

LEAS LIT

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MY MOTHER'S HAND

The pre-school Sunday School teacher is absent today, so my mother let us choose what to do. We could go into the nursery or come into church with her. The nursery is for babies, and I am a big girl. I am almost five. That's too big to go into the nursery, so I said I'd come into church. Then Annie said she'd come into church, too. She is only just three, so she is not a big girl. My mother put on her serious face and said, "Elizabeth and Anne, if you come into church you have to behave." Then she said it again, "Be. Hāve." Annie has a hard time being hāve because she is little, but I am a big girl, and I can be very hāve.

When we first came into church I could see my father. He is a husher. He shows the grown-ups where to sit and tells them to be quiet. Then he stands at the back so he can see if anyone is talking. I thought that I would sit next to my mother and Annie would sit next to me so I could take care of her. But my mother said we should sit on either side of her. The grown-ups sang some hymns that I didn't know, but I looked in the hymnal and found the word "Jesus" on some pages.

Now Father Campbell is talking, and I am getting boring. I pick up my mother's hand and hold it next to my cheek. This morning, she cut up onions to have for Sunday lunch, and there's a little bit of onion smell still on her hand. It is a nice smell. I bring her hand down on the pew and spread her fingers apart. I put my hand next to hers. Even though I am a big girl, my hand is much smaller than hers. When I am all grown up, I will have

big hands, too. My father's hands are even bigger than my mother's. I turn around and kneel to try to see him behind us, but my mother turns me back again. I sit still and am very hāve.

Annie is squirming. I reach across my mother's lap to calm her, but Annie says, "Don't!" loudly, and my mother puts my hand back on my side of her. She has put on her cross face, but she doesn't say anything. I take her hand again and bend one of the fingers in and out, in and out. When the finger is out straight there are wrinkles in the middle, but when I fold it up the wrinkles disappear. I make this happen with every finger, even her thumb.

If I sit on the edge of the pew, I can reach the kneeler with my foot and poke it. That makes a funny little sound. The kneeler says, "ssssshh", very quietly. Lots of things talk. The washer says, "unchen, unchen, unchen", and the dishwasher says, "ursher, ursher, ursher". The dryer usually says, "rrrrrrrrrr", but sometimes it says, "woppa op wop". The windshield wipers say, "Tomorrow you won't; tomorrow you won't." They are sad because they have to work in the rain. It would be fun to stomp hard on the kneeler to see what it would say, . . . but I am a big girl and I am being hāve.

Father Campbell says something about animals. We have two cats. I named one "Fluffy" because he has soft fur. My father named the other one "Spare Cat". That is not a very nice name. I don't want Spare Cat to have hurt feelings, so I sometimes call her "Stripey", because she has grey stripes. I told Annie that she could

call Spare Cat “Stripey”, too, even though it was my idea. Annie is too little to remember to be gentle every time with cats. The other day she picked up Spare Cat and hugged her too tight, and Spare Cat scratched her arm, and she got to have a Band-Aid. I wonder if the scratch still shows. I reach across my mother again to grab Annie’s arm and have a look, but Annie says, “No!” loudly, and my mother puts on a very cross face and moves my hand back again. She still doesn’t say anything, but she puts her hand on top of my hand. She looks back at Father Campbell with her ordinary face.

I pick up my mother’s hand and hug it to show that I love her even though she had a cross face. Then I spread it out again and look at her fingernails. Our babysitter has long fingernails that are painted different colors, but my mother’s fingernails are short. They have white at the top and a little pale patch at the bottom – just like my nails, only bigger. I wonder what happens if I try to bend a nail backwards...

What happens is that my mother jerks her hand away and looks at me with her surprised face. It’s her not-happy face, too. I guess maybe bending the nail backwards didn’t feel good. Maybe I wasn’t being as hāve as a big girl should be. I put on my sorry face, and whisper, “Sorry.” Then my mother smiles at me and smooths my hair. I smile back and hug her hand again.

Catharine Langmuir

AUNT MAE'S TUNA FISH DISH

The Setting

After WW II women had time to do social activities. Men worked, women worked at home, and the labor-saving appliances reduced the hours needed to keep a “nice home.” When the kids were off to school, Mom had some time to herself.

As a result, a vital part of the community was the Woman’s Club. Most of the women of childbearing age were members. A select subset of this club was the Bridge Club. It consisted of four tables and hosting rotated among the members. The hostess was expected to provide a light lunch as part of her duties. With time these lunches became much more complicated. This is what happened to my Aunt Mae.

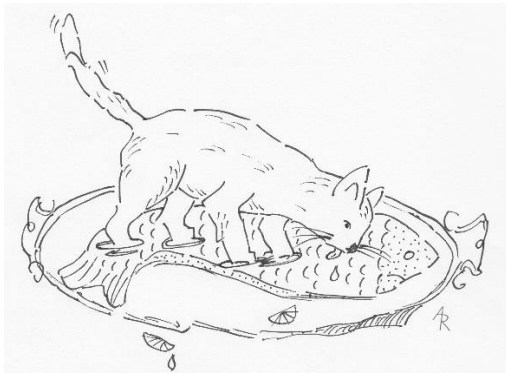
The Idea

Aunt Mae was aware of the metal molds that were becoming available. She thought it would be amazing if she could find a large fish mold for her upcoming turn to host the Bridge Club. After a long search, through many paper catalogs (remember them?), she found just what she wanted. It was about three feet long and would hold many cans of tuna fish. She was ready for her triumph.

The Day of the Lunch

She set up the dining room so each of her guests could pick what they wanted as they progressed along the table. She had snacks, salad, some drinks, and the tuna fish center piece. It was going to be wonderful.

She prepared it using twenty-two cans of tuna fish. It came out of the mold without a problem. She added a cherry eye, fins of lettuce, and lemon slices as spines on the back. Lying on a bed of crushed ice, it looked great. She carried the fish to the table and was making last-minute adjustments when she heard her guests outside on the walk. She put down what she was doing and went to the door to greet them. They all went into the living room, where the card tables were set up. and chatted for a moment. Returning to the dining room, she discovered, to her horror, that her cat was standing with all four feet in her tuna fish centerpiece. He was eating for all he was worth because he knew he did not have long before he would be interrupted. Aunt Mae grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and went to the back door and threw him outside.



What a disaster! She went into the dining room and spent some time repairing the damage. She added a can of tuna fish, repaired the fins, replaced the eye, and made the fish look almost as it had looked when it came out of the mold. She thought, “There, no one will ever

suspect.” She went into the living room and played a rubber of bridge.

The Lunch

They broke for lunch. It was a great success. Everything was going fine, until she went to the back door to empty the trash. On her back stoop was her cat. Stone cold dead. Oh my God!

She squared her shoulders and returned to the dining room where she had to confess to her guests what had happened. So off they went to the Emergency Room. They all had their stomachs pumped to get rid of the tuna fish. It was not a pleasant end of an otherwise nice lunch.

What Really Happened:

My aunt came home from the hospital, and as she was pulling into the driveway, her next-door neighbor boy came up to the car. She looked at him wondering what he wanted. He said, “Aunt Mae, I was so upset when the truck came down the street and hit your cat. I just could not leave him out there. So, I picked him up and placed him on your back porch.

OOPS!

Tom Roberts

GRIMM'S FIRST DRAFT

Once upon a time a not-so-good-looking girl named Eve lived with her two beautiful stepsisters and her kind and generous stepmother in the suburbs. Eve was particularly needy and greedy and felt that she was not getting her due from anyone in her world. Eve had heard rumors that her grandmother had a stash of gold bullion that exceeded that of Fort Knox, and one day she decided to visit Granny to find out whether the rumors were true. She slipped into her red hoodie, blinked twice, and that jack-o'-lantern that they had carved for Halloween turned into a carriage fit for a queen, with a refrigerator, wet bar and 52-inch plasma TV, drawn by a team of 20 snow-white horses. Off she went to Granny's McMansion in Sherwood Forest.

Granny had stolen the gold from the government when she, shapeshifter that she was, disguised herself as a man and got a job inventorying the bullion and walking out with one bar a day until she retired.

Now Granny was canny about keeping her wealth secure, and she had hired a guard whose name was Adam. Adam looked very much like the wolf that he was. When Granny learned on Facebook that Eve was on her way to visit her, she became suspicious of Eve's motives, since she knew very well what kind of person Eve was.

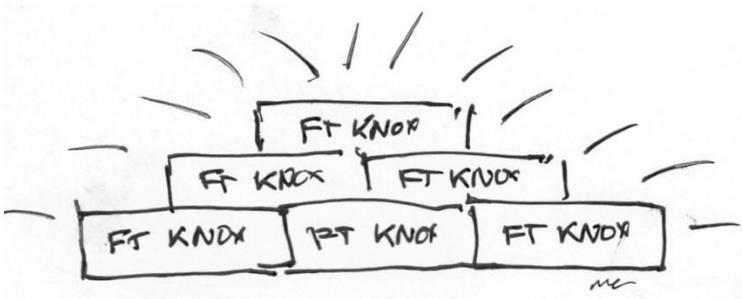
When Eve arrived, she wasted no time in offering Granny the beautiful Red Delicious apple she had thoughtfully injected with curare. Granny responded by hitting Eve over the head and knocking her out. Granny

had her seven height-challenged workmen store Eve in the trophy case. But Granny loved Red Delicious apples, took a big bite from the one Eve had offered to her, and promptly dropped dead. Meanwhile, Adam, gazing at Eve in the trophy case, was immediately smitten. He pulled a pair of pink jelly shoes out of his backpack and put them on Eve, saying, “All the better to chase me with, my dear.” Eve woke up.

Planning to have all the gold to herself, Eve offered what was left of the apple to Adam, but Adam had seen what happened to Granny and declined, instead grabbing Eve, kissing her passionately while running his paws up and down her body. Eve responded with equal passion, thinking, “This is what’s been missing from my life.”

When they came up for air, Eve returned the carriage to its jack-o’-lantern state and set it on the porch, put the seven height-challenged workmen on Social Security, sold the bullion back to the government at 100% profit, and lived happily ever after with Adam in the McMansion in Sherwood Forest playing catch-me catch-me and other assorted games.

Pat Williams



MOONSHINE STILL

Tom and I met in the Army and soon became friends. When we were both twenty-four, Tom had just started a business near the Moorestown Mall selling rugs and installing carpeting. I was a steel rule diemaker and a partner in a company located in Westville, NJ. I lived in a rural area of Gloucester County that had several acres of fenced pasture for my calves and roping horses. I was also a competitive calf roper and competed in rodeos and other roping competitions.

One day in early fall, Tom approached me with an idea to make some applejack moonshine. He had purchased a copper moonshine still from a pawnshop in Philadelphia, and he wanted to try his hand at making some booze. My property seemed like a good location. No neighbors to see what was going on, and a running spring-fed stream on the property if water was needed.



To begin this process, we needed to ferment some apples, so we purchased several baskets (it was apple season), and put them in a barrel of water after cutting them up into quarters. We moved the barrel out into the

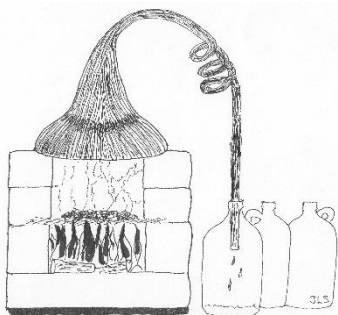
pasture and left it for weeks to ferment. The fermentation process lasted much longer than expected, and it was January before we decided the alcohol mash was ready to cook.

I built a three-sided concrete block fire box about four layers high with a cast iron grill that spanned the width of about three layers high to support the still. It was a beautiful large copper tub that tapered to an inverted funnel shape at the top, which then connected to several feet of coiled copper tubing. The still probably held about 30 or 40 gallons. At the bottom, or outlet end of the tubing, which reached to almost ground level, we placed one-gallon glass whiskey jugs to collect the liquid as it came dripping or streaming (we hoped) out of the tubing.

Tom and I added the watery mash to the still, placed it on the grill, and started the fire. Things began to heat up. We knew that steam rising into the coils would condense and turn into liquid as it traveled through the coils but did not know how long this should take. We waited for what seemed like a reasonable amount of time for liquid to start dripping into the jugs. Nothing was happening. Steam was coming out but no liquid. I thought maybe the steam wasn't cooling fast enough, so I went into the house and brought out several bath towels. I went to the stream and soaked the towels with the cold water and laid them on the coils, hoping to cool the steam faster and begin producing liquid.

Finally, the coils began to release drip by drip. Tom and I kept running back and forth to the stream to re-saturate and re-cool the towels. Dripping increased from

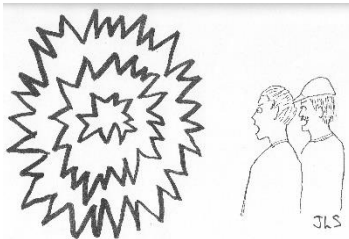
the coils slightly, but not enough to meet our expectations. I thought that maybe the fire should be hotter, so we added more wood. We had been at this for several hours. We added more wood. The fire was getting bigger. More wood.... fire bigger.



Finally, liquid began to stream from the coils into the jug. Quick, get another jug in place. The fire was blazing, and the liquid was flowing fast. Suddenly, the copper still began to rumble and rock on the grill, and the sides of the tub began to

swell. I shouted, "Tom, get away! It's going to explode!"

And did it explode! A huge white cloud of alcohol rose from the shattered still and continued to increase in size as it ascended. Soon the cloud was about half an



acre in size. About that time, my wife Helen, after hearing the explosion, came running out of the house. Up until now, she had wanted no part in the activity and expressed her displeasure in no uncer-

tain terms, but she feared the worst. First she reassured herself that we were not hurt.

Then she remembered that a neighboring farmer had placed feed corn for his cattle in a barrel of water believing this would make it more digestible for his livestock. The soaking produced alcohol fumes which

ascended into the atmosphere. It just so happened that an ATF helicopter was cruising the area with an alcohol sniffing device onboard, and it picked up the fumes from this farmer's field. They dropped in on the farmer, literally. When he explained what he was doing, the agents were satisfied that there was nothing nefarious going on. They flew away and continued on their mission.

Helen, however, was worried that a helicopter was going to drop out of the sky at any moment and arrest me and Tom for illegally making whiskey. The adventure was over, the still was destroyed, but we had about four gallons of clear light blue liquid, so what next? We were sensible enough to not drink it in its present form. A relative of Tom's, who was a chemist of some sort, explained that what we had was "fusel oil," which was the first stage in the process of making whiskey, and that it needed to go through further distilling processes before it was safe to drink. We did not have the resources to do that, so we were stuck with four gallons of beautiful blue alcohol after all our best efforts.

However, all was not lost. Tom's parents owned a summer home in Avalon, NJ, and they used our almost-applejack to winterize the toilets in their house to keep them from freezing.

Ed Barcus

MUSIC, MUSIC, MUSIC

I sighed with pleasure as the rumbling tire sound faded and the silence of the woods returned: crickets.

This was no anechoic chamber. True silence brings madness. Barring the moan of a cougar, the rattle of a snake, or the deafening chain-saw racket of cicadas, the silence of the woods is full of music: the katydids, a night bird, the swoosh of flailing leaves, the creaking branches, the sound of the wind that moves them – oh, there goes a motorcycle tearing by: not music.

My feet crunched on the gravel of the path as I reached the edge of the lake. I bent and picked up a pebble and threw it in with a satisfying “plop.” Bullseye ripples ran from the blow, their pattern a metaphor of a pure tone. A dissatisfied frog croaked and fled, adding its splay-legged splat. The stone, the frog, a duet I had created. Night was approaching and the woods were cooling off. I zipped my jacket and turned toward home.

“Hi Hon,” said Alice in her alto voice. “How was your walk?”

“Oh, the usual,” I said. She had the radio on, and I instantly recognized Respighi’s *The Pines of Rome*. It’s my favorite classical piece and the first I’d ever appreciated. As a teenager I was convalescing from a serious illness, able to do nothing but sit, too tired to read, but my ears worked, and I turned on the NPR station. There it was, a miracle of mixed sounds, even the call of a real bird. I smiled at my wife and waved her away, as she started to

turn off the broadcast. “Let it finish, please,” I said, and she went back to her work.

When *The Pines* faded, I shut the radio off and gave her a hug. Her hair brushed over my ear with a soft crackle. Outside an owl hooted. Another bird called: for love, defense, or what? I couldn’t know, but I was glad when he whistled again. “How about breakfast for dinner?” I said and we got to work. Soon bacon was snapping and popping, echoing the little explosions from our lit fireplace. The flames backed the timbre with a bass roar.

“Oh, that’s good,” I said, as my teeth snapped through a still sizzling bacon slice. My fork shrieked over the plate as I went for some egg, and I cringed at the dissonance. It made me think of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, and how I loved the vitality of it; lucky Stravinsky didn’t orchestrate for plate and fork! Done, the dishes clattered into the dishwasher, counterpoint to the tinkle of the glasses touching and the clash of the silverware dropping. Alice suggested we spend the evening reading, “I’m not in the mood for the noise of the news,” she said. So I picked up my book.

I love old books: the smell, the feel, the weight. I love the shush of the heavy pages rubbing together and the sigh of the leather binding as the book is opened. We read for some time. Occasionally, I stirred the fire. If I listened carefully, as the logs cracked and buckled, I could hear the hot coals seething. Once, I got us gin and tonics, enjoying the glug of pouring and the ping of the carbonation. I heard Alice yawn, and the mantel clock

chimed, and with unspoken agreement we prepared for bed.

The bed squeaked quietly as we settled down and the mattress grumbled a bit. Alice was asleep in an instant, her breathing inaudible except for the occasional little whistle. I sighed with contentment and lay there listening: crickets.

Bob Edelson

SOME LIGHT VERSES ON AGING

As your birthdays climb higher and higher,
Confidence you should acquire.
Decades you spent getting wiser,
Should garner respect for an old advisor.

But age has become a detriment.
If you run for President, an impediment.
Geezerpersons can be wise as whips
but it often seems we're invisible blips.

It's hard to look presentable,
Wrinkles and sundamage are lamentable.
It takes a lot longer to look half as good,
No calls for old extras in Hollywood.

Remember hawkers who'd guess your age
in Atlantic City and could perfectly gauge?
As children, we were indeed astounded
But only the young were so confounded.

You may have original body parts
But perhaps you have some counterparts.
We're lucky that science can keep our hearts steady
If we're not in agony and not deathready.

Most of us still have some marbles,
Though not up-to-date on all topicals.
And when long-known things play peek-a-boo,
That is likely scaring and frustrating you.

Better keep to a healthy regimen
be it exercise or vitamin.
Practice balance and strengthening,
avoid bent posture, choose litesuppering.

The prime directive – you must avoid falling!
The consequences can be appalling:
Hospitals, surgeons and nurses,
Pain, physios and curses.

Have your adventures been curtailed?
It's harder to travel, perhaps derailed.
We're relying on trips like cruising the Rhine
where our bags are handled, and walkers are fine.

We discuss our various medical visits.
Such topics are old age's perquisites.
Appointments dot our calendars each week,
Many conditions must need a tweak.

But here's to more good times ahead,
Even 5 pm suppers and 9 pm bed.
It's usually better to stay alive
For the satisfactions you may still derive.

Joyce Linda Sichel

PLL BE SEEING YOU

Tim arose early; his wife Claire was still sleeping. They had talked about his taking a trip up to Sudbury. She agreed and said she would spend the day with friends in London. It was a warm summer day and after breakfast Tim took the underground to Liverpool St. transit station. He purchased a ticket for Colchester. Sitting by the window in the coach, he watched as the landscape outside changed. The buildings and factories gave way to farms and meadows. When the electronic board announced Marks Tay station, Tim alighted and walked across the platform to the Sudbury branch-line train.

The sun was bright as he stood at the familiar crossroads. The old wooden signpost was still there, just as he remembered it, with its arms pointing to Great Waldington to the east and Sudbury to the west. He shielded his eyes. There was the old, thatched cottage, surrounded by flowers. To his surprise, the door opened and a woman stepped out into the sunlight. She was wearing a colorful apron over her large frame. Behind her two cats followed, and their fur seemed to match her apron. Her hair was streaked with gray strands, and glasses rested low over her nose. With some surprise, she said to Tim, "If you are a tourist and lost, how can I help?"

"No," Tim replied, "at one time I was stationed at the airbase here, though it was long ago. For me this is a nostalgia trip."

"Well, you sound like a Yank. Would you like to join me for a cup of tea? And I can show you what an

800-year-old cottage looks like.” She waved him in with a wide smile. Tim followed, bending his head at the door frame, and found himself in a large living room. Sunlight was coming in through small, glazed windows, and overhead, wooden beams reflected it. In one corner stood a grand piano, books were stacked on a small table, and sheet music was scattered around.

“Oh, I should introduce myself. I’m Julie Renback, and you?”

“Tim Reynold,” he replied.

“Well, Tim, I was the music teacher at the school in Sudbury, but now I’m retired. I’ve been living here for over 35 years. Let me put the kettle on, and I’ll show you around.” Tim followed her through the cottage. Julie seemed to have a story for every room and detailed knowledge of its history.

“So tell me Tim, why are you back here?”

Tim took a sip of tea and replied. “During the time I was stationed here, the signpost at the crossroads was the meeting place for me and Sheila Lane.”

Julie interrupted him. “You knew the Lane family?” The kitchen timer buzzed. “I have something cooking in the kitchen. You drink your tea, and we will continue our conversation later.” With her apron flying, she left Tim alone. He sat, eyes closed, and remembered a time, long ago, when...

It was cold and windy, but at least the snow had stopped. He took the mittens out of his flight jacket and

put them on. The signpost was covered with snow. He gave it a shake, and the arm to Sudbury stood uncovered. The old cottage across the way was covered with snow.

She appeared on her bike, pedaling slowly down the road, her WAAF uniform pulled tightly across her slim body. Dark auburn strands that had come loose from under her military cap were blowing across her face.

“Tim, I’m glad I didn’t miss you, snow and all,” she said as she got off her bike and leaned it against the signpost.

Tim’s answer was taking her in his arms and kissing her. “I’m more than glad since I have a mission to fly tomorrow. Sheila, the NCO club is open; let’s go over to warm up and have a drink.” Arm-in-arm they walked down the snow-covered road to the airbase. Inside the NCO Quonset, a warm fire burned in the stove. Airmen and their dates were sitting at tables, while others were dancing to music from a loudspeaker. It was the Glenn Miller Orchestra from London. Tim spotted an empty table, and he removed his jacket and took her coat and hat. “How is the family, and is your dad still painting?”

“Yes,” she said, “he was at your airbase this week sketching the bombers as they took off.”

Tim went up to the bar and brought back a glass of wine for Sheila and a half-pint of lager for himself. A melody they both liked came over the loudspeaker. “How about a dance?” Tim said.

“I’m keen for it,” Sheila answered.

As they danced, he held her with his face against hers. The music seemed to bring them closer than ever. When they sat down again, Tim said, “I have to tell you that the U.S. Air Force announced that those who want to can continue their college education here in the UK after the war.”

Sheila’s dark green eyes seemed to sparkle at the news, “Oh, Tim, that would be great. I hope you give it some serious thought.” Across the table they held each other’s hands. No words seemed necessary as they finished their drinks.

“Tim, I have to get back to work at Air Operations, but I’ll ring you up tomorrow when you get back. I do love you.” He watched her leave with her auburn hair flowing from under her cap...

Julie’s reentry startled Tim out of his remembrances.

“Yes,” Tim said, “Sheila and I were very good friends.”

“She was very talented, especially at the piano.” Julie paused, “You ought to know she died about a year ago. It was a very sad time for both her husband and her children.”

Tim sat staring at her. A stillness filled the room. He took a deep breath and quietly said, “Oh, I’m sorry to hear it. She was an important part of my life, even for the short time I was stationed here.” He had trouble

keeping the tears back. Abruptly he stood up, “I think it’s time to say goodbye. Julie, I want to thank you for the tea and the visit.”

With her gentle smile, Julie said, “It has been a delight for me, and I do hope you find some of those past memories you’re searching for.” After their warm handshake, she closed the cottage door behind him.

Tim walked back and put his hand on the old signpost. With the setting sun came a gentle breeze that flowed through the flowers and grass all around him. If only he had been able to reach Sheila and tell her that he was still alive after his aircraft was shot out of the sky, and that he would be a POW in Germany until the end of the war. He wondered how that would have changed his life.

It was so quiet, no roar of plane engines. Julie brought back the old memories. Yes! there was that last dance together with the Glenn Miller band playing: “I’ll be seeing you in all the old familiar places.”

George Rubin

REMEMBRANCES

Long, long days,
A cool breeze through the trees,
A chirping bird is heard,
Eating honeysuckle off the vine,
Building forts and chasing butterflies,
Cool water from the spring at the park,
Vendors selling berries,
Or offering knife sharpening in our alley,
Rollerskating in the street,
Playing board games on the porch
With the awning down,
“Red rover, red rover, will you come over?”
That all-important window fan.
Long, long days
Car trips with the windows open,
“If the cows are down does that mean rain?”
Swimming in the cool lake,
Homemade raspberry ice cream,
Family picnics,
Lightning bugs and sparklers,
Watching fireworks from the top of a sliding board

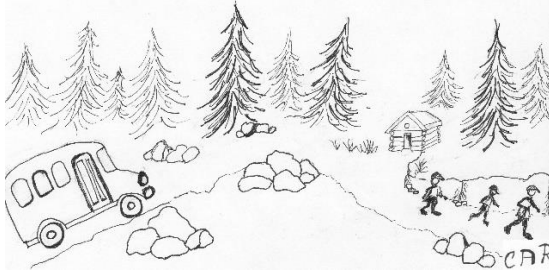


Long, long days,
Summer.

Doris Kabley

SUMMER CAMP MEMORIES

I was ten, and on a drizzly day my parents watched as many boys, a few men, and I boarded a school bus. Gears clashed and I gave my parents a wan wave. “You’ll have so much fun!” said my mother. Oh? Thirty miles north of the city, in pouring rain, we halted at the edge of a precipitous driveway. “Okay boys, we walk.” Out of control, we ran down the cliff. Our muddy bodies were separated by age and led to our cabins. Misery!



We were this camp’s first campers, slated for eight weeks’ residence. But “new” is not the same as “good,” nor does “new” assert “finished.” The softball field, the tennis courts, the game area, all were compacted dirt except the swimming “pool.” It was a pit recently dug into a stream bed, and the muddy water was no more than waist deep anywhere. In the center was a huge boulder. The rock had been uncovered late in the digging, towering feet above where the water would someday be. Dynamite? Not this year!

Surprisingly, I loved it. The next year I was eager to return. The boulder was gone and the water deep and clear. Each year got better. At sixteen, I became a junior counselor of the ten-year-olds. Ruefully, I remember complaining to one about his messy bed. “When I was

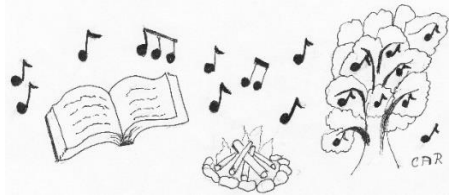
your age, I could make my bed much better than that!” Without hesitation, he replied, “Yes, but that was in the olden days.” Thus is wisdom gained. *(Bob Edelson)*

Having recalled the little 4-H sleepaway camp I attended in the 1950s, I wondered what had become of it. Bare wood cabins, outhouses, a communal outdoor sink with no hot water – that’s what \$12-\$14 a week bought then. We swam in all weathers, did basic crafts, and devoured whatever was put in front of us.



Did Camp Howe still exist? I doubted, but Googled it to find out. The extensive website left me gobsmacked. Glossy photos show cabins with furniture, windows, screens, and electricity (and, I’m sure, with indoor plumbing). There are science activities, paintball wars, sheep and goats, and all manner of boating activities – with life jackets. We never had those. There are many paid professional staff as well as the former-campers-now counselors, “need-based” scholarships, programs for “youth with disabilities,” “gender-inclusive cabins,” and chefs! One week \$650-850, two weeks \$1250-1700, and day camp \$450-550 per week. Campers can stay no longer than two weeks at a time and must go home for at least a week between repeat stays. What a difference five decades make! *(Katherine Riley)*

My favorite thing about camp was singing in the dining hall after meals. We were each given a small book of songs. I still have mine. These were high points of my day.



It was a church camp, so we could sign up for choir too. At the choir activity, we learned to sing parts and responses for the church service. Since my friend and I were both altos, we found this very comfortable and helpful once we got back to our regular church services. It doesn't sound like what teenagers would like, but I guess we were atypical. *(Doris Kahley)*

* * *

Camp Harriman, a Boys' Club project in New York's Harriman State Park, was wooded, hilly, and on a lake. It was the summer of 1967. Certainly I was mature enough (age 20) to spend a summer at sleep-away camp...as a counselor for the first time. Six boys from inner-city neighborhoods were coming to camp to spend two weeks together with me.



I was to plan and schedule the days we would have, in addition to basics provided by the Boys' Club. It was a junior social-worker's job, my later career. I was interested in their unique experiences, but I encouraged them to suspend some rules of the neighborhood back in the city, like beating an opponent, and surviving day by day. I managed well enough for the camp to have me back the next summer – as a Village Leader – even though I managed to get us all lost on a hike two hours from the camp and back again. *(Barry Klieger)*

Summer days, great friends, funny kids, and all the great outdoors. We were at Camp Onas along the Neshaminy Creek. I still have vivid memories of that distant time. There were outdoor sounds, outdoor games, boating, camping – on and on went the list. We had hunts to find snipes – the long-billed birds that live in marshy areas. One fellow-counselor made a long rope-slide from the hillside down across the meadow to the creek where you could fall off right into the Neshaminy.



Those summers of 1958 and 1959 were spent with great friends, funny kids and all the wonderful outdoors. They float into my memory still with their freedom, independence, and that wonderful sense of community.

(Deedy Roberts)

I was 19 and a counselor at Camp Cejwin, near Port Jervis New York. My group was boys aged 8 to 11 years. The camp was Jewish-themed, with services on Saturday that I was charged to help lead. We lived in wooden cabins that had electricity and hot water. The boys in my care were pretty well behaved, with only an occasional harmless prank on their counselor. Memorably, they put a fake bug under my bed cover, and, on another occasion, told me (for a short time) that one of my campers was missing.



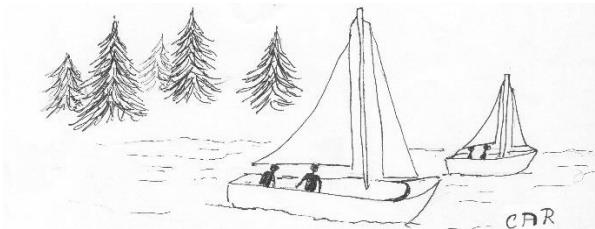
I enjoyed the company of my fellow counselors, who were all college students from various East Coast schools. The camp had a lake with all water activities and a girl's camp on the other side of the lake. I enjoyed the summer's work a lot and it may have spurred me on to the teaching career I chose. *(Al Migdal)*

Dear Son,

We are glad you chose to spend the summer again at Camp Sloane in Connecticut. It is such a good "Y" camp with wonderful water facilities that you enjoy so much. Let us know if you again have an international

counselor. They bring a whole different perspective with them. The only drawback at Sloane is those platform tents with drop-down sides that you all live in.

The clothes in your trunk get so dirty and wet. But that's just a mother's concern and it's only laundry. We are looking forward to Parent Visiting Day, when we see the confidence you are building – especially with sailing.



We know you plan to play a little soccer, and for the first time it will be coed. Hope you enjoy everything and are making lots of friends. Love, Mom and Dad

(Joyce Linda Sichel)

Writers Roundtable

The authors of these summer camp memories hope that you can relate to some of our history. This collection is brought to you by the Writers Roundtable, an MLRA-sponsored activity that is open to all residents who like to write or who want to try their hand at it.

HOUDINI

Over my lifetime I have had many pets, but none surpassed my baby raccoon. One sunny morning around 1969, my father called to ask a favor. A female raccoon had made her home in a big tree outside my parent's kitchen and there she gave birth to three little babies who were now crying piteously. Their mother had been killed in the road and my father needed help getting them down before they starved to death, so we went to my parents' farm to see what could be done. I didn't really want to go because I knew my father's "humane" solution would be to drown the babies.



In his mind he wasn't being cruel; he was saving them from pain and starvation. As a little girl growing up on that farm, I spent many spring and summer mornings making a comfortable hiding place for new kittens and their mother far away from my father's notice. I knew that if I could protect those kittens until their eyes opened, he wouldn't have the heart to do away with them. These raccoons were definitely beyond the infant stage, eyes wide open and super cute and very friendly. My children were immediately in love, and I was well on

the way. The kits were so hungry and still needed to nurse so we fed them with a rag dipped in milk and immediately took them to our vet, who was also a friend. He gave them a clean bill of health and told me how and what to feed them, and how to give them a very small place to sleep so as to maintain their body heat. In the beginning they needed to be fed every couple of hours, so I didn't get much sleep those first few weeks.

Raccoons, I learned, are smart, noisy, and don't sit still. They let their displeasure be known if food did not appear quickly enough, chittering away and knocking things over. They were lots of fun, but three of them was quite a challenge. Fortunately, I had a couple of friends who were willing to adopt. One, our vet, was already committed and another, the children's pediatrician, stepped up.

With only one baby left, life was easier. He was eating dog food now so middle-of-the-night feedings were over. My husband built a large cage with a wood frame and chicken wire, and even created a little sleeping hammock out of a wood box. We thought we had it made. It took the little rascal about an hour to figure out how to get out of that beautiful cage! And thus, our little raccoon's name became ... Houdini. Even though he could get out of the cage when he wanted to, Houdini never went anywhere except up on our roof, where he chittered and chattered and threw stones and tree branches and whatever else he could find at us. He also liked shiny things and was a little thief. His bed was filled with shiny gum wrappers, soda-can tabs, keys, and tin foil. He also craved my hoop earrings, and he once pulled so hard he made my ear bleed.

Mostly Houdini was a lot of fun. When he was out of his cage in the backyard, he liked to play with the kids' toys. But the sliding-board defeated him. We had a Siamese cat who, claws retracted, would walk elegantly up the sliding-board, and sit at the top. No matter what Houdini tried, he could not climb that sliding-board! He would get about halfway up and, claws out, slide back down, over and over again!

He washed all his food before he ate it, and the kids loved feeding him cheese puffs because he got so mad when they dissolved. Marshmallows were another food that infuriated him.

The summer passed and Houdini grew, and grew! By late fall, he weighed between 20 and 30 pounds. He was close to being an adult and though he always came back eventually, he sometimes refused to go into his cage at night. Adult raccoon play became a lot rougher, and we came to realize Houdini had to find a new home. I had heard of Betty Woodford's animal sanctuary in Medford before. So I drove out to look at the place. There was no one there when I knocked on the door of the house, so I just walked around. My memory is of a large space enclosed by an extremely high wire fence with what looked like a couple of pole shelters inside. I saw a possum and a fox, but I couldn't see much else. As I was walking back to my car, a man came up to me, and we talked about Houdini. This did seem like a good place for him. Food, water, company, and the freedom to climb that fence and disappear into the woods if he chose. Two weeks later we brought Houdini to Medford along with his blanket and my hoop earring. He was let into the enclosed area and scampered away from us

without a backward look. My children cried and my husband and I kept wiping our eyes.

I don't even know if the Woodford's sanctuary (now called Cedar Run) was recognized by the state and/or had nonprofit status. They refused our donation. Also, my memories of what the place looked like back in 1969 may be totally wrong. When I called to get some history, there was no one there who had any idea what the place looked like 55 years ago.

Now, as I think back, I know we should have done things much differently. If I had known of the sanctuary then, we could have brought Houdini there as a baby. There he could have grown up as a raccoon rather than a pet. Raccoons and other wild animals kept in private homes become domesticated. Even if not apparent, they form attachments. They learn not to fear people and other predators, especially cars. Sometimes they even become dangerous. Many people who have taken wild animals into their homes don't know what to do with them when they are no longer cute little babies, so they simply abandon them in a field or park to fend for themselves.

Raccoons who live in the wild far from civilization can have a life span of 20 years or more, while those who live in suburbs like Lumberton live about two years. So if you see a wild animal in your yard or somewhere else that is not his natural habitat, don't adopt him; just stay back and take a picture.

Margaret Rodney

DECLUTTERING GURUS AND ME

It is springtime, and one's thoughts lightly turn to getting rid of excess "stuff." One Friday, another decluttering expert talking on WHYYY gave some new suggestions about weeding out photos, keeping a budget that would highlight money spent on things that you didn't need, and always disposing of something old when you bought a new one. Then and there, I decided to start up the process I've been working on for a decade – disposing of excess possessions.

We all moved things into Medford Leas because we believed we could not live without them. Personally, I blame the generous basements of the Lumberton residences. Many a useless object was allowed on the moving van because there seemed to be so much room for it. The 12-quart stockpot, handheld Mixmaster, and too many old suitcases to count are lying in wait below me as I write. I used those things many times in the last forty years, why wouldn't I again? The children might want the knick-knacks. What if the desk chair I'm sitting in collapsed, and I suddenly needed another? As I acquire the advice of others about decluttering, I am working out some strategies that help me with personal challenges when it comes to the process.

Our generation was trained to follow rules that no longer apply. My parents and grandparents, who lived through the Depression, saved shoeboxes and *National Geographic*. They repaired things and repurposed materials. What they had was made to last, and they kept it in good shape. My grandparents made toys for my brother

and me, including stuffed animals from fabric scraps and a toolbox and wagon from wooden codfish boxes. I still have them. I live in my parents' living room with furniture that is older than I am. They took good care of it and reupholstered it, so it's still functional. My strategy here is to wear it out and not replace it. I will sub in some things I've added since – giveaways from friends who had too many chairs or small Thrift Shop tables. Speaking of which, the Thrift Shop is an excellent source of things that you can use and then return. The donations go to a worthy cause. And it's a good discipline to have a designated bag into which to put even single items. Never used that travel mug? Someone else will. When the bag is full, leave it on the donations shelf and start another one. The Free Books bookshelf is also helpful. Think of it as sharing your favorites that you won't read again with others in the community. Likewise take one, read it, and take it back.

I find the Marie Kondo method – keep only those things that speak to the heart, and discard items that no longer spark joy – of little help. Far too many things speak to me. Prior to my move, I did divest myself of my daughter's Cabbage Patch dolls, complete with the clothes my mother made for them. I took pictures of the whole lot and then entrusted the dolls to a good friend who said she had found a home for them. I asked no questions. A worthy cause can also soften the blow of parting with things that trigger nostalgia. Last fall's collection for Afghan refugees freed me to donate three boxes of well used but still viable toys that my 10-year-old grandson (who lives in California and seldom visits) will never miss.

Rationing is a strategy for those things that spark memories. Choose one vase, teacup, or toy and bundle up the others to give away. Take them to the free shelves outside the Thrift Shop, remembering that one man's trash is another man's treasure. Choose the one that is in the best condition, add it to your collection (mine is in a cabinet with glass doors) and discard the others. This worked well for my father's dilapidated lead soldiers.

This strategy feeds into the real estate rule. When that cabinet is full, then you have to start downsizing the collection. The best time for doing this is when you need space for something. I have subjected several kitchen cabinets to this when I get tired of moving dishes to get to other dishes. After six years of disuse, all those mismatched 12-ounce water glasses had to go. No tears were shed at their departure. Drawers and closets also respond well to having more space inside them.

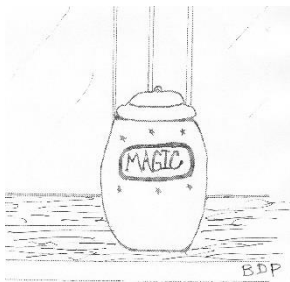
Don't be discouraged because you moved in too many things. We are all creatures of conspicuous consumption, adapting to new surroundings. It's a lifestyle adjustment. My neighbor finally discarded the seven pie pans she owned when she realized that she would never again host a dinner for 35. Once the realization hits, act on it. If you do it for thirty days, it becomes a habit.

Kathy Riley

MAGIC

Children believe in magic, even when their lives haven't been at all magical. I think it's part of the underlying folklore that humans share. Books and movies have magically happy endings; genies materialize and grant wishes just because they can. There are magic wands, fairy dust, magic stones to rub, crystals to hang nearby.

I spent many, many years practicing clinical psychology, helping both adults and children with emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal problems as they



faced their real lives. So why not let “magic” help a little? I kept a big, hand-made pottery jar on a windowsill that had big letters spelling “MAGIC” on its outside. It was an accessory of great curiosity for both children and adults who came to my practice

for help. I counted on the near-universal wish for magic that would make things better. When someone asked what was in the jar, I would invite them to pull the cork out of the top and look in.

You probably think I kept candy or other treats inside. But I deliberately did not fill it with anything. So, either magic must be invisible or there just isn't any at hand. I wanted to give the message that changing required work – on their part and on mine. But the idea of magic is so enticing. Maybe changes in feelings and behavior patterns could happen instantly and without

effort. Would that magic could make us all happier people very quickly and easily.

For curious children, I might turn the empty jar upside down and shake it, drawing from them what changes they wanted to make with the help of magic. For interested children, I did simple magic tricks with them and then explained (if they hadn't already caught on) what made the seeming magic happen. (In his teens, my son Bart had a small business entertaining children at birthday parties with his large variety of semi-professional magic tricks and patter.) That was my opening to introduce the idea of focusing on their goals and what concrete steps could help accomplish them – new ways of thinking, new habits to practice, and encouraging themselves with each improvement.

With adults, I would provide various tools to work on the goals they had come with or had already set up. I would strengthen their motivation and strongly encourage them to take their new steps consistently until they became new habits. We call this approach “cognitive behavior therapy,” which can effectively reach desired outcomes in a relatively short time – without any magic beyond the magic of expectation.

Pills, like anti-depressants since the 1980s, were advertised to act somewhat magically too. All you had to do was remember to take them occasionally and you would feel a great deal better. I had extensive training in prescribing psychiatric medications, since properly trained psychologists were expected to be able to prescribe as well as talk to their patients. But that never happened (with a few small exceptions in the military and in

underpopulated U.S. territories). Still, the training gave me knowledge and realism about the advantages, drawbacks, and limitations of these medications. They are not magic!

Finally, let me mention what is called the “placebo effect,” a well-known phenomenon in the behavioral sciences and many circumstances of life. It means that expectations for outcomes can actually influence what happens. Many medications and treatments of all sorts are probably helpful through these means, again throwing doubt on truly magical effects. But you may, after all, want to purchase an impressive-looking jar and label it MAGIC. It can’t hurt.

Joyce Linda Sichel

STORM

The clouds are riddled, effervescent with light.
Moment of magic in cottony heights before
The crack of thunder fills the violent night.

A warming breeze belies the coming fright.
A warning drizzle of rain predicts the pour.
The clouds are riddled, effervescent with light.

What time remains before the skies ignite?
We count the split between the flash and roar.
The crack of thunder fills the violent night.

Now light and sound coincident bite.
The storm's upon us, we tremble in awe.
The clouds are riddled, effervescent with light.

The waters flood, with lightnings unite.
Refuge? None averts our fear's impulsive soar.
The crack of thunder fills the violent night.

A breath, relief, the atmosphere's contrite.
The storm its anger moves and skies restore
Far clouds are riddled, effervescent with light.
Grumbling thunder leaves a violet night.

Bob Edelson

Min wakes up one morning

about four o'clock. She lies perfectly still, no need to get up, she's comfortable in her flannel nightgown and warm in her single bed. Her gnarled hands are tucked into her chest. She feels perfectly at peace. Min realizes that her arthritis pain is gone, her back doesn't hurt, her feet feel warm and fine.

It's early, still dark, but Min knows that the first rays of late winter sun will rise soon enough.

She knows it is her time to leave. After all, she recently celebrated her hundred and second birthday with her friends here at the Home. Her son, himself elderly, came and they had a peaceful time together. No squabbles, no nagging, just loving acceptance from each of them. Min lies still and remembers the day.

As for today, it is a weekday, no housekeeper due, no doctor appointments, no lunch table invitations today. Good, she can stay exactly where she is for as long as she wants until she is ready to leave. Friends, has she been as good a friend as possible? Min was an artist and needed so much of her time and energy for her collages and paintings. Perhaps she has been deficient in friendship. Min closes her eyes, pictures friends from her many decades, and in her mind, she says, "Thank you, and forgive me." She hopes that her son will share her many works of art from her studio with all the people she knew and liked.

Min watches the light grow brighter outside of her bedroom window. She remembers the war years when

people she knew had used the twilight or dawn to escape. She never talked about those years and everyone's missing family members. She must act soon to join them all at last. But first the goodbyes.

Lying still in her bed, Min senses that she is starting to leave her body. Maybe because she is an artist, she is curious rather than afraid. She has no pain, no regret, as her Min spirit rises from the bed.

She is entranced to see the room, the bed, the window from an entirely new perspective. She must go exploring, at least around the nursing home before she leaves entirely.

Min floats in and out of rooms, soundlessly whispering goodbye to those who had over the years become her close friends. For a moment she wishes she could pick up and distribute all the paintings that are in her room. She knows who would like her easel and paints. Oh well. An agnostic if not an atheist, Min finds herself thinking, "Thy will shall be done with my possessions, especially my artworks." She has a good laugh to herself.

Min is invisible. Artists being curious people, Min goes floating and exploring around the nursing home to look inside the kitchen, the staff room, the director's office, and even the maintenance supply area. She floats up to see what's over the auditorium, finding a bird's nest and some squirrels. She won't spill the beans. She is charmed.

Min can go anywhere, even outside of the walls of the building. She decides to go visit her living outside friends. Then the families of those who have died. She

will revisit Manhattan and Long Island, where most of them lived when she knew them. She senses that she can convey something peaceful to these people.



In a few minutes someone will notice that Min has not shown up for breakfast. A cafeteria worker will call an aide to check on Min. The aide will find what was Min in bed, now completely still, tucked in, face peaceful, and the aide will start to cry. She will call a nurse, who will put her arms around the aide and say, “It was

time. Min is free. She was an artist, she lived true to herself, she’s probably out exploring. In whatever dimension she is now in, she’ll be fascinated, we will miss her.” And they both have a good cry in each other’s arms. Min sees this and puts her arms around them figuratively and tries to impart that all is well. She will miss human form. But she is an artist. Curious. Eager for experience. Off she goes.

Judy Kruger
In memory of my friend Min, age 102

WRITING FOR LEAS LIT

We encourage residents of both campuses to submit original, unpublished manuscripts for possible inclusion in Leas Lit, Medford Leas' literary journal, which is published in June and December each year. 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 scholarly papers will be accepted. All submissions must be in English and not exceed 1600 words.

All stories and poems that have appeared in issues of Leas Lit since 2005 are available in the "Literary Journal" section of mlra.org (public website) by author and titles. This is updated for each new issue. You can use it for research or to find examples of accepted writing.

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

