

# Leas Lit



ORIGINAL WRITING AND ART  
BY RESIDENTS OF MEDFORD LEAS

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## TRUE CONFESSION

I've never understood why I don't like a plain ol' apple.

Don't get me wrong

I enjoy all the varieties,  
their sweet gentle smells,  
the soft gradation of colors  
as they transition from yellow to green to red  
(and everywhere in-between)

Or how some are lop-sided  
while others are hugely rotund.

And how it makes me a bit sad  
to know that summer's almost over  
when the baskets are over-flowing at the market  
on our way home from the shore.

I never understood why I don't like a plain ol' apple.

But I especially enjoy how you enjoy them.

How you simply grab one,  
toss it into the air  
and with a quick catch curve it into your mouth  
and take a big bite!

(How can you just chomp into it like that?)

How I wish I could just bite into the thing;

Juice running down my chin,  
chewing with my mouth wide open,  
as I told you through my almost laughing smile  
how fuckin' incredibly delicious it was!

(But I just can't.)

Remember that time I found you a bushel of your favorite—  
The STAR

It was like I was Richard Burton  
and you were Elizabeth Taylor  
and those measly apples were Hope diamonds!  
(But considerably cheaper).

Or like yesterday at the Creamery.  
You carefully chose one.

Not that one, not that, but that one.  
From all of those baskets  
How could you tell?  
Which one screams louder?

A Courtland?

A MacIntosh?

(Does a Maiden Blush have a chance?)



Oh, how I love to watch you make an apple pie!  
(Though you really do total the kitchen).

Flour, lemon (I don't get that part),  
Sugar and cinnamon.

You're happy and giddy as you dance  
through the kitchen  
cranking off the skins  
with that contraption my mother gave you.

Sweet juice covers the counter  
and drips down the cabinet  
until Bailey gladly licks it clean  
before it hits the floor  
and how high he jumps  
    (for an old dog)  
when you set the bowl of browning peels on the back porch.

The oven's set at 350, maybe 400  
(how would I know?)  
    The top crust brushed with butter so it browns lightly.  
And on special occasions  
you ask me to carve a design  
into the doughy beige lid  
    (Maybe a star or a flower).

I never understood why I just don't like a plain ol' apple  
    (but maybe I do).

*Paul Stridick*

## A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

September 11, 2025

**I**t was one of those perfect fall days like today, with blue skies and bright sun. School had just started, and kids were still full of summer energy and thrilled to see each other after summer vacation. Teachers at Stuart Country Day of the Sacred Heart in Princeton, New Jersey, were also full of the “back to school” excitement of a new year, getting to know the new kids, and schedules and routines of the year. Exactly 24 years ago, just after the first class of the day at 9:15, a fire drill broke into the buzz, and all the teachers headed out to the parking lot, leading their single files of students to designated spots between the assembled cars. After all were accounted for, the students headed back to classrooms with aides and staff, but unlike other days, the teachers were told to stay for a short meeting outside. As the new high school art teacher, I was among them.

The principal gravely explained that the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City, a mere 54 miles away, had been hit by an American Airlines plane at 8:46 am, followed by another plane hitting the South Tower at 9:03 am. It was being considered a terrorist attack. More information was unfolding moment by moment. We were to go back to our classrooms where the girls would be allowed to use their cell phones to contact their parents or receive calls. Many of our parents worked at the Towers daily, so we would act as counselors, awaiting news of survivors and giving comfort to the girls. Our classes had been cancelled, and we were all in mourning, in fear of what might come,

as was our whole country. Terror-stricken, we watched the television.

Many of our neighboring schools lost family members but we, at Stuart, lost no one to the attacks. Fortunately, some people were delayed getting to work by traffic, and the Path train was not running on schedule.

In the months to come, a friend and I, both trained foot reflexologists, volunteered on Saturdays to meet at the temporary headquarters of the Port Authority Police Department, located in a trailer, to massage the feet of the police who were on break from digging in the rubble of the buildings. Their mission was to find bodies, body parts, and materials that remained from the catastrophe. Each time a body or body part was found, they would all stop work, and the chaplain would lead the workers in prayer as they wrapped the body and carried it off the site. They needed the comfort of caring hands, listening ears, and loving souls as they spent a few minutes of rest on our massage tables.

A shrine had been made in the trailer in honor of those 37 Port Authority Police Officers who lost their lives that day. (This was the largest single loss of police officers in the history of US law enforcement.) As families came for comfort, we also massaged their feet and listened to their stories. Other volunteers brought food and tools and messages of gratitude in support of the work and workers and in honor of those lost.

Every week, the girls of Stuart gave me drawings, handmade cards, and candy bars to take to the volunteers to show their support. Several members of the Port Authority Police Department were welders, and as beams were

delivered to their lot, they made crosses and stars of David from the steel to give to helpers and workers. When they learned that Stuart's chapel was being refurbished, they gave me a cross to be attached to the processional cross of the chapel. When the chapel was dedicated, many of the parents who worked at the World Trade Center were in attendance, and they lined up to touch the cross made from the beam of the North Tower. Many never went back to their jobs after the attacks. I was also given a cross which bears the beam number. I learned that each beam of a building is numbered and listed, so this piece of history is authenticated by its number.

On another sunny day, on May 30, 2002, when the last of the clearing of the buildings was done and the holes were left empty, the city held a big parade, and we were honored at a special dinner for volunteers. In retrospect, I feel that this was one of the most important jobs I have ever done, to give comfort to those who lost so much on that morning, 24 years ago.

Over 3,000 lives were taken that day and many more died later, poisoned by environmental pollution created as the site burned into December 2001. I know many of you, if not all, remember where you were on 9/11. Some of you may have lost loved ones, friends or neighbors; we all have a story to tell. I was 56 years old then and it doesn't feel like so long ago.

*Cynthia Dayton*

## IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING

I stepped out of the Omni at the top of Nob Hill on California Street and pivoted to take in the scenery. It was a beautiful afternoon, clear and cool in San Francisco, very different than the fog-scape in which I'd arrived the previous evening. I'd barely perceived the main entrance when my Uber driver crept in from our abominably lengthy ride from the airport. I gave him only three stars because he'd cursed the weather for the entire drive. Now, in the daylight, I felt guilty. He was probably scared and worried. Slow driving doesn't make for many fares. Maybe that's why I'd decided on a little adventure today. And what a day for it! There was the tang of salt from the bay, and I could just see the sparkle of the white caps.

My old friend Gordie had invited me over for dinner and drinks and to meet his new wife at their home on Arizona Street. I hadn't seen him in the years since his first wife had died, a lapse I was ashamed of. Now we'd have a wonderful reunion. I took out my phone, opened the Waymo app, and carelessly typed in his address. This would be fun and would please Gordie; he worked there. The car arrived. It was a neat, white Jaguar electric with a blue cyclopean eye on its roof and two appendages on its sides that reminded me of a T. Rex's little arms. The car reeled me in through the app, counting down the number of feet that I traversed to its door. I heard the doors unlock and I climbed into the back seat. In addition to the new car smell was the smell of something electric—a touch of ozone, I think.

The car welcomed me, and I felt a thrill of apprehension as the reality of its being driverless hit me. Behind the steering wheel was...no one! With a bit of bluster, I thanked it for its courtesy and, as instructed, I fastened my seat belt. “Confirming, sir or madam, your destination is 310 Arizona Avenue.”

“Yes,” I said with anticipation. Nothing happened. Sheepishly, I saw an acknowledgement icon flashing on the screen in front of me and I touched it. “Thank you,” said the car. The locks engaged and the car began to roll, accelerating with the rush of an electric. I watched apprehensively as it entered the viscous San Fran traffic; the unattended steering wheel turned gently this way and that. Safely moving, I began to check email. “Would you like to take the scenic route?” it asked. “Sure,” I replied and then, abashed, hit the button.

Tire noise penetrated my email fog. We were going way too fast for these crowded city streets! But I looked up and we had left them. We were just merging onto the freeway. “That’s odd,” I thought. Maybe this beast knew a shortcut? Then I looked at the route map. The blue line extended off the screen, going south. I took out my phone and checked the route on Apple Maps. This GPS demanded that we exit the freeway and make a U-turn. I was getting rattled. “Car, turn around, you’re going the wrong way!” I yelled. It asked in dulcet tones if I’d like to access the news or stream some entertainment.

In the middle of the screen was a large icon that said, “Emergency Stop.” What would happen if I touched it? We were going about 55 and the traffic was heavy. Screw it! The car had driven safely; it was just confused about the route. It

would find a safe way to halt. I pressed it. Nothing happened and I whimpered. I pressed the button for communication with the car's overlords. Nothing happened. Now I was really scared. "Gordie, I'll call Gordie. He works for them. He'll know what to do."

"Hi, Dave," he answered and despite my situation, I felt a flood of relief at reaching a friend. "We've been looking for you. Running late?" I quickly explained my dilemma. "Dave, don't worry. I know this is scary, but these cars are safe. I know, I helped program them. I'm gonna hang up and talk to Central. What's the car's number? I'll get right back to you." I had to restrain myself from yelling "don't hang up, please!" We had left the city now and were doing a solid 65, I could tell because my eyes were frozen on the speedometer. I couldn't bear to look outside. Gordie called back. "Dave, are you sure you gave me the right number?" I verified it with him, reading it off the touchscreen. There was silence. "I'll get back to you. Hang in there," he said and hung up.

Hang in there? I was in a driverless car rocketing down the freeway to God knew where. It was time for action! I



punched everything I could on the screen and was rewarded with an auto insurance ad. “Okay, car. We’ll see who’s boss.” I squeezed my bulk between the front seats, avoiding the headrests, and fell face-down over the pedals. The car changed lanes, pitching me left, and my head hit the car door. Was it trying to dislodge me? Prevent me from taking control? When I struck the door, my feet were thrown onto the passenger seat. (Hell, they were all passenger seats, that was the trouble.) I levered myself up and drew my feet over the console, being careful not to touch anything. Finally! I was seated in the driver’s seat. I put my feet on the pedals, twisted the steering wheel toward the shoulder and jammed on the brakes, and...nothing happened except a message flashed on the front screen and the car spoke, “Please relax and enjoy the ride. For your safety, the manual controls have been disabled. If this is an emergency, press the Emergency Stop button.” Fatalistically, I pressed the button and, of course, nothing happened. I sat back and through a haze of anguish I watched the scenery. But by the time we got to the Big Sur, I was actually enjoying it.

After about three hours, the car, which I now addressed as Hal, gently rolled to a stop on the shoulder. It was out of power. I heard the doors unlock and I was out in a flash. No sense taking chances. My phone rang; it was Gordie. “Dave, how are you? We’ve figured out what happened.” I sorted out my feelings ranging from fury to helplessness and neither let me speak. “So, you know we couldn’t find the car number in our database. Well, get this,” he laughed, “the car’s from Phoenix! We’re trying to figure out how it got to SF now. Well, anyway, you made a mistake entering my address. You put in Arizona Avenue instead of Arizona Street. There’s no Arizona Avenue in Frisco, but, can you

guess it?” He paused for my answer and when I remained silent, he continued. “But there is an Arizona Avenue in Phoenix, big thoroughfare. The car was going home. Can you beat it? Hey, Dave are you there?” I grunted. “Well, we know where you are and we’re sending a car to get you. It’s got a special long-range battery, but you’ll have to charge it part way back. Don’t worry, the car will tell you how. It’ll be great to see you!”

“Gordie,” I said, “If you send an autonomous car to me, I swear to God, I will wreck it. Nothing will be left but shards of glass and steel and a burning battery. Do you understand me, Gordie?”

“Oh,” he said, “Yes, okaaaay. I guess I’ll drive down to get you.”

“You do that Gordie. I’ll be waiting.”

*Bob Edelson*

## THAT SOUNDS JUST LIKE

The impending departure of Steven Colbert from CBS television reminded me of my long-lived relationship with that network. Growing up in Passaic, NJ, in the 1960s, we didn't have many choices for television watching. We had a handful of channels and networks, the big ones were CBS, NBC, and ABC. The evening news to me was always defined by CBS. I think of every big event that occurred in that era—three assassinations, two Kennedys and Martin Luther King, their funerals, the Vietnam war, NASA launches, and the moon landing in 1969. I remember sitting on the floor in my PJs after dinner, my older brother Marty working on his high school newspaper with one ear tuned to the TV in the living room. All we needed to know was gleaned from what Walter Cronkite reported on the CBS evening news. In his starched white shirt, suit, skinny necktie, and studious eyeglasses, he was the image of a news anchor. He was the sonorous narrator of that black and white era. When he took those glasses off, you knew something important was happening. On November 22, 1963, he came on the air with “President Kennedy died at 1pm CST...”. He put his glasses back on and continued to do his job.

Fast forward to adulthood. Edith and I were on vacation at Yosemite National Park in the late 1990s. Boardwalks allow park visitors to view the hot springs, fumaroles, geysers, and other geologic features, without getting scalded while taking a selfie. And we observed, sometimes too closely, signature Yosemite wildlife: elk, moose, and buffalo.

One day, we were hiking a trail, and I heard someone asking a park ranger questions. I turned to Edith and said,

“Jeez! you know that sounds just like Walter Cronkite!” And there he was, retired and traveling with Mrs. Cronkite, but with a news crew from the local Wyoming CBS affiliate. He was on some sort of promotional tour, and he was doing what a journalist, even a retired one, would do—he was asking questions.

Later that day we were on the porch of the Old Faithful Lodge. After seeing that famous geyser erupt (right on schedule!), I went inside to get us a couple of drinks. There sitting at the bar was Walter Cronkite with his colleagues. I walked over and introduced myself, saying “Mr. Cronkite, my brother is a journalist in the US Navy. He would be thrilled to know that I shook your hand.” He intoned in that Walter Cronkite voice, “Well that’s very nice of you to say.” The bartender was taking drink orders from this CBS team. The younger members were getting things called Cosmos. Mr. Cronkite, however, asked for a “double Makers Mark. Neat.” (I think everybody can relate to trips like that.) I still regret not asking him for an autograph.

The CBS connection followed me to our home in Montclair—Steven Colbert’s neighborhood. I remember one Halloween hearing how parents were sure to hit certain “destination” neighborhoods with their trick-or-treaters. Stephen Colbert’s house was very popular because he gave out full-size candy bars. I guess parents wanted the added benefit of celebrity spotting.

Edith and I are slowly becoming oriented to life at Medford Leas and the Philadelphia media market. I still faithfully default to CBS news, but I occasionally miss that voice. Or, as Mr. Cronkite would say, “And that’s the way it is.”

*Dave Fucio*

## DREAMS

Always getting attentions  
for their strange aggregations.  
People and events fusing, blurring,  
and illogically meandering.

In antiquity, seen as divine instruction.  
To Freudian doctors, buried seduction.  
Censored from the conscious mind,  
kernels for dream analysis to find.

Now known to be brain constructions  
produced by chemical inductions.  
Story-making out of recent bits.  
Dreams not organized like daytime wits.

Snatches of the day before,  
mixed with people from heretofore.  
Then discombobulated waking.  
My deceased father comment-making?

Feeling anxious, angry, floored,  
guilty, ashamed or abhorred.  
Dreamer's feelings in the dream,  
best clues to what they likely mean.

Often in the night's collections  
are past daytime stress reflections.  
Rarely granting wish-fulfillment  
or happiness abundant.

Occasional exciting ones occur,  
but even those are bathed in blur.  
Neuroscience pushes inquiries  
farther than did dreaming diaries.

*Joyce Linda Sichel*

## RURAL BACKYARD

Wooden clips pin  
housedress to  
flannel shirt.  
Clothesline rope sags  
from back porch  
to maple tree.  
Frayed rope dangles  
a single board  
left to swing.



Gray granite still  
frames the yard.  
Old roses ramble.

A tire-less Buick rests  
on concrete blocks,  
hood yawning.  
Daisies, clover, dandelions,  
Ajuga, dominate grass.

Pole beans mark the garden plot.  
Rag-tied tomatoes  
blend with sprawling  
squash of summer.  
A scarecrow,  
patched and bleached,  
guards the scraggly corn  
while a crow  
rests on his shoulder.

*Janet Moodie*

## THE ROAMING DEMOGRAPHER

**T**he term demographic data refers to the characteristics of a population, such as age, gender, income, education, occupation, and ethnicity.

I remember a small feature column, perhaps in *The New Yorker Magazine*, with the title of this piece. A reporter would write up chance encounters with people she met in the city, things not important enough to be “newsworthy.” However, there was always a surprising twist to the stories: humorous, ironic, inspiring, thought-provoking, and always positive. The stories humanized NYC for those like me who only knew it through headline news and tourist attractions. At this time, there were no cellphones, let alone smart ones, and I imagined the demographer identifying strangers who seemed open to conversation, engaging them, and then jotting notes on a pad to refer to later. When I began to write the new resident biographies for Lumberton Leas, I assumed that title in my mind as I took pad and pen and went off to interview with strangers.

How did I get the job? The Lumberton pioneer resident who interviewed Dave and me asked me to cover for her in 2017 when she needed to be away for several weeks. In those days, move-ins were coming thick and fast. She had read my bookmobile piece in *Medford Leas Life* and told me she liked my writing. Flattery will get you everywhere. I agreed to substitute for her as needed.

She gave me some pointers about topics, and two of the above data demographics categories are among the most popular for our residents: education and occupation.

Additional specifically Lumberton demographics include children and grandchildren, outside interests, and reasons for choosing Medford Leas. Often residents are legacies. One or more parents, sometimes even a grandparent, lived on the main campus. Friends in Lumberton Leas are also a draw. We moved here because our close friends had done so six years before. Sometimes residents move here to be near children and grandchildren already living in the area. Personal contacts generate new residents.

Then there are the researchers, those who determine a geographical area where they wish to resettle, list all the CCRCs in it, and begin making inquiries about each, followed up by visits. A newcomer who was a resident of the Bronx her whole life and worked and volunteered in Manhattan carefully assessed several facilities. Woodside Drive won her over—the setting, the unit, her ability to get to her shore home, and her neighbors, as she got to know them. She did remark somewhat wistfully that her New York friends might be persuaded to visit, but that they would never move here because they'd never learned to drive.

When I first moved from New Brunswick, I met many residents who lived in this area or Philadelphia for most of their lives. Some had even agreed to move in together. I felt like an outsider—unfamiliar with local landmarks, alternate routes to places of interest, and local lore. I didn't expect to find personal connections or points of reference with my subjects. My first interview, however, dispelled this misconception. The couple lived nearby, and after they returned home one afternoon, I walked over to their house, rang the doorbell, and introduced myself with, "I'm Gavin's mother." My son had told me that he and the husband were

members of the same Zen Sangha in Philadelphia. In senior living, who expects to use her child as an introduction? We scheduled an interview in person and continue to be good friends.

Then I interviewed a couple who had lived for many years in Amherst, MA, across the street from good friends of my father. What a coincidence. They loved Western Massachusetts and even knew the Chesterfield Gorge, where I often went swimming as a child. Perhaps we had seen each other there or in one or another of the country stores in the area. I was surprised and delighted to share Western Massachusetts memories with them.

The Covid interviews were easy to schedule. No one had anywhere else to be, I had met some of the new residents while walking the perimeter path, and we were all yearning for social contact. One sat on her deck steps and told me about closing on the sale of her house in the morning while her movers packed her up and then moving into her Lumberton unit that afternoon. From a lawn chair in her backyard, I marveled at her organization and stamina. Another couple posed in front of their maple tree as the *Chronicle* photographer took their pictures. Then we proceeded with the interview, socially distanced in the tree's deep shade. Another couple invited me to their deck where we learned that the wife and my older brother had both attended the same elementary school before my family relocated to New England—another coincidence I had not anticipated.

When interviews are indoors, I get to see the campus from many angles through the windows and admire how they have arranged their homes. An eighteenth-century

grandfather clock, amazing collectibles, resident artists' paintings, wood carvings, stained glass, dogs and cats adjusting to their new homes—these are only some of the details that together we work into their bios. Quirky things happen as well. Once, as new resident and I chatted in her living room, a Medford Leas maintenance worker sprayed the first floor baseboards for ants. That did not stop us from getting to know each other and organizing the bio.

More than fifty interviews later, I'm still roaming, trying to describe the eclectic Lumberton demographic and keep up with another bulge in our occupancy. Knowledge is power, and meeting new people is fun. Beware, however; like my predecessor, I'm now beginning to look for backup.

*Kathy Riley*

## ADJUSTMENT

Trousers stoop  
As glutes droop.

Feet become balloons  
When blood pressure zooms,

And heart fibrillation  
Needs medical mitigation.

While vision ebbs,  
Wrinkles form webs.

An answer's unsung  
On the tip of my tongue,

I've only known you forty years.  
What, on earth, are your names, my dears.

For words that soared beautifully  
Pseudo-synonyms serve dutifully.

Belly's protruded  
Till feet are occluded.

Walking's unsteady  
With quads like spaghetti.

The spice of the Indies  
Gives digestive calamities,

And every meal's end  
Is a cause to pass wind.

Though all this adjustment  
May be repugnant,  
It is, as they say,  
Old age's cachet.

*Bob Edelson*

## **SERGEANTS AND SYRUP, WINTER, FORT DIX, 1957**

**O**ne of the few things you looked forward to in basic training was Range Week. That's when you got to go out to the rifle range day after day and actually shoot your M-1 rifle. You had to get up even earlier than usual, though, around 0430 hours, and this particular Range Week was the coldest in Fort Dix's history. On our third day we stood in formation in the predawn darkness, stomping our feet to keep warm, our breath freezing into little cartoon clouds in front of our faces. It was so cold that when our field first sergeant asked for volunteers for chow line serving duty to "step forward," everybody in my platoon dashed forward. I was one of the lucky ones to be chosen. Sergeant Mitchell, my platoon sergeant, double-time marched us to the mess hall. The sound of our boots thumping the frozen ground echoed off the empty barracks as we trotted off to take up our stations.

The mess hall was warm and inviting and smelled of hotcakes, bacon, sausage, and steaming coffee. We quickly moved behind the serving counter and manned our weapons: serving spoons, forks, and tongs. Our company was served quickly. Chow line servers eat last, and I was the last of the servers to reach the line. I quickly put a couple of pieces of bacon on my metal tray. But when I got to the pan that held the hotcakes, it held just one lone hotcake. I put it on my tray. Then I looked over at the twelve-foot-long griddle that ran along the wall behind the serving trays. It was covered with hotcakes, four deep and about twenty-five

long. The ones in front of me had already been turned over and were just about done.

The hotcake cook, wearing just a tee shirt above his white trousers, was about halfway down the griddle, and was proceeding to my left, flipping hotcakes in a steady, deliberate way. I caught the eye of the assistant cook who was standing in front of me. I gestured at the empty hotcake pan and pointed at the hotcakes on the griddle. His eyes widened in alarm, and he put his fingers to his lips, shaking his head in warning. I said I'd be happy to take a hotcake even if it was a little underdone.

With that, the hotcake cook spun around and pointed his spatula at me, screaming "You'll \*\*\*\*\* well wait until I'm \*\*\*\*\* good and ready to give you a hotcake! You think I'm here to give every \*\*\*\*\* one of youse who comes along a \*\*\*\*\* hotcake every time he wants one, you can \*\*\*\*\* well forget it!" My mouth dropped open, but I couldn't think of anything to say. He spun back to his griddle, muttering, and slowed his pace. He thrust his spatula under each hotcake as if he were slowly stabbing an enemy soldier with a bayonet. Then he raised it deliberately, turned the hotcake over, and slammed it back on the griddle.

By now, little wisps of black smoke were coming from under the cooking hotcakes. I pointed this out silently to the assistant cook. He just stood there and rolled his eyes. Totally frustrated, I reached over to the hot syrup container. I took the full ladle and sloshed it all over my single hotcake and the bacon and flung it back into the container with an oath "\*\*\*\*\*!" delivered with all the fury and sarcasm I could muster.

At that second, the cook wheeled around and saw the ladle disappear deep into the syrup with a wet “buloop” sound.

“What the \*\*\*\* do you think you’re doin’?”

“I’m sorry,” I said, feeling instantly flustered and stupid. I reached my hand deep into the hot syrup and retrieved the ladle.

That did it! The cook went nuts. He beat his spatula against serving counter in front of me, thrust his chin into my face and warmed to a tirade whose two central themes were “Who the \*\*\*\*” did I think I was, and “What the \*\*\*\*” did I think I was doing?

Then he said, “All right, Come with me, Troop.”



Still carrying his spatula, and oblivious of the clouds of black smoke now streaming up from the entire length of the griddle, he marched me off to the back of the mess hall to see the chief mess sergeant.

The very fat chief sat in front of a roll-top desk, smoking a cigar.

“What’s the trouble, sergeant?” he said, his voice rumbling up from his great belly.

“This here sonofabitch put his hand in the syrup,” the cook said, still furious.

All I could think of was the punishment that was sure to be inflicted upon me by these two. Legend had it that an exceptionally bad offender could be compelled to spend days on end cleaning the mess hall’s grease traps with a teaspoon. I started to feel really threatened.

“Is that true, Troop?” said the chief menacingly, his eyes barely visible underneath layers of fat.

“Yeah, I guess so,” I shrugged guiltily.

“Well, let’s go see your p’toon sergeant,” he grunted as he heaved himself out of his swivel chair.

The three of us went back into the mess hall and up to Sergeant Mitchell. He was a wiry, grizzled, well-worn man in his forties. He never smiled much, but he didn’t yell at us all the time the way some other non-coms did. Maybe that was because he had earned the Combat Infantryman’s Badge in both World War II and the Korean War. He was leaning against a post, his fatigue jacket unzipped, a Korean War style fur cap on his head. His right hand held a brown

plastic cup of mess hall coffee. His left hand held a cigarette, unfiltered.

The mess sergeant spoke first, “This man in your p’toon, Sarge?”

Sergeant Mitchell took a drag on his cigarette and nodded.

“Well, he just put his hand in the goddamn syrup,” said the mess sergeant with great indignation, as though I had just committed a major crime.

Another drag on the cigarette. Sergeant Mitchell turned to me, “Why did you do that, Troop?” he said, dead serious.

I tried to explain. I started to stammer something about how the ladle had just fallen into the syrup container and how I was trying to rescue it, when the hotcake cook interrupted me with “Din’t you never think about hygiene?”

I didn’t say so, but of course I had never thought of hygiene, especially when I saw the hotcake cook at work in his T-shirt, a cigarette butt dangling from his lips, dripping a mixture of sweat and ashes onto the hotcakes.

But, by now I felt that absolute contrition might help my cause. “I guess not,” I mumbled, my head lowered.

Sergeant Mitchell took charge. One more drag on the cigarette, then, grimly to me, “All right, Harp, you report to me back at the barracks.”

And to the other two, “Don’t worry, I’ll take care of this.” They nodded, satisfied, and went back to their work.

Released for the moment, I took my tray over to a table, washed down the bacon and single hotcake with coffee that

had grown cold and hurried out of the mess hall, the last of my company. Back at the barracks I looked for Sergeant Mitchell, but I couldn't find him. I caught my bus to the range, resting my chin on the muzzle of my rifle to catch a little more sleep on the way.

All through our practice exercises that morning, my mind kept wandering to the punishment that Sergeant Mitchell was sure to inflict upon me. Extra KP? No weekend passes for a month? All night furnace duty? Extra guard duty? Cleaning the grease trap? All of these? The more I thought about it the more anxious I got. Finally, when we took a break for lunch, I found Sergeant Mitchell. He was in charge of the field mess operation, a perfect position from which to impose the maximum punishment, which would have been some outdoor KP in that subfreezing weather. I found him standing by the hot water heater used to wash mess trays, cigarette and coffee in hand.

“You wanted to see me, sergeant.”

“Oh, yeah. You're the man who stuck his hand in the syrup, right?”

“Yeah,” I said as contritely as I could.

“Didja have your gloves on?”

“What?”

“Didja have your gloves on?”

Bewildered, and still thinking he was finding yet another reason to punish me even more severely, I could only stammer, “Uh ... No ... I er...”

“Next time, put your gloves on.”

I thought for a crazy moment that that was his response to the cooks' concern about hygiene. "What?..." I started to ask him what he meant, when he cut me off.

"Forget about it," he said.

I just stared at him stupidly, warily.

"Forget about it," he repeated, taking another drag on his cigarette, shaking his head slowly, and allowing just the faintest hint of a smile to show itself.

That was my instant lesson in how Bands of Brothers were created in the army. I felt I would have gone through Hell for him.

*Lee Harp*

## IN MY WALK

In my walk today  
I looked up.  
The wind was blowing  
The trees almost in half  
And they were  
Throwing their leaves  
Around maybe hoping to  
Distract the wind from  
It's onslaught?  
Who knows?  
And the birds were  
Muffled and the  
Frogs have given up  
Their chorus for the  
Nonce. And there wasn't  
ONE deer in my walk,  
Not one.

And I looked up  
And was reminded  
Of all the people who  
Are sad and confused  
Like the leaves  
Tumbling around in the wind.  
And the people who  
Are complaining about  
The "state of the world"  
And what it is coming to.

And I looked up  
And thought, geez,  
It's kind of cold and  
Feeling like winter  
Is trying to creep up  
On us. And I started  
Getting sad and  
Distressed.  
And then, when one  
HUGE brown leaf  
Struck me in the face,  
I realized, that even  
Though the wind is blowing  
The trees sideways  
And the birds are  
Hunkering down  
But not the squirrels,  
(never the squirrels!),

The sun is out.  
And I am breathing hard  
But walking to get that  
Heart rate up.  
And things are okay for today.  
And that's all we can really  
Depend on, right?  
Just today.  
And I began to feel hopeful  
And maybe things aren't  
As bad as they seem.  
And I reminded myself to  
Keep on looking up  
Through the blizzard  
Of leaves and  
Stop listening to the  
Doomsayers and whiners.  
You only have today.  
And that is enough for now.

*Cynthia Page*

## COMPANY TOWNLETS

It was in the early 1960s when my husband, straight out of college, was hired by IBM. That company taught computer science to its new employees who were college graduates with majors of all kinds. They were all hired and trained to work on the design, building, and implementation of the new System 360. Called *mainframe* computers, these were designed for dealing with the massive amounts of data generated by businesses, organizations, and institutions of all kinds. Up and down the Hudson Valley in New York State were IBM plants and offices. Personal computers were undreamed of at that time. These early IBM computers were huge, room-filling machines, kept running by electricity, air conditioning, and attendants monitoring them twenty-four hours a day.

Employees' jobs ranged from skilled manual ones to highly technical: manufacturing, typists for data input, computer operators, system designers, salespeople, and more. My husband was a Systems Engineer who helped companies who were buyers of IBM's hardware to implement its use at their job sites.

Meanwhile, back on the home front, these new employees (mostly, but not exclusively, male) needed places to live and most brought their young families with them. If IBM had provided the housing, stores, and services for employees at all their locations, they would have been old-style company towns—like the manufacturing cities of the American past. Indirectly, IBM was responsible for filling the needs of their many employees by creating

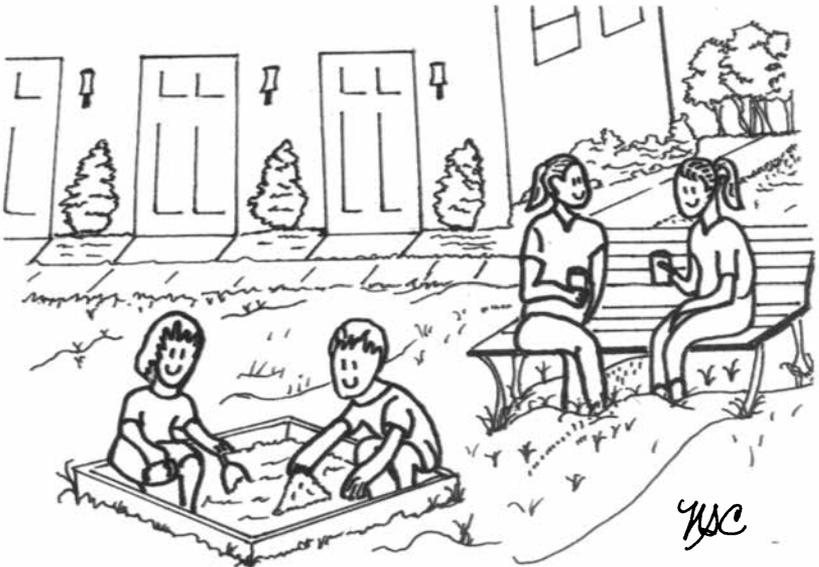
demand for what other businesses could provide. Living accommodations, stores, and services were not IBM-owned; they were indirectly IBM-supported because IBM issued the paychecks to the families who would use these services. I like to think they spawned company *townlets*. The rents in the new apartment clusters were affordable—necessary since most families had only the one wage-earner. But, in those years, women usually stayed home to “keep house and raise children,” in any case.

I was a new wife and mother from New York City, used to a very urban lifestyle. We were all new renters in our garden apartment neighborhood in rural Wappingers Falls, NY, and we were surrounded by many other new IBM families. We all lived on the ground floor and had tiny plots of dirt on either side of our doorways. My husband had no time and I had no knowledge to garden intelligently. Also the kitchen needed reconstruction, since we could feel the freezing winter air through our lower cabinets. When snow came early and very, very heavily, a ground crew piled the snow around the lampposts (where it reached to their tops).

Growing up in the city, I never learned to drive until those days in Dutchess County. Unfortunately, I had some accidents on the slippery roads. Since the area was mainly rural, there was a lot of driving to do. Every destination seemed to be at least a half hour away. The only department store (Lucky Platt and Co.) was a considerable distance away in downtown Poughkeepsie. Our doctors were also a fair distance away. I called to cancel a pediatrician appointment on a particularly freezing day. The receptionist said to me “just wrap the baby up well and come in.” The only

acceptable excuse would probably have been a blinding snowstorm, of which we had plenty on other days.

It was a place, like many other IBM townlets, with neighbors from all around the country. Next door, my best friend was from Kansas, kept her butter out of the refrigerator, and ironed her husband's boxer shorts. We got along well with that family because we both had toddler boys—our first children. We had a joint sandbox, little picnics with hot dogs on the “common” (a grassy area that was by no means a lawn). She cooked a lot of Betty Crocker kinds of recipes and I remember plenty of macaroni and cheese. My other close friend was from Maine, where she attended Bowdoin College and was very homespun in her ways. She had colonial furniture with several rockers, chair pads, home-sewn curtains, and lots of knick-knacks and sayings on the walls. She was a warm person and had a daughter just a little older than our son. Another one of the



wives did Italian cooking and invited us to learn about herbs and spices in her little kitchen—the same as ours.

A few apartments down the road was a family who went on road rallies, something unfamiliar to us. The motor club supplied a complicated route that was filled with confusing options. (Of course there was no GPS at the time.) Amateur drivers in street-legal, insured cars competed for best checkpoint times and completion time. In other apartments there were very physically active families who organized sports and ballgames on the common. I remember how young we all were. When our children were sleeping on weekend evenings, adult socializing was very simple. While I'm sure there was some drinking alcohol, this was well before the invasion of street drugs.

I never appreciated that young, innocent community as fully as now. When we left the area years later, we and our neighbors fanned out here and there. But now, in old age, I am in a place where the neighbors again share a lot of my life circumstances. They are retired, have given up some of their prior lives and interests, and are trying to fit in. We are all different, but we are looking for quality of life in retirement. The life I spent in that townlet was a good model for a tolerant, friendly America—one where people's gifts and contributions to the whole are appreciated, and a positive outlook prevails.

*Joyce Linda Sichel*

## A WALK IN THE SUN

**H**e sat on the apartment stoop and watched the trolley car go by, its bell clanging. Otherwise it was a quiet Sunday with all the stores closed. The early morning sun threw shadows from the lamp poles onto the street. He brushed his hair back, took the walk-a-meter out of his pocket, wound it, and put it on his belt. With every click, it would show the miles he had walked. The door behind him opened and his father came down the stoop. “Well son, are you ready for our walk?” His tall figure blocked out the sun. “Ready to see the airplanes, as I promised?” The father smiled and ran his hand through his son’s hair.

The boy jumped to his feet, “I sure am, been looking forward to it all week.” As he stood next to his father, he said, “let me set my walk-a-meter,” as he pulled down the start button. Together they set out into the rising sun. There were only a few street noises: a garbage truck picking up trash, a milk truck turning the corner, stopping, and the milkman stepping out carrying the bottles to the nearest house. The sun was shining brightly, and they stopped at a bench to drink from a thermos his father carried. There were fewer houses now, only open lots and for sale signs. Ahead of them on one of the streets was an old man sitting at the curb in a dilapidated lounge chair. He looked at the boy and his father as they came up to him. “I begged her not to throw my chair out.” His hands were shaking. They walked on without a comment. Looking at his watch, his father said, “Getting time to have some lunch.” As if his words were magic, ahead of them they saw a food cart. As

they walked up to it, the owner, a large bearded man, took their order for hot dogs and soda. They sat on the grass eating their lunch, watching the cars go by. Soon after, they were walking again, and in the distance the young boy could hear the sound of airplane engines. Crossing the highway, they faced a high wire fence and next to it stood a uniformed soldier. "Where are you two going?" he asked. "My son wants to see the planes; is it all right?" He replied, "yes, but no one is allowed on the airfield." They followed the soldier's directions and there they were.

On the other side of the fence, at least a dozen Army bombers were parked, all camouflaged and with their engines running, ready for takeoff. The boy ran up and gripped the fence captivated by the noise of the planes. The excitement filled his entire body as the planes moved forward to take off at the end of the airfield. His father standing close to him said, "I understand they are going to Europe, especially to England, to help in the war." The boy stood mesmerized and just nodded his head at his father's words. Soon the planes were all gone and silence filled the air.

The sun was lower now behind the apartment buildings, as they started home. The boy adjusted his walk-a-meter. His father said, "Let's stop at that food cart, if he's still there, and get a drink. Okay?" The boy nodded his head in agreement. They found the cart, bought the drinks, and slowly walked homeward into the setting sun, sipping their sodas. The boy took his father's hand, looking up at him, "That was great Dad, all those planes!" His father smiled, "Let's do it again, sometime."

Years later, flying in his own bomber from the same airfield, Floyd Bennett, the same boy (now a man and a soldier) remembered that walk in the sun. It was a wonderful experience, but one they never did again.

*George Rubin*

## QU'EST-CE LAMAZE?

**I**t was 1973, and the practice of Lamaze had entered a period of popularity among young married couples in parts of the United States. My wife, Anne, and I were one of those couples. I suspect that some readers of this article are wondering: “What is Lamaze, perhaps some Latin American dance craze?” Well, not exactly.

Lamaze is an educational program which prepares parents for childbirth. The wife learns about the physical and psychological experience of giving birth. A Lamaze childbirth is often without the assistance of medication, and, ideally, with the presence and assistance of the husband. The method first achieved recognition in obstetrics in the United States in the 1960's, because of the efforts of obstetrician Fernand Lamaze, who practiced in France.

At the time, Anne and I were living in New Brunswick where Anne had attended the Graduate School of Social Work at Rutgers University while I commuted to Seton Hall Law School in Newark. We had been married for five years, and we decided IT WAS TIME. Anne quickly became pregnant.

After researching the Lamaze program and procedures, Anne decided she wanted to give the approach a try. She reviewed the procedures with me, which of course required my active participation in the preparation for childbirth. Somehow, I did not panic.

Prior to Lamaze, wives and husbands did not go to classes together during the pregnancy, nor did they

participate in the physical exercises and breathing procedures in preparation for pregnancy, labor and delivery. Lamaze required the wife and husband to work together during the pregnancy and then the delivery. Also, during the months prior to labor and delivery, the husband's duty was to listen to and sympathize with his wife's many and varied physical and mental changes.

Before Lamaze, the day of birth would generally find the husband in a hospital waiting room, sometimes for hours, pacing, reading, watching TV, or talking with other men. Some future fathers may have even found their way to a local golf course or bar, where they would await the joyous news. Not so with a Lamaze childbirth.

Instead, Anne and I attended Lamaze classes each week for many weeks, where she practiced lying on the floor in childbirth and other positions, doing exercises, and concentrating on alternative breathing patterns to mitigate the experience of pain. This activity would be employed during the last hours of labor and delivery. To foster relaxation, we learned about the birthing process from start to finish. This would greatly reduce physical pain, fear and stress, and in some cases reduce or eliminate the need for pain medication. I would be present during labor and later, childbirth, to encourage and assist my wife, which seems only fair since I was present at the beginning of the childbirth process nine months earlier.

Anne and I completed the lengthy Lamaze course, and we were as ready as possible for what was to come, at least as far as possible for a couple who had never been through the childbirth experience.

The big day arrived on June 16, 1974, Anne and I proceeded to St. Peters Hospital at 8AM, after Anne finally convinced me that her labor pains were real and not imagined. Since the hospital supported Lamaze training, I was not sent to a waiting room, but to the labor room with Anne. We did what we were taught for several hours and at the proper time I put on a mask and gown, and we proceeded to the delivery room. Our obstetrician directed me to stand behind Anne's head, and to watch the clock on the wall to be able to record officially the time of the birth of our child.

Anne used all the training and experience she gained from the Lamaze course, and I was there to offer encouragement, and our Maureen entered this world at 3PM. Anne was alert throughout, and it was so exciting and wonderful to be there together and witness the birth of our daughter. Our Lamaze childbirth experience was a success!

Four years passed and we decided to have a second child. Lamaze labor and birthing experience #2 commenced on July 5, 1978, at Washington Township Memorial Hospital. Prior to that date we attended a Lamaze update course. We also had the benefit of knowledge gained from the birth of our daughter. Based on that experience and additional training, our obstetrician asked me: "Would you like to deliver your baby?" After a deep breath my reply was: "Yes, I would like to do that!"

So off our obstetrician and I went to the scrub room to wash up and put on surgical masks, caps, gowns and booties. We returned to the delivery room with our arms raised and bent at the elbows (just like in the movies). With our doctor

standing behind me, I sat down on the seat at the business end of the proceeding.

Then, with the help of instructions from our doctor, I watched the result of each contraction. After sufficient progress brought the crowning of our baby's head, I was able to place my hands over the baby's ears to assist in the natural turning process of our baby's head and shoulders. More and more of our child came forth until the baby slipped quickly into my hands, and I laid our son down on the bed, where he immediately cried out and gained color. There was a sigh of relief from Anne, who had been working so hard during labor contractions. At that point I clamped and then cut the umbilical cord and used the bulb syringe to clear our son's nose and throat. I then laid our son on his mother's belly.

Anne was completely exhausted, as was I, and I walked to the front of the bed to be next to her. We let our "lazy" obstetrician take care of the remaining procedures to complete the delivery. After a couple of days in the hospital Anne and Stacy III came home to join his four-year-old sister Maureen and me.

Anne and I simply cannot begin to express our awe and gratitude for the wonderful experience of being together and working together in the labor and childbirth process for our two children. We recommend the Lamaze preparation to any couple willing to give it a try. We have had no comparable experience in our lives.

***Merci beaucoup, Dr. Lamaze!***

*Stacy Moore*

## THE EVOLUTION OF CHILDREN’S PLAY

I’ve been reading some 19th-century novels lately, and I’ve noticed there isn’t much mention of childhood play. Dickens’s children hardly play at all—Pip in *Great Expectations* never seems to, and *Oliver Twist* certainly doesn’t. It isn’t until Mark Twain, in the late 1800s, that we really see children at play.

I spent a lot of time with my grandmother when I was little, and I remember being surprised at the stories she told about her own childhood. Later, I did some reading about the time period of the novels I loved, and I began to understand why her memories sounded so different from mine. In the early 1900s, play was hardly play at all—it was mostly practice for the life that lay ahead. Girls were expected to become mothers and homemakers, so their “games” meant sewing scraps into rag dolls, pretending to cook meals, or rocking babies in their arms. Boys fished, carved sticks into whistles or wooden guns, climbed trees, and played leapfrog—activities that built strength for farming, physical labor, or military service. Even in their play, children were rehearsing the roles they were expected to take on as adults.



As the 1900s proceeded, things began to change. School became a regular part of most children's days, and people started to recognize that childhood was its own life stage and should be something more than just preparation for adult work. Not all children were fortunate. Child labor was still rampant—many worked six days a week, twelve hours a day in factories, with no time for play at all. But for those who did have the chance, play opened new doors. Erector Sets and Tinker Toys taught problem-solving and creativity. Organized sports taught teamwork and leadership. Still, gender expectations were strong. Women were expected to use the skills they had learned through play to become good caregivers and homemakers. If unmarried, they were expected to teach. My grandmother grew up just prior to 1900 and was faced with these expectations. She dreamed of being a nurse, but her father told her that was unsuitable for a young woman. She could teach, he said, until she married—and she did, marrying my grandfather in 1900 at just 18. Change was coming, but slowly.

The world shifted again with World War I and World War II. My mother graduated from college in 1929 and set off for Turkey to work as an English-speaking librarian. Within a year she was back—Europe was rumbling with the threat of war. For several years she worked as a librarian and spent most of her salary and all her vacations traveling around the US with girlfriends, enjoying the freedom that wouldn't have been possible 20 years before. She married my father soon after the US formally entered the war and I was born two years later.

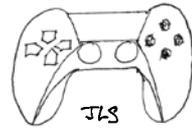
I don't remember much about my earliest play. I had no brothers or sisters, but I did have a lot of freedom and my bike. My



father built me a kind of jungle gym out of pipes, and that became my favorite thing. On a farm, though, children were expected to work. Schools closed during potato planting and digging seasons and for hunting season. Play always had to make room for work.

My favorite memories of children’s play come from the 1960s, when my own children were growing up. By then, play wasn’t about preparing for the future at all, it was about the present moment. We lived in a small town, and the children had plenty of friends. In the summer they were out the door right after breakfast, checking in only at lunchtime, and not home again until dinner. In the woods behind our house, they built forts and invented long, elaborate stories about battles and adventures. Their play was never organized, and they wouldn’t have wanted it to be. It was imagination, pure make-believe.

When I look at children today, their play feels different once again. So much of it happens on screens—video games, tablets, phones—that sometimes it hardly looks like play at all to me. And yet, just as play has always done, this new kind prepares them for the world they will inherit.



They are learning to navigate technology, to communicate quickly, and to sift through endless streams of information. These are the skills that will shape their futures, just as childhood games always have.

*Marge Rodney*



## 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, not be written by artificial intelligence, 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](http://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 special memories to share, let us hear from you. We will be reaching out in the coming months.

