “Mommy, there’s a monster in my room.” In she comes, benign and calm. She looks at the monster on my green trunk and quietly folds last night’s carelessly tossed clothes.

Would that all dragons were so easily slain. The current dragon, Intolerance, is the dragon we Quakers have decided to attack. We are benign and calm, and we steadily chip away at its edges.

One Saturday, there was a gathering at Arch Street Meeting. Three-hundred people had pre-registered and then, on the day, one hundred more signed up. Our large west room has galleries on four sides overlooking the large central meeting room. On January 10th its capacity was tested. There were people of every hue, both Quaker and non-Quaker. I saw a man, who was possibly a Mennonite, standing in the space and getting the sense of it. We sat quietly in worship as the crowd continued to pour in. Soon the first floor was full, and then we heard

the tread of many feet walking to the upper gallery. Our clerk, Jada Jackson, said “Look around you.” I looked back at the multicolored sea of faces. We had come to slay the dragon.

After worshipping together for an hour we broke into small groups. People who weren’t associated with a Friends Meeting stayed in the large meeting room. How I would love to have been a fly on that wall. The question we were addressing was “What are your personal privileges?” For many of us it came as a surprise that our very skin color was a personal privilege. We listed so many more: education, health, owning a car, speaking the King’s English. The list of our privileges grew longer and longer. We benefit from endless privileges which ensure that we will be listened to, that we won’t be needlessly stopped on the road, that we will be seen in a positive light. Answering this question was only step one.

We returned to the large meeting room and again gathered in silence. One dear Friend led us in “We Shall Overcome.” Was the dragon of racism slain? No. We only got up the courage to look him in the eye. We were in a place of safety. Mother was in the room with us. She picked up the offending monster and said, “Here. Look at it.” We must face down our monsters. We must look them in the eye.

Edith Roberts

HOW TO MAKE YOUR FAMILY GROW

Even after the Supreme Court's decision on *Brown vs. Board of Education* that affirmed school desegregation, the terms of this ruling were not being fulfilled in the South. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called on Quakers to help with the education of black southern high school students who were being left behind. This led the American Friends Service Committee, N.Y. Metropolitan Region, to establish a program known as the Southern Students Project. My wife, Margery, and I had been members of the committee that oversaw the project. We met monthly to place students with families all across the Northeast. To evaluate how the project was going, we needed to hear reports from our staff social worker as to his travels through the south. After a time on the committee, we decided to host our own student.

On a hot summer afternoon, I waited in Pennsylvania station for Howard Alexander to arrive from Montgomery, Alabama. This was his first time in New York. I gave him a hug. He was not sure how to reciprocate. With a smile he accepted my welcome. The drive back to Levittown, LI, was quiet. Now that Howard was a part of our family, I began to think of how we would have to adjust to what lay ahead.

Howard was going to begin his junior year at Levittown's Division Avenue High School. In Montgomery, he would be a senior, but because of the poor quality of education there, the committee felt that he would do better as a junior. The very helpful high school staff asked that Howard arrive in mid-August, before the fall term started. Meetings were set up with

the teaching staff and administrators, including the high school principal and district superintendent. On our own, we formed a diverse support group. This was very important, since Levittown and the high school were all white. Howard was to be the only black student in a school of 2,200.

What followed, as I reflect on it, were two exciting years. Our oldest child, Tony, was 8 years old; he now had an older brother to play sports. Our middle daughter, Rita, five years old, now had a built in baby-sitter; and Laura, who had turned one year, now had someone to change her diaper and feed her. This helped my children develop a perception about race that carried over into their adult lives. I found I now had two boys to share my own experiences with. For Marge, having a teenager in the house greatly changed the dynamic of the family.

As I think back on our family life at the time, some incidents do stand out. For instance, Howard had gone to visit a classmate during a very heavy snowstorm. When he started walking home, he became totally lost. Even the street signs were covered with snow. Any local boy would have rung a doorbell. He was terrified to ring any doorbells, so he trudged on. It was almost an hour later that he found our house. I had been out looking for him. Fortunately he made it home before me.

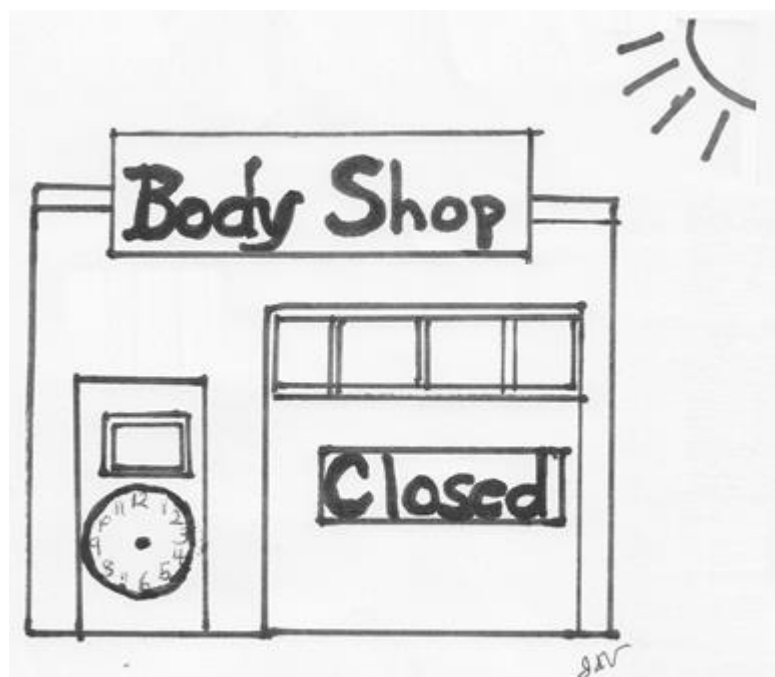
Howard was also the star running back on the high school football team. Division Avenue High School was playing Mineola High School on a bright fall afternoon. A Mineola player tackled Howard as he was carrying the ball and put the cleat of his shoe right into Howard's hand. The game stopped immediately, and Howard had

to be taken to the hospital to have the wound closed with stiches. There followed a meeting of high school coaches and administrators as to disciplinary action against the student. But more important, it led to a series of seminars on race relations in both schools. In the 1960s, this was something that white schools never had to face.

Graduation came after two hectic years for Howard, during which he excelled in scholastics and sports. He was all set to take his girlfriend to the Senior Prom. We had a family meeting, knowing that the student was white and her family would never allow it. He asked her anyway, and of course the family said no. Then the two of them decided neither would attend, but they went out on Prom night and had their own prom party together.

We were so pleased that Howard's parents, his mother, a home economics teacher, and father, an agricultural agent for the county, came to his graduation to see him honored and praised by the student body and his teachers. They were amazed by the number of colleges to which he was accepted. His final choice was Bates College in Maine. After serving as an officer in the Coast Guard, Howard went on to make a career in banking. Today he lives in Freehold, NJ, with his wife Nancy, and they are blessed with children and grandchildren. He continues to be an important part of our family. It was an experience we have never regretted.

George Rubin



I NEED REPAIR

I need repair.

No love's ascribed to pacemaker beats.
Allure's not found in cataracted eyes.
No paeon's sung for shell-like aids,
Or music made to pill's delays.

But,

I need repair.

My hip is sprung in bed or out.
My neck keeps popping like a shout.
My toe is swollen with the gout.
Arthritis makes a painful bout.

So,

I need repair.

But no repair is there.

Slowly, slowly,
The sweetest things...flow...slow.
Grace is not disclosed in speed.

Care
Will ease repair.

Bob Edelson

BELOW EXPECTATIONS

Disembarking in Decin on a misty morning, I, a novice Viking traveler on the Elegant Elbe cruise, was looking forward to Prague. From my visit in 1989, I remembered beautiful architecture, lots of history, and pleasant walks through squares and over the Charles Bridge. I anticipated change; the Iron Curtain was long gone and with it the dreary little restaurants and stores with limited merchandise. As a regular stop on the Christmas market tours, the city would be overflowing with everything from mass-produced souvenirs to handcrafted glass, fabric, and jewelry. And most stores would take euros.



After a sunrise bus ride through the countryside, we approached the city. Traffic increased, and the Hradcany Castle loomed up over the city. We arrived at an enormous Hilton among other tall glass buildings. Big changes in thirty years. Our rooms were not ready, so Viking had scheduled a

city tour to pass the time – 80 tourists and two guides. We'd be out until 3 pm, lunching along the way.

Two buses deposited us at the top of the Castle Hill. We disembarked and began walking, and walking, and walking – through increasingly large crowds of other tourists. At a security checkpoint, we stood in ill-defined lines, opened bags, walked through scanners, and then located Michael, our guide. He strode ahead, giving his talk via the hearing devices that we all were wearing, and he carried a long stick with the Viking emblem on top to guide us. Some of us lost sight of him and simply followed a fellow traveler whom we could identify. At Michael’s pace, picture taking was impossible for most of us.

I had hoped to visit the castle again and perhaps go into St. Vitus Cathedral, but Michael hurried by the former and only half-heartedly suggested the latter. Lines snaking around the building discouraged us. We did stop long enough to take a few pictures, however, before being borne along down another street by waves of tourists and arriving at the Presidential Palace.

Here Michael deposited us to wait for the changing of the guard in 15 minutes – an underestimate of the time. Already crowds had gathered, and we could see very little when band and marching soldiers finally appeared. At least we could hear the music. After standing for the better part of half an hour, we clustered around Michael and awaited further instructions.

He gave us two alternatives for our downward route: a steep, narrow road without sidewalk or 100 steps with a railing. We chose option B and were off, Michael in front with his Viking sign. Then disaster struck. Sue, wife of Corky, called out to him, “Take a picture of

this,” and then she was swept away toward the steps. Corky stopped. The rest of us continued to the steps – very crowded – and negotiated our descent as best we could, Michael bobbing along ahead of us. Sometimes we could spot him, sometimes not. He was not talking.

Arriving at the bottom, we regrouped, and it was then that Sue missed Corky. Michael, undecided about what to do, made several calls to the Viking group at the Hilton, but nothing came of them. Meanwhile, Lauren, one of the younger travelers, volunteered to climb back up to see if she could locate Corky. We continued to stand around, willing her to be successful and becoming increasingly aware that it was lunchtime.

Sue kept insisting that she would wait with her friend Judy and that the rest of the group should move on. Others offered suggestions. When Lauren returned, unsuccessful, Sue declared that Corky would be all right and that she would go on with the rest of us. Michael finally began walking down to the next square with the group behind, elbowing their way through crowds, dodging streetcars, and struggling to keep up.

At the next square, Michael dismissed us to eat lunch and disappeared, perhaps to make more phone calls. All we knew was where we should meet again at 1 pm. Sue and her friends went into a café, but another group secured a sidewalk table.

It was they who witnessed the return of Corky, called out to him, and heard the account of his adventure. Unable to even see the steps because of the crowds and out of range of Michael’s voice, he continued on to the small street we had decided not to use. Walking

down quite easily, he deduced that he was in the square previously mentioned as our luncheon destination. After a pastry and a drink, he walked around the square, looking for familiar faces and the Viking logo, unfazed by the whole thing and confident that he would find us. After all, we were a large group, he could turn on his listening device, and there was also that Viking logo to guide him.

When we assembled after lunch, everyone was relieved that Corky had returned, but now no one ventured away from the group or even attempted a photo. Most believed that they would not be as clever or lucky as Corky if they got lost, and we had had a sample of what Viking was capable of in such a situation. Undaunted, Michael continued to lead from the front. Watching out for one another, we missed some of the landmarks he pointed out. When we finally reached our bus, we were exhausted.

At the hotel, we crept into the bar and revived ourselves. Then we retired to our rooms to fill out the evaluations of the Prague tour with blistering frankness. We stressed the need for more than one guide and/or smaller groups, strategies for emergency assistance, and more consideration of what the group hoped to do regarding picture-taking, time for lunch, and the amount of walking and standing involved. This novice Viking customer concluded that the boat trip was excellent but that land arrangements are still a work in progress.

Kathy Riley

DOWN AT THE END OF THE STREET

My Infant World

Down we go to old Mrs. Rhoads's house,
Down at the end of the old dirt road
My mother's hand in mine.

Ma chitchats in adult talk,
"Off thee goes now, down the hill."
Down I roll, around and around.

The brook at the bottom crystal clear,
Watercress and sunlit ripples,
Childhood's springtime rite.

And Now Today

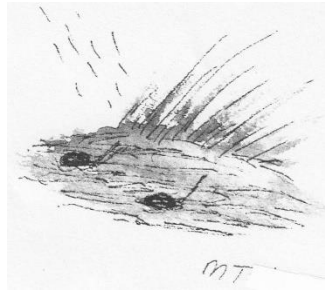
I drive down the hill on hard macadam;
The red brick office building slaps me to a stop.
On the hill to the right is a funeral home – a wisp of
memory.

Old Mrs. Rhoads is gone and mother too.
The stream is imprisoned in an old iron pipe.
Watercress – what is watercress?

Edith Roberts

Spring is
 wet wind
 green grass
grey gone
 underground
 singing

Molly Gayley



SELF-ISOLATION

“Have a cookie,” squeaks a small voice.

“Fattening,” admonishes a deeper one.

“Stay home. Wash hands. Observe social distance.”

“Sleep in for a change.”

“Follow your regular schedule.”

Stay indoors.

Watch TV. News? Reruns? PBS?

Read, but what?

Newspapers, terrifying and repetitive,

Books, soporific or engrossing,

Then feel guilty for not being useful.

(There’s always quaran-cleaning.)

Go outdoors.

Walk the perimeter path?

Garden? Weeds aplenty there.

Gather in large driveways, always at a distance?

Meet at the mailbox

Or call from deck to deck?

“A glass of wine with dinner?”

“Careful, don’t exhaust the supply.”

Open a can of soup

Or eat the produce?

Two voices, incessantly arguing.

Shut in, with my best friend

And my worst enemy,

But which is which?

Kathy Riley

Joan McKeon passed away on May 22. Joan was a valued member of the Leas Lit Editorial Committee and chair of the Flower Show. Joan's poem "The Arranger" appeared in the December 2009 issue of Leas Lit.

THE ARRANGER

You may be one who knows no fear,
Who seeks adventure, far and near.
But truly, friend, you've not known danger
Till you've been in a car with a flower arranger.
The screeching stops, the backing-ups,
The spilling of hot coffee cups,
The turn-offs from the traveled lane –
She thinks her car is all-terrain.
I do my best – she holds my feet
As I climb trees for bittersweet.
Stop! There's some early goldenrod,
And in that ditch, some milkweed pods.
There's poison ivy, too, I see.
We watch our steps. (Too late for me!)
Back in the car, and off we race,
A U-turn for some Queen Anne's Lace.
The car's now full of fresh-picked treasure.
At last it ends. She smiles with pleasure.
Of dangers risked she'll never know –
She's ready for the flower show!

Joan McKeon

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!