

LEAS LIT

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DRIVING THROUGH MEMORIES

When I moved to Lumberton in October of 2019, the area was familiar, but unfamiliar at the same time. I grew up in Pennsauken, NJ, and shopped at both the Cherry Hill Mall and the Moorestown Mall when they were a new and exciting concept for indoor shopping. Strawbridge & Clothier and Wanamaker's were the anchor stores. I spent many a winter weekend ice skating on Strawbridge Lake in Moorestown, and I knew Flying Feather Farm and what we called "Johnson's Corn Corner." So, it was all familiar, but overwhelmingly expanded with traffic that was daunting. But the area most filled with memories was the "back way" to Long Beach Island through the pine barrens.

My parents bought a small cottage on Long Beach Island in 1955, and I spent every summer there from



that time until I got a permanent job after college. The house didn't have much storage space, nor was it winterized, so we would have to take everything for the summer with us, including all our clothes, toys, games, linens, cleaning items, etc. There

were five of us in our single sedan car. We always joked that my sisters and I would get in the back seat and then our father would pack more things in around us.

However, before I took the trip from Lumberton, I had to study a map, primarily because I never knew the names of the roads. I just knew that the road out of Medford was on an angle, and the trees created a canopy overhead (Dixontown Road). There was no McDonald's as a landmark either. But the rest of the drive was very familiar. Down Dixontown Road and turn left to go past the high school. Keep going and cross over 206 (the Tabernacle Inn is gone now). Come to the corner with Russo's market and cross over, passing Nixon's General store. Many years ago, my sister and her husband made the trip down and tried to 'trip up' my father when they got to the shore. They asked him whether he remembered a man named Nixon. He said "Sure, Abner J. Nixon, he owns the store in Tabernacle."

Next started the fun part. The curves going into Chatsworth, past Patty Bowker Road, the cranberry bog (no longer in operation) and Chatsworth Lake. Then the turn at the Fire Hall and finally Busby's store. We almost always stopped to get penny candy and my younger sister and I would have a contest to see if we could make our jaw breaker last until we got to the island. We made the turn at Busby's to get to Route 72 on a road that had several hills. In our view from the back seat, it seemed as if we were flying off the top of the highest one. Back then one of the favorite pastimes for kids was to tie their sneakers together and throw them up over the electric or telephone lines. One line crossed over the road, almost always adorned with several pairs of sneakers.

Then the hard part. The travel down Route 72. We would be travelling on a Saturday with all the other vacationers, day trippers and homeowners. The traffic

always slowed to a crawl as we approached the island. In the early years the entrance to the island was a wooden drawbridge. It made quite a rattle as we went across. Then we saw it! The dilapidated shack in the meadows to the south of the bridge. That was the signal that we had arrived. It was also where, if you were the lucky one to call it first, you could win the alphabet game, because Zachary Realty would have a sign. The shack is gone now, brought down by the Sandy storm, but every time someone posts a picture on Facebook, someone will mention how much they miss it as the landmark that said we had arrived.



Jeanette Peterson

WHAT'S IN A NUMBER?

Many people have a favorite number that they use to make various selections throughout their lifetime. Mine is number 11.

The reason I chose that number goes back to my childhood, when for four summers at ages nine through twelve I lived on a farm outside Vincentown, NJ with my mom and siblings. There, along with other Italian families, we picked blueberries from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Saturday.

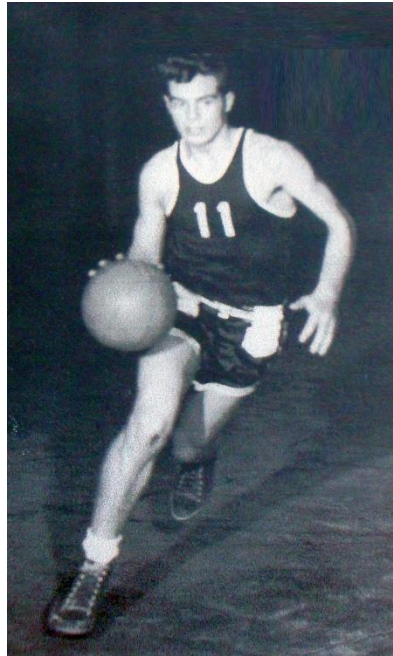
On the first day in the field, we lined up to be assigned a number, which was to be marked on the lip of each pint-sized container that would hold the berries we picked. We understood the reason for the number was for identification, as the filled containers would be randomly tested. Containers were to be completely filled with only ripe berries but not anything else such as red or green berries or leaves, because this would subject the picker to a reprimand or even termination.

Mom, who was fifth in line, balked at accepting number 5 because she felt it would be too time-consuming to mark each container with that number. She requested and accepted number 11 instead because, as she explained later, she could hold an entire stack of empty containers and in an instant simply draw two pencil lines down their edges, which would create an 11 and satisfy the required identification.

Mom introduced several other practices which helped make our time in the field a little easier, and they were quickly adopted by others. None, however,

impressed me as much as her insistence on that number. In high school, I wore it on my basketball and baseball uniforms and later for several basketball teams in an independent league. It was also on my uniform while playing on a team at Fort Dix when I served in the U.S. Army. Not only have I used the number for my uniforms, but currently when playing pickleball in Cherry Hill with Medford Leas resident Vince Menzel and his racquetballers, the balls I take there are identified from those belonging to other players by the number I've placed on them, which is of course 11.

Geno Mori



THE WEIGHT GAINER'S LAMENT

To the tune of Jerome Kern's "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes"

I haven't been too wise – eating cakes and pies.
Cookies and ice cream, sugar to extreme –
It's all gone to my thighs!

Cokes, pizzas – all such crap make me want to nap.
Junk food is my prize. God, I love those fries!
It all goes to my thighs!

(chorus)

Who can say just how I got this way?
My belly's grown out to here!
I'll change my ways and stop this nasty craze.
(Perhaps just one more beer.)

Old friends are so surprised when they see my size.
Much of what I eat magnifies my seat –
The rest goes to my thighs!

(2nd chorus)

Yes, I know, I shouldn't "manga" so,
A diet is what I need.
Yet, I stall – I hear those Twinkies call.
I'm such a sorry breed.

Now, before it is too late stop filling up my plate.
Listen to my cries! Help me exercise!
It's all gone to my thighs!

Harry Forrest



HINDSIGHT IS 20/20

By “hindsight is 20/20,” people mean that, once events are past, we can see them with perfect clarity, whereas the future is 20/40, or maybe 20/400. But the truth is we are nearsighted in either direction. There is another saying: “history is written by the winners,” which is another way of saying, “we see what we want to see.” So much for the clarity of hindsight...or any other.

* * *

Hank stood on the edge of the bluff, looking down at a sea made gray by reflection of the heavy clouds. The spume floated up to him, bringing the strong smell of salt and a briny lace on his eyelashes. The ocean was pressing hard against the cliff and the smash of the waves obliterated all other sound. Out on the tossing water, Hank saw a boat, maybe a fishing ketch, which appeared to be floundering. He reached for his cell phone and dialed 911.

William kept his eye on the cliffs, but he wasn't terribly worried. The sea was rough, but the tide was running out and he could ignore the shoreside rocks. It had been a good and, he hoped, a profitable voyage. His boat was too small to make a living the old way with cod and mackerel. Besides, the giant factory fishers of the Russians and the Japanese took them all, leaving none for people like him. But he and Tommy had found a niche, swordfish. Too bad that it was illegal. William inched the throttle forward a bit. Timing was critical. He wanted to pull into the harbor just after nightfall, when the fisheries patrolmen were happy in the pub and before they

emerged drunk and eager to screw him. On the cliff, high above, he saw a man standing waving at them. He jabbed Tommy with an elbow and pointed to him and they both waved, laughing and grinning.

Nothing. No answer. Hank looked at his phone. “No signal” was displayed where the signal strength bars were supposed to be. He looked out to sea where the boat was nearly obscured by the mist and he waved mightily, shouting, “Do you need help?” He could make out two men standing by the wheelhouse, waving back at him and he knew that they must go down any minute. The boat was small and riding low and Hank, looking down, could see the black teeth of some fearsome shoals. If the sea didn’t swamp them, then the rocks would tear them apart. Hank grabbed his rented bike and pedaled madly across the hilltops and then swung onto the steep decline that led to the little port town where his B&B lay.

William pulled into the quiet harbor, engine muffled, hardly ticking over with just enough way to bring them into the dock. Tommy stood in the bow, painter in hand. As the side grazed the fibrous bumpers, Tommy leapt to shore and snubbed the bow tight, then rushed astern to do the same with the line William threw. William cut the engine and they quietly prepared the crane to hoist their catch out of the hold and swing the two huge fish into the bed of his waiting truck. Across the way, there was singing and the clash of heavy glasses from the pub and both men smiled but sped up. Out of nowhere a bicycle careened toward them, stopping with screeching brakes within inches of the men.

Hank came roaring down the hill, the bicycle barely under control, but he knew its limits from his days as an amateur cyclist. Where to find help? He felt sure that 911 would work in the town, but there, by the pier was a small boat with two men, perhaps preparing to go out for night fishing. "Help, help," Hank called. "There's a boat off the headland that's in trouble. Can you help?"

William winced at the shout and thought fast. Was this the guy they'd waved to just a few minutes ago? Could he think that his boat had foundered, or was there a second one in trouble? "How do you know the boat's in trouble?" he asked.

"It was terrible! The seas were tossing the thing like a toy. I think it was a fisherman. There were at least two people aboard and they were scared. They were waving like crazy. I tried to call 911, but there was no signal." To William's ears, Hank was beginning to sound hysterical. "Then I came down here as fast as I could. Can you help?"

William had no doubt what boat Hank had seen. He glanced at Tommy who gave a slight nod. A couple of men had emerged from the pub. Even over their carousing they could hear Hank's anguished shouts. The patrol were cops of a sort and their ears were tuned to the sound of fear. They started toward the three and William scrambled. He turned and ran to intercept the patrolmen. "Hey, this guy's seen a boat in trouble by the headland, maybe lost their engine. He wants help. I got no lights to speak of. Can you guys talk to him?"

How could they say no? They gave Hank a quick interrogation, found that he was sober, scared, and naïve,

but they'd have to follow up on his sighting. Soon the patrol boat was racing out of the harbor, blue lights flashing, siren at a low but very audible pitch. They would turn it off when they got to the scene to listen for cries. As they'd directed, Hank went over to the pub to wait.

William and Tommy got back to work, creating a bed of ice taken from their boat, then efficiently hauling the swordfish from the hold and lowering them gently into the truck. The truck springs protested at the load and the vehicle took on a distinct tilt down from front to back. With this much weight taken off the front wheels they'd have to drive carefully, but there was no rush now. "Let's go sell some swordfish steaks," William said, clapping Tommy's back as he climbed into the cab and they headed for their clandestine fishmonger. It had been an interesting night, William thought. He glanced back at the quiet harbor and saw no cause for alarm.

Bob Edelson



THE V.A. HOSPITAL

The clinic is crowded.
Only the sun's rays, slanting through the window,
 brighten the room.
The men sit and stare,
 some without limbs, their faces lined and scarred,
 and behind those eyes,
 what battles are they seeing and reliving?
Where they lost their youth,
 for it died in the air, on the ground or on the sea.
At times they shout out to an unseen enemy.
They know they have faced death,
 and were the lucky ones to get away.
Yet after all these years they still face the same fears.
They sit and stare, while the sun shines down on them.
The forgotten heroes that we no longer care about?

George Rubin

HOW MY FAMILY ALMOST PROVOKED AN INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT

We enjoyed going on cruises to the Caribbean during the winter school holidays. These were family cruises with my husband, myself, and our two boys (in what we could kindly call the awkward ages of adolescence). We all piled into a four-bunk stateroom to keep our cost down, but we were rarely there anyway. There was always so much to do, including an active youth group that the cruise line offered in that season, and both boys would find new friends to pal around with and new activities to experience.

One year the cruise line scored a coup. They arranged to take their passengers to Fidel Castro's Cuba as one of the ports of call. (Very few Americans were allowed to visit Cuba in those days.) This is how we almost created front-page news. Cuban immigration officials, traveling in a motor launch from the mainland, came on board when the ship first dropped anchor in the Havana harbor. They set up border control processing in one of the ship's lounges. There was always a very international ship's crew and some diversity of nationality among the passengers too. With this accomplished, the ship was allowed to dock. We were issued identity cards, which we understood were all that we would need to carry when we left the ship.

We were allowed to debark in a tightly collected tour group. Our guides escorted us on the itinerary of activities, which probably lasted about two hours. As I recall, we were taken to 1) the waterfront promenade

(although it had deteriorated since I visited with my parents as a child), 2) a folkloric dance performance, 3) a souvenir craft and cigar cooperative, 4) a public health clinic, and 5) a political lecture. Our guides certainly had intelligence credentials, if not tourism ones.

As we traveled by bouncing bus through Havana's streets, we observed that most of the vehicles were very old American ones and the regime was not maintaining the infrastructure of this once-beautiful city. The great old colonial houses had been broken up into apartments for many families. Paint was peeling; the stucco sidings were not being refreshed. Restrooms were available for us at the dance performance, but we found the plumbing wasn't operating.

Picture-taking was strictly limited. Our older boy told me later that he had taken photos of the ships in the harbor (which appeared to be Russian), even though picture-taking there was prohibited. I took a picture of the huge outdoor Che Guevara wall mural. I'm not sure if that was permissible, but it couldn't be missed. Finally, the tour was over and we were escorted back to our ship's dock. We were told that if we wanted to spend a few minutes seeing the confined area right around the docks, we could take a little walk on our own. Passengers who did not want to do that could return directly to the gangplank. Our younger son wanted to go right back on board with his friend and the friend's mother.

There wasn't anything interesting to see when my husband, the older boy, and I walked around. Disappointed that there were no tropical flowers or even sugar cane to be seen, we returned in perhaps ten minutes.



And there was our younger son with a cluster of people surrounding him at the top of the gang-plank! The Cuban officials had not let him back on board since he showed his identity card but no passport! We were

horrified to find two crying children and a very flustered adult woman who had not left the boys' side. Next to them was a Cuban sentry, dressed in gray fatigues with his rifle at his shoulder, guarding the nine-year-old suspected spy or defector (who was sitting on the floor for one reason or another).

The courageous ship's doctor, who spoke only Italian and a little English, was gesticulating wildly in his effort to free the child from detention while the sentry was interrogating them all in Spanish. The ship's horn had begun blowing to signal its near-imminent departure. Only minutes were left to resolve the crisis, which was accomplished by my producing my son's passport from my purse. It was the most memorable day of our cruise travels, though not the most pleasant. Of course, it became a dramatic family story to tell friends when we got back home and in future years (like now).

Joyce Linda Sichel

WIN, PLACE, AND SHOW

It had been a hot summer at the beach. Lots of sun and little rain. The wind had scattered sand up to the front porch of the bungalow. Tim had just returned from day camp. Closing the screen door behind him, he tossed his catcher's mitt on the couch. His 14-year-old body was tan and some sweat still ran down his face. He took a bottle of milk out of the icebox and gulped some of it down. After returning the bottle to the icebox he went into his bedroom, stripped off his clothes including his baseball shirt and pants and went into the shower. After he dried himself he put on clean shorts and a tee shirt.

Tim knew that Irving would be home soon, and he had to get all of the racing materials ready. On the kitchen table he laid out the statistical sheets, graph paper and writing pads. He looked at his list of horse racing tracks, Monmouth Park, Saratoga, Pimlico, Belmont, Arlington and Santa Anita. On his next sheet were horses and jockeys: Kelso ridden by John Velazquez, Native Dancer ridden by Irad Ortiz, Jr., Red Rum ridden by Joel Rosario, Frankel ridden by Mike Smith; then followed Big Ben and Best Mate with their riders. Tim noted down the weight of each jockey. They averaged about 119 pounds. On his graph paper were the betting odds for each horse and where they were racing the next day. This included the winning odds, second for "place" and third for "show." Tim had just settled down into his chair when the screen door banged closed and Irving entered the kitchen, still wearing his tie and suit jacket.

“It sure is a hot one,” he said as he took off his jacket and mopped his face with his handkerchief. A big grin filled his face as he ran his hand through his wavy hair. “It’s just as hot in the city as it is here at the beach.”

Tim looked up from the table. “You’re home early,” he said.

Irving loosened his tie. “It’s pretty much the same every Friday. Everyone wants to get a head start for the weekend. OK, Tim, let’s get to work. I see you have all the charts set up.”

Irving was a perennial summer house guest, even though he had an apartment at the Half Moon Hotel. A bachelor, he had been a friend of the family for many years. Tim saw him almost as an uncle, whom he looked up to as the one person who made him feel more grown up. Irving took the Sporting News and the Daily Racing Form out of his jacket.

“OK, let’s start with Belmont. Give me all the details for the third race,”

Tim looked at his sheets and replied, “That’s Native Dancer, jockey Ortiz at 114 lb. At 3-1 to win.”

Working with Irving as they checked their statistics, Tim filled in all the work sheets, going over every track and race and betting odds. The sun had already sunk behind the bungalow when they finished. Tim began to collect his charts and papers and wondered, did Irving ever win any of these bets? Maybe so, for he never seemed to lack money.

Irving got up, stretched and said, “That's enough

for today. I'm going to place some bets on these races for tomorrow." With that, he picked up his jacket went to his room and to the phone. Tim continued to put his papers into a folder, as he heard the screen door slam and his mother entered the kitchen.

"Hello, Tim dear. It was beastly hot shopping today, Oh, by the way, how was your baseball game at camp?" she asked as she removed her sun hat and sunglasses.

"We won, Mom, and I got a hit," he said in an elated voice, "but it was so hot we played only seven innings." As she walked across the room she stopped at the kitchen table.

"Tim, what are all these papers and this folder on the table?" she asked.

"I was helping Uncle Irving."

"What do you mean, helping?" She pulled the papers out of the folder and looked at them. Tim said, "It has to do with horse racing, Mom."

"Horse racing! Do you mean to tell me that you are putting together betting sheets for Irving?" she asked, her voice rising.

"Sort of," Tim said reluctantly. "I help him with all the racing statistics around the country."

"Now, young man, this has to stop right now." Her voice had gone up another decibel. "And where is Irving? I want to talk to him right now!" Her voice was loud enough to bring Irving out of his room and into the kitchen. "Sophie, don't pick on Tim, he has been my

little helper.” Irving tried to lighten the atmosphere.

“Helper!” she yelled “You’re turning my son into a bookie!”

“Ah, come on, Mom,” Tim interjected, “I have only been trying to help Irving.” Sophie turned and walked out the door, saying, “Wait till your father comes home and hears about this.”

It was very quiet around the dinner table that evening. Only music from the radio filled the room. Tim’s dad put down his coffee cup. “OK, Irving, Sophie told me the whole story and what you have asked Tim to do for you and I say emphatically, it stops now! I know he wants to help you, but with his high school term starting shortly he needs to think more about his studies, not horse racing.”

“OK, Bill, I get the message. But Tim, thanks again for all your help,” Irving said as he got up and went out onto the porch. Tim followed him. “I’m sorry,” he said. “You know Mom and Dad are pretty strict with me. As their one and only, they expect me to be perfect. I know how you must feel, but I still hope you have some winners tomorrow.”

Tim looked up at Irving, “We really had some good times this summer.”

Though the weather continued to be hot there was a coolness in the bungalow. Day camp came to an end and Tim received a medal as their star catcher. Irving continued to commute each day to the city. In the evening there was the usual small talk around the dinner

table. Sophie and Bill acted cordially to Irving, but horse racing never entered the conversation.

After Labor Day the family closed up the bungalow. Irving went back to his hotel apartment. It was not long after that he was drafted, as the war had escalated. Tim was back in high school when he received a recording that Irving had made at his Army base. He smiled at the end of the record as it said: "Tim, give my regards to the Belmont Track."

Tim had driven out to the beach with his wife Wendy. He wanted to show her the old summer bungalow. Most of those were gone now, though theirs was still standing. He parked the car on McKenzie St. and they walked over.

"You mean this is where you spent your summers growing up? It sure does look dilapidated," Wendy said. Tim hesitated before answering her, "It was different then, before the war. Young families everywhere." There was a faraway look on his face, "We had some very good times here."

As they turned to leave, a slight breeze blew some newspapers along the street curb. One was the Daily Racing Form.

George Rubin

SQUIRREL SOLUTIONS

“Small brown birds,” said my Australian friend Sharon dismissively. She had set up a bird feeder to entertain her two small children, both born in the United States and unfamiliar with exotic Australian fauna. I knew nothing about Australian birds. Were there ostriches? Surely feeders Down Under were not designed to attract them. Sharon admitted that her children weren’t disappointed with sparrows and house finches, and I suggested that something flashy, a flicker, perhaps, might turn up.

I grew up with bird feeders. Rural Western Massachusetts had a variety of birds but also much natural habitat. I’m not sure when my parents decided to try luring them out of the woods, but they found an excellent way of doing it. Our house, like mine in Lumber-ton, was built into the side of a hill, and the kitchen on the northeast corner had ample windows one story above the ground. My father nailed a strip of molding to the wide wooden sills of the two east-facing windows, placed a small aluminum garbage can (with a tight-fitting lid to keep out rodents) next to the fridge, and periodically filled the sills with birdseed, especially unshelled sunflower seeds. We doled it out by the cupful whenever we noticed the sills were empty. No one had to go outside to fill the feeder, a task that no doubt would have fallen to my brother and me, and which we would have shirked or fought over.

The birds came, slowly at first. By the first winter, however, we dispensed up to six cups a day. A steady

stream of chickadees and purple finches flew across from the birch trees on the far side of the driveway. Juncos and mourning doves waited on the ground below for the messy eaters to kick seed their way. On snowy days we threw some down for them. Ubiquitous sparrows fed from both sills and ground. My parents purchased a Peterson *Field Guide to the Birds* and started identifying confusing fall warblers.

Then the evening grosbeaks arrived, and we were all hooked. Only my grandmother, a native of rural Connecticut, had ever seen one before. A friend of my brother's remarked that we had a "monster goldfinch" on our sill. They returned faithfully over the decades, long after I moved away.



Of course, where there is birdseed, there are squirrels, both gray and red in Worthington. They climbed up on the roof from nearby bushes, clambered into the gutter, and swung gracefully from their hind feet onto the sills, scattering the birds. We could hear the squirrels scabbling away and would bang angrily on the window. They leapt to the ground and ran off but would always return. One once even unhooked a heavy suet holder, dropped to the ground after it, and hauled it triumphantly away into the woods. Eventually, we admitted defeat and became rather fond of the critters.

My house in New Brunswick had no really good spot for a feeder, so I contented myself with watching

those birds that came to the backyard on their own. I identified the easy ones and occasionally reached for my own Peterson, a gift from my family. Work, children, and travel kept me busy.

Moving to Lumberton, I noticed many feeders, some as close as the decks or front yard trees, others along the perimeter path. The people who would hike out to fill the distant ones had my respect, but I wanted birds up close and personal. In my second summer, I purchased a wooden feeder with a little house-shaped structure to hold seed and trays on either side. I hung it in the tree in front of the kitchen window and waited. After a few days, finches and sparrows arrived, then mourning doves on the ground below. Cardinals came, too; they never got as far north as the Berkshire Hills. Chickadees, wrens, and juncos turned up; then disaster struck.

One morning the feeder lay on the ground in pieces. “Raccoons,” my neighbor opined, “or maybe a possum.” I like wild animals as well as birds, but I wanted a feeder that would stand up to their depredations. They could eat whatever fell to the ground, but that was it. I went back to Lowe’s and invested in a serious feeder – a square tube with four holes and perches and a grid on the outside that slid down and covered the holes when a heavy animal crawled on it. Its name is Squirrel Solutions.

It has worked for five summers and winters. I found two raccoons in the tree one night, desperately clawing at it to no avail. Generations of squirrels have been flummoxed as well. Each year, the new ones try

unsuccessfully to get the seed that they can see and smell but never touch. Some make the mistake of jumping to the wind chime, thinking it might yield food. They do not repeat that mistake.

In the time of Covid-19 I have added two suet holders that the New Jersey squirrels cannot dislodge from the tree and another smaller squirrel-proof tube. I have to admit to one defeat, however. One night I looked out to see Bambi with his tongue in one of the holes of Squirrel Solutions. I don't know how much he got, but he spilled quite a lot, much to the delight of furry and feathered ground feeders. Oh, yes, and I now also have chipmunks.

Kathy Riley

WRITERS' EXPERIENCES OF RETIREMENT

Working and retirement are different experiences for each of us. We thought that you might like to sample what some of your fellow residents who are writers have to say about retirement. These are excerpts from longer pieces, but each paragraph is by a different member of the Writers Roundtable, one of the more enduring activities under MLRA sponsorship.

I was born for retirement. People ask me, "What do you do all day?" I have no trouble filling my days. In fact, I have no idea how I ever found time to work. Understand, I am not a cleaner or a cook. I never had a desire to stay home and take care of a house. And when my daughter was born, I was happy to pay a dear woman lots of money to come to my house every day and dote on my child while I went to work. But what do I do all day? Read, watch movies, do jigsaw puzzles, sing, do church work, write, and edit. That keeps me happily fulfilled.

I was fortunate that I was only 58 when I completed a 34-year career in education and was able to retire. I felt it was better to enjoy my remaining years in relatively good health rather than seek a slightly increased pension and possibly face living in poorer health. Why have slightly more money by postponing retirement, but need to spend the money on doctors, hospitals, and medicine? My dear wife and I were able to enjoy 29 years in retirement, visiting three continents and

numerous foreign capitals. Many, many wonderful memories!

For almost twenty years I had a large solo psychology practice in the professional building of a general hospital where I was on the staff. I would squeeze seeing hospital patients (whom I had been asked to assess and recommend treatment by our physicians) into my lunch hours and after I finally finished in the office. The constant feeling of responsibility for my many patients was like running through my life carrying a backpack full of stones. Anxiety about finding interventions that would help them, worry about those at liberty but at risk for suicide, and being on guard for unwarranted complaints to my professional board tensed my shoulders and back. When I first retired, I found my arms moving upward *without my conscious intention* each time I realized my freedom. I am happy to report that much of my time now feels like play.

When I was young, I loved the Westerns, and I accepted their credo that “to die with your boots on” was the way to live. Foolish boy! At the age of seventy-one, I removed my boots and found that I was still a tenderfoot, with much to learn. Retirement allows me to rediscover experiences that I deferred in the joy – and snags – of work and child raising. I’ve picked up my flute, discarded for years. I read what I want, not what I must. And I’m writing for fun, as for example..

I am retired. It has been a slow adjustment because I’m so used to “getting something done” before the sun

goes down. First I tried learning the piano, making jewelry, and painting with watercolors before deciding that a walk suffices for both my physical and mental exercise for the day. And those walks have been enlightening and restorative. The cicadas buzzing, the hawk screeching, and the breeze riffing through the trees are engaging, if I take the time to be aware of them. The swooping silent dragonfly sentinels are looking for a meal, but they are neither hurried nor harried. They sometimes wait until I am almost upon them before gracefully getting out of my way. The butterflies are drinking from the butterfly bushes and hardly notice at all as I pass. So maybe I am learning from nature about not needing accomplishments to be worthwhile. Maybe the path I walk strewn with golden pine needles is just that: a path. As I've said, I'm still learning.

After forty years of a passionate love affair with my profession, I stopped! And, like a blast of cold air, I was alone and in shock. But in no time, there was no time. My breathing calmed. I was in a space that was mine. Exquisitely mine. It was now me and all my delicious choices. While I miss my calling, I wonder why I had feared losing my identity. I am me and it was time.

It seems to me that my lifetime went too quickly. I gave little thought to what would happen at retirement. My special needs work over fifty years was challenging and stressful. I felt good about my careers of helping people, but it often took a lot out of me. Now, in retirement, I have adjusted to a lifestyle mostly of my choice. I refuse to multitask, and I love it this way. Time is a gift

now, but a mixed one. I sometimes reflect on all the things that could or should have been. Health has become a new priority. One great day at a time is a life I am appreciating.

I have been retired for seven years. That sounds almost biblical. Were they the fat or the lean years? Did I labor at some task to reach a particular goal? Fail, and have to endure seven more years? Could they have been the seven years of bad luck? Actually, those years are the time it has taken me to let go of some ridiculous notions about retirement like believing that I have turned into my parents or that I cannot survive on my own. My life has assumed a structure that I would not have imagined, and I have found lots of new friends and interesting pastimes as well as some setbacks and sadness. Most importantly, I don't have to impress anyone else with a brilliant new career or glamorous bucket list. I have no more or less control over my future than I ever had, and it cannot be foretold. I need not worry about organizing it. There will be more changes to accept, good and bad. And I will accept them.

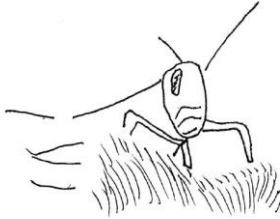
Writers Roundtable

Headline from Los Angeles Times 8/8/2000

'Crispy Critter Blamed for Washington State Blaze'

ODE TO CRISPY CRITTER

Crispy Critter who danced about
Once a grasshopper who was out
Jumping, playing in sun so bright
Now creates earth's own sunlight.
You suffered greatly your mistake
Our scorched earth is in your wake.



Bobbie Del Prete

EXPERIENCING COVID TIME

The time at our disposal each day is elastic; the passions we feel dilate it, those that inspire us shrink it, and habit fills it.

-Marcel Proust

During Covid Time, some of us went on with our days mostly just as we always did. Others had a sense of time as stretched out and we luxuriated in the gift. Some people felt like we were just numbly killing time. And I heard a few people say that Covid Time has been so long that they feel that they must be near the end of their lives by now. We don't have to study physics to know that time is felt differently by everyone, and that our sense of time can change drastically in reaction to circumstances.

Many of us became hyperaware of the rituals of our days. Wake at eight o'clock, feed the cat, clean ourselves up, eat breakfast, check the weather report, get dressed, look at our To Do list, pay our bills, go to our appointments, make phone calls, have leftovers for lunch, take an afternoon rest, fend off the scam phone calls, make plans for dinner, have dinner, come home, watch junky TV, pick up the daily mess, take the trash out, wash up, get into pajamas, fiddle with the thermostat, pet the cat some more, decide between a late TV program or just go to bed, get a glass of water, check that the doors are locked, get in bed, think about our friends or family, wonder what we forgot to do, wonder if so-and-so might be home from the shore yet, or could we maybe go down the shore next month, and off into sleep we go. Or not. Day after day.

For some people, their daily ritual is a conscious comfort, an absolute necessity. It is what glues them to time, provides a strong sense of meaning. Covid Time affirms their sense of time.

For others, the daily ritual is done mostly automatically, without much thought. It is equivalent to eating the same bowl of oatmeal day in and day out. There isn't much of a sense of time passing when the daily ritual is detached from the conscious mind.

And for me, when daily ritual seems like all there is during Covid Time, it has the potential to be crushing. This is where my imagination has to come in. I am not an artist, or I would be turning all the sameness into song, paintings, stories, sculpture, or something else new. The past nineteen months have often felt to me like living in a closed cardboard box.

But not all day, every day.

What has sustained me during Covid Time?

Partly, I inherited my dad's sense of playfulness and imagination. So some days I can take myself on trips to other places while my body remains on my sofa. I might go see my pen pal of 25 years, who is English and lives near London. We have never actually met in person. Or I might go visit all the many homes my family lived in since I was born. I imagine what they look like now and who is in them.

One unexpected benefit of my 30-year Quaker practice is that I have learned to sit and attend to what is right around me. I may have my eyes closed, but my ears

are open and my skin is taking in feeling. If my eyes are open, I may be watching dew sparkle on the morning trees outside the Holly Room. This kind of time never feels like it needs to be killed. In my Quaker time, deep connections seem to grow between my spirit and those of other people, present or not, and somehow with all of life. Thus, time, including Covid Time, is filled with meaning.

I suppose the trick is to be able to have this type of experience of connection at every moment, even during Covid Time. That would be the opposite of killing time. That would be living Covid Time time. If I can learn to live every moment like this, then when it does become time for me to die, I will know that I used my time well. Used Covid Time and ordinary time to connect, to feel, to sense, to love.

Judy Kruger

RESOURCES

“Our bridges rust, our roads are cracked;
Our tires are blown and hubcaps flung.
Repair. Repair.”

“The cost is huge:
Thousands, thousands, thousands, thousands.
Resources we don’t have.”

“Then taxes,
We must have taxes, taxes, taxes.”

“But taxes cost jobs. It’s impossible.”

And Mr. Musk strides by,
Satisfied.
Defense costs \$600 billion.
We are safe.

“Our bridges fall, our roads collapse;
The school bus rolls, and cars are smashed.
Death. Death. Replace. Replace.”

“The cost is huge: billions, billions.
Resources we don’t have.”

“Then taxes,
We must have taxes, taxes, taxes.”

“But taxes cost jobs. It’s impossible.”

And Mr. Zuckerberg strides by,
Satisfied.

Defense costs \$700 billion.
We are safe.

“We can foresee pandemics coming;
They always have, they always will.
Prepare. Prepare.”

“The cost is huge:
Thousands, thousands, thousands, thousands.
Resources we don’t have.”

“Then taxes,
We must have taxes, taxes, taxes.”

“But taxes cost jobs. It’s impossible.”

And Mr. Trump strides by,
Satisfied.
Defense costs \$800 billion.
We are safe.

“Now Covid’s here. Deny. Deny.
Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta.
Death. Death. Inject. Inject.”

“The cost is huge: billions, billions.
Resources we don’t have.”

“Then taxes,
We must have taxes, taxes, taxes.”

“But taxes cost jobs. It’s impossible.”

And Mr. Abbott passes by.
Satisfied.
Defense costs \$900 billion.
We are safe.

“The storms are rolling, winds are howling;
The fires are raging, deserts growing.
Retrench. Retrench.”

“The cost is huge: trillions, trillions.
Resources we don’t have.”

“Then taxes,
We must have taxes, taxes, taxes.”

“But taxes cost jobs. It’s impossible.”

And Mr. Bezos strides by.
Satisfied.
Defense costs \$1 trillion.
We are safe.

“The planet’s dying, Extinctions abound.
The oceans rise – into the skies – and fall.
The fires have no fuel. Destruction complete.”

“Damn the cost. We must do something!”

“Too late. Too late. There are no jobs.
And no defense.”

Bob Edelson

WRITING FOR LEAS LIT

Residents of both campuses, as well as staff, are encouraged to submit original manuscripts for publication in Leas Lit Literary Journal, which is published in June and December. Twice a year, a flyer soliciting submissions is distributed 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 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.

The following policies apply to submissions. The piece should be in English, original and not have been published previously. Book reviews will not be accepted. Each piece should be no longer than 1600 words.

If you have a story to tell – true or fictional – or feelings to share, let us hear from you.

