

Leas Lit



ORIGINAL WRITING AND ART
BY RESIDENTS OF MEDFORD LEAS

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CONTENTS

Pangolin	<i>Bob Edelson</i>	1
The Alaska Story	<i>Barry Cyphers</i>	4
Grandma Nellie	<i>Sue Madeira</i>	8
Gateway to India	<i>Katherine Riley</i>	11
The Adventures of Nana Drew	<i>Joyce Linda Sichel</i>	15
Because I Almost Swea'd To Death	<i>Paul Stridick</i>	18
Loophole	<i>Bob Edelson</i>	19
Welcome Home, Little Brother	<i>George Rubin</i>	22
A Special New Year	<i>Janet Reynolds</i>	24
The Rodney Dangerfield Tree	<i>Dave Fucio</i>	26
Symphony	<i>Ann Scott</i>	28
Ritual	<i>Janet Moodie</i>	30
Lumberyard Bumbler	<i>Judy Kruger</i>	32
Forsythe Wildlife Preserve	<i>Sue Madeira</i>	37
Coming Out as Old	<i>Marina Spence</i>	38

PANGOLIN



Harmless critter,
With keratin clothing,
Looks like a pinecone
Its sharp scales imposing.

Its babies suck milk,
'Cause it's really a mammal.
It has few defenses,
So it often must scramble.

Digging claws are dull,
They'd not hurt a fly,
But if you're ant or termite,
You're gonna die.

Its bipedal motion's like
A tyrannosaur's walk.
Sleeps in burrows,
For daylight's fraught.

It can't see far
But has a nose that betters
The skills of a dog:
Hound, shepherd, or setter.

Cannot bite,
Has only a tongue,
But that's a foot long
With saliva like gum.

When predators near
A hard globe it forms.
Its armored veneer
Is protection lukewarm.

Doctors Chinese
Make nostrums from scales,
And the meat is gourmet,
So poachers assail.

But that's not all
Why they're in harm's way.
Charged fences for livestock
Make three times the decay.

Years fifty-five million
They've been around,
But now they're trafficked,
Electrocuted, shot down.

And all for no reason.
Their keratin scales
Are no more medicine
Than your own fingernails.

And surely our livestock,
Though it needs protection,
Doesn't require
Pangolin execution!

So save the poor pangolin
Wherever it's found.
It's not like we need
Another species cut down.

Bob Edelson



THE ALASKA STORY

The phone rang three or four times, and went to voicemail. After introducing myself, I said “I’m calling for Lorne Mullick. The reason I’m calling is that I think perhaps our fathers were in Alaska together in 1951. My dad was involved in a search and rescue mission following a plane crash. If any of that makes any sense, please give me a call at...” It was just a shot in the dark. That was on a Sunday in June, 2017. But the next afternoon I had the most fascinating 45-minute phone conversation of my life.

On September 1, 1951, my dad wrote a 16-page narrative detailing the events of the previous day. He was stationed in Adak, Alaska in the U.S. Navy aboard the USS Bagaduce. That morning the Bagaduce was heading out on maneuvers when they received orders to respond to the report of a missing plane. As directed, they headed toward the plane’s scheduled flight path. A few hours later they received word that the plane, a four-engine patrol bomber, carrying a ten-man crew, had smashed into the side of a mountain on Little Tanaga Island that foggy morning.

The Bagaduce arrived at the island about 5 pm. A team of sailors, including my dad, headed to the beach in a whale boat. The crash site was about 800 feet up the mountain and as they scrambled up to the site, they found exactly what you’d expect. The largest remaining pieces of the plane were part of a wing and half an engine. Charred debris and the crew’s remains were scattered everywhere. There probably had been quite an explosion when the plane crashed, because that type of plane would have the capacity to carry six bombs and 3000 gallons of fuel.

It took the recovery team about five hours to meticulously collect the remains and personal effects of the crew and carry them down the mountain, then load and secure them on the ship. My dad was 23 years old at the time. I can't even imagine the emotional impact that whole experience must have had on him and his shipmates.

Around 10 pm the captain gave the command to weigh anchor. In that moment, no one onboard the ship could have known about a lone survivor, the guy who was still out there on the island.

But, as they prepared to leave, the captain glanced back toward the shore and saw a flash of light! Over the next few minutes there were a few more intermittent flashes. So, two boats were sent back to the island. My dad volunteered for a spot on the second boat. After a search, the rescue team found a man part way up the mountain, huddled under a ledge, badly burned and seriously injured. He was a couple hundred yards away from the path the original team had taken up to the wreckage, which explains why they hadn't seen him before.

The flashes seen from the ship must have been the light on the man's Mae-West jacket flashing as his head nodded up and down as he drifted in and out of consciousness. After identifying him as a survivor from the flight, the team bundled him up and got him to the ship.

Back on board, the doctor removed his burned clothes and tended to the burns on his face, head and upper body. The man clearly recalled the fire and four explosions in the aftermath of the plane's impact. My dad's notes say that the

fellow's name was Mullick and that he was from Oakland, California.

As I grew up, my dad rarely talked about the experience, as is so frequently the case. But we dug out my dad's first-hand account of the "Alaska Story", when he passed away in 2003. Then in 2017, I was organizing my desk and came across the manuscript again, and I wondered whether this fellow Mullick had actually survived his injuries. If so, could we find him? Armed with current technology, my wife Denise and I began some internet sleuthing, eventually leading to my out-of-the-blue call to a stranger that Sunday.

When Lorne Mullick returned my call the next afternoon, we soon confirmed that our fathers had indeed crossed paths in Alaska in 1951.

Lorne was 3½ years old when his dad, Frank, came home from Alaska in a body cast with burns all over his body. His head was wrapped in bandages. Lorne remembers the long rehab and the incredible story his dad shared about the rescue.

"He was a tough old bird", Lorne said of his father. Frank Mullick had joined the Navy during the Second World War and fought at the Battle of Midway. He was bombed at Guadalcanal. He was in Fiji a couple times. After all that, Frank ended up in Alaska in 1951. He was 28 years old. On that early morning flight in August, he was only on the airplane to get in some flight hours. He was asleep in the tail section when the plane crashed into the side of that mountain. As his body slammed into the bulkhead, two vertebrae were crushed. With the plane on fire, he worked his way forward and found the crew all dead. He jumped out

of the fuselage and stumbled and rolled downhill toward the beach. Frank was badly burned. He didn't have shoes. He had no way to communicate with anyone. But he found a safe place away from the crash site and crawled under a ledge.

At some point after Mullick's recovery, the Navy tried to "medical him out", but he fought it and stayed in the service until the early 1960's, because "he loved it". After his Navy career, Frank spent 20 years at Lockheed working on the development of missile systems. My question was answered—not only had Frank survived, he had thrived. He passed away in 2009 at the age of 86, but he was around to see two grandchildren and one great-grandchild come into the world.

There had been a flurry of emails after my phone call with Lorne. I sent him my dad's manuscript. Lorne sent some items from a file his father had saved. There was the Navy accident report, attributing the crash to pilot error and radar issues. There was a Kodiak Alaska newspaper clipping describing the incident along with some amazing photos of the plane wreckage, and the recovery team sifting through the debris. When Lorne shared a picture of Frank Mullick, his head wrapped in bandages, the whole story became very, very real to me. There were so many revelations over the next week or so, it was almost overwhelming.

In the end, Lorne and I were grateful to have a more complete picture of the events of that tragic day 75 years ago. I only wish our fathers would have had a chance to meet again. That would have been an amazing reunion.

Barry Cyphers

GRANDMA NELLIE

My grandma Nellie was a caretaker for all of my childhood. My grandfather had Parkinson's disease, and at that time, there were no medications to control his continuous shaking. Before that, she had cared for her youngest daughter, who died of ulcerative colitis at age 19. Her remaining three children were all successful in their own ways. And she helped take care of me when my Dad was in the South Pacific.

Through it all my grandmother was a multitasker. She seemed to cook dinner for much of the day, for example, boiling green beans with bacon for hours. Her fried chicken was amazingly delicious. What filled my heart and stomach were the oatmeal raisin and chocolate chip cookies in a



cookie jar that was always accessible. I could have a cookie anytime I wanted! This was so unlike my mother's kitchen where mealtimes were strict, and the kitchen was closed otherwise. When we visited for a week every two years during my childhood, she would yell out: "Whoee! Whoee!" when we first arrived. She also sewed clothes and made beautiful quilts throughout her life. I was greatly touched when she made me a shirt and shorts set when I was 7 years old.

My grandmother grew up on a farm in southern Illinois. Although she had only an eighth-grade education, she wrote letters frequently, describing what she ate each day and the cost of different food items. To save paper, she would write in between the lines of a letter my parents had sent her. What a character!

She was one of eight children but, due to tuberculosis and the 1918 flu, only four survived past age 25. Her brother was the only one who received an education; he became a doctor.

After she and my grandfather married, they moved to Canon City, Colorado. They struggled to put food on the table during the Depression and grew their own vegetables and corn. Later they owned a small house and rented the upstairs to make end meet. After you entered the living room, their bedroom followed through a large archway. There was a private bedroom in the back and another next to the living room. This one had wall to wall mattresses for family who came to visit. You would just walk over other mattresses until you got to yours!

Before Sam and I married, we visited her in Colorado Springs. She made me sleep with her, and Sam was just outside that room on a cot. All night long, we could hear her cough and cough and struggle to breathe. Sam diagnosed her with aortic stenosis and told her she needed a valve replacement. She readily followed his advice and got on a bus for 3 hours to have surgery in Denver, Colorado. This prolonged her life by 15 years, and Sam was considered a hero by our extended family.

Being tall and big boned, she exuded calm and strength. However, she was fearful of a prisoner possibly escaping the State Prison in their town, and also often told stories of terrible accidents and people being attacked by grizzly bears.

Throughout my life, even after Grandma Nellie died, I felt she was my greatest ally and support. During my mother's final years and during the pandemic, I kept her picture on my closet floor, where I could see it daily for inspiration and support.

Sue Madeira

GATEWAY TO INDIA

I'm not sure when my fascination with India began. Perhaps I inherited it from my father. His library included novels about the Raj from its beginnings to the end of World War II. My grandmother read me *The Secret Garden* until I was old enough to read it myself. I'm only a year older than the partition of India and Pakistan, which I remember as East and West Pakistan from my stamp-collecting days. I, too, gravitated to novels about India—*Bowani Junction*, *Passage to India*, *The Raj Quartet*, randomly selected from a London bookstore in 1975. And yes, I did read Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, all 1300 plus pages.

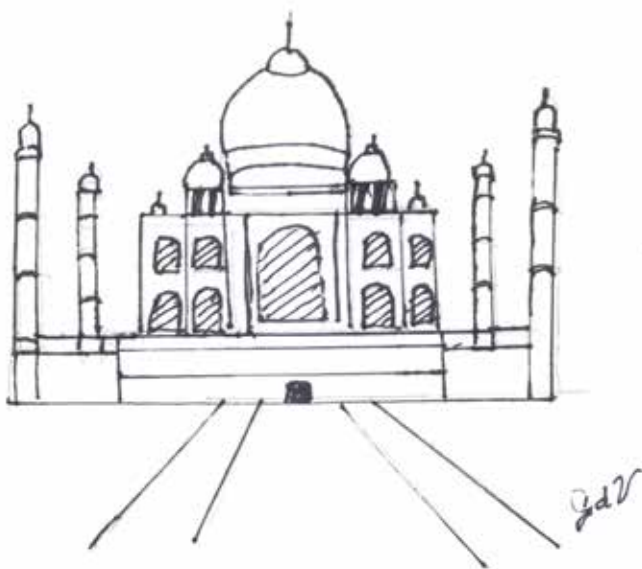
In spite of my literary bias toward things Indian, I did not want to travel there. It wasn't fashionable in the '60s and '70s. People who had done so talked of the monsoons, crowds, heat, cobras, and gastric distress. One travel agent friend took her own canned tuna fish and survived on that. I preferred the British Isles, where I spoke the language, or Greece, Italy, and France, whose art and architecture were the basis of my art history course. I could also explore the cuisine and wines without major complications.

Times change, and so do people. In 2006, the National Association of Independent Schools announced a summer (!) trip to India to visit a variety of schools there: Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai, and an excursion to Agra and Jaipur for sightseeing that of course included the Taj Mahal. When several of my colleagues enthusiastically petitioned our headmaster and the school administration agreed to split the bill, I signed up.

On our third day, recovered from jet lag and following a busy schedule of school visits in Delhi, we had an afternoon off. Paula, my roommate, and Justin, a teacher from Boston, had reserved a taxi to take them to the Taj. The rest of the group were going shopping. I'd already booked the add-on for the Taj, but why not go twice? We set forth in a steady rain with a young driver who spoke good English. Using his cellphone, he arranged for a guide to meet us in Agra.

We stopped at several checkpoints. Our driver explained that we were crossing some sort of boundary lines (city? county?) and had to state our destination. Once, he parked and got out of the car to make a report. Souvenir sellers and a cobra in a basket descended upon us, and we rolled up the windows.

The rain continued, and the driver's windshield wiper began to scrape badly. He stopped yet again and tried to



adjust it. We wondered when the Taj closed and if we would get there in time. Paula caught the driver's attention and waved him in. From her bag she pulled her duct tape wallet and announced, "This has a repair kit." Sure enough, she produced several lengths of unused tape. The driver smiled, went out into the rain again, and mended the wiper. We drove on.

After a final stop, this time at a McDonald's to use the restrooms, we arrived. A smiling guide, also fluent in English, awaited us. The rain stopped, right on cue. We walked through the massive open gates and into the garden with the reflecting pool stretching toward the famous tomb at the far end. The whole enclosure was almost deserted! Hours of heavy rain had driven away the usual crowds of tourists. We had the whole place to ourselves with more than an hour until closing time.

We went first to Mumtaz's tomb, where the guide swept aside two other tourists in order to have us right in front of the sarcophagus. He pointed out the jewels in the inlay work of vines, flowers, and leaves on the white marble. Tucked back in a corner was the tomb of Shah Jehan, who had built the Taj for his favorite wife. We learned that he'd planned a similar tomb in black marble across the river, facing his wife's monument. Walking around the outside, we saw an orchard on the proposed site. Shah Jehan was deposed by his son Aurangzeb and imprisoned in the Red Fort down river. From his cell, he could see his masterpiece, but his tomb was never built.

We followed the outside walkways, exploring the mosque on one back corner and the guest house on the other, while asking our guide questions. Then we took pictures—views that looked like the iconic postcards and calendar shots—with no other people blocking our view.

Our driver chose a restaurant he thought we would like that offered a menu of sandwiches, chicken fingers, and French fries with a side of ketchup. We washed it down with Coke. Midway through the meal, the electricity went out. Candles were provided. We finished and paid. I suspect that McDonald's on the highway would have been more expensive and even more generic.

The drive home did not seem to require those official stops, but our driver did make one unscheduled one at a small shop. As he settled back into the driver's seat, he handed Paula a box and explained that it contained a sweet for which the area was famous. Our visit would not be complete without sampling it. He refused to let us reimburse him.

The trip to India added a realistic dimension to my fiction-driven fantasies about the country, and I enjoyed the juxtapositions of ancient and modern. “Enjoyed” is not the right word for the contrasts between wealth and poverty, but that's another story. When I imagined how that first trip would go, I did not include being alone at the Taj.

Katherine Riley

THE ADVENTURES OF NANA DREW, NJCCRCS DETECTIVE

I'm 79 years old now, and feel honored to be asked by the NJCCRCS to bring the old Nancy Drew adventures from our childhood up to the present. I call myself Nana because that's what my grandchildren call me. It makes a rather nice parallel I think—Nancy Drew and Nana Drew.

The *Girl Detective* was quite feisty. When I reviewed a few original books that the NJCCRCS had on hand, I liked that Nancy was a more modern gal than many young women of the 1930s through the '50s. Nancy enlisted the help of Helen, Bess, and her cousin George in solving her mild detecting challenges. I'll call on my friends too, especially since they have now advanced to appropriate ages for NJCCRCS membership.

I've decided that my first case should be to solve the *mystery of the missing grandfather clock*. I have lived at Medford Leas over ten years and the comfortable, homey community building existed many more years than that. We used to have a living room here called the Lounge or Willow Room. (Most of our rooms have the names of trees which are spread over the large acreage they call the Arboretum.) I always knew where this clock could be found—in the Willow Room. The clock has a beautiful face and hands, a lovely chime on the hour, and what we call presence. But then it disappeared when the owners and administration set about modernizing the place.

I caught sight of the clock in one of the halls where it remained for a short while. Then one of my helpful friends told me that she had seen it in a storage room when she

happened to pass by, but when I looked it was gone. In addition to a great many residents and staff, we are always having relatives and visiting outsiders coming to see and hear special programs. I began to worry that the clock, while heavy, might have been taken away by shady strangers. We also had a very large number of contractors during those years of renovation. Now, I like to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, but a workman might want to give his wife a handsome antique for their home, like he had seen in posh worksites. He might think that this old piece of furniture was a discard, given wherever it was standing and all the updating going on.

I called my helper friends and we decided to form a search party to comb all the areas of the community building looking for the clock. Some of the places we investigated were also under construction with temporary walls and routes, but we did our best to look around places that were blocked. None of us saw it, so we expanded the search party to include two members of Administration. They were also getting more concerned about the whereabouts of this very heavy, heirloom clock. Finally, we went into normally off-limits storage areas where a lot of furniture was put temporarily. We didn't find it. I was afraid we were getting too close to wiring and mechanicals (as well as heating and air conditioning systems) as we peered behind walls and into work closets. We certainly did not want to disturb those things since they were touchy to begin with! We thought about going upstairs to Assisted Living, but were reminded that those elevators had also been under repair and it was unlikely that any delicate furniture had been moved on them. Besides, the upstairs was being renovated too and there were no big open spaces where a very large

clock could be hidden. We searched all lost-and-found areas to no avail too.

Our last effort was to enlist the staff who inventoried supplies, hoping that they would have the special skills we needed. But they came up empty-handed with no written records. The denouement of solving this case, which had almost exhausted my ideas, occurred when they switched us from where we customarily played our table games to a big room called the Gathering Room (no tree name). When all the games had been moved in there and we were beginning to set the room up, I heard a chime coming from an area in the room that still needed to be sorted out. There was a large dropcloth over a big tower. It was the grandfather clock, the time had been set, and it was still running!

And there it remains today. I, Nana Drew, am keeping close tabs on it, to no one's surprise. Meanwhile, I have been approached by a staff member about another mystery, and the NJCCRCS is quite pleased for me to get involved. How timely that is, because it will be our next adventure.

Joyce Linda Sichel

BECAUSE I ALMOST SWEA'D TO DEATH

With apologies to Emily Dickinson

Because I almost Swea'd to Death-
He kindly gave to me—
A Device that rids the Heat
And Humidity.

It cools my House,
It cools my Car
And Office and the Store.
I owe a Debt of Gratitude to Willis Carrier!

OH, what Price
Does this Heaven cost
For each cooler Day?
I shall pay Electric Bills
For all Eternity.

Paul Stridick



LOOPHOLE

Across the room, the clerk grudgingly looked up from his monitor, reluctant to leave the solitaire game I could see from the counter. “Whatcha want?” he grumbled.

“A license. They told me I had to get a license and that this was the place to...,” I replied. I didn’t like him. I didn’t like the grubby, windowless office in the heart of the vast Federal Building. Most of all, I didn’t like being told that “If that’s the way you want to spend your time, get a license!” I tried to keep my anger hidden. This person had power over me, and he knew it. I pretended respect. “I’m sorry to bother you, sir. Is this the right place?”

“That depends,” he said. There was a kind of ripping sound as his pants left their long association with his chair. He stood and came to the counter. He looked like he wanted to punch me. “A license for what?”

“I need a writer’s license,” I said, and I winced at my beseeching tone.

Six months ago, the FCC stated that, to inhibit domestic terrorism, all journalistic writing must be “inspected” before publication, and, they said, that meant knowing about the writers, hence, licensure. We journalists laughed at the absurdity, and the big public outfits (those who still had profits) went to court. As expected, the court threw out the entire regulation, censorship and all. The government appealed and lost again. It filed a brief with the Supreme Court claiming the rule was necessary for purposes of

national security. The Court ruled the regulations legal. There were minority dissents, but what did it matter?

We, the writers, would not stand for this. We would refuse to be licensed and continue to report. The people who pay our salaries folded under pressure “for business reasons.” Some writers decided to pursue their craft online. I’ve got a family to feed. So here I was kowtowing to a clerk.

“Writer’s license? Sure,” he smirked. He grabbed a thick sheaf of paper from a niche and shoved it at me. “Ya gotta fill this out by hand and bring it back with the application fee.” He smiled. “It’s \$100,000. We accept cash, credit, or a bank draft.” He returned to his computer game.

“Wait,” I said, “Isn’t there some other way?”

He turned back and stared at my crumpled face and a hint of compassion reached his eyes. “Look,” he said, “I gotta a job to keep too.” His voice fell to a whisper. “I read the paper since I was a kid. I even had a lesson in elementary school on how to read it. I don’t read it anymore ‘cause I can’t trust it.” He came back to the counter and gestured me closer. “Ya might try this.” He handed me a single sheet of paper. “Fill it out. You can do it here.”

I looked at the heading. “Well, it’s something,” I murmured. “What’s the fee?”

“Ten bucks.”

My eyes flew open. “Why the incredible difference?”

“Poetry’s art, not journalism. Art ain’t worth much.”

I filled out the form, gave him \$10, and got my license.

The word sped around the community with the speed of gossip. And things changed. Soon the media were full of rhymes, of iambs, trochees. There were enjambments, metaphors, alliteration, sonnets, quatrains, haikus, even sestinas, for God's sake. Onomatopoeia was the sonorous word of the year. Here's a sample of my verse.

In Congress today, the Speaker delayed
All thinking that didn't agree
With the party's assertion that this would waylay
All restraint on their spend jamboree.

Okay, okay, it's prose poorly disguised in doggerel, but it's poetry, isn't it? We're hoping we'll be grandfathered when the license fee is raised.

What if we wrote it to music?

Bob Edelson

WELCOME HOME, LITTLE BROTHER

Marge called out loud and clear, “Come on in guys; dinner is on the table.” Tony and Rita came bounding down the stairs from their rooms. Laura put her sketch book aside and followed her brother and sister to the table. George, who was helping Marge set the table, pulled out a chair and sat down. Marge finished putting all the food on the table and said, “I spoke with Ms. Wilson at the New York Adoption Agency today, and they have a baby for us to see and make a decision whether we want to take him.” Tony smiled, “That’s great Mom. I know we made a decision to integrate our family and also Levittown. Let’s do it.” He and his sisters were looking forward to their new brother and seeing how he would fit into the family.

Next morning everyone climbed into the family station wagon and took the long drive to Harlem Hospital. Ms. Wilson, who had worked with them from the beginning and the interracial adoption, was waiting and greeted them with her usual smile. “It’s good to see you,” she said. “Come with me and see the baby.”

On a hospital table lay a small baby boy. His light brown skin shone under the operating room lights. When a nurse took off his diaper, he kicked and smiled. Then suddenly a stream of urine rose into the air. In unison John, Rita, and Laura shouted, “Take him. Take him! He is definitely one of us.” As they yelled and clapped, George smiled; and Marge picked up the baby, who closed his eyes, sleepily resting on her shoulder. Ms. Wilson smiled happily and remarked, “He sure feels comfy! He fell right to sleep.”



The ride home was noisy and joyful. The children couldn't keep their eyes off their new brother. "We have to name him," Tony said. "I'm for John, after our late President J.F.K." Rita chimed in, "How about Martin, for Dr. Martin Luther King?" At home they all gathered and looked down at John Martin as he slept. "Welcome home, little brother," George breathed.

It was not long after that Marge and George were invited to the David Suskind Show to speak about interracial adoption. This was followed by a live news segment on the ABC news hour and a picture with a story in the newspaper *Newsday*.

Postscript: Today John Martin is a sixty-year-old grandfather. He survived being spoiled by his parents and siblings and is the little brother they all imagined and who would make their family complete.

George Rubin

A SPECIAL NEW YEAR

At 6:30 am I arrived at work knowing that it would be a challenging day as holidays were usually short staffed in the hospital where I worked. After receiving the handover from the night shift, I promptly conducted rounds on all twenty-five patients to verify that their conditions corresponded with the information provided by the night charge nurse.

My hospital was located on Broad Street just north of Philadelphia City Hall. It was an amazingly beautiful day for January 1st, and the occasional window was open to allow in the fresh air. I started my busy day by handing out the breakfast trays, making sure that everyone was able to eat their meal. Mrs. G., in a room at the end of the hall, was sitting up in bed looking over her meal. Asking her if it was all right, she told me that she just was not hungry. I said just try a bit, be sure to at least drink your milk. It is good for you!

The nine o'clock meds were next on my schedule. By the time I returned to Mrs. G. it was about 9:30 am. She was asleep and had not touched her breakfast. I checked her IV which was due to finish at 11am. All was well. At least I thought so.

At 11 am when I returned to Mrs. G.'s room, she was still asleep. This was not so unusual. Her nursing home had sent her to the emergency room five days ago. Her admission diagnosis was pneumonia. Her symptoms had improved; the antibiotics were working their magic. I put my hand on her forehead to check her temperature, and it was quite cool. When I tried to wake her to check her blood pressure, I discovered that she was not responsive. Her blood pressure was low, her pulse slow but steady.

Now what? Protocol would be to notify her physician of record, but it was a holiday and he was not available. I paged the on-call resident, and he agreed to see her. This is where it gets, well, difficult.

Mrs. G. was 92 years old. She had been in a nursing home for seven years. Since her admission to the hospital, she had not received any visitors nor had any phone calls. She was a sweet, non-demanding person. She had expressed to me that she was lonely and missed her family. During the doctor's examination she became restless. Then her heart rate accelerated and she experienced atrial fibrillation. The doctor immediately asked me to call a code. I said no.

Shocking! The doctor argued that he could save her. I held my ground. After discussing Mrs. G.'s situation, the resident reluctantly agreed with me. She was not experiencing distress, she was not in pain, she was not conscious. She was not alone. I was with her. I held her hand and spoke to her of the simple things in life. Then as the afternoon faded, the sound of the Mummers Parade floated through the window from the street below. Mrs. G. died peacefully as the strains of "Oh Dem Golden Slippers" filled the air. She was at peace.

Epilog: This experience took place in January of 1973. At that time Advanced Directives, Living Wills, and Do Not Resuscitate were not common concepts as they are today. This was my first time, as a nurse, encountering such a decision. Did I make the right choice? I honestly believe I did. Would you have made a different one?

Janet Reynolds

THE RODNEY DANGERFIELD TREE

I'm the tree that stands on my own private island in the Wellness Center parking lot. There's an uneven cement circle surrounding my roots. But I'm unknown to many. I wear no identifying sign or badge. My neighbor, on his own island, "Red" Maple; he's got a sign.

But me? I've got a red fire hydrant. Three yellow metal bollards. I have a slightly askew parking lot sign, and two blue valve boxes for the water main. The main passes my roots, though I get no benefit. Last but not least, there's the port-a-john! I mean, it's barely a yard away from me. I know I need fertilization, but this is ridiculous!

Let me help you out. I'm a descendant of the American Elm (*Ulmus Americana*). I deserve some respect! After all, a lot of my ancestors in the US were devastated by a disease in the early 20th century. I'm not that old. But, still...

I know, I know. Many other trees around the grounds aren't identified. But many have some kind of signage. Multiple times. And in Latin, no less. Those flamboyant crepe myrtles. Such showoffs. And every single crabapple. Talk about crabby. Over on the south side near the employee parking lot, there's that big Dawn Redwood. What kind of name is that, anyway? ("Welcome to the Arboretum Bar 'n' Grill. My name is Dawn Redwood. Would you like to see a menu?") The eastern, Norway, and other spruces that drop pine needles and sap all over cars; all have identification tags.

Well, after a long winter, it's finally spring time. I should lighten up, right? The sun is shining. My sap is flowing

and I'm leafing out. The birds and bugs are keeping me company. Yup, bugs are my friends. And they finally removed that port-a-john! Good news!

(PS: my island has inherited a broken plastic street barricade and a dirty traffic cone. I mean, c'mon already!)

Dave Fucio



SYMPHONY

I struggle
at the top of the ladder,
painting what seem to be
an endless series of paneled doors.

The drudgery is broken by
the frenzied notes of
Khatchaturian's Saber Dance
cascading down the stairs.

The melodic strains of
a Mendelssohn symphony
follow on its heels —
one of the nine symphonies
Mendelssohn wrote before the
age of sixteen,
and I marvel at such genius.

I am mindful
of the tedious hours
of rehearsal and performance in
recording all this.
And I am grateful
that the gift of music
has been preserved for all time.

But then,
on this warm spring day,
I open the door —
and the mellifluous trills
of my avian friends spill forth,
unrehearsed—a live performance—both
bold and sweet
with infinite variations.
It fills the air with a symphony
continually
renewing itself.
And I marvel even more.

Ann Scott

RITUAL

I left early—hoping the beach would be mine for awhile,
Wanting to walk at the edge of the tide—half in, half out,
Needing to sit in the stillness of the morning
And meditate the Whatever.
To ponder the unceasing miracle of lulling waves,
To refresh myself—a Sabbath renewal
From months of never lulling pace.

Whatever their reasons, a myriad of others
Had forsaken Sunday rituals too.
Non-existent parking places.
A young, blonde, impeccably uniformed, police woman
Intensely doing her job.
First, unison movement of people and gear
Away from in-reaching tide.
Next, unison movement toward receding tide—
Follow the liturgy!

A helicopter hovers,
Chop-chop chopping
The blend of radio blares.
A gaunt young woman
Exposes butterfly and serpent tattoos
Escaping her spare bikini, front and back.
The scent of tangy salt air
Merges with the perfumes of sun-tan oils.

With gravity, ointments are eased over prostrate bodies.
Practiced positions carefully assumed
For measured worship of the sun.
Motion is as constant as a frenzied sea—
Time for a cold drink or ice cream cone,
Time to fuss with radio dial or position a chair,
Time to hand out hot dog money or go for a walk—
No place to do nothing at all.

I left early.

Janet Moodie

EAR



LUMBERYARD BUMBLER

Well, what was a young woman to do? I had five years of college loans to repay, an unemployed artist partner to support, rent on our ratty apartment, and a dad who reminded me he had to pay for three other siblings' undergraduate educations.

It was the nineteen seventies and women were realizing that men made a noticeably larger salary in their traditional jobs. I thought about that, and the fact that pretty soon I would like to dump both the boyfriend and the crummy apartment. But I had no training in the trades, and no interest in going back to school for highly skilled work such as becoming an electrician or architect.

What skills did I have that might be transferable?

It dawned on me that if a girl was adept at a sewing machine, she could indeed learn to use construction tools. I had made my clothes since I was about thirteen; the local fabric store held Saturday morning classes. We started by learning about patterns. Then we learned how to thread a sewing machine. Our first projects were exceedingly simple, but by the time we had completed one summer of classes, we had made the long granny dresses that were popular that year, bell-bottom pants, and peasant blouses. That autumn I made my mother a formal coat of a nubby fabric, lined in a pink silky fabric. I even sewed myself a reversible bathing suit. Once you got the hang of patterns and process, you could sew anything.

How different could construction tools be from sewing tools?

I went to the nearest lumberyard. I asked for the manager. Before I introduced myself, he said to me, “We don’t need any cashiers at the moment.” Remember, this was the nineteen-seventies. I took a long breath and said, “I am here to apply for the assistant manager trainee job that is posted in the newspaper.” The man was confused. “Why should I hire you?” he asked me. “Because you can train me and I’ll do exactly what you teach me,” I replied.

I was hired on the spot. It turned out Rick had one problem employee who never listened to him and would shortly be fired. My timing had unknowingly been perfect.

There were a few hitches. “Grossman’s Lumber doesn’t have any other women manager trainees that I know of,” my boss said, “so you’ll have to buy some clothes that look like our uniform.”

“That’s just temporary, right?” I asked.

My new boss, Rick, looked thoughtful. “I’ll have to call Headquarters. They won’t be happy.”

“Well, I won’t be the only female for long,” I said. Rick looked startled. After work that day, I hurried into a clothing store and purchased a pair of brown slacks and a button-down shirt that was as close to Grossman’s bright orange one as I could find. The receipt would go to Headquarters for reimbursement.

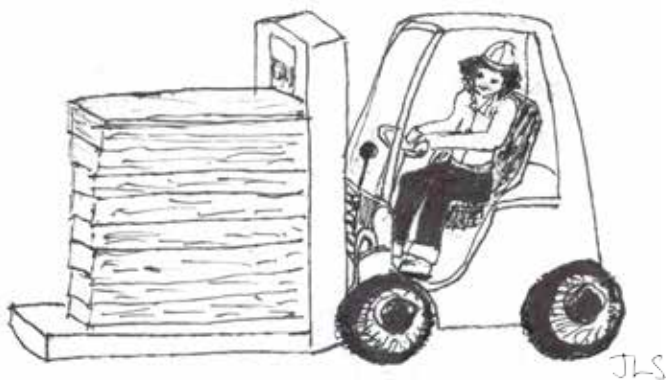
Rick set me to work on my first day taking gallons of paint out of boxes and lining them up near the cash

registers. He was outside with a truck for a while and assumed I could handle that with no supervision.

Remember, I was living with an artist. When Rick returned, he saw that I had unpacked all the boxes. However, the gallon cans had been arranged in sculptural patterns all around the front of the store. The man could have fired me. He didn't. He had raised kids, bless his heart.

That afternoon, someone from Headquarters in Massachusetts showed up to figure out the uniform problem. He took me to lunch at a nearby diner. "What should I do?" he asked me. "Assume women are going to get hired for all the available positions, throughout the whole chain of stores," I said, and watched the man wince. "That would be expensive," he said. I was tempted to say, "A lawsuit for discrimination would be a lot more expensive," but held my tongue.

Headquarters eventually did get uniforms for women manufactured. I was pleased and put the word out among all of my New England feminist activist networks that Grossman's was a good place to work.



Soon it came time for me to learn to use the forklift. I had been driving a car for at least ten years without any accidents, so learning was easy. Forward, backward, up, down, tilt. The forklift needed to be gassed up at the gas station next door every morning. That was added to my responsibilities.

One morning I was standing at a pump and a car drove up on the other side. An elderly man got out. He stared. “What kind of a car is that thing?” he asked. His eyes were practically falling out. I said calmly, “That is a forklift, sir.” “No,” he said, “really, what is it?” I thought, what century is this, what planet are we on? Then I gently explained that women were willing to do what used to be men’s work to support themselves. “Oh,” he said, “like Rosie the Riveter!” We beamed at each other and I drove the forklift back to the lumberyard.

But during the first snowstorm in New England, a co-worker who was resentful of my job as manager trainee, went out to the yard and unhooked the brakes on the forklift. A truck loaded with pallets of shingles came in for me to unload. As I drove through the yard, lifting the blades preparing to hook the first pallet, I skidded and almost crashed. No, the co-worker was not fired. But Rick and I decided that I was ready to promote. I’d be working at a store about fifteen miles down the road. Fine with me. More than fine. Nicer co-workers, a higher salary, a more scenic drive to work, and an ice cream store right next to the lumberyard for those hot summer days.

After the second full year working for Grossman’s Lumber, I was well-trained. Customers knew they would get correct answers from me, even if I needed to ask others

for advice. I was ready to buy my own little house to work on. I went to the bank to see about a mortgage. “Well,” the manager said, “Women used to have to have a man sign their mortgage.” He sighed. “I guess you women want to make your own money decisions too.” Now I had the degrees, the skills, the money, and the little country fixer-upper house. The nineteen-seventies were good years for me. And yes, I was fully aware of the social conditions. My cousin was in Vietnam. America was in turmoil. My local NOW chapter, of which I was president, was forever joining with other chapters and chartering buses to march in state capitols and Washington, DC for the Equal Rights Amendment and other causes.

These days, when world conditions seem utterly overwhelming, I often remember that I learned my you-can-deal-with-it skills from a startled but ultimately encouraging boss at a lumberyard in the boonies.

Judy Kruger

FORSYTHE WILDLIFE PRESERVE

As a wave breaks in the ocean
a Snowy Owl pops up from the earth,
a creation of universal matter,
from universal consciousness, from God.

Everything is one.

Sue Madeira



COMING OUT AS OLD

I was outed by the Social Security Administration in 2015, when they directed me to sign up for Medicare. “But I’m not old!” became my earworm. At the office, I told the clerk how surreal it felt to be signing up for Medicare. Ever perceptive, I realized she didn’t care.

My coming-out-as-old transition lurched forward in phases. Here is what I remember:

Deep Denial—I am insulted when a box office clerk asks if I want to purchase a senior ticket, or when someone asks if I am retired. I’m not old! I run to the mirror.

Still Denial—On the phone at work, I whisper when I must give my birthyear for booking doctors’ appointments. I am afraid that my colleagues will overhear my age—and, being in technology, my colleagues are mostly male, pimply, and 12 years old. I will color my hair forever.

Neither Deny nor Accept—I attend a women’s group of peers where we talk about our fears of aging. When handed the talking stick, I release goblins I didn’t know I had. At home, shaken, I list every major transition traversed thus far: going away to college, first professional job, moving across country. Then I list what had scared me about the change beforehand. Reviewing the list, I see that my fears didn’t materialize, weren’t as bad as I had thought, or were overcome with help. Maybe this will happen with aging? Not sure.

Semi-Acceptance—A friend sends an article where the writer says her wrinkles, thick waist, and graying hair camouflage her; people see her aging costume and do not know (or do not care to know) all the selves who live inside. A switch flips on in my mind. Chagrined, I realize that I have fallen for these traps: I have equated how people see me on the outside with how I am on the inside and have succumbed to our culture’s group-think definition of old. While it seems too late to move to a country that honors its old—does one still exist?—it’s not too late to examine these traps. If only I had the time.

Mostly Acceptance—I retire when “I’m too old for this #&!”, meaning the politics of the job, becomes my boring mantra. I had wanted to work until 70, like my mother, but since I rarely emulated my mother after age 13, why start now? I’m done.

I join an elders’ writing group for women, somehow getting past the name. We write what we like about our ages, the regrets we hold no longer, the resilience we possess—it is Covid time after all—and the dreams we want to make real or release. I sometimes like reading my words to the other squares on the Zoom screen. I am seen and heard. Becoming old isn’t just inevitable, it holds a whiff of freedom.

Acceptance—I stop coloring my hair and start getting a seat on the subway. While shopping, I notice that most clerks talk too fast or slur too much. Didn’t people used to speak more clearly? With younger friends I hide a little smirk as they discuss their obsessions. They won’t last; nothing does. About this, the Buddhists are right.

Thank Goodness—Ten years after Medicare sign-up day, my wife and I move to Medford Leas. I am grateful to be here, surrounded by trees, kindness, and treadmills--plus role models who possess keen perception and surety of self. I am old; I am learning. For now, that is enough.

Marina Spence

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 (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.

