

Leas Lit



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This issue is dedicated
to our friends and colleagues

Roberta Foss

Editorial Committee Chair

2016 - 2022

Deceased 2023

and

Joanne Thomas

Contributing Editor

2015 - 2022

Deceased 2023

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MAKE ROOM FOR JOY

In our old age came Covid, gun violence, and hard hearts in power.

We need to seek joys, like sea-glass pebbles on the beach at low tide.

Joy may come this evening when you glimpse the beauty of twilight,
taste special food, stay up too late with a good book.

If you are mindful, you will recognize more joy in your days.
Did you notice when you were happy this morning?

Did you sit and stay a while in the summer sun,
without worrying about your exposed skin?

Limit your attention to news, selling itself by dramatizing the worst.
Perhaps listen to favorite music or watch a sporting event.

Settle down to write a letter, sew, tend plants, or bake.
Get a sense of accomplishment and maybe a thank-you.

Volunteer some service and you may share well-being with the receiver.
Try smiling at people you like, making you both happier.

Arrange something pleasing for the near future.
Don't shy away from new activities you can try and learn.

Join in laughter with friends – new or old.
The suffering world won't be helped by your outrage over each blow.
Make room in your days for joy.

Joyce Linda Sichel

TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS

We were so looking forward to the birth of our second child in January. Carol hoped that it would not be too difficult to carry the child through the Christmas season and then we could fulfill our plans for an expanded family in the new year.

To our dismay, however, in mid-October Carol began to experience the labor pains that were familiar from the birth of our first child. When they did not subside, we went to the doctor, who announced that the baby was coming three months early! and there was nothing that could be done to stop it. He advised us to go to the hospital, let the labor proceed to miscarriage and move on with our lives with more children later.

Of course we were devastated. This was not in our plans, but what could we do? We went to the hospital and through the labor process. While it was occurring, however, the staff recognized that the child was viable and was going to be born alive. But... there was little hope that she would be able to survive very long. She was taken to an emergency nursery and transferred that day to another hospital, which had an intensive care unit for premature infants. Still, little hope was offered.

Carol, having known that child intimately for six months, had different emotions than I had. In order to cope, I became practical and started to think of what could/should be done when our baby died. Should there be a service? What could be said? And what was given to me were the words of the Psalmist: "Teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom"

(Psalm 90:12). Here was a child who might live only for days, perhaps only one day. We had hoped and planned for our child to have years, many years, of fruitful life. Now I needed to ask for wisdom for one who might only live for days.

I found then, and still find now almost fifty years later, how difficult it is to comprehend that type of thinking. As mortal as we humans are, we still think, and plan, in large blocks of time, months, years, decades, even centuries. Who thinks just of days? Can we do that even now?

It's the beginning of the summer season. We have lots of time to enjoy weeks of good weather, of vacations, travel, and recreation before the fall season and all the school and multiple holiday preparations that that will bring. And even after that time has passed, we still can think of plans for a new year, new years, and all the choices that we will be able to make then.

That even goes for those of us in the Leas, who have already been through all the decisions about retirement and later-year care. Don't we still think in terms of blocks of time, not just days? We have children, grandchildren, even great-grandchildren, to think about and plan for. There are projects, issues, goals, campaigns in which we are involved that will occupy us for quite some time to come. For even those of us on these campuses who are much more limited, there are still many choices and activities and programs that face us ahead. How full are our calendars with long-term plans for our lives?

Yet the "wisdom" of the Scriptures teaches us to count one day at a time. Each day is a gift. Each sunrise

and sunset can be appreciated. Each new flower or bud is a sign of life. Each individual person we see, if only in passing, is an opportunity to grow beyond ourselves and be filled. We can still plan and look ahead, even far ahead, but true wisdom comes when we can number our days, one by one.

Even for those of us who think we truly might only have days left in our lives, there can be wisdom. I once visited a woman in assisted living who was bedfast and almost blind. Her hearing was good, however, and her mind was sharp, but she was not a happy person and wondered why I had come to see her. “We can talk,” I encouraged, “and then we can pray.” “Oh, I pray regularly,” she retorted. “Every morning when I wake up, I say, ‘Oh God, why am I still here?!’” I was a little taken aback but then replied, “Well, that’s another day you have to talk with God.” Even those days we can count.

I want to tell you that our daughter survived her birth and still lives fully almost fifty years later. And she works in the city of Philadelphia with preschool children that they may live and thrive every day of their lives.

Our long-term hopes and dreams for her have truly been blessed abundantly.

Yet because of how her life began, we also learned to look at our lives differently, by counting each day we are given.

Ed Hann

FOR LARISSA

She bellyflopped, she bobbed, she teetered
Sea-unworthy legs, over ample feet
Neck and wobbly head seeming unscrewed
Was this the ugly duckling of the brood?

The brood, in time, put on its mallard trim
Marched in chevron file, mocked the clown
Who bigger grew and floundered like a moose
Was this ungainly duck a silly goose?

In time, her neck arched queenlike from
A creamy bosom above a waist that some
How trailed a hammered silver wake.
Then the ducks who had jibed, the fussy drake
Who'd sorely ridiculed the dingy clown,
Came ranked, to adulate the lovely swan.

Charles Perrone



TALES OF THE PASTA POT

Recently, I was searching for a container I'd misplaced and unearthed a family heirloom. No, it wasn't a valuable antique, but when I saw Mom's battered pasta pot sitting in the back corner of the kitchen hutch, wonderful memories flooded my mind. On Thursdays, Mom would make any pasta from farfalle and linguine to ziti. Sundays and holidays we always had homemade pasta.



Mom's Sunday or holiday pasta was a two-day process beginning with a pile of flour on the board she also used for pizza dough. I'm not sure of the exact proportions and process because my culinary skills have always been limited. She added ingredients to the flour, kneaded it, and formed what I called the "large dough ball." This she placed under a bowl to rise overnight. She always gave specific instruction to us kids: "Non toccare la ciotola." We knew enough Italian not to touch the bowl. The next morning after she attended 6:00 am Mass and while the rest of the family was still in bed, she kneaded, rolled, stretched, and cut that large dough ball into very long and thin pasta. Before the noon meal, she filled the trusty pasta pot with water, brought it to a boil, and put the pasta in. It was always perfectly cooked, and we smothered it with our homemade tomato sauce.

The entire family devoured it happily and enjoyed the fruits of Mom's labor.

Even though I never learned to make pasta, I did help with the sauce. Mom would purchase four baskets of ripe tomatoes, clean them, and blanch them to loosen the skin. Then we kids were expected to help, turning the handle of the meat grinder into which Mom loaded them. This separated the skin from the pulp. While I cranked, Mom pressed the tomatoes down into the machine. She always instructed me, "Girare la maniglia senza scosse." (Turn the handle smoothly.) Italian was the language of cooking in our home. My older brother would deliberately jerk the handle, spilling the pulp onto the floor. He resented being indoors in a hot kitchen. I did what Mom told me, feeling that I was helping her and was a partner in making the sauce.

I wasn't always the obedient helper, however. Once there was an incident with the dough ball. I disregarded Mom's orders about not touching it. I was curious about what was happening under that bowl. When nobody was in sight, I cautiously slid a table knife under the bowl and into the dough ball. Although nothing happened, I was scared that I might have damaged the pasta and that Mom would find out. I woke up worrying about it in the middle of the night, and at Mass the following day, I said a silent prayer for its safety and well-being. When I returned from church, Mom was busy preparing the dough in the usual manner. She said nothing to me as she put it into the pasta pot. I thought I was safe; she hadn't detected my crime.

At the table, I was so pleased with myself that I spoke out saying, "Mom, I think this pasta tastes better than ever before." She put down her fork, looked at me sternly, and asked (in the customary Italian): "Because you touched it with a knife?" I hung my head, ate the rest of my meal in silence, and vowed to never touch that bowl again. But I couldn't help wondering, "How does she always know?"

And she always did. Often when she was boiling the pasta, Mom would remove a few strands, place them in a dish, and ask me to taste them. I happily agreed to do so. After tasting a small piece, my answer was always, "Yes. It's done." Sometimes Mom agreed; other times she would cook it a little longer. I never questioned it then, and I considered myself the family's official pasta taster. This title, which I bestowed upon myself, filled me with self-importance, and I would remind my older sister of it every time she beat me at something. She was

properly impressed. Time passed, and on one Thursday evening, I noticed something that changed things forever. When Mom asked me to test the pasta, I saw that while I did so, she also tasted some herself! I was crushed. I had never been the family pasta tester. I confessed to my sister, making her happy at my loss of status. However, I continued to test the pasta whenever Mom asked me to, keeping our ritual alive.

Mom would continue to make pasta for years, and we would enjoy all of our favorites, but one day she discovered Pennsylvania Dutch Noodles in the grocery store where she shopped. She declared that they were so close in size and taste to hers that it was no longer worth her time and effort to continue making pasta.

As I ponder the future of my beloved pasta pot, I realize it is useless as a cooking utensil. It has no lid, its wooden handle is burned and warped, and the metal has thinned to the point of being unsafe. However, I'm not able to discard it and the memories of all those pasta meals prepared in it over the years. It is still welcome in my kitchen hutch, and I will remember Mom and smile whenever I catch sight of it.

Geno Mori

LATTE – A CAT TALE

Early in 2021, after a year in Lumberton, I noticed in my basement a cat carrier, a litter box, a cat bed, food bowls and toys. Clearly I'd planned on adopting a cat after ten years without one. Since most shelters were closed, I began my search online. After some months I found an attractive female tabby at C.A.T.S. in Ocean City. The initials stand for Citizens Altering the Strays. I completed adoption papers, passed, and set off to meet a classic tabby with the required M on her forehead and green eyes.

The shelter was located in a resale shop called Mew to You. Imagine you could go to buy some Stangl pottery and come home with a kitten or go for a cat and purchase a Lenox vase. The idea for the combined facility came from the success of placing kittens for adoption in the window of an antique shop. Mew to You had a room with cats in cages or roaming free. However, the cat I'd come to meet was one of two caged cats in a back room. I was told the two patrolled the store at night and slept during the day. I figured if they hadn't broken anything in the store my extensive collection of collectibles would be safe. The staff were surprised that I wanted to take Ernestine home with me that day. They seemed reluctant to let her go but I'd brought a carrier. I made a donation and received her favorite blanket, food and toys.

After studying her swirling beige pattern on a black ground, I renamed her Latte. Then I wondered why it appeared she had mittens on her front feet. I discovered she is polydactyl and has extra digits. Most cats have 5

toes on their front paws and 4 on their rear ones. Latte has 6 on one foot and 7 on the other. Polydactyl cats were loved by Ernest Hemingway, who had many at his home in Key West.

The next day Latte didn't appear, so at 2 pm I went searching and spied her under my bed. She stayed up for two hours then went back to sleep. Remember, she worked the night shift. At 6:30 pm while I was watching the PBS News, there was a tap on my arm, and there she was ready to start her day. I felt I'd been accepted as a housemate. But, as all cat owners know, we are really staff. Breakfast was called for, so kibble was served. Over time it became apparent that she is a dried food addict and will not eat meat or fish. When offered any animal product, she sniffs it from a distance and pronounces it inedible. On the other hand, leaves, dried impatiens flowers and crabgrass are relished. Now, whenever I come into the house from the yard, she stares intently at my hands to see if I'm carrying greens. I tried to explain to her that cats are carnivores with sharp pointed teeth not really good for biting off bits of grass, all to no avail.



Latte's dry diet leads to lots of drinking, not from a bowl but from the faucet in the bathroom sink. First she puts her paw under the water and follows the stream down to the drain, then licks it. Is this testing the temperature or chlorine levels? Next she laps the water before it reaches the sink. Like all good pet owners, I purchased a large ceramic bowl with a fountain to simulate the faucet. Does she use it? Only if the water isn't running.

Where do cats sleep? Latte has tried a Styrofoam meat tray, a large clay bowl, a basket and anywhere in the sun. But her favorite spot is on me, not on my lap but on my chest so we are face-to-face both cross-eyed. She stretches one paw up on my shoulder. This nap may be interrupted by telephone calls or sneezing, both of which she dislikes. Something that displeases her is followed by rapid tail switching. I called C.A.T.S. about how often this occurs, and they assured me that she isn't mad, only annoyed.

One thing she likes is exploring the basement and garage for camel crickets and mice. The first time she brought up a mouse she walked past me and I said, "Wait a minute, do you have something in your mouth?" I looked closer and saw a tiny tail. After being chased around the living room it escaped under the door into the sunroom. The next morning I found it cowering inside a bird house I'd left on the floor. I took the box for a walk and released a tiny very frightened mouse into the wild. Latte has caught both gray house mice and brown white-footed mice. She only ate one. Another time she had something in her mouth that she dropped on my

bed and batted around a few times. That turned out to be a small Yukon gold potato.

Like me, Latte is an avid birdwatcher. We start our day watching birds that visit my five feeders. I call it wildlife TV and have my binoculars at the ready. Latte loves the red-breasted nuthatch that climbs on a peanut feeder hung from the gutter right outside. Sometimes she is overcome, stands on tippy toes and stretches to reach as close to the feeder as possible. She also loves the squirrel antics on my deck and can hear them well before I know they are close by. Once when two chickadees were fighting and tumbled down right in front of her, she ducked.

In closing I would highly recommend sharing your home with a pussy kitty from C.A.T.S. What joy she has brought to me.

Holly Hoffman

HE SEES

Clark had known since his thirties that he had central cataracts slowly growing in both eyes. His optician said, “Eventually you’ll have to have them removed,” and to Clark’s obvious question the unsatisfactory answer, “You’ll know when.” He felt some anxiety at first, but “eventually” is a long time and except for occasional questions at his annual eye exams, Clark pretty much forgot about it.

“Eventually” came thirty years later. He was driving on the turnpike and suddenly realized that he couldn’t see through one eye. The doctor had been right; Clark knew.

He had little trepidation on entering the surgery. Failures in this operation were very rare and maintaining the status quo was silly; the eye was useless. The preparation took longer than the surgery – drops of this, drops of that – then the surgeon stepped up. There were a few moments when the cataract was removed when light returned, but not vision. Then the doctor slipped in his new lens and his sight was astonishingly clear. The deterioration had been so gradual that he hadn’t noticed. Clark emerged from the office into a perfect morning and the sky was BLUE, a color he unknowingly hadn’t seen in years. It was glorious! Unlike the sequel to any operation he’d ever had, he drove himself home, jealously looking here, looking there, drawing in his world’s colors, textures, and brilliance, even on a busy, urban road. He couldn’t wait to get the other, dull eye repaired.

A month later, Clark left the surgery, his second cataract gone. His vision was painfully brilliant: incredible! He walked to where his car was parked: no car. “Oh shit,” he thought and pulled out his cell to call the police. He couldn’t see his phone; that is, he could feel it, solid in his hand, but he couldn’t see it. The phone was perfectly transparent. “Oh, my God.” Clark reached toward where the car should be and touched a warm metallic surface. Then he swiveled around and saw no cars, no buildings. The macadam was clear, so were the power poles down the street, though no drooping wires were there. The sky was beautiful with puffy cotton clouds. The hills in the distance were blue on the horizon, but most things in his vicinity were, to him, just gone. Out on the road, he could hear invisible cars whoosh by, but what he saw were people, apparently seated in air, three feet above the ground. He felt a wash of hysteria rising, but the phone was still in his hand, caught in an iron grip. He could feel the button and the screen and from memory he activated the voice dialing feature and called the ophthalmologist whom he had left moments before. It seemed like hours. “Your call is very important to us...” He wanted to scream.

Eventually – after a very long time on hold – he got through. The doctor and the receptionist came running out to help him. Clark’s attention immediately fixed on the woman. She was pretty; he’d admired her on his way into the office. Now all she was wearing were bra and underpants. More astonishing was that her bare feet flew toward him an inch above the tar. He started to giggle. The doctor came to his side and grasped an arm, the receptionist grabbed the other. He looked at her feet and

could see a sort of wispy image of shoes. He didn't want to look at her near nakedness but couldn't help himself, and he saw that she bore equally diaphanous clothing over her underwear. "Don't worry, we know what's wrong," the doctor said. "Let us help you inside and we'll have you right in a few minutes."

They guided him back into the building, holding him as he stumbled over the metal thresholds, going through wooden doors of which his escorts grasped invisible handles. The doctor quickly administered a short-acting sedative and personally repeated the procedure Clark had just had, replacing the new lens with another. As Clark's vision cleared, he looked through a window at the hundred cars in the parking lot. The doctor gave him back his Apple-green phone and took him out to the waiting room where the receptionist, a look of concern on her face, was chastely clad in a pretty rayon blouse and skirt. She wore bright pink, plastic shoes. "I owe you an explanation," the doctor said. "No shit!" Clark thought.

"Perhaps you've heard of Superman in the comics or the movies," the doctor continued.

Clark nodded, "Of course I have."

"Well, Superman was born in 1938, and, for the most part, he's human. After all he's been married and everything." The doctor appeared a little embarrassed. "Anyway, he's gotten on and he came to me with cataracts, just like many older people. We replaced his lenses, though they were the most difficult surgeries I've performed. Had to convince him to bring in kryptonite after

I'd broken three scalpel blades on his eye. Since he has x-ray vision, the replacement lens had to be, ah, special."

"What's this got to do with me?" Clark asked.

"We accidentally gave you one of the spare lenses we had made for him. You see, Superman can turn his x-ray vision on and off. A regular human can't, nor can we control it. The effect for us is that we can only see organic things. The less close to nature they are, the less we can see. For example, my clothes are mostly cotton. I'll bet you could see them just fine. Rhoda's synthetic blouse, hardly at all." Clark looked at the listening receptionist; her face was flaming, and she didn't look at him. "But everything's fine now. I'm sorry that we put you through that experience. It must have been very frightening."

"It's okay," Clark said. "I'll never forget it, the most memorable thing that's ever happened to me." They shook hands and Clark turned to leave. "By the way," he said, "who is he, anyway?"

The doctor grimaced, "I probably owe you that, but I can't: HIPAA, you know."

Clark walked off, shaking his head, glad to see his old beat-up car in the lot. The world looked beautiful.

Bob Edelson

FIRESIDE BOOK OF FOLKSONGS

I was five when *Fireside Book of Folksongs* first came into our house. My mother had the soul of a singer, but her singing was all done in lullabies or when elbow deep in soap suds by the kitchen sink. Mom and Dad had gone through the Great Depression and bought nothing for themselves, but they enjoyed vicariously the pleasure their gifts gave to others. *Fireside* was a gift to my brother Jim and was left propped against our old piano when he left home. There would be another five years before I learned to read music.

In fifth grade the town offered us free violin lessons on borrowed instruments. We were lined up in a row of eight and plunked and scratched our way into having some idea of notes and timing. Probably pitch was another story. And then there was that old, out-of-tune piano. Pinklepurrr, our white-bibbed black cat, and I were the only piano players in the house. Pinklepurrr played glorious, wonderful things as she trod back and forth across the keys. I was much more tentative. My mother knew middle C and with my slight violin skills I figured it out from there. *Fireside* was the book.

I knew so many songs from our concerts over the never-ending dishes, songs such as “Shenandoah,” “Alouette,” “The Erie Canal” and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” And of course, there were always Christmas carols. It was simply a matter of taking that middle C on the piano and figuring them out. After school all I wanted to do was take my pointer finger and go plunk, plunk, plunk on the piano. Every day I discovered more

and more of the treasures found in *Fireside Book of Folksongs*.

Fast forward to a plucky seventeen, when I headed off to my annual camp counselling job along Neshaminy Creek. *Fireside* came with me to Camp Onas and was propped against the piano for general musical joy. One year there was a precocious camper named Mike M., a real piano player. He danced over the keys giving us many a singalong. *Fireside* was his joy. Rather amazingly, at the end of the summer, when the campers disappeared to their homes, *Fireside* disappeared with them. It was the first time I had ever been robbed.

My mother never skipped a beat. Soon there was a new *Fireside Book of Folk Songs* on our old piano at home. I never wrote my name in it, but it was mine. It has been my treasure from forever. By adulthood I had learned and loved every song in the book. The soul of a country is in its music and *Fireside* has fed into my love of our great diverse world.

Fast forward again, to a recent weekend when Dick and I took our fat, green-covered book on the road, singing and fiddling our way through many of its songs. We were on the stage before the large empty theater and were being televised on Medford Leas closed circuit TV – our moment in the sun. What fun! When the forty-five minutes or so was over we picked up my violin and headed home.

It was Thursday and horror of horrors: *Fireside* had been left behind! As soon as I realized, I drove back to the main building and hurried to the theater. The auditorium was dark and empty, the curtains closed, and the

music stands put away. The lectern, which had been moved to the side, was back in its central position. There was no *Fireside*. There was nothing but cold, cold order.

Back home on the computer Danielle had written a lovely letter thanking us. I wrote back asking about my book, but there was no reply. I now knew the worst. I've spent since Thursday racking my brain as to what could have happened. This essay is the memorial service for *Fireside Book of Folksongs*. Emotion aside, my daughter found they can still be purchased used and in good condition. One hundred dollars does not seem too much.

Edith Roberts

Postscript: Today was Friends Meeting in the theater, and four hours later there was choir. On my chair when



we arrived back in the theater was my precious book. Our dear Danielle had found her. *Fireside* had never disappeared. Mike M.'s name from those long-ago camp counselling days may be remembered in infamy, but so much more happily remembered will be the dear people who surround this place where we live with love.

WHAT I NEVER KNEW ABOUT TROPICAL FISH

After a 60-gallon freshwater aquarium was set up in my apartment, I looked forward to the soothing effect of watching fish. It was, instead, the beginning of my education in fish behavior. The following are some of the surprising things I learned.

- 1) You need “starter fish.” After the plants are established in your tank and the water has the right chemical balance, you have to add the “canary-in-the-coal-mine” kind of fish. Mine were five glowlight tetras (*Hemigrammus erythrozonus*), placid and peaceful, happy in the lower part of the tank.
- 2) There are fish that constitute a clean-up crew. In my tank they are the most fun of all. The star is the female dwarf albino bristlenose pleco (*Ancistrus cirrhosus*): pretty ugly, with a four-inch pinky-cream body and little red eyes in a large head. She has a round sucking catfish-like mouth. “Abby” and the Siamese algae eaters really do vacuum up the algae on the glass, the driftwood, and the leaves.
- 3) Some of the crew are only interested in particles of food in the sand. Needless to say, they spend most of their time at the bottom of the tank. The cutest are the chunky two-inch corys, in particular those with panda coloring (*Corydoras panda*). They are incredibly industrious, sifting through the sand with their noses while their tails flutter like petticoats behind them. The weirdest of the cleaners are the kuhlii loaches (*Pangio kuhlii*). They resemble brown striped

earthworms, prefer to burrow in the sand, and wiggle out at any sign of food.

- 4) Some fish have to rest a lot. The exhausted corys often look as if they are asleep on the sand. The algae eaters even lie on the driftwood or the leaves. Abby relaxes upside down in the driftwood.



- 5) The fish working the sand “walk” on their fins.
- 6) My nerite snails (*Vittina natalensis*) and amano shrimps (*Caridina multidentata*) are dependable cleaners too. The shrimp are difficult to find as they are almost transparent. The snails belie the meaning of the phrase “snail’s pace.” If you see one, look away, then look back, and it’s traveled across the tank.
- 7) Bony fish usually have swim bladders to keep them afloat. The algae eaters don’t, so they sink when they stop swimming.
- 8) Most of my fish like to be with others like themselves in a school (or shoal). Apparently they get stressed if they are alone. An exception: Abby, who mostly ignores her neighbors, but finds them annoying when she galumphs out to clamp down on a nutritional tablet on the sand near them.

- 9) Some fish are all right in pairs. The two algae eaters do a sort of vertical, twisting dance together in the water. Then there are the male and female sunset high fin variegatus (*Xiphophorus variatus*), cousins of the popular platys (*Xiphophorus maculatus*). They like to swim together up and down the glass. Sometimes, when she has had enough of him, she hides in the plants.
- 10) The koi guppies (*Poecilia reticulata*) prefer to be at the surface of the water, although the large female patrols the tank, usually accompanied by a small flamboyant male, beautiful orange tail quivering. She is so heavy that she actually has to rest on the sand at times.
- 11) Most of my fish discreetly lay eggs. I did know that guppies were live-bearers, but I wasn't prepared for the fertility of the sunsets, live-bearers too. An amazing number of their babies (fry) have survived. New tiny ones keep appearing, in spite of being a good meal for the other omnivores.
- 12) How many fish do I have? Counting fish is a real challenge. For example, there should be ten blue-and-red cardinal tetras, but they are small, they all look alike, and they keep moving!
- 13) Many of my fish are mainly nocturnal. It's difficult to study their behavior when the tank is dark. However, their light is on from nine to five and I do my best.

I've had the aquarium for nine months now and I'm grateful to have had an entry into this watery universe. It's a self-contained world, full of fascinating creatures with fascinating habits and I keep observing and learning.

Betsy Pennink

SEA-FEVERED: SIXTH GRADE

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking,

*I must recite this poem again, in the bale of the teacher's eye,
And all I ask is the bell's bong and the chance to say goodbye.
For my mind's blank, and I smell rank, and my poor knee's shaking,
And the grey mist on my gray face shows my gray nerve's braking.*

I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the seagulls crying.

*I must recite this poem again, though the call of the pain in my side
Is a wild call and a clear call that my bowels must not be denied;
And all I ask with my pleading eyes is the end of versifying,
As a fluffed word and a blown rhyme are beyond terrifying.*

I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the wind's like a whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

*I must recite this poem again, to leave the room with my life,
For my way and teacher's way with differences are rife,
And all I ask is a good grade and forgiveness from my mates,
As the clock ticks and the bell clicks, and I flee through the
schoolyard gates.*

John Masfield
annotated by Bob Edelson



WE WERE THOSE SUCKERS?

Childcare centers were popular purchases at that time. We had the credentials, but we were foolish chumps to buy one. It started with my husband's being between jobs in a new city. Our inquiry put us quickly in the hands of two sales brokers who knew gullible city people when they saw them. The brokers represented a desperate couple who owned a rural childcare center and couldn't wait to unload their burden. We should have realized from the numbers that it would be very hard to run a quality preschool, which was our naïve intent. Even the local banker knew better and told us so (after we became the owners).

Fortunately, I had paying work in the nearby city, so I could keep the business going while I also did the bookkeeping and dipped periodically into savings. My husband ran the center that we called The Rainbow School. Neither he nor I had any private business experience, being education and counseling professionals. To keep customers, we added an expensive certified kindergarten teacher and an in-ground swimming pool.

We also timed our purchase unfortunately. We bought when childcare centers in several parts of the country were being taken to court for pedophilia. Even though the owners were innocent, children (or their parents or social workers) concocted exciting fantasies of satanic rituals going on in the centers. The media especially featured male owners. So my nervous husband made sure that he was never alone with a child; no doors were ever closed, and he never, never escorted a child to the bathrooms.

Due to our inexperience, we didn't expect the trivial complaints made about our center to the board of childcare protective services in the county. Complaints were usually made by a fired employee or an overly anxious parent. For example, an anonymous phone call to them described a long, wide knotted rope that hung on the wall of one of the classrooms. Inspectors quickly came, and the teacher of that class had to explain that the rope was to keep the children together when they went outside. There were knots every two feet for each child to hold.

Three years in, an employee slipped on our swimming pool deck and narrowly avoided a very serious injury. After that scare, we decided to sell The Rainbow School. We city people were really *rubes* who were in over our heads and at high risk legally and financially. It wasn't the good fit we had imagined. Our meetings at home were very tense.

The better news is that our local advertising brought out a genial funeral director from a neighboring town who wanted to buy an additional human service business that was cheerier. The sale went through, and we were able to settle our debts. Our smart banker was relieved, the parents of our charges seemed happy enough, and we breathed many sighs of relief as we no longer went from crisis to crisis. We wished the new owner much success and happiness, just as others had wished us. And maybe he had them.

Joyce Linda Sichel

LOOKING BACK ON MY NOTES FROM THE FIRST YEAR

Journal entry, February 2013: *“This promotional postcard from Medford Leas offers studio apartments. I’ve just called Tonya to go take a look with me, even though it is out in the boonies.”*

On my first evening at Medford Leas ten years ago, I just couldn’t get my mind off chocolate chip cookies. It had been a long, long moving day. Why did I possess so much stuff? In one of Medford Leas’ most tender traditions, Dining Services had brought me my first dinner in my new home. When it arrived, I realized that I was so frazzled that I had neglected to order any dessert. Sure enough, about 7 pm that craving for chocolate chip cookies was still present. What to do? Hesitantly, I dialed 0 for the receptionist and asked if anyone from Dining was still around. Yup. “Thanks so much for delivering dinner. That was so thoughtful,” I said, “but I wonder if it would be OK if I walked over and got a cookie for dessert?” There was laughter at the other end of the line. “We’ll never tell! Just come over. We’ll put a package of chocolate chip cookies at the Reception Desk for you.”

Journal entry, March: “I’ve been more physically active since moving here than – when? Also eating much better. And more than I have in years. I am actually hungry again!”

After a week or two, strolling through the courts one early morning, I noticed something strange. Outside someone’s door there was a pair of great big men’s shoes. Maybe they had gotten wet in the rain? Maybe

someone never wore shoes inside the house? Wait, wait, the person who lived in this apartment was a woman – a widow. About two minutes later the thought crossed my mind that this woman had male overnight company. I was shocked. Truly. With few older people in my life, I had never thought about sexual intimacy in the geriatric population. A few minutes later, I felt great happiness for that pair of elders, and then for the potential for intimacy throughout our lives. Never expected to be mulling this over!

Journal entry, April: “Seven mourning doves close to the top of the oak tree, napping motionlessly in the afternoon. Eventually one starts grooming. A second dove follows. Then the third. Like a game of marbles, they are all triggered by the first marble’s movement. All seven doves are now grooming.”

Furniture got placed where I liked it. Extra stuff went to the Thrift Shop. I learned how and when to obtain food. I started to explore around the campus. One morning, I spontaneously rang the doorbell of the Rosens. Minnie sleepily answered. “Would you like to take a walk and show me where the creek is?” I asked innocently. Minnie told me two important facts: One, the Rosens are not early morning people. Two, do ask them to show me around New York City instead of going in any woods anywhere at any time. Later I learned that quite a number of dyed-in-the-wool New Yorkers had come to Medford Leas in its early years.

Journal entry, May: “I am not feeling at all like I deserve so much in my life.”

Shortly, there was a note card in my Atrium mailbox. It was from a man (who is no longer with us) inviting me to have dinner with him the next Friday evening. I had no idea what was involved, but assumed that the dining room was a formal occasion. So I dug out the one linen dress I had saved from working days, found a pair of stockings, and considered painting my nails. I was so excited to eat in the dining room. The day of the dinner, he went to a florist and got a wrist corsage for me to wear. Unfortunately, after the dinner I realized his intentions were to find a girlfriend and so I had to write him a Dear John note. I had only wanted to be a Grownup, but he apparently wanted to be a Groom.

Oh, that dress. It had been my favorite for work days when I had to go to a conference or an important meeting. It was tan on the top and black on the bottom and needed ironing. After a few months at the Leas, it was apparent that dressy linen dresses were superfluous. I took it to the Thrift Shop. Bye-bye, favorite dress. About two weeks later, I went back to the Thrift Shop to get some note pads. There on display right inside the door was my donation. At the counter, I longingly asked the women, "Might I take my linen dress back, please?" "Sorry," they said, "You will have to pay eight dollars like any other customer." I slunk home without it. Probably someone on staff wears it to church. And irons it.

Journal entry, May: "Time to let go of a lot of clothes, habits, ways. Wonder what's left when we let go of way more than we ever guessed – our homes, our health, our friends – I guess our feelings are what we always have. Looking

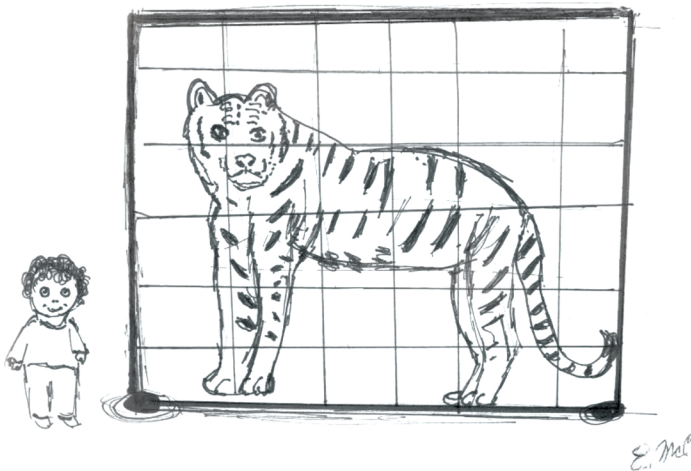
around at frailty during Meeting for Worship, that seems to be true. I can grow a spiritual life here.”

It was a full ten years that I have lived here at the end of February. I have never in my life lived anywhere this long. My parents were peripatetic and so was I. Sometimes I do need to get in my car and run away for a day or so. But I live here, I mean really live here. This is truly the first time in my life that I've thought about being in one place for so long, actually really living somewhere. To feel invested is a brand-new feeling. To live somewhere long enough to tell stories from the first year! Oh, and wait, there are more...

Judy Kruger

ZOOLOGICAL THOUGHTS

I went to the zoo with the granddaughter yesterday. It wasn't a big zoo like the one in Philadelphia; this one is billed as New Jersey's first zoo, just a small one that operates with donations. It was a hot day, but her exuberance wasn't dimmed in the least. She ran, skipped, and cavorted down the paths, looking at porcupines, wild pigs, tortoises, and most especially the tiger in residence. Tigers happen to be one of those animals that I could stare at for hours, even if they are just lazily snoring in the shade. Their size, their majesty, and those golden eyes have always fascinated me.



As I watched my curly-topped toddler run from one end of the path to the other, I began to think of the dichotomy of zoos. When I was a child, a visit to the Philadelphia Zoo was thrilling and the animals so exotic that I remembered it for weeks afterward. Even after multiple school trips there, I was always enamored of the

place. As a young adult, I took pride in becoming a member of the zoo, donating yearly. But also, as a young adult, I began to hear alternate views of zoos. Some were just warehouses for large animals. Those steel bars were a symbol of their utter powerlessness. They were housed in cages with metal floors which were more easily hosed down. They weren't fed things that were especially in their diet but whatever the zookeepers happened to get. I don't know if the Philadelphia Zoo did that; I recall they were one of the first to talk about animal husbandry and preserving species before extinction. But I did read of other zoos that didn't seem to be quite as "enlightened" with the whole "taking care of the animals" thing, but more enamored with the "spectacle" thing. One of the last times I visited the Philadelphia Zoo, I remember thinking that the enclosures, although more open than previously, were still enclosures. Now I don't like the idea of a lion or tiger roaming about the neighborhood for sure. In fact, I even read a book about the idea of returning apex predators to the world again. But somehow the cages or areas set aside made me uneasy and I left the place less than enthusiastic.

I've watched hundreds of nature documentaries. I understand the need for conservation. In the zoo I visited with my granddaughter, one of the leopards had a tail which had been lopped off. One of the majestic sand cranes, standing taller than the three-year-old, had only one eye – it looked to have been removed, and the lid was mangled. I have no idea if these things were done to the animals when they got to the zoo or they were the reason the zoo had them in the first place. It occurred to me that such a place, in which animals had been abused

or diseased and unable to be returned to the wild, was a good thing, if indeed that is what happened. In our own backyard, the Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge is just such a place.

And what would happen, I wondered, if there were no zoos? The families that come to see the animals and gape and stare at the rare and beautiful, where else could they see an actual antelope? A giraffe? An ostrich? A polar bear? Granted, the few children who poke at the animals or throw stones or sticks at them (yes, I have seen this happen), need to be pulled by the ear and given a stern lecture – something which never seems to be done by the parents of these terrors. But on the whole, the zoo provides a window into a world that most people will never see. EVER. And if the conservation efforts of the zoos of the world don't continue, no one WILL ever see these things again either. A world without polar bears, or white rhinos (not extinct...yet), or a world without tigers is not something I want to contemplate.

I remember a movie called *Oh, God!* with John Denver. George Burns played the Almighty. And as he was admonishing Denver that the world can be saved, if we chose to save it Burns (in his guise as God) said, “You think it’s easy to make a fish? And once it’s gone, pshhh, that’s it.” I remember hearing that and thinking, he has a point. What happens when these animals are no longer here? So I guess I will continue to visit the zoo. Maybe even rejoin the Philadelphia Zoo. Because I just can’t stand the idea of never seeing another tiger. And I want the granddaughter to see one, too.

Cindy Page

CURIOUS AND CURIUSER

It's My Story and I'm Sticking to It

On a damp, gray Saturday morning in mid-May, I arrived in Moorestown for my customary yoga class. Turning right on Chester Avenue, I pulled into a parking spot right in front of the studio. I was ready for an hour in which to stretch, breathe, and ignore the extensive to-do list looming over my afternoon. At least for an hour, I could block all that out.

Living alone made me worry about losing my car keys. I checked their whereabouts before getting into the car, made sure I took them out of the ignition and put them in purse or safe pocket, and carried a separate valet key, just in case. There was no one at home to come to my rescue. That day I went through the checklist: money for the meter, glasses off in the car, purse in hand, and keys out of the ignition and looped over my left forefinger. I popped the trunk and got out.

The pocketbook went into the trunk when I removed the yoga mat and bag of props. Before closing the trunk, I made sure that I had my keys. Then I locked the car automatically with the key and fed the meter. Moorestown charges \$70 for a parking ticket. On that fateful day, I was twelve paces from the studio door, concrete sidewalk to brick steps to lobby. Keys and bags in hand, I walked in.

Melissa, the teacher, was in the studio, but I was the first student to arrive. Usually, I put my keys in one shoe and leave both in the lobby. That day I was wearing a jacket, however, and decided to put the keys in a

pocket so that I would remember to take the jacket when I left. I hung it up and went into the studio.

There would be only two more students. A young man poked his head around the door and announced that he was a drop in. Melissa stepped out into the lobby to help him register online and then returned. Meanwhile, Michelle, a regular, arrived, exclaiming, “Where is everybody?” Melissa noted that this was the entire class, and Paul, now registered, came in and introduced himself.

After a slow-paced class, I was relaxed and ready for all my tasks. All would be well. I took my time rolling up my mat. Meanwhile Paul and Michelle had exited. After going to the restroom, I put on my shoes, and reached for my jacket.

No keys in the pockets! None lying on the floor. I checked the restroom; maybe I’d inadvertently taken them out of my jacket before I went in? Not there, either. I dumped out both bags to no avail. The keys were not where they should have been, or where they shouldn’t, for that matter.

I looked outside and was relieved to see my car still there. Alerting Melissa to my plight, I then retraced my steps, looked into the car to see if the keys were in the ignition, on the passenger seat, or on the floor. They were not. Nor were they under the car, by the meter, or on the sidewalk or steps.

I returned to the lobby. Melissa was in a hurry to pick up her daughter but first called Triple A for me. They found my account and dispatched help. Then

Melissa regretfully departed, insisting that I call her as soon as I could get into my trunk and get my phone. By now I was convinced that I must have put the keys in the trunk with my purse. Where else could they be? That whole memory of the jacket pocket couldn't be right.

Mr. Triple A, a wiry fellow with imaginative tattoos, arrived in fifteen minutes, opened the car within five, and popped the trunk. I looked in, hoping to feel stupid for having locked the keys inside, but I would not get off that easily. No keys, in the trunk or purse.

Retrieving my purse with valet key and phone, I signed off on the rescue, gave the lobby and restroom another look, and called Melissa to say that I was heading home. Though the keys to my house, the Community Building, and my mailbox had gone with the car key, none had identifying marks. No locks to change and I had duplicates. I was coping but baffled. Where could those keys have gone? Did someone steal them? Why? I got no satisfaction from knowing that I'd remembered the sequence of events correctly. Or had I?

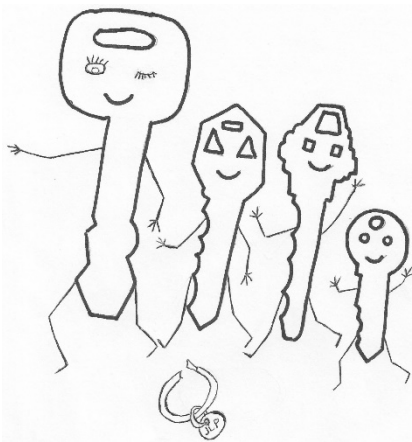
The studio's owner searched everywhere, as did other teachers. No one with an office in the building had been in on Saturday morning. The cleaning people did not turn them up.

Several friends and acquaintances offered theories to explain the disappearance. One: the smart key was stolen for its battery. Because of snarled supply chains, these were in short supply. But my keys were in my jacket pocket. No one saw me put them there. How would a thief have found them? Two: I had dropped the keys outside, and a good citizen returned them to the

police department. If that had happened, why hadn't I heard four keys on a metal ring hit the sidewalk or steps? What accounted for my belief that I had put them in my jacket pocket? And my friends' reciting the same tired clichés – “Once you get the new key, you'll find the old one,” or “I lost my keys like that and found them in another coat pocket” – did not make them come true or make me feel better. If it happened as I believed it did, neither of these explanations could happen.

The dealer who had sold me the car assured me that he could replace the key easily. Not necessarily so. I knew it would not be cheap, but after more than four weeks and several botched attempts to get a key that would actually start the car, I felt very sorry for myself. Ten months later, I'm no closer to an answer, and I keep wondering what I missed. Did things really happen the way I vividly “remember” them? I relive the incident every time I go to the yoga studio, doomed to wonder what could possibly have happened. I can now joke about it, but I'm also very careful where I put my car key.

Kathy Riley



THE RUSSIAN

If I were to write my memoir, there are stories I would never forget. This is one that will always be with me.

It was in the summer of 1973 that I first met Vitaly Kobyshev. He stepped out of the transport limo, tall and blond with a wide smile. A graduate of Moscow University, he was the political analyst for "Izvestia," the national Soviet Union newspaper. Exiting with him were his wife Emma and their two sons, 15 and 5.

Vitaly had been invited to speak to the annual gathering of Quakers at Silver Bay, NY, on Lake George. He had given this invitation considerable thought before saying yes. "What do I say to a religious group that I know very little about and what interest do they have hearing about communism?" Appointed as one of his hosts, I was with him as he entered the auditorium filled with over 600 Quakers. Even with a deep Slavic voice, his English was perfect. For the next four days, there were seminars and conversations that ended with him calling us "Tovarisch" and us calling him "Friend."

A month or two later I did receive an English translation of his speech from the Russian newspaper. This had been the first time he had ever spent considerable time with Americans. His assumptions about us changed with every encounter that week. He wrote: "George stood out like prosperity itself, smiling, well groomed. When we got to talking I found I was mistaken: he has swallowed a lot in his life and things have not been smooth sailing. His war experiences, his vow to survive. 'Practically,' he said, 'you try to live life

according to your conscience ...’ Then, there was Edward, an elderly psychologist and teacher, who had escaped Germany before the Anschluss. because he couldn’t bear to see what was happening to his students. I asked him if he would go back to Austria. ‘I cannot. If you have seen how the burghers greeted the Nazis ...’ Burl, a trade union official, attended a public meeting where the guest speaker was a renowned Soviet sharpshooter Lyudmila Pavlyuchenko. That evening for him was a discovery of the USSR.” Vitaly concluded: “One of the outcomes of this time together was that we understood each other a little better.”

Vitaly, Emma and their five-year-old returned with us to Long Island. Their teenage son had returned to Russia for school. We had a wonderful week together. They enjoyed the hospitality of our home and children. They loved exploring suburban life in the US on many of the side trips we took. On one quiet evening Vitaly and I discussed the war.

Vitaly said, “I know about your war experiences, I also know how both our countries fought the same enemy – Fascism. But one major difference, our country was invaded. I witnessed what it did to my older brother. He came home from Stalingrad wounded, the whole family was distraught. George, I have with me his x-rays and medical records. Is there anyone you might know who can look at them?” As he pulled a large envelope from his briefcase, “I’ll try,” I said. We were both quiet with only the crickets outside having their own conversation. Vitaly then said, “After graduation from college I had refused to join the Communist Party. But when I went to work at Izvestia I was told I needed to be

a party member to see my career in journalism expand. At that point I acquiesced and joined.”

The next day I showed the material Vitaly had given me to my colleagues at the medical center. They said that the Russian doctors were doing all that could be done. When I told this to Vitaly, he said, “I understand” and thanked me.

When it was time to say goodbye, we all felt that a bond of friendship had been established that went beyond politics and nationality. As the years went by Vitaly was traveling widely but we continued to correspond. He had his own TV news program and an editorship at the newspaper.

Then, one evening, we went to the Metropolitan Opera house in New York to see a performance of “Eugene Onegin.” This was the first time, since the start of the cold war, that the Bolshoi Opera had returned to New York. Sitting there were Vitaly and Emma with the Russian delegation. During intermission we had a chance to talk about our families. Even in this short interlude there was a warm feeling of fellowship that flowed between us. This was to be the last time we would ever see them.

In 2007 I received a letter from Izvestia. It was a shock to see that it was an obituary:

“Not having lived three weeks to his 79th birthday, died Vitaly Kobyshev, talented international journalist, clever, bright, principled man, a veteran of Izvestia. Most recently he suffered a great loss – death of his wife Emma Petrova. When he left New York and returned to Moscow he was named to head a new Department of

International Information of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Vitaly has written several books about the United States, Britain, and Latin America. He has been given an award for the best job in international journalism.”

I wrote back to Izvestia, “Vitaly was a reliable, loyal friend. I deeply grieve with his family.”

I do miss him and often wonder how he would look at the world today, and especially our relationship with Russia. I know that he wanted a continued direct relationship and mutual friendships between America and the Soviet people – he wanted us to be closer to each other, to spend time in each other’s countries and to keep up professional contacts. To connect in one way or another.

For only a short time Vitaly and I fulfilled this dream.

George Rubin

WRITING FOR LEAS LIT

We encourage residents of both campuses to submit original manuscripts for publication in Leas Lit literary journal, which is published in June and December. We distribute flyers inviting submissions, with details about how to do so. There are deadlines of March 31st and September 30th for the two issues. Manuscripts received after a deadline will be considered for the next issue. The Editorial Committee (blind as to authorship) judges which of the submitted pieces will be accepted for publication. Each resident may submit one story and one poem for each issue. Neither book reviews nor academic papers will be accepted. Submissions must be in English and not exceed 1600 words.

All stories and poems in issues of Leas Lit since 2005 are available in the “Magazine/Literary Journal” section of mlra.org (public website) by author and title.

If you have a story or a poem to offer – true or fictional – or feelings to share, let us hear from you. We will be reaching out in the coming months.

