

LEAS LIT

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CONTENTS

The Survey	<i>Kathy Riley</i>	1
Choices, Choices	<i>Ed Hann</i>	5
Haiku	<i>Jean Ricketts</i>	8
Trip to Cabo	<i>John Sommi</i>	9
Communication Woes	<i>Harry Forrest</i>	13
Puff Piece	<i>Paula Susan</i>	14
The President's Airplane	<i>Bob Edelson</i>	16
Shame-Attacking Stunts	<i>Joyce Linda Sichel</i>	20
Old Bert and I	<i>Walter Dow</i>	23
We Fly the Big Ones	<i>George Rubin</i>	25
Martha and Her Chicken	<i>Joyce Koch</i>	31
A Pony Ride to Forget	<i>Geno Mori</i>	34
The Tulip Tree at 50 Euclid	<i>Edith Roberts</i>	38
From Saint Benedict's Rule?	<i>Bob Edelson</i>	40
How I Learned to Love Baseball	<i>Jean Ricketts</i>	41
We Need Hugs	<i>Joyce Linda Sichel</i>	43

THE SURVEY

“**I**s this a black ballpoint pen? What about that one? Where’s something black to compare them with? What’s wrong with my eyes? Cheap giveaways from charitable organizations, I really should get a good one.” Clearly, artificial light created the problem. The directions might have suggested, “Do this in the daytime.”

So began my attempt to fill out the *Quality Improvement Program Residential Living Resident Survey*. Something about that title seemed a bit wordy, maybe redundant. The line below was better; “Please help us learn how we can improve—today and in the future.” That was fair enough. I would persevere.

The instructions with boldfaced prompts caused bad flashbacks to the GREs. Would any misstep invalidate the entire document? And the due date leaped out at me in red. Maybe I should have gotten to my mailbox sooner. I saw my campus representative stuffing mailboxes on Tuesday but hurried away to run errands. Then I didn’t go back until Thursday – two precious days lost. The heft of the envelope promised length. I procrastinated until evening before opening it.

The cover letter announced that it would take “approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.” That called for a large cup of coffee and a comfortable seat. I prepared myself accordingly and began.

Many pages of what we teachers used to call *multiple guess* questions confronted me. Filling in the circles neatly and completely with that black pen would be the equivalent of *bubbling*, our term for our middle school students' efforts with number two pencils. Now I was on the receiving end of the directions. With some misgivings, I began my task.

First I ascertained that the scale went from best to worst reading left to right, with "not applicable" at the far right. "None" as the most positive response was clear, but seldom is anything perfect. What would the difference be between "minimal" and "some"? As with physical therapy surveys that asked me the degree of difficulty I had walking several blocks, I was left in a quandary over the choices.

Admonishing myself that the survey meant my opinion at this time, I pushed on, relying on the experiences of the past six years. In some cases, like the dining rooms and activities, I referred to the pre-Covid world. I was a big fan then and hoped to be so again.

The pattern of the survey felt eerily familiar: courtesy, timeliness, quality, accessibility, and responsiveness. Where had I seen this lineup before? Answer: in surveys from my doctors and dentist. After every visit, they materialized in my email, and if I did not do them, reminders pinged in my texts, complete with a smiling picture of the practitioner. Sometimes that was enough to guilt me into filling them out. Cynically, I accused them of

generating statistics in hopes of making *New Jersey Magazine's* Best Doctors list. A friend, however, informed me that the surveys were a Medicare requirement.

Slogging through page after page of circle-darkening, I recognized the array of services that await me as a resident with life care. Those that I have used – maintenance, transportation, and the Wellness Center – have done very well. By the next survey, there may be fewer NAs, and closer contact with the Medford campus could provide different suggestions for improvement. Time will tell.

The essay questions were challenging. I suggested specific, concrete improvements but couldn't think of what might be missing that was preventing me from living the life I wish. Question 138 asked for improvements "in each of the following areas" but failed to supply any. I thought I had already done this earlier. I could provide my own categories perhaps. There are a few days left before 18 March to resolve this.

The data collected from this survey will be very subjective, often colored by a recent experience, or lack thereof. After two years of stringent Covid protocols, asking residents how happy they have been is a brave move on the Committee's part. We have sorely missed activities and seeing friends and family. Will my answers just count as another completed survey and raise the percentage of residents participating?

Oddly, after all my grumbling about it, the survey focused my swirling thoughts about living here. I'm wistful but reconciled to all those steak dinners with friends that I did not eat in the Garden Room. I found some folks who wanted to do arts and crafts when my regular group couldn't meet. It took longer to replace the microwave, but I got a new one eventually. The hip surgery was successful, amidst masks and social distancing. Ingenious neighbors and I replaced the social activities cancelled by Covid with outdoor gatherings. Resilience got us through.

I completed my survey, and in March of 2022 the perspective is optimistic.

Kathy Riley

CHOICES, CHOICES

“**M**om, Dad: Can we have a PacMan game?”

That was the request our two young daughters made back in the 1980s when that interactive video game was universally popular. It was also quite expensive at the time, so we had to reply, “We’re sorry, dears, we can’t afford that. And anyway, our TV isn’t set up to be compatible with the disc it requires.”

“Oh, no,” our girls replied, “you don’t need to connect it to the TV. Our friend’s parents bought her a whole separate PacMan machine for their game room!”

That was the day Carol and I decided we needed to consider moving from the well-to-do neighborhood in which our jobs had placed us. We wanted to find a community where our children could be raised in an environment where they would experience families of a variety of economic, racial and cultural backgrounds that would better reflect the country and the world in which we hoped they would grow to live and serve. We moved to a town with a broad mixture of White, Hispanic and African-American families whose history had roots which reached back into American colonial history. It also had deep roots in a segregated society from which the current residents were seeking to grow beyond and above. It was into that community that we chose to have our daughters grow.

We have rarely regretted that choice. One of our daughters has become a teacher serving pre-school and special needs children in Head Start and similar programs in Camden and Philadelphia. Our other daughter

is now a volunteer in a mixed-race high school where she is seeking to help all students find the best options for colleges or other career opportunities, whatever their backgrounds. And one of our grandsons decided to take a “gap year” between high school and college where he worked in the deep South with communities of color and Native American families. Obviously we are very proud of all of them.

Now, however, we have chosen to live here in the Leas, where the diversity of race and economics is much less than it was when we made choices for the next generations of our family. We love the sense of community and security here, but has that limited the choices we now have for living in a broader country that is more reflective of the full world? I hope not.

We can still choose the books we read and the lectures and programs we attend.

We can still choose the concerts and performances we go to and the persons who have created and presented them.

We can still choose the communities of faith in which we will worship and serve.

We can still choose to visit places in this country and around the world where we can meet and interact with all kinds of people.

We can still choose what institutions and individuals we will support, financially and actively.

We can still choose to learn of the history, the full history, of this nation and those who have made it great and growing.

And we can still choose to be part of this Leas community and help its life be even more diverse and whole for our current neighbors and all who will yet become part of us.

We can even choose the games we play – yes, even the video games! – so that other children and grandchildren will have their best choices too.

Ed Hann

In sunny April
nodding to early springtime
Fiddle Ferns flourish

Jean Ricketts



TRIP TO CABO

Catherine and I have traveled quite a bit, both with our seven children and by ourselves after retirement. With such a large family we quickly decided that owning a family-sized camper was far more affordable than a nightly rental of three or four rooms in a hotel or motel.

Our love of camping remained after the many long trips we took with our children. We accepted that urge early in our retirement and purchased a 32-foot-long Holiday Rambler, a three room apartment on wheels, which offered both winter heating and summer air conditioning and a master bedroom with a king-sized bed. All the amenities of a home, without worrying about booking rooms. We could, if needed, spend a night in a Walmart parking lot, as we once did in Las Vegas.

Our longest and best road trip, in both time and distance, was to Cabo San Lucas, a beautiful resort at the tip of the Baja California peninsula which extended from the sea up into the foothills. Our destination was 760 miles south of the border crossing into Mexico. We left Mount Laurel, NJ, in early January and were on the road through the middle of April, about three and one half months, and drove well over 7,500 miles. I say we, because Catherine shared the driving.

We took Interstate 95 south to Interstate 10 and proceeded west to New Orleans, exploring the lovely city and enjoying the cuisine for several days. After visiting the Alamo and San Antonio, we stopped in Big Bend

National Park with its Rio Grande border with Mexico and saw how the low water level would permit immigrants to cross the river and enter the United States in search of a better life for themselves and their families.

Then on to El Paso and Las Cruces, NM and visits to “active adult” communities much like our home in Mount Laurel. We camped for several weeks in Arizona, enjoying Tucson and Phoenix and their lovely, warm winter weather, before moving on to San Diego to meet up with the other Holiday Rambler owners with whom we would become a 14-rig caravan travelling into Mexico under the guidance of Holiday Rambler employees. After three days of rest and orientation about driving conditions in Mexico and glasses of wine in celebration of having come from many distant parts of America, our caravan moved to the San Ysidro border crossing to enter Tijuana, Mexico.

When we camped for the first time in Mexico we made a wonderful discovery. We had also moved to ‘Margaritaville,’ for each night thereafter when we made camp there were pitchers of margaritas for us to enjoy before we made our dinners. We looked forward to each evening.

While driving through Tijuana I made certain I was obeying the speed limits, yet we were soon pulled over by a local police officer. He told me the camper taillights were not working and I was being fined \$50. I could pay him, which would spare me a trip to the police station. I told Catherine to move into the driver’s seat and hit the brakes and then the turn signals. All the lights worked perfectly. I said to him, “Everything seems to be work-

ing.” He gave me a dirty look and sent me on my way, after reminding me to drive carefully in Mexico.

The paved road that took us south amid desert-like conditions was barely wide enough to permit passage of two vehicles going in opposite directions and had very limited shoulders. In that era before cell phones we used radio phones to keep in contact with each other. This was important, for the equipment enabled us to warn each other of a tractor-trailer approaching from behind and about to attempt to pass.

Driving along the highway we soon saw how dangerous the road was. We passed many a wrecked vehicle along the side of the road. You could easily determine how long ago the accident had occurred by what was left of the damaged vehicle. Bit by bit, anything salvageable was taken until only the rusting bones of the chassis were left. The first things taken were wheels and tires, followed by window glass, doors, and seats. Even engines and transmissions were taken. Nothing usable was left on the roadside.

We made several stops along the route. At one we boarded pontoon boats and motored out to see whales and newborn calves. We were so close we could almost touch these magnificent animals. At another campsite we took canoes and paddled out to a small island in the bay and went clamming for hard-shelled clams. We brought enough with us to our campground that a delicious clam chowder was made with pasta. A surprise dinner occurred when some of our fellow campers brought out elk and moose taken in successful hunts and made stew with the frozen meat. Who knew we would

have such a varied diet, beyond that of the tasty offerings of local Mexican restaurants?

Our route home was Interstate 40, which permitted us to explore middle America. The mountains and valleys of southern California and Wyoming were lovely, slowly transitioning from short-grass prairie to tall grass, and America's heartland of Oklahoma and Missouri, before moving into Tennessee and Virginia. While camping overnight in Oklahoma, we had some special excitement when a tornado struck the neighboring town and we were pelted with heavy rain and some sleet. We could hear the wind howling around us and felt the trailer shaking a bit in response to an extra powerful gust of wind. Luckily the following day was warm and the patches of ice quickly melted.

When we reached home we were filled with so many wonderful memories and endless stories to tell our children and grandchildren.

John Sommi



COMMUNICATION WOES

To the tune of Hoagie Carmichael's "Stardust"

Intro

For years I used a “clamshell” telephone –
Portable and serving all my needs,
But, like all things old, its functions slowed down
Leaving me to wonder how to best proceed.
My children cried, “Hey, Dad, it's time to change!
A smart phone is most logically your choice!”
So, I took the leap – but I should explain
Why there's a tremor in my voice.

Verse

Sometimes I wonder why I spend each day and night
struggling with that phone.
Its gadgetry haunts my reverie,
and I am filled with doubt and fright.
The technology seems beyond my comprehension.
I'm sure these phones aren't made for old folks
on pensions,
They cause us stress and get us all uptight.
But I'll keep pressing on –
I'll persevere and learn to use this thing
And not be scared every time it rings,
(Hey, look! That text I sent got through!)
So, I'll soldier on – though I fear I may do
something wrong
This old guy's back in school
And my grandkids think that I'm ‘cool.’

Harry Forrest



PUFF PIECE

Mother Nature, I have forsaken my once firm resolve. I have joined the masses and bought myself a Puffy Coat.

Never did I want to look like everyone else. So, year after year, I suffered in my black winter coat. (It does have some stitching that makes it look a little like a puffy-wannabe.) No matter how many layers beneath, it never kept me warm. I actually loathed going out in the long winter of dead cold. Walking through the corridors, I shivered and moved briskly. Absolutely nothing helped.

So, one day in desperation, I called my friend: “Macy’s has a sale of winter coats.” It took two try-ons and, “This is it!” Let me tell you about my Puffy Coat. It is a dusty rose, with a fur hood. While I am no Dr. Zhivago look-alike, I feel really good in it. There is an extra zipper lining at the chest, which is a welcome addition. And, when I hang my coat in the cloakroom at dinner, I glance at the many other Puffy Coats and think that “not one of them is appreciated like mine.”

All it took was forsaking my petty resolve and a few minutes at Macy’s. Another delightful surprise was that my coat was reduced to half price and another 15% off. So much for my years of silliness and hurrah for the designers and the smart women who bought these coats!

Mother Nature, I’m ready for you. Now I too can move through the seasons. I have my Puffy Coat awaiting your cold, bitter winters. For now, I am welcoming pretty spring.

Paula Susan

THE PRESIDENT'S AIRPLANE

Once upon a time there was a president of a large retail corporation. The president had a lot of money. A lot. He had so much money that if he laid all the bills on the ground, it would circle the earth one thousand, four hundred and forty-seven times. If he made a pile of it, it would reach the moon. But he was not satisfied.

“I want my own jet airplane,” he told his company’s chief financial officer. “I’m tired of sitting in coach and getting tiny bags of pretzels when I want peanuts!” (He was a very insensitive man and very cheap.) “But my airplane must be unique. It must make me more money as well as stocking peanuts. Oh, and it must have a bigger seat. Just one. For me.”

“If you call the chief engineer,” said the CFO, “she will know what to do and I will give her the money.” Now the CFO had no idea how the president’s airplane could make him money. He knew that private airplanes are very expensive. He just wanted to have someone else to take the blame.

So the president called in the chief engineer and said, “I want you to make me a jet airplane that will fly me fast around the world and will make me money.”

The chief engineer said, “I have an idea.” Chief engineers always have ideas. “I will make you an atomic-powered airplane. It will have a molten-salt nuclear reactor which will be very reliable and safe. It will cost a lot to build, but you can make more of them to sell on your

website and you will make lots of money. Please give me a billion dollars.”

“But wait,” said the president, “this is new technology. What if it fails? I wouldn’t like to crash.”

“It will have a battery backup,” the chief engineer said. “It will give you time to find a landing place. But my reactor will never fail, so it’s a waste of money. But I will do it. Please give me two-billion dollars.”

So the president told the CFO to give the chief engineer the money. And he did.

The chief engineer worked very hard. She hired many people and she bought lots of stuff. She bought carbon fiber and uranium and lead for shielding and great heaps of salt for moltening, so that she could cool the reactor, and she bought boxcar loads of D-cells because they were cheap, and she knew they would never be needed anyway.

The president called her every month and said, “Where is my airplane?”

The chief engineer said, “It is progressing nicely, and I need another billion dollars.” After a while, the president stopped calling. Finally, the chief engineer called the president. “I have your airplane ready. Come see and we’ll fly around the world as far as your money will stretch because we’re nuclear.”

“Okay,” the president said, “but that will only be forty-seven times because the airplane has cost me one thousand four hundred times.”

“That’s all right,” the chief engineer said, “you will make it back and more when we sell airplanes like this to airlines and other presidents. Mr. Musk and Mr. Zuckerberg are already on the waiting list.”

The president came to the airport and was very happy. His airplane was so beautiful. “The salt is molten, the uranium is fissioning, and the D-cells are waiting in reserve. Let’s go,” said the chief engineer.

The president’s airplane raced down the runway and into the air. “I will have some peanuts,” he told the flight attendant. And the attendant brought them, but... “These peanuts are unsalted,” the president said. “I always have salted nuts. Get me some salt.”

“Yes sir,” the attendant said. “I know where to get some.” Soon he returned and tossed the salt on the peanuts.

The president reached for his salted peanuts. “These peanuts are very hot!” he exclaimed. .

“Uh-oh,” said the chief engineer as she saw a stream of molten salt cross the cabin and the engine sound diminished. “I will go to battery backup, sir,” she told the president. “This flight attendant has breached the reactor.” The chief engineer raced to the front of the plane and threw a big switch that read “Battery Backup.” The engines resumed their roar, but a big red needle rapidly swung right on a dial that read “Battery Capacity.” “Uh-oh,” said the chief engineer. “I guess the D-cells don’t have enough energy. We are going to crash.”

The president was very angry. “You have wasted all of my money,” he said. At the last.

The president’s estate sued the chief engineer’s estate for insufficient salt and batteries.

Bob Edelson

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SHAME-ATTACKING STUNTS

To say that my mentor, the late Dr. Albert Ellis, was eccentric would be putting it mildly. While he was brilliant and creative – almost single-handedly turning the psychological world from psychoanalytic to conscious thought and behavior – he was a very irreverent and sometimes disrespectful man. He really didn't care what you thought of him. He was a model for feeling no shame, having almost no rules for himself. Sometimes he did not greet me on the steps of his Institute building, although he knew me well. Because he suffered from diabetes, he would wear strange orthopedic shoes called "space shoes," putting his feet on display on an ottoman while treating patients. He would also unwrap (in front of everyone with no explanation) a peanut butter sandwich at the same time of day, whether he was at home or away. He traveled widely – giving lectures and workshops all over the world – following his same routines.

The Friday evening free group therapy at his Institute was a famous and well-attended opportunity to get one of your problems solved or just to watch his technique. The person he was helping might break into tears since Dr. Ellis was not very sensitive to how they were feeling. Being called a "Love Slob" was quite a jolt. He really was a very good therapist though, giving you a much more helpful slant on your attitudes and actions that were causing you pain.

Among his wonderfully creative and therapeutic ideas was to have people, who were burdened by worries about what other people thought of them, do outlandish things in public. He would warn us not to do anything

we could be arrested for, but to deliberately make fools of ourselves to become less sensitive to disapproval. We were to perform these as many times as necessary. He called these liberating experiences “exercises,” but they were really *stunts* that were supposed to attract people’s negative attention and help the doer to gradually feel less shame. Since we all lived and worked in New York City, we had ample opportunities for doing these things and realizing that most people cared very little for odd behaviors here or there.



One of these assignments that might get you noticed was to tie a long string to a hot dog and pull it along the sidewalk behind you as though it were a dog. Another was to ride a city bus, calling out the names of the upcoming stops in a loud enough voice for people to hear, and a particularly attention-getting stunt was to talk to yourself on the street so that people would hear and assume you were bizarre. Initially these things were very

difficult to do, but with repetition you would become less focused on yourself.

You might recall “Candid Camera,” an early reality television show starring Allen Funt. A hidden camera took pictures of people doing rather odd things (getting their permission later to show them on the air). But Albert Ellis’s exercises were intended to help you overcome problems, not entertain others. He wrote a large number of books with such suggestions, gave these assignments to his many students, and of course to his patients. So for the years that I was his student, there I was on commuter trains standing up and calling stops out loud. It was always surprising when people didn’t even notice what I was doing and went on with their own conversations or paperwork. So much for our belief that all eyes and ears are on us when we do things somewhat out-of-line. I found that it helped me be much less concerned and embarrassed about how I came across to people, and that was a very good thing.

Joyce Linda Sichel

OLD BERT AND I *

Have you ever heard, read, and probably enjoyed *Bert and I*, short Maine humor stories? I experienced my own Maine story after purchasing a summer camp on Lake Cobbscontee. Along with the camp's many other charming features, there was a beautiful stone fireplace and a telephone that had to be cranked to get the telephone operator (TA). I was informed by the seller that the TA knew everything about everything in the general area.

Upon taking ownership of the camp, I found that we had no firewood. I cranked up the TA, who gave me the answer to my problem – Melvin Mason in Purgatory, who sold wood. Soon after getting this referral, I drove to Purgatory, which was only about five miles away. Upon arriving at Melvin's home, I found a man sitting on his front porch in an over-stuffed upholstered chair. The three sides of the house not facing the road had approximately 100 cords of ready-to-burn firewood.



After parking my car in his driveway, I introduced myself and inquired if he was Mr. Mason. He answered “*AYAH.*” After a brief conversation, I asked the price of the wood and he answered: “Fifteen dollars a cord.” I asked if that included delivery. With lack of emotion on his face and looking at the New Jersey license plates on my car, he answered “It’s all according to where you want it delivered.”

Walter Dow

**Bert and I* is the name given to numerous collections of humor stories set in the “Down East” culture of traditional Maine. The stories communicate the quirkiness of rural New England and Maine culture, told with a dry wit that would later inspire the Lake Wobegon stories.

WE FLY THE BIG ONES: A Training Mission

Prologue

A true story as seen through the eyes of an 18-year-old.

There will be no heroism, no brass bands will be playing for us. Most of us are just boys who grew up all of a sudden. We are a “combat crew.” Some call us the boys who “fly the big ones.” We don’t feel important, but it is our job, it’s got to be done, and we are going to do it.

It was raining a while ago, but it has stopped and the sun is trying to push its head through leaden stratus clouds. “That rain would have to let up. Nuts!” That’s our ball turret gunner. He’s standing by the window, a book in his hand, his disgusted eyes viewing the sky outside.

“Buck up, junior, don’t you like flying the big speckled birds?” asks our grinning engineer. He is sitting on his sack, a long cigar clamped between his teeth, diligently polishing a pair of silver wings. I can hear our tail gunner singing in the latrine. Guess he’s shaving. Sparks, our radioman, is lying on his cot with his wide-open eyes focused on the ceiling, thinking about his girl back home in South Dakota. There is a picture of her on the shelf.

That's us, all five of us. As different as night and day. We are from Texas, Dakota, Wisconsin, and even Brooklyn. Yet here we are, living and flying together.

We're leaving now. I grab what I need automatically: oxygen mask, summer flying helmet, and a couple of boxes of cookies. We can see our four officers at the flight line. The curly head of our bombardier sticks up above the rest. Greetings pass around. We respect our officers, for theirs is a big job — flying, bombing, navigating. Yet we feel good inside knowing that they depend on us too. It seems that above the clouds, bars and stripes, lieutenant and corporal, disappear. Up there it's pilot and tail gunner, bombardier and radioman.

We're at the gunnery briefing shack. The mission officer calls out, "At ease!" It brings the laughter and jabbering to an end. "Today we'll be doing air-to-air gunnery at 20,000 feet. There will be a few instructors along. You will have 1050 rounds of ammo and will fire only on the west leg of the range." Now each man is making a mental note of the plane he's on. Our B-17G is 7778-D. The talking is over. We pick up our parachutes and clip the harness over our flying suits. Next we check out our boots, pants, and gloves, and I sign out my guns. They feel cold to the touch and the oil is still fresh on the barrel. Here is something I know about. I don't fly or drop bombs but I've been trained to know the guts of these 50-caliber machine guns. It's my job. I can put them together and make them recoil 14 times a second, 800 times a minute. I guess what makes us a team is each being a master of his job.

We have installed the guns and loaded the ammo in all the turrets. Two of our gunners are on the wings

checking the fuel supply. The engineer is standing near the front hatch filling out and checking his forms. Back toward the tail, the co-pilot, his straight black hair flowing over his eyes, has a slide rule on his knee and a form in his lap. He is filling out the balance and load. Our pilot has arrived. He calmly walks around the ship. His hands glide over the wing surfaces, he turns the turbos and checks the rudder and stabilizer. His face is serious, intent on the job at hand. The bombardier is in the nose. It's hot and beads of perspiration are forming above his eyes. He is working on the bombsight carefully and methodically. The navigator arrives, carrying his equipment in a small valise. He smiles and his Chicago accent sounds loud as he greets us. We rib each other; it helps lower the tension.

The props are pulled through the standard nine times and we climb aboard. The four engines mesh and blow a breeze back toward the tail. "Army 778 to Canary control, request permission to take off." I feel the engines rev up and then fade to a lower r.p.m. The radio-man is already hard at work on his transmitter and receiver. The bombardier and navigator are sitting in the waist, wearing headphones to keep out the loud hum of the engines. Then suddenly the engines rev up and the brakes unlock, and the sudden surge of power forces me backwards. The air speed increases, and gracefully but slowly we leave the ground below us. Our ears plug up and we swallow and they pop open. The wheels come up and lock into place. Our shadow on the ground is fading. We are airborne. The crew is getting into position now. The navigator and bombardier have picked up their chutes and slowly work their bodies through the bomb

bay up to the nose. The tail gunner is at his post connecting his headset and throat mike. The ball gunner is engaging and disengaging clutches. Slowly he brings the turret hatch up. He dons his heavy clothing, climbs in, and checks his interphone connections, switches, and pedals. The hatch closes over his head and the motor starts with a whine. Slowly the ball turret begins to turn.

“Pilot to crew, interphone check, over.” One by one we check in.

“Pilot to crew, we’re at 10,000 feet. Have your oxygen masks on. The bombardier or radio will check every fifteen minutes.” A “Roger” passes through the plane — a little muffled now because of the masks.

The sweet smell of oxygen fills my throat and lungs. I watch the blinker on the control move up and down. The pressure is well over 350 lbs. I return to my gun and check it for the last time. “Pilot to crew, fire at will.” I hand-charge twice and the chant of 50-caliber bullets fills the air. Empty shell cases fall around me. We call in as we finish firing. Like hungry animals the guns have eaten their ammo and now are quiet.

“Pilot to crew, you can take off your masks now, we’re down from altitude.” The bombardier comes back and tells us he is going to toggle off the bombs. I follow him back as far as the bomb bay and I swing down between the bomb racks and slowly and carefully remove the cotter pins from the tail fuses of the bombs. I swing up and turn on the rack selector switches and climb up to the flight deck. The pilot has his feet cocked above the rudder pedal, his face sweaty, his hair mussed. The earphone has left a large red patch over his right ear. The

co-pilot is flying the bomber. His hands are gripping the control yoke. The plane is moving smoothly, altitude and airspeed are perfect. A cold wind hits my feet. I look back, the bomb doors are open. I close the bulkhead door. The engineer standing beside me is checking fuel consumption. His usual smile is there but the cigar is gone, replaced by a cookie that he is busily chewing. I put on a headset and listen to the conversation. "Bombardier to pilot, you can follow the P.D.I. (position, direction indicator) now, over. Let's have it level, a little more to the left, a little more, roll her out, bombs away." I can hear the click as the A4 releases snap together, the bombs are gone. Only the arming wires are swinging in the slipstream.

"Pilot to navigator, let's have a heading for the field."

"Navigator to pilot, it's 240 degrees."

"What's our ETA (estimated time of arrival)?"

"Haven't got it yet, but wait a minute. . ." I don't listen for the finish but head back to the waist, for we're going home. The bombardier and navigator join me and Sparks has music on and we are feeling good. The ball turret and tail gunner join us. The cookie boxes are open and we're all munching. The wheels come down and slowly the ship enters the landing pattern. Our speed slackens. The engineer, crank in hand, goes back to check the tail wheel and then returns to the flight deck. The pilot and co-pilot are working hard now bringing the big bird down. The co-pilot turns off the turbo-superchargers and puts the flaps down. The engineer is calling out the airspeed: 120-110-100-90. The

wheels touch the tarmac and hold. We are rolling fast now, the brakes squeal. The two inboard engines are cut. The brakes lock and we park. The engines rev up for the last time and die with a swish of air.

We are home. We don't feel like birdmen, more like a tired bunch of fellows. Our job for today is done. The pilot and co-pilot have left for final interrogation. The bombardier and navigator are taking back their equipment. Two of the gunners on the wing help with refueling. The radio man heads back to the radio shack with headphones and his equipment. We are all gone now.

Epilogue

There are many tomorrows ahead of us. We will be flying again. We have been given wings. Our lives are now molded with the roar of the engines and the sound of the slipstream. We are flying the big ones.

George Rubin

MARTHA AND HER CHICKEN

Martha's dance recital was coming up this Friday. This was no ordinary recital; she'd had many, usually two a year since she was ten years old. But this one was special for many reasons. It was the last one before she went off to college. And it was the only one that her chicken, Henrietta, was performing with her. It has taken a great many hurdles to reach this point.

The first hurdle was getting her dad to agree to letting her keep a Silky Chicken for its full life, nine years or more. Dad's attitude was that of a farmer, chop the fowl's head off when it was fully grown and have it for Sunday dinner. So she laid out a variety of well thought out arguments and explained how she would care for it and pay for the feed. Her planning paid off and he agreed. Four years ago when she was a freshman in high school, she purchased her Silky from the feed and grain store in town.

As the chick grew, there was great affection between Martha and Henrietta (Etty), as she had named the chicken, who was placid and even affectionate. Martha made the coop cozy and warm but large enough so she could spend time with Etty any season of the year, even having a fan for summer and a tree for shade as well. Martha would do her homework next to her pet and occasionally get a head rub on her arm. The teenager saw some videos online where chickens were taught to identify objects and wondered if she could do this with her chicken. She proceeded to work with her and eventually thought of ways to incorporate Etty into her dance at times.

In the spring of her senior year Martha was studying hard and sending out college applications. She was thrilled to be admitted into the college of her choice, the state university which was an hour away from home. The spring's dance recital was quite a big deal to Martha and the other seniors in dance. One big hurdle started with getting permission from the school to bring a chicken in for her dance, and that included all sorts of folderol. Martha was happy she had left plenty of time to carry out that task.

Recital day arrived, a Sunday afternoon at the high school, and Martha, her parents and Henrietta loaded themselves into the minivan and headed out. There were multiple costumes because Martha was taking part in three group dances in addition to her solo. They put Etty's cage at the edge of the stage when Martha was performing with the groups so that she could see Martha and didn't get lonely.

The recital was going well, other than some minor mishaps, and Etty was calm as could be. Martha's dance was the last one and when the music started, she danced to the center of the stage in a shimmering leotard, made some graceful moves, sank to her knees, and gestured offstage. Henrietta, right on cue, began to walk toward her, but stopped midway, turned to the audience, and made what could be construed as a little bow. Everyone gasped, then clapped. Henrietta continued on to Martha and when she got there she paused. Her beloved mistress had rolled into a ball and the chicken hopped on Martha's feet, then legs, then back. Once she was there Martha gracefully started to stand and the chicken climbed to her shoulders then onto her head, where she

sat down and made herself comfortable. Martha reached up with one hand to pet Etty, then began a dance around the stage floor with the relaxed chicken on her head. The dancing was beautiful, graceful, mesmerizing.

At the end Martha reversed the procedure to get Henrietta back on the floor and they both took their bows to a very appreciative audience. Martha picked up her Silky and was already thinking about how she was going to take her to college.

Joyce Koch





A PONY RIDE TO FORGET

One summer day, after completing the first grade of grammar school, I was playing outside with other kids in my neighborhood when a man came down our street with a pony. He was offering pony rides! The man, who was dressed in boots and a large cowboy hat, really impressed me. I could envision him sitting around the campfire at the end of the day with other cowboys, drinking coffee from a tin cup and telling stories about herding cattle, as I'd seen in the movies. He walked alongside the pony and carried a large box, which I later learned was a camera. It was attached to a 3-legged stand and a large black cloth.

We kids were excited to possibly be riding an actual pony, and when mothers started to appear some kids began to form a line. Each kid who got a pony ride was dressed in Western Style articles such as a cowboy hat, bandana and even a gun & holster before being placed on the pony by the man. He then covered his head with the large black cloth attached to the 3-legged stand. When he reemerged from under the cloth, he led the pony to the end of the street and back to where he started. All this was closely watched by each of the kids' mothers who talked with the pony man. After watching several kids get pony rides, I wanted one too, but when I asked to be next, the pony man told me I first needed my mother's permission, so I left for home to get it.

Mom was watching the outside activity from the front room of our house, and before I could utter a word it was obvious she had already decided the answer

to the question I was about to ask. Speaking in Italian, as she always did, she said: “Non salire su quell cavallo.” I clearly understood those words to mean: “Don’t get on that horse.” I thought that perhaps she was afraid that I might somehow fall off the pony and be hurt, so I explained that it was not a horse, but only a small pony. She still said no.

Back outside I rejoined my friends and followed the man and his pony to another small street where he was also giving pony rides.

At one point I summoned the courage to ask again for a pony ride, while reasoning that since I was not on my own street no one would even know if I had a ride! This time the man said nothing about getting my mother’s permission; he only asked for my address. He then dressed me as he did the others, lifted me on the pony and even placed my finger on the trigger of the six shooter. Before covering his head with the black cloth, he asked me to smile, which revealed the gap where a baby tooth had fallen out. When he reemerged from under the cloth, I finally got my pony ride, which was actually quite uneventful. I had hoped the pony would be galloping with me holding onto the reins as I pretended to be an actual cowboy, but the pony walked at a very slow pace and then, being guided by the pony man, was inclined to stop every so often to rest. When we returned to our starting point, I was lifted off the pony and my friends and I simply went off to a nearby park to continue playing, and that was the end of that, or so I thought!

About a week later, while I was again playing outside, Mom called me to come home. She was there to-

gether with the man (this time without his pony) and I could tell that she was upset! While holding a photograph of me atop the pony, she scoldingly asked, “perche mi hai disobbesito?” — (“Why did you disobey me?”).

I looked at the picture and then back at her and then, as only a naïve 6-year-old would do, blurted out: “HOW DID HE GET THAT?” I then immediately took up a defensive position in anticipation of what could happen next! What did happen next, though, was I saw Mom reach into the pocket of the apron she always wore, remove money and for some reason give it to the pony man, who then left. I now braced myself to learn of the punishment I would receive, deserved for committing “An Act of Direct Disobedience.” Mom, acting in her capacity of both judge and jury, imposed a several-days house confinement sentence which I chose not to appeal. Rather, I served it in “remorseful quiet reflection.”

For the longest time after that day, I didn’t know what happened to that photograph, (and I didn’t ask), for it was never displayed anywhere in our home. It was years later when I was preparing for marriage and moving from home that Mom gave it to me, and after recounting the event of those early years, we were both able to share a laugh together about it. However, that episode in my early childhood did teach me that every action has a reaction, which was a meaningful life lesson experience.

Geno Mori

THE TULIP POPLAR TREE AT 50 EUCLID

In 1906, the grand old tulip poplar tree at 50 Euclid in Had-donfield was brought home in a suitcase from the Poconos by my father Redman Engle. My father was the same age as the young century – six.

My grandfather, Linton Engle, had twin homes built for my great grandmother and great great aunt at 50 and 52 Euclid. How many people those two homes have sheltered through the years, including yours truly! They were comfortably sized and sat a yard or so up from street level on what had once been the town's athletic fields. In 1906 the land was barren of all growth but grass. Then home came my father from the Poconos, opened his suitcase, and planted his tree. Thus began the proud reign of our tulip poplar, the fine *Liriodendron tulipifera*. It has been our families' pride and joy.

It stands a little over twenty feet away from the back corner of the house. After it reached a good size, my dad hammered railway spikes up its side for children who wanted to own the world. My brothers climbed it for years and then finally it was my turn. My father watched as I made that first climb. The spikes were strong and firmly hammered in. They stuck about five inches out from the tree. The bark was dark brown, rough and thick. I was really afraid ... but up I went until I was level with the chimney on our house. The thing I best remember was seeing the various peaked rooves which met high on the rooftop. Dad stood at the bottom saying calm words of encouragement. I remember quite well that I had no desire to repeat the climb.

The tulip poplar has now grown so wide that the spikes have been covered over by many more circles of life. Shade is provided for 50 Euclid and at least three more neighboring

gardens. There was a narrow path running up the side of our house which local school children would use to cut a corner off their route. They would run up our path and then climb over their own fences and hedges feeling that surging sense of freedom. The poplar tree, its arms outstretched, smiled down on them.

An old-fashioned garden gate now closes off that secret route, but still the poplar smiles – and grows grander and grander. If there is some form of holiness in trees, as my father always seemed to believe, then stand straight and tall beneath it with your hands aloft. Receive its blessing of peace.

Edith Roberts

FROM SAINT BENEDICT'S RULE ?

“...if [a pilgrim monk] have been found gossipy and contumacious in the time of his sojourn as guest, not only ought he not to be joined to the body of the monastery, but also it shall be said to him, honestly, that he must depart. If he does not go, let two stout monks, in the name of God, explain the matter to him.”

The last sentence is considered by many to be a modern, humorous addition added a millennium and a half after Saint Benedict's death.

* * *

Some claim Saint Benedict said it,
Though no one his pen can credit.

That Saint Ben, a man of peace,
Would not with violence cease,
Strains credibility,
Obliges incredulity.

But...

When Ben chastised a balky bro,
Did the friar just up and gladly go?

Perhaps Saint B., with humility,
And plausible deniability,
Risked the liability,
And dispatched stout monks with facility.

Bob Edelson

HOW I LEARNED TO LOVE BASEBALL

When I was growing up, Philadelphia had two baseball teams, the Athletics and the Phillies, and the games were played during the day. My parents and siblings had no interest in baseball, but summer days often found me at my grandmother's house, where she was a faithful listener of the Athletics, a radio listener as television was in the future.



Born in 1879 into a prosperous family of candy makers, my grandmother was one of the few women of her generation to graduate high school and attend college. She never finished college because she met my grandfather.

I loved my grandmother. She and my grandfather lived not far, about 15 minutes by bicycle, from our home. Ours was a small town. Everywhere was 15 minutes or less; school and church, friends, shops and my grandmother.

While my gran had many talents, she also had asthma, which limited her to an extent but did not prevent her from keeping score cards for the games. Scoring

for baseball games uses numbers and symbols to indicate the action on the field. It was intriguing for me to watch her make markings on a chart, which in some mysterious way recorded what we were hearing about hits and runs and steals and outs.

Quickly bored, I would often go and play with the kids on the street but wander back for a drink or snack or the bathroom. But gradually, as I and my attention span grew, I asked her to explain the strange marks. Thus began my baseball education.

My grandmother's marks were real baseball, imagined from the radio and recorded in a scorebook day by day throughout the season. I had to listen, attend, and learn the various markings for every play. And as I did, I absorbed the game without even realizing it.

When I began to attend professional games, the situation was overwhelming; the crowd, the noise, the size of the stadium, were too much for a kid to grasp until I got my scorecard and began to keep track of the game. It is still a bit overwhelming to go to the ballpark but the scorecard keeps me always in the game and somehow always in touch with the wonderful grandmother who taught me to love baseball.

Jean Ricketts

WE NEED HUGS

Gating the campus unexpectedly,
trusting our leaders, but cautiously.
Getting confused and scared by news,
disinformation in media views.

Counting the cases continually,
hearing warnings of variants serially.
Comparing it with Spanish flu,
is this pandemic our Waterloo?

Masking our faces uncomfortably,
getting vaccine shots compliantly.
Shrinking from activities known,
most of us just staying at home.

Realizing our vulnerability,
submitting to tests done nasally.
Refraining from visiting children,
lest one lead to the Covid pavilion.

Keeping businesses or people healthy?
Opening classrooms or teaching virtually?
Polarizing beyond politics,
in mandates for opposing logistics.

Being anxious, bored, frustrated, lonely.
Wondering will it last permanently?
Habituating to the past few years,
will we ever again get hugs from our peers?

Joyce Linda Sichel

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 y

