



Reflections 2021-2022



Reflections is the literary and art annual of the Renaissance Institute, a learning community of older men and women affiliated with the Notre Dame of Maryland University. Writing and artwork are created by Members.

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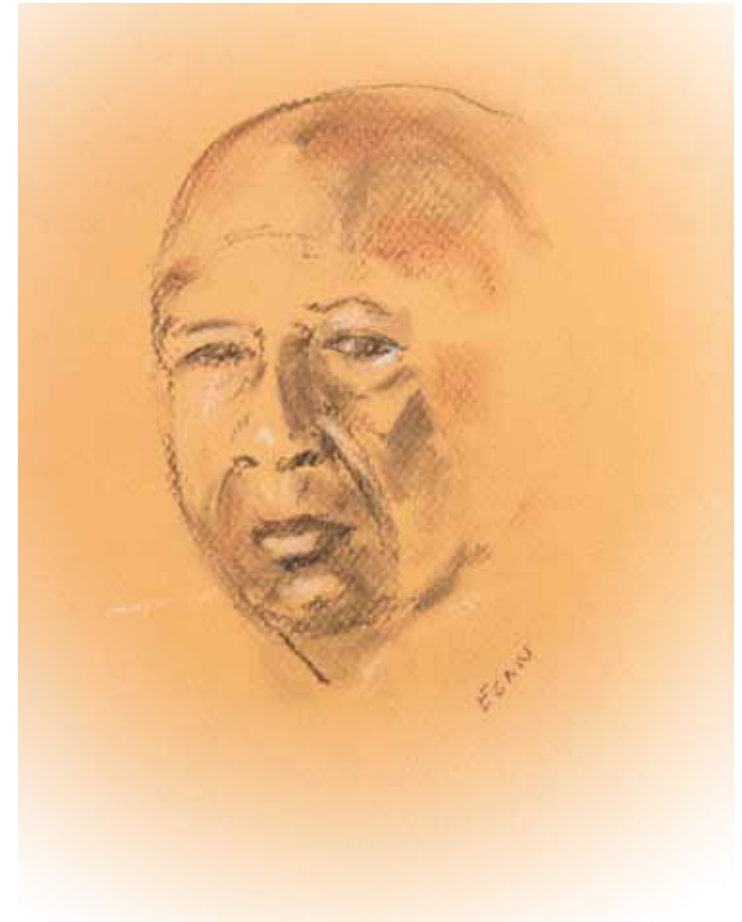
The Reflections team wants to recognize the passing of our longtime colleague Carolyn Donahue. She will be missed.

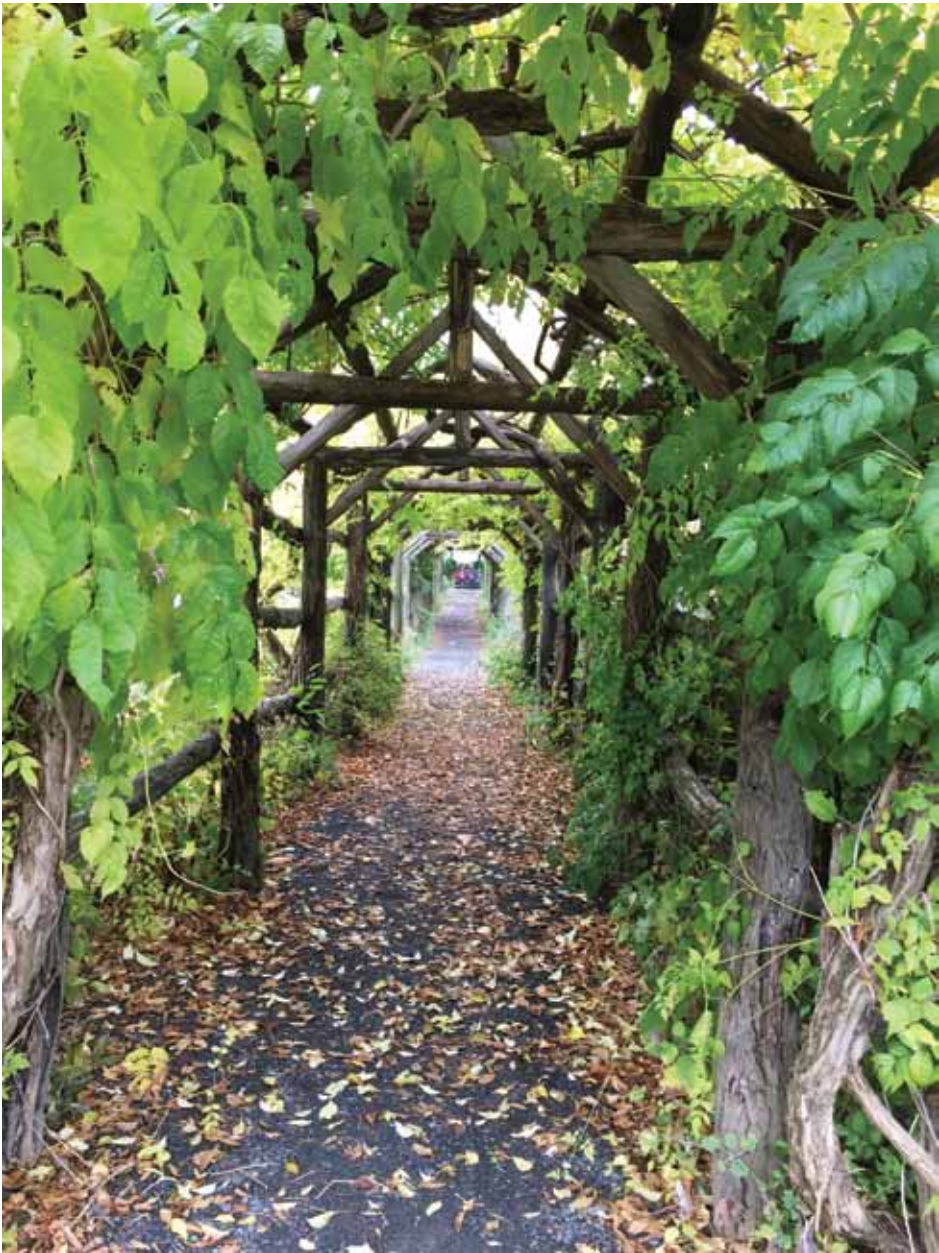
FRONT COVER ART: Cromwell Valley Park Creek, pen & ink, watercolor, Sarah Tateosian

INSIDE FRONT COVER ART: North Florida Sunrise, photo, Michael Reinsel

FACING PAGE ART: Elijah Cummings, charcoal and pastel, Peggy Egan (original photo Bloomberg)

BACK COVER ART: Twin Arches Meadow, ink and watercolor, Linda Stager





Arbor, photo, Ginny Lipscomb



Cat's Eye, ink & watercolor, Deborah Slawson

Birding in Baltimore

Judy Floam

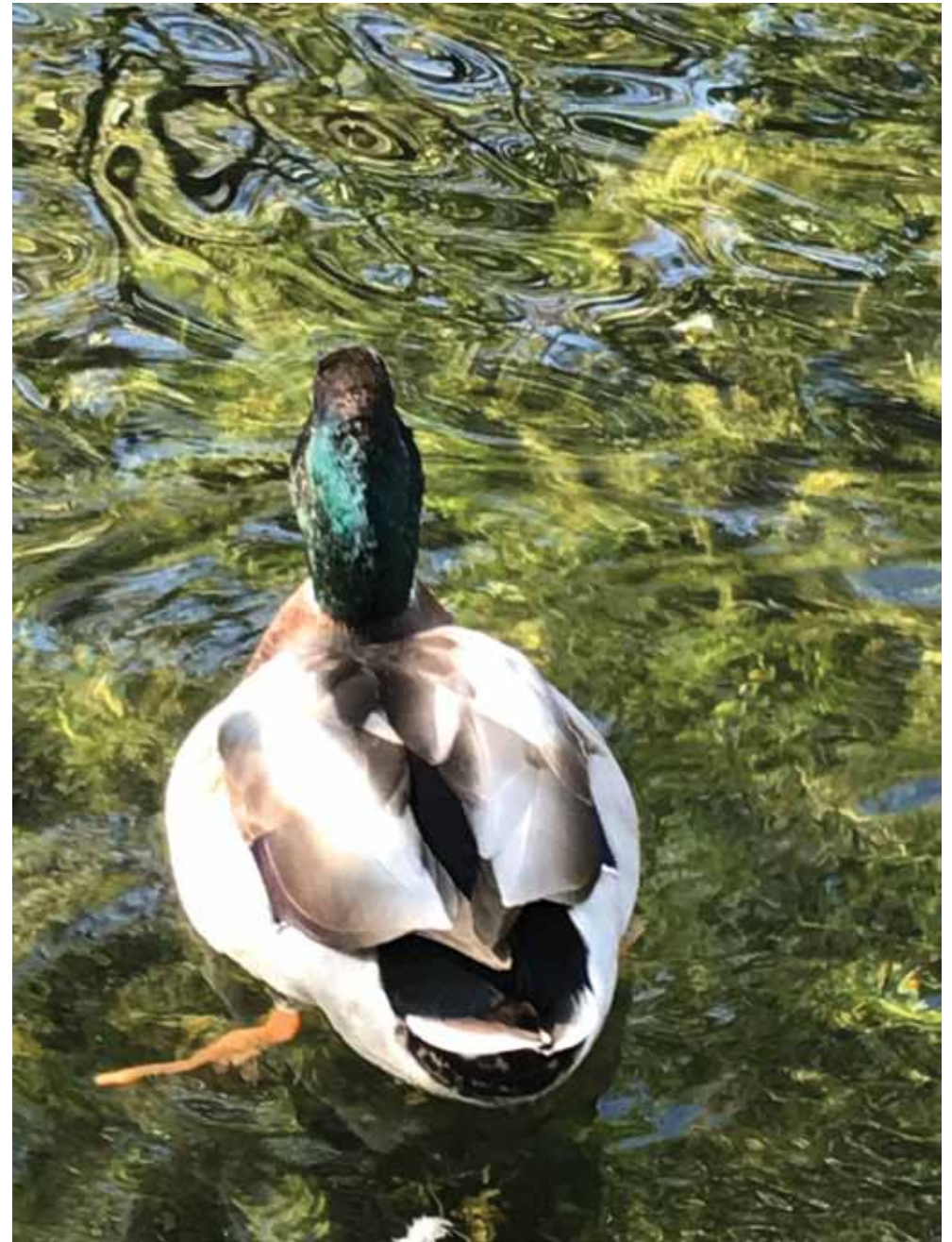
It was a Monday morning. I was taking a walk to my local Safeway. The first two blocks are lined with modest brick cape cods and ranch houses. On Thursday night, they bring their trash-filled cans to the curb for the Friday-morning pickup.

The third block is a different world: clusters of three-story red brick apartment buildings, arranged around a parking area. On pickup days – Monday is one – everyone brings their trash in green lawn bags to the parking area entrance and soon there's a big pile. And on every trash pickup day, a convocation of crows shows up, hopping noisily over the pile, pecking away at the bags, looking for edible morsels. With their sharp beaks, the crows have soon pecked holes all over the bags, the better to search for edibles.

There are trees near the apartments, and when the crows aren't picking over the trash bags they fly up and rest on the branches. On this particular Monday, I happened to look up at one of the trees. A few crows were perched on the lower branches but on a top branch was a very large grayish bird with white legs. It was definitely not a crow! The bird flew down to join the crows on the trash bags and the crows got out of its way. But after a few minutes, a trash truck came along and backed up to the pile. And the birds all dispersed.

Since then, whenever I pass the apartments on trash day, I look for that great big bird, but all I see are crows.

(For the birders among you who want to know, it was a Black Vulture.)



Drake on Springlake, photo, Nancy Caplan

Old Attitudes

Joyce Dennison

Looking back on twelve years of compulsory education, many of us will remember a particular year when things began to seem extra challenging, or out-of-the ordinary. For me, that time was the year I entered the seventh grade, approached puberty, and encountered what we would now refer to as “Isms.”

My elementary years had been uncomplicated—they had a certain rhythm that I could count on. And although this was the 1940’s and the school was technically segregated, in accordance with state law, our classes were only vaguely separated by race, as black and white teachers constantly traded classrooms to teach their special subjects; reading groups were combined by skill levels; and at recess and lunch, there was no separation at all. So, episodes of racial tension were few.

Kennett Square was a tolerant place, for that time, as many neighborhoods included multiple races and ethnic groups; Kennett had been a reliable stop on the Underground Railroad; and there had been a strong Quaker presence since the town’s inception. But, as I was soon to discover in seventh grade, there were instances of ignorance and hostility, which I did not understand well enough at the time to grasp in a historical context, or regard with a broader view. At the time, I thought the adults involved in these incidents had “lost their marbles,” had “a screw loose,” or simply weren’t all there.

The first of these two odd incidents happened in History class. My teacher, Mr. Knorr, had given us a homework assignment that I was actually looking forward to. It was easy, would involve no paperwork, and would not require memorizing dates, like the Battle of Hastings, the Magna Carta, the “discovery” of America, or some other European milestone. No, all we had to do was ask our parents about our ethnic background and share this information with the class.

The next day, in alphabetical order by last name, students revealed their ethnic identity: Irish, German, Italian, and so forth. There were two black students in the class, myself included, but the other girl was absent that day. When my turn came, I repeated what my parents had told me: Negro (the polite term at the time) and Portuguese.

To my astonishment, Mr. Knorr stared at me for a moment and then said: “Get out.”

Stunned, I got up and left the classroom. There was no detention at the time, so I decided to go to the principal’s office, for lack of a better idea. I had never been kicked out of class before, so this was something new. When I appeared in the office, I told the school secretary, Miss Foch, that I had been kicked out of class and what should I do next?

I was ushered into the principal’s office, where I repeated the story to Dr. Shaeffer. He stared at me also, but not quite the same way Mr. Knorr stared at me. He said I should bring a parent to school the next day so we could all meet with Mr. Knorr and get the full story.

At this point I began to wonder if Dr. Shaeffer might also be a little nutty, because he suggested a meeting with my parents as if this would be an easy thing for me to arrange. In the first place, my parents both worked all day and I couldn’t imagine how I could ask them to miss a day of work, all because I had been kicked out of History class. In the second place, they were civilized, mannerly folks, and I knew they would be so disappointed in me for getting myself into a jam that I couldn’t even explain.

I finally got up the courage to tell my mother and father, as we ate dinner. To my surprise, my father, who ordinarily was very quiet and shy and left all business affairs for my mother to sort out, said firmly, “I will meet with your teacher tomorrow.”

The next day, after he had come home early from the junkyard and changed clothes, my father walked to the school and met with me, Mr. Knorr, and Dr. Shaeffer. Mr. Knorr said it was obvious I hadn’t bothered to do my homework, as I had made up some silly tale about being Portuguese. My father said, “I am Joyce’s father, and I am a Negro with a Portuguese grandfather” ...and added dryly, “Doesn’t that count?”

I should add that my father almost never spoke, so for him this was a lengthy oration. Mr. Knorr was speechless after that, Dr. Shaeffer proclaimed the matter closed, and I was allowed to return to History class

the next day. Although Mr. Knorr never apologized, he never targeted me again, for which I thank my father, who was there for me when I needed him.

The second incident, while offensive, was more comic than the episode with Mr. Knorr, and it did allow for some rather enjoyable “pushback.” My English teacher, Miss Rachel Reynolds, had an odd fixation regarding black people and their choice of clothing: she proclaimed, repeatedly, that “colored people should never wear colors.” Apparently, brown people should wear brown so they always match and never stand out—this was what seemed to be her reasoning. It was hard to understand, of course, what my choice of clothing had to do with grammar, punctuation, or figures of speech.

This odd “tic” of Miss Reynolds, which, even at the time, I understood to be irrational, turned into a delightful game for me and another black student, Louise Maxwell. We had each independently decided to rebel against Miss Reynolds by wearing pastel-colored blouses, brightly colored socks, and—at least once a week, a bright red sweater. When we compared notes and realized we had both adopted the same strategy, we grew ever bolder with our fashion statements. Miss Reynolds’ own attire, meanwhile, grew blander and blander, perhaps in an unspoken effort to “balance” our sartorial excess.

So, thinking back on my seventh-grade adventures, my fellow 12-year-olds and I were a handful, as we journeyed through “hormone hell,” but at least we had hope of growing out of it. I can only hope that, with the passage of time, Mr. Knorr and Miss Reynolds grew out of it too.



Old Tree at Hampton, watercolor, Harriet Jenkins

In a Whirl

Mary Hom

It was summertime, schools were out, and my parents enrolled me in the Saturday morning YWCA activities for children. I really enjoyed the trampoline, swimming, cooking, pottery, and baton twirling.

The trampoline instructor was a middle-aged man who taught sitting down since he wore a full leg cast extending from his right hip to his toes. He explained to us wide-eyed, jaw-dropped youngsters that he sustained his injury during a stunt on the trampoline with another performer.

But none of us “chickened out.” Interesting enough was that my parents never found out. I know this for a fact because my parents would never tolerate such an experience for me. They’d be convinced that I would be wearing the next cast!

I did well. We all did. Sit-drop, knee-drop, front-drop where one lands prone and then bounces back up to standing. I was afraid of the back-drop when I would have to land supine and then stand. Injury thoughts crept into my mind...

But it was only a short time before the daredevil in me flirted with danger and then, later, common sense finally took root. Much, much later.

I never became proficient in swimming where we used paddleboards to keep us afloat and I kicked so hard that my legs became overly tired. I tried freestyle, but I ended up gulping water instead of air.

The cooking class was truly a treat! Our instructor helped us prepare French toast by having each of us add an ingredient, then she would do the actual cooking. The best part? Everyone got a slice! Bon Appetit!

In pottery, we all gathered around the kiln before our instructor shooed us back. I decided to make my mother a jewel box from clay, including the lid. Let’s just say that if I asked you what I made, with some imagination, you might be able to guess. After it left the kiln and cooled off, I took it home. My mother thanked me and smiled, probably trying to think of where she could store it. Then, it mysteriously disappeared.

Now, I have to tell you that the baton must have been created with me in

mind – it could be taken home to practice and brought back for class. I also must confess I was good at it, and I knew it. Did I tell you that humility took its good old time cultivating in me right behind common sense? I twirled everywhere – in class and at home. Tossing the baton up in the air and catching it as it returned was challenging for anyone.

Time went on. The YWCA program drew to a close with performances on stage for our parents.

There were many performers with different skills presented that day. But all I remember was the last one, the baton twirling event. Everyone was both excited and nervous, including me. No one wanted to be laughed at. No one wanted to fail our parents.

I recalled there were two of us, but in the heat of the moment, I forgot her name. I must have been more nervous than I realized.

We started with easy exercises – basic twirling with accompanying moves, more twirling as we turned full circle.

Finally, we were to end with a difficult act. We began to twirl our batons slowly, progressing a little faster, and then very rapidly. At this point, we both tossed our batons high in the air, waiting for their return.

When mine headed downward, I caught it, not in front, but from behind my back to my surprise! I was thrilled! I glanced at the audience, who smiled. A few began to clap. But as I looked to my right at Sally, I saw- we all saw- her baton fly out of her reach and “ker-plunk” to the floor.

I smiled, glad I caught mine which I held high above my head, with no sportsmanship, no empathy, for her. She clumsily picked up her baton, and, tearfully, walked off stage. I never saw her again.

As I write this, I am filled with disappointment in myself. If I could live this event again, after my success, I would walk over to the other baton twirler, pick up her baton and hand it to her. Then, I would give her a quick hug, and, as we held hands, bow together to a thunderous applause.

Changing Feet

Linda Speaker

My feet aren't generally at the forefront of my mind, except for brief specific periods in the past. I'd worn a size 6 shoe consistently until my mid-30s. Living in southern California from age 28 on, we wore sandals, mostly, or lightweight shoes, but after birthing two babies and carrying them around for a couple years each, my feet seemed to spread out from the weight, and I eventually graduated to a size 7-1/2. Then when I was 41, we moved to Oregon and I became an elementary teacher once again. Weather and profession dictated more closed-toe and heavier shoes. Clogs were popular, and on the weekends I wore hiking boots to hike the Columbia River Gorge. Women were becoming shit-kickers and our shoes helped that along! But then, styles come and go, and lighter, more feminine "ballet shoes" held appeal. I didn't realize that at times I may have been like Cinderella's step-sisters pouring into shoes too small for me. I'd continue to wear them teaching, when I was on my feet nearly all day. A fit-bit-like device which I wore for several years revealed that I'd usually take 6,000 steps by the end of my work day.

All that walking in "princess style" shoes led to bunions on both feet, and eventually I retired, ballet shoes and all.

From there I embraced yoga, often taking five classes a week. How did that affect my feet after less than a year? The barefoot down dogs and vinyasas created a spread of the toes of my left foot. A noticeable gap developed on either side of my long second toe, which itself started heading away from my big toe. I learned that this condition is termed "a hammerhead toe", hardly a fun sounding attribute and not as useful as it sounds. A visit to a kindly but direct podiatrist shamed me into getting rid of all my shoes, including my beloved tan and black fashion boots. Searching out shoes with wide or alas, even extra wide toe boxes presented an awakening of sorts. Seeing a pair of my sneakers in this new size, a guy friend referred to them as "gunboats".

One thing's for sure, as we navigate through these golden years, our constantly changing bodies keep us "on our toes..."



My Gunboats, Ready, photo, Linda Speaker



Brenda

Carolyn Cecil

What I know about her, she had blond hair and kept it neatly in place always looking picture perfect, but not someone I felt jealous of. She was warm and scientific. A nurse to beat all nurses. Always open to checking some medical detail for friends or strangers. Always pleasant, friendly, yes, like a saint. She took care of family and everyone the way she must have done in clinical work, though she had been re-aligned to mostly computer nursing. It was her job and a large part of her identity. All this was taken for granted with Brenda, my next-door neighbor. Helping was what she did and many souls benefitted and she left us all suddenly on September 26 just as it was cooler in Baltimore, her second home after Mississippi. She did not like our winters. We are less without her.

Quiet Reflections
photo, Armand Pulcinella



Garden Bridge, NJ
gouache, Carlene Moscott

Love and Loss

*To ask is artless –
love and not want
to let go or love so much
we are willing to let go.*

Which is better?

*Perhaps we tease ourselves
into thinking we have choices.
At journey's end
we surrender to acceptance.*

Kathryn Pettus

Brittle Trees

*White limbs pasted
on flat February sky
dark hawk rides frigid drafts.*

*Emerged into pale sun
knife-like gusts blast my face
push against a leaden pace
shadows of trees line my path.*

*Patch of light further on
I'll walk to the edge of the sun.*

True Binford



Fields of Provence
watercolor, Josef Nathanson

All Washed Up

Saul Lindenbaum

Our dishwasher, fifteen years old, was in rough shape. It was literally held together by bag ties that kept the tines in place, in order to prevent the dishes from flopping over. We had ordered a new lower rack last May, but after months of blaming supply chain delays for the lack of delivery, they finally told us that the part was no longer being made.

So off we went to the local branch of Bray & Scarff. My wife had done her homework, online and in Consumer Reports, and was ready with an answer when the salesman asked, "What can I do for you?"

"We're interested in the Bosch 800 series dishwasher," she said.

"An excellent choice. Top of the line. A marvel of German engineering."

I thought back to the Volkswagen Rabbit we had owned in the '70s. It had begun to fall apart after a month, pieces breaking off the dashboard (which seemed to be made of cardboard), the struts collapsing at a traffic light, and the oil needing to be changed every time we filled the gas tank.

"But I have to tell you," the salesman said, "that there's a little supply chain problem right now. Because of the pandemic, delivery will take six to eight months, at a minimum."

My wife was ready for him. "We'll take the comparable KitchenAide model, instead."

"Good choice. We have it in stock and we can deliver it in two days."

On the appointed day, a technician arrived. His first act was to measure the opening for the dishwasher. Then he measured it again. "Problem," he said. "It won't slide out, and the new one won't fit."

"How can that be?" I asked. "It went in, so how can it not come out?"

"Have you had a new floor put in since you got this old dishwasher?"

I thought for a moment. "Yes."

"Right. So they must have laid the new floor on top of the old one, and that raised the floor level. Not much – less than an inch, but

enough to block the opening. I can get this one out by cutting off the legs, but the new one still won't go in. I could cut out a piece of the floor, or you can try to get a smaller model washer."

We returned to Bray & Scarff, where the salesman did not seem quite so pleased to see us for a second time.. "Well," he said, when we had explained the problem, "there's an ADA model that's a bit smaller than standard, and that's what you need."

I was confused. "The Americans for Democratic Action makes dishwashers?"

Now it was the salesman's turn to look puzzled. "What? No. It's the Americans with Disabilities Act. They require a wheelchair accessible washer. But it's made by Bosch, which was your first choice, and we actually have one unit in the warehouse. Delivery in three days. By the way, would you like the extended warranty?"

"On me, or on the dishwasher?" I asked. "I might need it more."

The salesman again looked puzzled, so I dropped the subject, and he resumed typing up the order.

The new dishwasher arrived on the promised day, and this time the installation went smoothly. It is well-designed and can hold more dishes, which means slightly less frequent unloading. But I was a little taken aback by the arrangement of the dishes, which go in at a right angle to the front, not from front to back, as in the old machine. Also, the third rack is at the top, not on the bottom. I'm a creature of habit, and had an efficient routine for loading and unloading, and now I would have to learn a new one. But then I realized that this was, as I used to tell my patients, a "growth opportunity," or, as one young lady had so charmingly called it, an AFGO (Another F#!&g Growth Opportunity). So I stopped worrying, and am learning to love the new dishwasher – even without the extended warranty.

I just hope that German engineering has improved.

Closure

Elizabeth Fanto

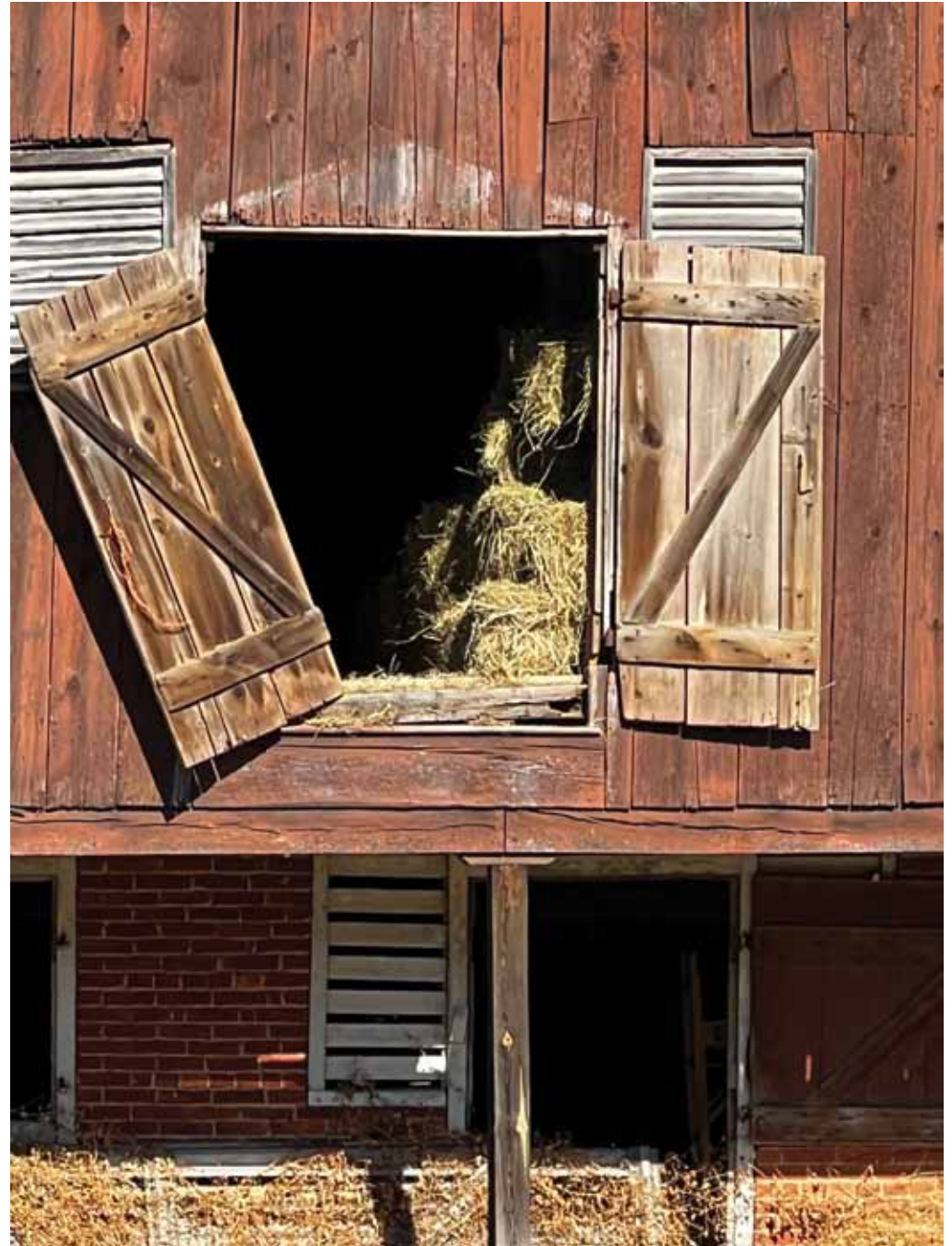
Alexa attended Jane's memorial service. She looked at the pictures, read the glowing tributes, signed the guest book. She took three book-marks to remember her old friend.

Alexa felt sure that the new neighbors would never dig up the lilac bush. Now, only she knew the secret buried there.

Reality

*I squirm in the sunny car reading
A hand on my raised knee.
I slowly flex my hand out flat.
The sun washed skin becomes a million opals
With a glimmer, a glow, a radiance.
The skin like the rolling desert sands.
In my mind see my youthful
View of my grandmother's hands.
By the ancient gods
Am I really as old as she was then?
Take back your opals and your dunes
Let time begin again.*

Robert Poor



*Still Farming
photo, Denis Smith*

The Visit

Kathy Stone

"Sarah! Wake up Sarah!" She was interrupted from a vivid dream. Her arm was being shaken hard. She bolted awake and saw her grandfather before her, his cheek and forehead bleeding and red blood soaking through his white tee shirt. "Get up now!", he shouted. She had never heard him raise his voice before. Over his left shoulder she could now see the windows at the foot of the bed had been smashed through. Glass shards lay upon the bed and to her right, the long, heavy branch of a hickory tree. It had struck her grandfather but miraculously missed her.

The room was filled with an eerie white light. "Now, Sarah!" he yelled and grabbed her arm, pulling her through the room and out the door of the attic bedroom. The sharp claps of thunder made it hard for her to hear him. He released her hand and went ahead checking for safety.

Darkness engulfed him.

"Grandad! Are you OK?!" She heard the sharp crack of wood and saw the outline of her grandfather disappear through the center of the attic floor. She heard his blood-curdling cry and then a loud thud as he hit something hard below. Then all was quiet. Sarah stood as if paralyzed, unable to move an inch, fearful of the darkness before her and the possible danger lying ahead.

Then came a high-pitched scream from below from her grandmother and then another and then another.

A feeling of bravery and strength consumed her at that moment. She screamed, "Grandma! Grandma! I'm coming! I'll help you!" She fell to her knees and hand upon hand before her she crawled slowly toward the descending stairs, carefully moving around the gaping hole that had moments before swallowed her grandfather. Down the solid steps she practically ran and soon was in the arms of her grandmother who stood shaking in front of the open door to the bathroom. There before her eyes Sarah saw her grandfather sprawled unconscious and blood-covered in the bathtub! Her grandmother was still shaking and within seconds moved toward the open toilet, dropped to her knees and proceeded to vomit violently. Sarah kneeled beside her until she was able to stand and led her to her bed. Helping her to get comfortable, she patted her head and covered her with a blanket. Then she quickly ran back to the bathroom and began shouting at her grandfather. "Wake up, Granddaddy! Wake up!" But his eyes remained closed and he did not move a muscle. She placed her hand on his heart and to her great relief she felt a heartbeat. She placed her fingers beneath his nose and felt a faint airflow, further giving her comfort. She ran for the

blanket that was draped across the living room sofa and quickly laid it over his immobile body.

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Sarah's initial sense of physical bravery and strength began to fade and a new power overcame her. Her nine-year-old brain was fully engaged as she ran to the phone to call the operator. The phone was dead. Outside the wind roared and powerful ropes of rain blew sideways in sheets, pelting the windows by the phone table so hard that she was afraid they would soon break. She grabbed her grandmother's hooded rain cape and ran out the door and down to the train tracks. She ran with all the speed her short legs could manage, lashed by rain and at times nearly blinded by the bright flashes of lightning, until she reached the back door of Mr. Aaron. Aaron Day was the most prosperous of the people in the black community that bordered her grandparents' home. He was also the closest neighbor and her grandfather's friend.

She had met him several times. She banged on the door and the window with all her might and yelled, "Mr. Aaron! Come quickly!"

A light soon appeared in the kitchen and the door opened to her. Gasping for breath, it took her no more

than seconds to explain her mission. He scooped her soaking body up and carried her to the front seat of his pickup truck. They drove swiftly a short distance down the road to get Ike, a very large and strong man, who soon joined them in the front seat. She knew him too, as he had once, drunk, awakened the whole house in the middle of the night when she was visiting by banging on their back door, seeking entrance to what he thought was his own house. Her grandmother had gently guided him away from her door and toward his own home without an accusatory word. She always remembered that.

The two men were able to lift her grandfather out of the bathtub and through the smallhouse to the truck bed. They covered him with an old tarpaulin and, in response to her pleadings, allowed Sarah to ride back there for the ride to the emergency room of Annapolis General Hospital. She threw part of the tarpaulin over her head. She could feel the truck weave with the strongest gusts of wind and the lightning and thunder were ever present. An unrelenting rain lashed her cheeks as viciously as cruel hands slapping at her. Grandfather never moved.

Through the storm Sarah spied the bright lights of the hospital. Soon they arrived and Mr. Aaron jumped from the truck, through the rain and

wind, and through the glass doors of the emergency room. Within a minute, a stretcher appeared carried by two large men who gently lifted Grandfather onto it and carried him quickly through the sliding glass doors. From there the stretcher disappeared through swinging doors. Sarah was very sad that none of them were allowed to follow.

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They were all given dry towels, clean and dry hospital gowns, and hot drinks of their choice. Sarah chose hot chocolate. She was happy that the gowns were green, her favorite color.

She began to cry then, her small shoulders heaving up and down, and she lost control of her bladder. She was able to muster some embarrassment at this. After what seemed like a very long time, actually several hours, a young ER doctor came out and told them that Mr. Carson had suffered a concussion, two broken legs, and a broken arm. But he had regained consciousness. He would recover slowly and would have to remain in the hospital for an undetermined time.

They should all go home now. But first, he said, they could go in for just a minute to say good- bye. Mr. Carson needed his rest now. It was

4am. Sarah sank into her grandmother's cool sheets, still in her hospital gown, and slipped into a fitful sleep. She awoke next to her grandmother who was feeling much better, sitting up in bed and now learning all the details of the night before. She and Sarah sipped tea and snuggled.

Once again, sleep overcame Sarah. She awoke in late morning to a blazing sun shining upon the room. She could see a clear blue sky and no wind was blowing. A hot Grandma-style pancake breakfast greeted her when she appeared in the dining room. She was ravenous and full of smiles. She was in a chatting mood.

By late that Sunday afternoon the phone lines were repaired and Grandma called her friend Jenny, the town's operator, and asked to be through to the hospital. After satisfying herself that her husband would recover but would need to stay in the hospital for a time, and being told that she could visit the following day, the call ended. Now it was Sarah's turn to call Jenny and ask to be put through to Baltimore, to her own phone number. Her father answered. "Hi Honey, glad you called. How are you? We have been wondering if any of that storm reached down there.

It's over here and I will be there in

a couple of hours to bring you home. Everyone in the family is missing you and looking forward to hearing about how much fun you've had in the country this week. A couple of your sisters are jealous. Well, pack up now. See you soon!"

Sarah then realized with a bit of a jolt that her family knew nothing about it! They knew nothing about last night! She was a bit concerned about how to tell her mother that she had missed Mass that morning...It was her first time ever. She

so hoped she would let her return to her grandparents. She so hoped that she would let her come back to her favorite place on earth.

But she knew at that moment that three things were now absolutely certain: she would never go up in that attic again; she would never come for a visit during winter; and never again would she eat her penny candy sitting under that hickory tree.



Ship Wreck
watercolor, Lee Kexel (photo Pixabay)

winter, birth

raising children is a bit like making snowmen
beginning with the anticipation of a blizzard
heavy gray skies filled with waiting
deceptive flakes predicting lightness
then
awakening to the deep deep perfection
ready for all our preparations
boots, gloves, scarves, layers and layers
oh! struggling to open the drifted door
falling down the hidden porch steps
flailing
until the sun softens that startling otherness
some musical melt beguiles us
so, we begin our task
rolling up a ball of snow
with our grand plan
firmly planted in our mind
only to find a mind traveling
in its own timezone
unrepentantly calving in an instant
from full moon to waning gibbous
lurching laughing lamenting
it takes two
to stack the rounds
leaning in the wind
toppling forward
melting into an earthen flourish
defying, exceeding, upending
all our expectations

Peter Whedbee

*Winter Scene, watercolor,
Josef Nathanson, photo Pixabay*



*Castle Fogarty, Thurles, Tipperary Ireland
watercolor, Lee Kexel*



Night Passage

*A person can see very little on a desert road
in the middle of the night. Perhaps a jackrabbit
scampering over the hot tarmac showered by
dancing headlights. Coyotes are too savvy to try,
too perceptive to enter the world of the highway.*

*My mother, a monolith in the front seat,
unmoving since dinner from the nearby woeful café,
eyes now wet with fear and sadness,
broke her silence with one statement
directed at us, but delivered straight ahead
through the front windshield toward
the empty road and on into the silvery light
proffered by the arcs of the filling station,
the last for over the one hundred miles to come,
“You boys be quiet back there.”*

*My father, busy, hiding his own fears
and trepidations behind the matter of work,
much like a man, maybe of his times,
and maybe just as a man looking for
something to fiddle away his feelings,
so then busy with water bags, burlap and canvas,
tied tight and high to the front grille
to plumply rest until needed, hopefully not,
as a rip in the fabric would seep water
for miles, lost and never regained,
and useless in the event of overheating.*

*We were presenting ourselves,
to the wide-open desert still baking
despite the nightly hour of ten o'clock,
still baking under the canopy of stars,
and still baking under a fat, full moon
lighting our way through a vast unknown.
A night passage, spiced by new and curious smells,
witnessed through the eyes of an eight-year-old,
with family hopes pinned
to a sun-bleached, green sedan.*

Stephen Sutton



*Moonstruck
photo, Nancy Caplan*

Jack at One

Phil Fretz

It was on a summer's day five years ago, at our beach house in Sussex County, a single house in a development with sidewalks that I trod almost every day. But this was not an ordinary day. I was outside for a walk and what made it special was my walking companion, my first grandchild, Jack, close to two years old. I was holding his small hand in my firm grip, ensuring that nothing would befall his progress. The sidewalk was not wide, but the two of us fit inside. I was in my typical gear, old shorts, a Tee with a local icon on the front. He in his knee-length sweatpants, New York City logo on one leg, muddy Velcro-fastened shoes, and bright red



Kelpie, Napping, graphite, Sb Sowbel

shirt. While I plodded along in my aged gait, Jack walked on at his pace. His thumb was embedded firmly in his mouth, a look of contentment on his placid face. I pointed out where neighbors lived, where the dogs could run and play, where the rabbits raced across the grassy fields, everything I could think of. I wasn't thinking about his comprehension. I just wanted to share my joy at his presence. Jack didn't have to speak. Our hands spoke for us.

Birds chirped from the old trees that remained from what used to be farmland. We stopped to listen, as Jack looked up at their perches on high branches. He looked at me and I at him.

Jack's demeanor exhibited the trust of being in the company of his Papa, his name for me. I think both of us felt the strength of my hand holding his. My smile was concerned and serene, so happy to have him near me.

I know it's trite to say one's heart is overfull, but I felt it in this case. I had enormous pride in the generation that bore him, my daughter and son-in-law. In this young boy's footsteps, I felt unbridled pride. His eyes were taking in the world in front of him. My eyes were on him, my hopes and dreams for him, my fears that the troubles in the wider world somehow not exempt him from their wrath. Prayer wasn't in my customary routine, but now I would do that for him.

Born at home a couple of days before my seventieth birthday, his first name a version of generations of my father's family's first name. Nothing but high hopes that he will prosper and grow into a wonderful namesake overwhelmed me. I loved the dream that he embodied.

His birth changed me, took away the parochial concerns of daily life, and let me focus on the future. It was a moment too precious to forget. I know he won't remember this day, but for me, it was a moment when three generations come alive. Way too precious to forget.

A Patch of Old Snow

*The blizzard swirls in late January
filling basement stairwells and windowsills
whitening out the day into a moving blur
reducing everything — cars, bushes, mailboxes
into mounds and sweeps of white*

*Neighbors emerge from their burrows
to join in battle with snow blowers,
shovels, with shouts of friendly encouragement
muffled under heavy scarves, caps and coats.*

*Children drag out sleds, make snowmen
and angels, their cheeks red with cold
that night, candles flare during a power outage
people tell tales like pioneers of old*

*Days pass, the snow crusts and melts
and the camaraderie of necessity
dissolves back into everyday concerns
leaving a bleakness that matches
the last dirty bones of the snow*

*Out on the street, a young boy steadily
kicks a last patch of old snow into wet crumbs
He lingers a moment at the remains at his feet
feeling a loss*

Elizabeth Fanto

Low Tide, photo, Laura Workman



Don't Try This at Home

Ellen Lindenbaum

There is a "Little Free Library" box outside the Rec Center in Jacksonville. I always check it when we're walking around the nearby track. The contents are varied – romance novels with dashing-looking males and demure (or not) damsels on the covers; foreign intrigue tales, with covers showing dark figures lurking in shadowed doorways; cookbooks; children's stories; religious tracts; and self-improvement books; all with colorful dust jackets.

Imagine my surprise one day when I spotted a drab book in the back corner – no dust jacket, just a muddy brown hardcover with dull orange capital letters: WAR-TIME GUIDE FOR THE HOME. Opening it revealed 260 pages, slightly brown around the edges, copyrighted in 1942 by the Popular Science Publishing Company.

The contents were divided into two parts: Making Things, and Fixing Things. A note opposite the title page stated that "successful use depends on the skill and knowledge of the reader. The publisher doesn't guarantee the results, or assume any responsibility for injury."

Page one dealt with air raid protection and how to clear your attic of combustible materials in case incendiary bombs pierce the roof. This was followed by a page of silhouettes of enemy planes, as seen from the ground – attack bombers, pursuit planes, observation planes, and dive bombers. After this sobering information, several pages explained how to set up a "refuge room" in your house, as well as making and installing blackout drapes.

I have only some fragmentary memories from early childhood of dark curtains, neighborhood air raid wardens, and talk of ration cards. But for my parents and grandparents, this was serious business. In 1942, there was no assurance that the continental United States would be spared from the horrors of Pearl Harbor, or the warfare and destruction that was taking place in Europe.

Dipping into Part I, I came across some non-lethal topics, such as several paragraphs on waterproofing straw hats with a formula combining shellac, white rosin, Venice turpentine, castor oil, and alcohol. Perhaps it would have been easier to wear a different hat if it was raining, or open an umbrella!

In the Cosmetics section, the ingredients for make-your-own toothpaste were Orris root, Cuttlefish bone, Precipitated chalk, bicarbonate of soda and essence of violet. Maybe it was effective, but I'll bet it wasn't tasty. My personal favorite in this section was Freckle Bleach, using a mixture of Borax, potassium chlorate, peroxide of hydrogen, glycerin, and rosewater. Oh, to have had this remedy when I was 10, and my freckles were too numerous to count.

On a practical level, there were several mixtures listed for making Fly Paper, the simplest ones combining either castor oil or lard oil, with rosin, to be spread on varnished paper.

Then there were more complicated topics, such as making solidified gasoline to be used as a spot remover or glove cleaner; etching steel using aqua regia, a 3:1 mixture of muriatic acid and nitric acid; and tests for the purity of wool. This last one required something called the "flame test," or the "more troublesome boiling lye test". Nitric acid? Boiling lye? As for the solidified gasoline, aren't there other methods for removing spots from clothing? Good grief! These all sound so dangerous, if not lethal, for the average homeowner.

By now I am too intimidated to delve into Part II. Perhaps I'll pick up the book again one day. For the moment, I am very happy to be living in 2021, where I can simply hop in the car, and find what I need at Home Depot, or Ace Hardware, or Lowes – as long as the Supply Chain holds up!

*Haunting
photograph, Denis Smith*



Remembering Thanksgiving Dinner Down at the Eastern Shore

Bill Bennett

"Isabelle, your corn pudding looks delicious," Harriet announced from her wheelchair. She was at the head of the Thanksgiving table in the two-bedroom bungalow she shared with her sister Ruth. Their younger sister, Isabelle, my mother, had made the corn pudding and a congealed salad. Yes, once again, we had all come down to Salisbury for Thanksgiving. My wife, Kathleen, had made and brought two pumpkin pies, an apple-mince pie with hard sauce, and a sauerkraut and apple dish.

In preparation for this annual event, Harriet, who had led a very active life since having polio at age seven, had cooked a huge turkey with oyster dressing and extra regular dressing, as well as candied sweet potatoes, and mashed a huge bowl of white potatoes, and baked two dozen rolls. She also had made a dense, moist country cornbread (the kind we fry in butter the next day for breakfast).

"What? The boys like macaroni and cheese?"

"Macaroni and cheese for the boys."

"Oh, Bill, I think we'll need two gravy boats. That silver one needs to be polished. Do you mind, Bill? You do such a wonderful job polishing. I

just don't have the strength in my hands anymore.

A green vegetable?

Peas will do. I want the celery, olives and pickles in the cut-glass dishes that were Cousin Ella's."

"Do we need another dish?"

"Certainly not!", Isabelle stated.

"Well, I made an applesauce cake if anybody gets hungry later", replied Harriet.

As I said, we made it to Aunt Harriet's table again. My wife, her mother, Rose, Craig who would turn 16 the next week, Jeff, 14, Colin, 12, and I. We were spending the weekend with Mom and Dad in Salisbury. Aunt Harriet had called us in late August to make sure we weren't making any other plans for Thanksgiving. Of course, we wouldn't disappoint her.

It was my job to set the table under Aunt Harriet's supervision. Fancy dishes, that hadn't been used since last year, were brought out from the cupboards and placed on the table exactly where Harriet wanted them. "I expect you better scald those dishes before you put food in them," Harriet suggested.

I knew they were perfectly clean, but I took them to the sink and ran some warm water over them anyway.

The kitchen sink was set extra low so Harriet could use it while seated. Two doors opened below the sink and she pushed her chair in so that her upper body was directly at the sink. There were only base cabinets in the kitchen because Harriet cooked from her wheelchair. All of the things that would have been in the upper cabinets were piled on the counter surfaces. The only preparation surface of any size was the kitchen table where Harriet worked easily next to her Sunbeam Mix Master.

Kathleen and I found it very difficult to do anything in that kitchen, let alone perform the miracles of seamless serving and cleaning up expected from us. At least the current cocker spaniel and the poodle were closed in the basement until dinner was served. I still sometimes stumbled into their water bowls trying to find a work space on the counter.

Kathleen helped me carve the turkey in the kitchen. Last year Aunt Harriet, in a Norman Rockwell inspired moment, had gotten me to attempt carving the turkey at the table. On about the third slice, the turkey slid off the meat platter and soaked the linen tablecloth around it with greasy essence.

This year, once we got to the table, I was selected to say grace. At a young age, I had memorized Grandfather Bennett's Methodist grace, which he said in our home every night at dinner. I might have added, "Thank you, Lord, for this dinner truly worth its starch."

Then what Kathleen later called the "Hawking of the Food" began.

Harriet invited, "Have some more sweet potato. You didn't get any dark meat and I know you love it. Take a big helping of that, we've got plenty. Oh my, you missed the cornbread. Bill, pass Rose the cornbread."

Rose would not have eaten cornbread normally, but she was too nice to refuse it. Putting a square on her plate, she smiled and nodded a "Thank you."

Harriet was eating only a moderate amount of food, less than most of those at the table. She was in her mid-60's and had a pretty face, obvious vitality, and a ready smile for the world. Her hair was still dark brown with its distinctive "widow's peak" hairline. She didn't seem to have any age lines in her face. I knew that she used Pond's Cold Cream and I used to tell her that she should send her picture to the Ponds Company because she looked better than the distinguished women in their ads.

Harriet, who held down three telephone service jobs from her home, was keeping a vigilant eye on everyone's plate lest they leave her tonight able to eat one more morsel of food during at least the next twelve hours.

Then, suddenly the spotlight was on my wife.

Kathleen was again working on losing that same 5 pounds that seemed determined to return to all the wrong places, time after time. Kathleen who didn't even like corn meal dishes, Kathleen, who had said a thousand times, "Why didn't I or any of my sisters take after our wiry, slim father, who couldn't seem to gain weight. No, we all got Mother's slow metabolism."

Turning the spotlight on Kathleen, who was trying to hide behind the centerpiece of mums, Aunt Harriet exclaimed, "Why, Kathleen, you haven't got a thing on your plate!"

Every eye in that room was suddenly riveted to one dinner plate. There was a slice of turkey breast, cranberries, some peas, some oyster dressing, and some sauerkraut. There was no gravy anywhere! WHO doesn't like gravy?

"My! Pass Kathleen some potatoes and rolls and whatever she needs," Harriet went on.

Kathleen smiled back saying she didn't need a thing. She passed the dishes handed her, on around the table, and tried to change the subject.

"Aunt Harriet, Craig will be 16 next week."

"My, that's wonderful, Craig. I guess you'll be getting your driver's license soon."

Craig looked excited, "I have my learner's permit application ready to mail."

Dinner continued. Then there was excitement in the air when Kathleen served her desserts. Aunt Ruth, whose main pleasure in her retirement was eating, was especially enthusiastic.

Of course, I ate everything passed to me, in response to Aunt Harriet's every request. As I got up to take the plates to the kitchen, scrape them and set them in the dishwasher, I could feel a little indigestion creeping up my throat. I wondered where my Tums were. After turning on the dishwasher, I began to hand wash the pots and pans and the hand-painted dishes using the back-breakingly low sink.

We then sat in the living room a while with the furnace pumping up the temperature to a steaming 80 degrees. Someone in our group

flicked the thermostat down a little every time she passed it until Harriet, in her short-sleeved dress, announced, "I think it's cool in here. Is anybody else cool?"

A general chorus of "No, we're fine," rang out.

Aunt Ruth, generally very lady-like, with her well powdered nose, her lipstick, scent of perfume, and her plump body laced tightly into a corset, belched a big belch.

Harriet remarked, "RUTH!!!... my heavens!", and smiled away her embarrassment for Ruth.

Ruth said, "Excuse me", and giggled.

Then Craig, who had been practicing belching along with perfecting The Three Stooges sounds, belched loudly twice and laughed.

"Craig, behave yourself!" Kathleen scolded.

Later, the boys settled in the kitchen playing with the dogs and watching a small TV on the kitchen table. They were drinking soft drinks from the two cases Aunt Harriet kept in the pantry. Sometimes when they left, their pants pockets would be bulging with extra soft drinks. At our house, they were reduced to

making their own Kool Aid.

We decided to go about eight o'clock. There were hugs, kisses and thank you's all around with promises to stop by tomorrow.

Somehow, each year, when Harriet invited us, we would accept, the hardships of the previous Thanksgiving now dim in our memories. The boys enjoyed coming to Salisbury and we did too...mostly.

We worked at replacing the food anxiety at the table with relaxing conversation, but we didn't make much progress.

Now we are content with the memory of the love of family that brought us together around that starch-laden Thanksgiving table. We are also grateful that current Thanksgivings, while essentially free of tension, anxiety, and even excess starch, are still filled with the love of family, especially for our new granddaughters.

Trains

*When I was a child
Saturdays in the early morning
I would lie in bed taking it all in
Until the world woke up
Sunshine illuminating my window
I tuned in to AM-WCAO radio playing
Whatever Johnny Dark announced
"The lion sleeps tonight"
"Tie me kangaroo down..."
These mornings long ago were sacred to me
The only day of the week without obligations
I didn't have to be anywhere
At any time – no school, no church
So I was able to listen to the trains
Down the road in the woodland
Heard only when the weather was just right
Today, I listen for the trains at Penn Station
I can almost hear them now...
And smile*

Mary Hom



Owl, watercolor, Jeannine Mantz, photo Pixabay



Winter Sunset, watercolor, Manuela Porta

To Reread or Not to Reread

Ann Martin

That isn't exactly the question.

So, I will start with: are you the type of person, who having read a terrific book, well written, neatly plotted or full of interesting new information, whichever it is you want in a book, put it on the shelf to fall away to dust without you noticing? Or, perhaps you lend it to a friend, not caring if it is ever returned?

I suspect that viewers of film and TV are the same. No matter how good the show was, there is no desire to revisit. I don't know if this is a case of "so many options, so little time" or what. But I try to hold my tongue and not remark on the many things we do repetitively. We go to the same favorite restaurant, cook the same favorite foods, even usually buy the same type of clothes. Why not revisit a special film or book?

Or it is a case of "I know the ending, so I don't need to see or read it again."

I have a friend who is very much in the opposite camp. She watches reruns of the same shows again and again and she not only rereads, but she rereads immediately. I believe she races through the book the first time, and reads again to see the tricks and nuances of the writing.

I straddle both camps, as far as reading is concerned. There are two well-known and respected authors of what are often called Golden Age mysteries. They are Dorothy L Sayers and Agatha Christie.

I doubt that anyone will argue against the idea that Sayers is the better writer, but with a couple of exceptions, I tend not to reread her books. It is not because I know the ending, which I usually do, but I also recall many scenes along the way. For me, it might be said, that she writes too well. It stays with me.

On the other hand, I can almost always pick up an Agatha Christie and it will seem like a new experience. Her specialty is puzzles and I enjoy that aspect, and often don't immediately recall the solution. But I

guess I would also call her writing slightly nebulous. Her characters are not so strongly drawn that I have an image in my head when they are introduced. The vicar who appears in this book is probably, in my mind, very different from the vicar I imagined that last time I read the story.

Knowing the ending is not an issue.



View at Hampton, watercolor and ink, Harriet Jenkins

Gratitude and Joy

Virginia Peters

It was my final day of work, May 31, 2018, and I had mixed feelings about retiring. I knew I would miss my co-workers tremendously, which has certainly been the case. On that day various people I worked with honored me with cards wishing me well and with thoughtful gifts. One gift in particular has meant the most to me. It was a pretty journal with a cloth-like cover decorated with green foliage and orange, yellow and blue flowers. I decided I would use it to record what I was grateful for each day and, especially, what gave me joy.

In the past I had started a gratitude journal several times, but somehow only kept them up for a few weeks. This time would be different. I began writing my journal on June 1, 2018 and have not missed a day since. To say this practice has been a blessing would be an understatement!

Every evening, just before retiring, I reflect on my day. I recollect the people I have interacted with in person, on a telephone call or through e-mails. I recall the tranquility of being outdoors immersed in the sights and sounds of nature. I happily recount the

small unexpected moments of joy I experienced, such as the kindness of strangers or something that someone said that made me laugh.

One of the benefits I have discovered from doing this is that I sleep quite soundly most nights. But even more importantly is the fact that keeping this journal has increased my awareness greatly. I no longer take as many things for granted.

I now have a greater appreciation for loving family members and dear friends, for blessings

such as having a warm apartment on a cold day or being able to buy groceries in a world where so many are hungry. On a lighter note, I focus more on what is beautiful, like a magnificent sunrise or sunset, the pretty flowers in a neighborhood garden, a peaceful or stirring piece of music I heard, or being inspired by something I have read. I often note in my journal my gratitude for a Renaissance class I have enjoyed.

So now, what do I give to others when they retire? Often, I may give them a journal, a most wonderful Gift!



Hello, Spring!
watercolor,
Laura Workman

Memories of My Father

Noreen Hickey-Schiappa

I think that my father was my Aunt Mary's favorite brother. She called him Buddy and the cousins called him Uncle Buddy. He was a cool guy. He had a lot of stories. In his youth, he said that he was a "gay young blade." He liked to dance and Aunt Mary said that he was really good at cutting a rug. A couple of times, I tried to dance with him but his steps were really complicated. I think he said that we were doing a fox trot. At any rate, I was pretty impressed. He taught me a lot of life terms, which he thought I would need. It was from him that I learned a quarter was two bits, a dollar was a clam, a five-dollar bill was a fin, and a ten dollar, a sawbuck. These are things that a girl needs to know. I think he had a misspent youth and this thought appealed to me - particularly because everyone else in my life was trying to make a lady out of me. I guess he spent a lot of time in pool halls because my brother and his friends were in for quite a surprise. They invited him to play pool and I think they were planning to show him up. Well, it turned out that they never invited him again because in a true "pool shark" fashion, he set up all the balls and proceeded to knock them all in. I love this story because in my heart there were so many times I wanted to best my always older, bigger, stronger brother.



Julia in the Redwood Forest
watercolor, Paula Murphy



Spider, Spider on the Wall

*There is a spider on the window wall
Many dishes you have seen me wash
Avoiding them would be my wish
As you watch from my window wall*

*One night water was left in the sink
Your relative's misstep took him over the brink
Barely seen when I placed him on the counter
I felt sad he drowned in my sink water*

*I have seen wispy webs here, there
But today I don't see many strands
You patiently wait, sit and stare
For any hapless bug to enter your lair*

*Your delicate form is hard to see
Hair-like legs of transparency
A dot of a head and tiny eyes
A lady who waits for her nails to dry*

Carlene Moscatt

*In the Shadows,
photo, Armand Pulcinella*

Who Are We?

Susan Wolfe

*I'm a Little Teapot short and stout.
Here is my handle, here is my spout.
When I get all steamed up, hear me shout.
Tip me over and pour me out.*

They say we are programmed by our parents to behave correctly in our youngest years. We change so we can survive; precisely so that we don't get abandoned. But who are we when we are born? Who are we before being conditioned? A clue is when we're so young that we just 'do' or 'say' while not knowing the consequences. My mother wrote a memory for a RI class. When she showed it to me, I recalled the experience knowing it was the beginning of one of my survival archetypes.

It was our end of year Pre-K production when our whole class, numbering twelve, was on stage. I remember that I was disappointed that I didn't have a bigger part. I only had to say a line or two when I jumped out as the jack-in-the-box at the back of the stage. I also recalled that it was really boring to just sit on stage in our assigned spots while every child rehearsed their parts over and over again. A bigger part in the production was when one girl sang *I'm a Little Teapot*, while she made a handle and a spout with her arms. On the big day, we little people looked out into the normally big dark empty space to find it full of people! Their adult faces turned toward us, feeling their eyes, their sounds, their energy all focused on us. Understandably, one little girl refused to perform.

At first the music teacher tried to get her to sing. Then her classroom teacher came to the edge of the stage and urged her to get up. Then even her mother came up but still the little girl was stubborn and absolutely refused. Well, I got tired of waiting (probably the audience was too), I climbed out of my box which hid me, walked towards that sea of faces and performed *I'm a Little Teapot* without missing a beat. At the end I spun around and jumped back down into my box. The show continued from there through the smiles and chuckles of the audience. My strongest memory was when I found Mom in the audience afterwards and all these adults were straining, peering around Mom to look at me. That felt weird.

That evening at dinner, Mom relayed what happened with pride all the while sitting across from me was my big sister glaring at me with a big scowl on her face. My story made Dad laugh. I liked that I made Dad laugh; that's when I unconsciously decided to become funny. Mom neatly tucked my red-and-white jack-in-the-box hat within the layers of woolens in our cedar chest.



*New Balance
graphite, Christine Goglia*

Heartbeats

*lone gull gracefully flaps
over the rippled sea
green beneath pure sky blue
sunrise soon will be here
waves caress the shoreline
gulf's heartbeat is steady
twenty times a minute
one-third as fast as mine
both of us living bodies
full of deep mystery
watch and listen closely
learning by osmosis*

Michael Reinsel

Diagnosis is Destiny

*Every year marks more clearly her decline
I tried to ignore then explain away the loss
—her hovering neighbors—
less attentive than threatening
staid in their witness
as they creep into her air space
as if by chance
as if in innocence*

*Her limbs grow bare and splotchy
though her skirt still sways green in the fall breeze
berries ripen toward red
buds patiently await the spring
a bloom they will never see*

Susan Marshall



Chokecherry, photo, Terry Weisser

On the Bridge

*There's work to be done on the footbridge beside Crow Lake
where a slim stream joins a backwater marsh,
grass as tall as your head.
I lounged like a lout on a rough wooden rail
while you drilled and hammered making a ruckus.
My gaze swept over tall grasses
undulating, gently suggesting waves.
A concealed heron at one with the grass
rose up with a grin on its beak
and turned to stalk for prey.
You laid down your hammer and watched that bird
precisely lift each long-toed foot
as it started to pry with care in the grass,
probing for frogs or fish.
I saw its eye turn from amber to ruby
when it paused before the kill,
sharp yellow beak darted down into marsh,
sleek head lifted high long neck out-stretched,
frog swallowed - two gulps then gone.*

True Binford



Clematis, photo, Terry Weisser

Everlasting

Amanda Joyce

My sister always prolonged things. Whatever it was, she wanted it to last...and last. If she shook your hand, she'd hold it too long and you'd have to snatch it back. If someone told a joke, she laughed too long and too hard, after the rest of us had grown silent. Eating a meal with her was a torment—her bites were too small, with long pauses in between. "But I'm not finished!" was always her lament, as servers hovered and companions fidgeted.

She was a year younger, so I was supposed to be her protector, but I longed to escape her clingy ways. I was a year ahead of her in school, but I had a skiing accident at age ten, when two racing boys collided with me and shattered my legs. Surgery, bone grafts and traction followed; by the time I regained my ability to walk, I had lost a year of school, and my sister and I were now in the same grade.

When we were fifteen our father died of a rare cancer diagnosed too late for treatment. We all grieved; our mother and her sisters; our grandparents; Daddy's friends and all the employees at his company. Mom took over as head of the company; she kept it running and didn't have to lay off a single soul. I saw a child psychologist for six months, just to have someone outside the family to talk to; and I gradually regained my footing as my grades improved.

My sister was another matter. Every day after school she camped out at his grave site, which was a barren, muddy patch since his gravestone wouldn't be installed for another six months. She only went to school because Mom insisted; she did no homework (I did it for her), passed no tests, and devoted her class time to staring bleakly out the window. She passed from ninth to tenth with all D's, which the teachers issued out of pity, using the completed homework as justification.

Our lives finally returned to normal, although she never changed her basic ways. When it was time for us to go to college, Mom persuaded us to go to her alma mater, where, as an alumna and a donor, she would be able to get a good deal. I was desperate to get away from my sister, for once, but it was more manageable for Mom to send us to the same place.

I thrived in college. As a language major, I was able to reside in a special dorm for polyglot students. My sister didn't declare a major until she had to, and then she settled on English. Her dorm was at the other end of the campus, and for once, I didn't have to see her every day. I assumed she was doing OK, until Mom called and said she'd gotten word from the college that my sister had been placed on probation due to failing grades. Knowing what needed to be done, I sought her out, prioritized her assignments, and completed them so she was allowed to remain in school.

I spent senior year dating a lot, since I already had enough credits to graduate and could now take time to enjoy myself. I checked on my sister from time to time, and she said everything was fine, she needed no help. She swore she loved college, but whatever she did with her time was a mystery.

Graduation was glorious. The campus smelled of mayflowers; spring rains held off and ceremonies were outside. I graduated summa cum laude and was offered a fellowship on the West Coast; I planned to fly there immediately. Although I hadn't seen my sister lately, I kind of thought that we'd sit together for the ceremony, where Mom and my aunts could see us; but my sister was nowhere in sight and I put it out of my mind.

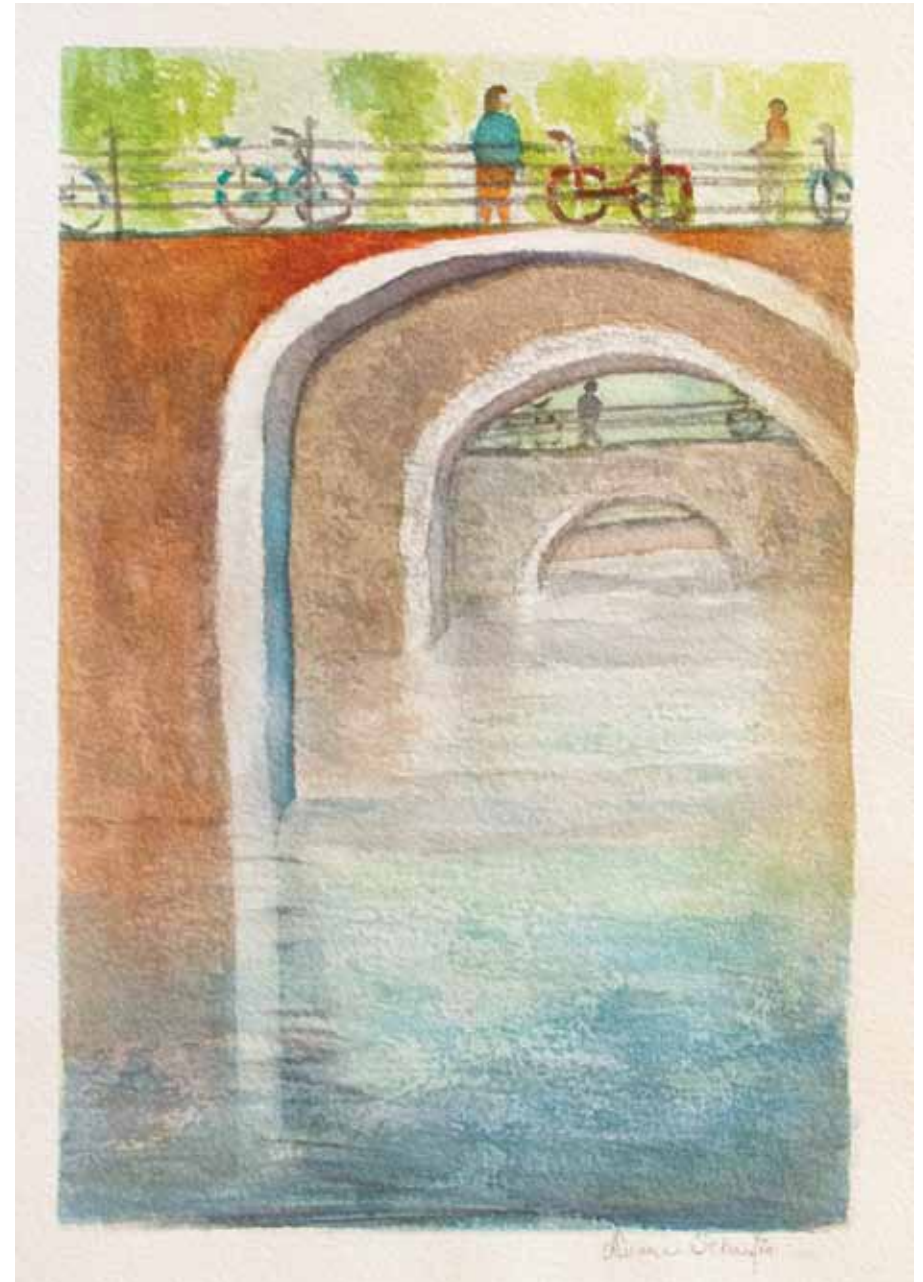
After graduation, Mom gave me a big hug, as did my aunts, and they took turns snapping pictures. I expected my sister to join us, but she was a no-show. The odd thing was, Mom didn't seem to be looking for her; and when I said something, she said she'd explain it later-- but right now, this was my big moment and we were all going to celebrate. We went to an expensive restaurant, ate lobster and drank wine. After that my aunts returned to their hotel and Mom and I took a walk.

Mom explained that she'd gotten a letter from the school. My sister was not going to graduate, had failed in all subjects; and lacked the credits to earn a degree. I felt guilty of course, and apologized, but my mother sanely told me it was time to move on and live my life.

We returned to the campus, where we parked in front of my sister's dorm. There was a flurry of departing students and parents. One student recognized me and offered congratulations on all my success; I thanked her and mentioned we were looking for my sister. She said my sister had to be around somewhere—nobody loved dorm life the way she did, and she was always in one of the common rooms telling funny stories (since when had my sister become such a bon vivant?), or hanging out in the cafeteria, lingering over a meal. (That I could believe.)

We never saw my sister again. We filed a missing person's report, but nothing came of it. It got a lot of coverage in the local press and even now, thirty years later, they still run a story about it every few years.

I go to reunions often. Each time I do, I listen to the latest stories the students tell, about the old woman with the dirty sweatshirt and stringy gray hair, who appears in the dining room sometimes, or the common room, but slips away if anyone tries to talk to her.



Amsterdam Bridges Reflections,
watercolor, Diane Schaefer

My First Class at the University of Texas at Austin

A Letter to my Great-Grandson

Elizabeth Howard

Dear Connor,

I cannot describe to you how terrified I was. Remember that I skipped fourth grade, and so had limited experience with the multiplication tables and long division. Avoiding math in high school as much as possible, I should have known not to enroll in algebra the first class on the first day of my first semester.

Boyfriend, an engineering student, and I found desks toward the back of the room. I think about 60 students were in the algebra class, mostly Asians. When the professor came in, he said something to the effect that the first 250 pages of the text were review and if there were no questions, we would skip that. WHAT? WAIT!

"Ask a question," I told Boyfriend.

"No," he said. "I know this."

Desperate, I raised my hand, and the professor acknowledged me.

"Yes," he said. "Which problem?"

I wanted to yell ALL OF THEM! Instead, I let my gaze fall into the open book and grabbed a problem.

"Number 128," I said.

"Okay," he said, "Read it to me."

Connor, have there ever been moments in your life you wish you could take back? Things you've done that haunt you? I was so scared I forgot how to read exponents.

"3X with a little, tiny 4 on top of it," I began.

At that moment about 50 students in front of me turned around in their seats to get a better look at the idiot speaking. I managed to live through reading the problem with all the X-es and Y-s and their little, tiny numbers up on top, sure the Chinese were thinking all Americans are stupid. Boyfriend pushed the text onto my desk and moved his

desk farther away. I was traumatized! The first rattle out of the UT box, and I had demonstrated how ignorant I was. I couldn't wait to escape the classroom. I didn't hear any of the professor's explanation of how to solve the problem. Cheeks burning from embarrassment, I could think of nothing other than getting out of there. At the end of the class, I told Boyfriend I was going to the dean's office to drop algebra.

"You have to take it," he argued. "It's required for your degree."

I said, out of the mood to argue, "If I get close to graduation, however unlikely, I'll take algebra. If I flunk out, I don't want to suffer death by mathematics if I don't have to."

The Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences was in the Tower Building, which J. Frank Dobie, an iconic Texas writer, said resembled "... a toothpick in a pie." About a dozen people stood around the secretary's desk, and another five or six sat in chairs along a wall. Phones ringing,

people going in and out, chaos ruled.

"The dean is meeting with scopro students today. Are you on scholastic probation?" the secretary asked, looking at the fever blister on my nose and brushing a wisp of hair out of her face with her hand.

"Not yet," I said.

"If you decide to wait for him, just know he has to talk to most of these students ahead of you. Or you can come back tomorrow," she said, looking hopeful to get rid of me for the day. However, as I said, I was determined to drop, not wanting to see any of those algebra people ever again. Dropping the class was my only option, apart from suicide. However, even in all my pain of being stupid, I suspected suicide would be overkill. Please excuse the pun.

I waited about an hour and a half in the dean's outer office. When the last probationary student left, Dean Burdine came out. The secretary told him I was waiting to talk to him. Behind his closed office door, I explained that I needed his signature to

drop algebra.

“This is only the first day of class,” he said. “Why don’t you give yourself a chance?”

I assured him that I was steadfast. I had to drop.

“Why?” he said.

Then I told him what I had done, calling exponents the “little, tiny numbers.” And I explained that I didn’t want to waste any effort on algebra if it looked like I wouldn’t graduate.

There was no criticism of me, no condescension at all. He said, “I agree, you have to drop.” After a somber moment, he reached for a stack of papers. Taking one off the top, he signed his name.

I’ve often thought about how respectful Dean Burdine was. I admired him then and remember him often. He was one of just a few positive early influences on me and my tiny intellect. I left his office relieved, my infinitesimal self-esteem restored. I promised myself that I would never knowingly make someone feel bad about his/her achievement, or lack thereof.



Fixer-Upper, Ink & Pencil, Michael Boehk



*The Signature,
watercolor, Babs Bierman*

Circle and Square

*The box of Jila Mints
blue cap and pin-striped sides
reminds her of her grandfather,
as the box resembled the pin-striped
pack of Parliament cigarettes he kept
in his shirt pocket. First, a cigarette,
accompanied with conversation,
then the mint, often with coffee,
which encircled their common love
with a sweet, understood silence.*

Stephen Sutton

Song of Waiting

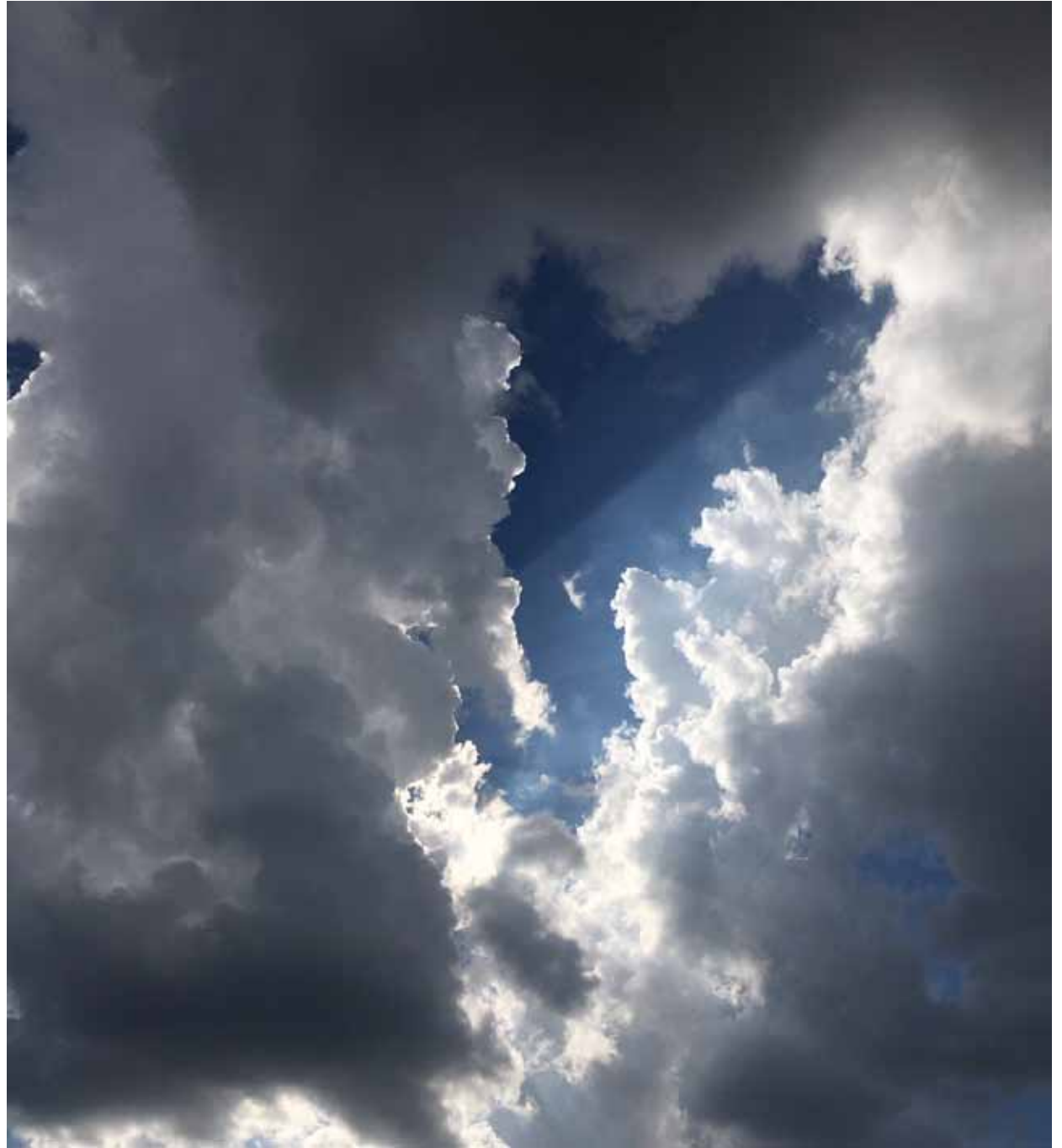
I sing to use the waiting
- Emily Dickinson

*Sing to use the waiting
when days drift into nights
without demarcation
intercessions go unanswered
sing a song of waiting
wrestle the low notes
doubt and despair
then reach for the highest
hope and healing
embellish with trills
a triplet or add a glissando
make room in the score
for a least one note of grace
let music fill the emptiness
sing, sing to use the waiting*

Kathryn Pettus

*The soft shapes of summer clouds:
Renoir's nudes, reclining*

Jay Brodie



My Heart's Just Not in It
photo, Ginny Lipscomb

The Trip

Andrea Wilson

My husband, Carl, and I left last Sunday to go to our usual place, Elk Neck State Park. The pandemic made us miss last year, so we were excited to get there. As we approached our destination on the two-lane road, a car pulling a very wide boat was coming in the opposite direction. Carl swerved to avoid it, and the back wheels on the trailer slipped off the road. We got back on track and continued to the camping area.

We had a different campsite this year, and Carl had trouble getting the trailer straight. He finally gave up with the vehicles slightly askew. It was hot and humid, and we couldn't wait to get into the trailer for the air conditioning. When we opened the door, we found that slight bump off the road had opened every cabinet and drawer. The floor was covered with plates, cups, silverware and most of the other kitchen equipment. We cleared a path to the thermostat and turned on the AC.... nothing. Tried the lights...nothing. No electricity at all. Carl

checked the fuses, the gauges, everything. Finally, he went out and looked at the power pole. It seemed the last campers there had flipped the breaker switch. Once it was turned on, we were back in business, and set about putting away the rest of the debris on the floor. By this time, we were so tired that dinner was cold cut sandwiches and a couple of cookies.

We had brought along a lot of CDs to play in the evening. We knew the player in the trailer wasn't working, so bought an old-fashioned boombox to substitute. It worked perfectly when we tested it at home, but wouldn't work in the trailer, so we talked for a while and went to bed early.

My pattern was to take a long hike each morning. I tried. The heat wasn't bad, but it was too muggy and buggy to try. In the past couple of years my knees, stamina and energy had seriously declined. So, no hikes. We saw no animals, either.

The heat continued, and we decided to leave on Thursday, which was a day earlier than planned. Storms were predicted, and we wanted to beat the rain on the way back. Meanwhile, we went out for some very good dinners and visited the kind of shops that visitors go to.

When we packed up to come home yesterday, we found that one of the stabilizers on the trailer had been damaged when it went off the road. It had been lowered effectively when we first got there, but now wouldn't raise up. We spent a lot of time lying on rugs on the ground removing rusted bolts and tying the stabilizer up. We left Elk Neck much later than we expected to.

By the time we arrived home, the huge thunderstorms were pouring down. Carl couldn't back the trailer into its usual place because he couldn't see into the side mirrors on his truck. They were obscured by rain and kept steaming up, so

it was left at the end of the driveway, just clearing the sidewalk. We grabbed some essential items and scurried into the house. There we found that the electricity was out due to the storms. When it finally came on about an hour later, the Comcast connection was still out. That's the landline phone, the tv and the internet. That righted itself in another hour.

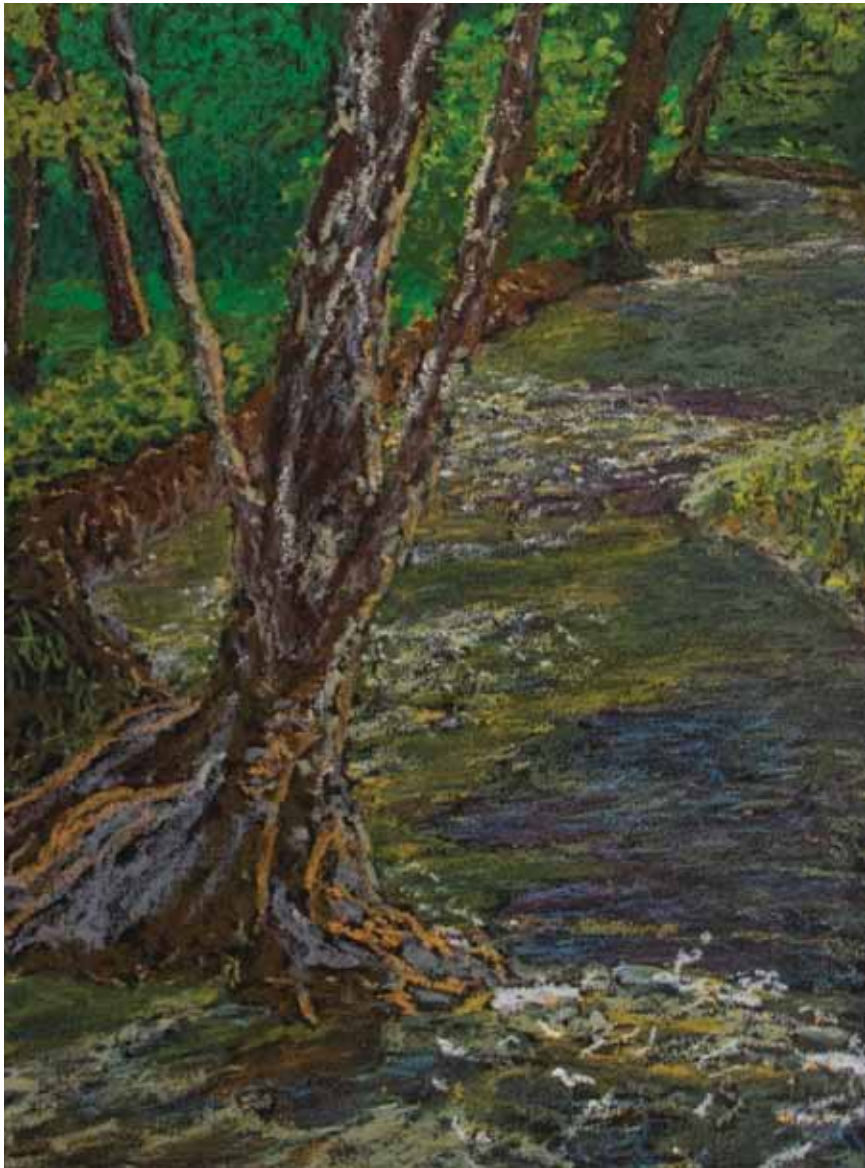
Now it's still raining. The food in the trailer fridge is probably garbage, and the trailer still is not parked where it needs to be.

The trip wasn't all bad. Here are the highlights:

- The cicadas were not nearly so noisy
- We had some great dinners out.
- I never had to cook.
- We had wonderful conversations in the evenings.
- We never had an argument.
- We're donating the trailer to NPR.



Coleus in Bloom,
watercolor and oil pastel,
Sharon Rabb



*South Codorus Creek at Twin Arches
oil pastel, Deborah Slawson*

An Old Picture

*Sits on my dresser in its original frame
I would guess it is from the 1920's
A young girl poses to her right
Her head turns toward you
Though her eyes evade your own
She seems to be about four or five years old*

*She looks much as I did at that age
The dark eyes those bangs and the short-cropped hair*

*Her smile is faint and if you cover her eyes
You are not sure her lips smile at all
If you cover her lips her eyes look wary
Already*

*Already not quite seeing you satisfactorily
Already looking askance at her determined and measured life*

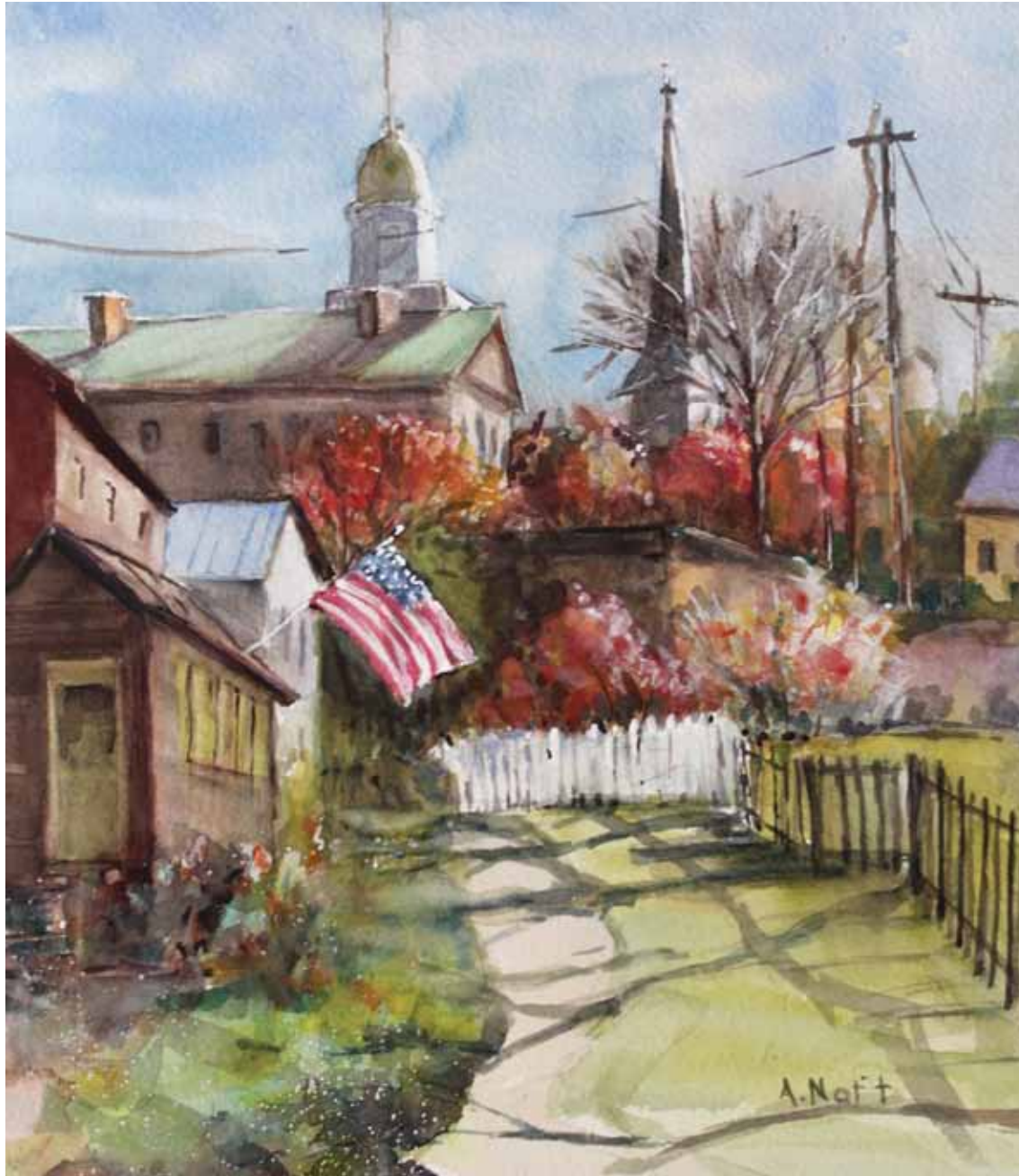
Susan Marshall



Leaves, oil pastel, Robin Ujcic-Snyder



Oregon Ridge Pond, oil pastel, Linda Stager



Inevitability

*A large shiny roasting pan
Useful as a bucket for sand
A child's plaything
To float tiny water wings
In makeshift tub of water
Or used to float small boats
Beneath a small toy moat
It could be weighted down
And used as an anchor
Or emptied so to float
Perhaps placed in a doorway
To block traffic flow
Replace a directional sign
To tell one where to go
Put in a shallow
Pond to float far away
Used to roast a tasty goose
Stuffed with savory couscous
Or sit on a shelf waiting
For the fateful day
When given up and
Tossed away*

Elizabeth Lewis

Ellicott City Garden Walk, watercolor, Andrea Naft

Anonymous

*All the lonely people where do they all come from
- The Beatles*

*A nameless Eleanor Rigby in South London
Trudges up the steps to the top floor
Drops down her grocery sack, pulls tight the door*

*A tired man returns from a fortnight's trip
November dusk, chilling rain
Door key in hand, a breath of relief.
The hallway spews forth an eerie miasma.
Sickening stench. Perhaps a dead rat?
The odor invades his whole habitat.*

*That winter complaints by the dozens unheeded.
March winds blow in Covid 19.
Two years pass, two years of rent unpaid
Spurs those in power to enter the flat.
A skeleton sprawls on the bathroom mat.*

The Daily Sun gives the age as sixty-one.

*In a world where tens of thousands daily starve
This story continues its Dance Macabre
In the distant corner of my consciousness.*

Dorian Borsella



Flower Seller, acrylic, Babs Bierman

Paul

Peter Whedbee

It seemed as if he was always too late.
Nothing in the present had any weight, until he had time to think about
it, then he could feel it, as a memory.
The future, a slippery fish.

So it was, my friend Paul confided in me, as we sat on a slanted boulder
in the shade of a cottonwood tree, staring into the frothy pool of a back
eddy. His normally cheerful, mischievous face bordered on the somber,
flat as the prairie grasslands of his home state.

What's happened? I asked.

She's pregnant.

Karen? Why so grim? You guys are good.
Is this child a surprise?

A child is a person. Who needs me.
I don't know if I will be able to love both Karen and my child.

Your child? Just yours?

You're making it even more complicated. How am I supposed to hold
an infant?

—

Sitting beside Karen at Paul's interment, I remembered that conversation
by the creek. Their daughter, now three, wandered among the rows of
knees seated around the flat green field, windless, waiting, clouds.

Phoebe, sweet Phoebe!
And so she turned, his face writ small beneath her brow. Toddling
to her mother, Phoebe slipped her hand into Karen's, pushing the
handkerchief aside.



Lucy
watercolor, Manuela Porta



Wilson
watercolor, Andrea Naft



Cousins

*The last of four
I am the family's "baby."
Too young for cousin playmates
Only idols:
Cousin Jane and her sister Betsy.
Jane seventeen to my seven,
Athletic, disciplined, severe in my eyes,
Controlled her world
As mine whirled in chaos.
But Betsy, nineteen, was and is my favorite:
All beauty, smiles, and brilliance.
Hours together spent in laughter
As adults:
Inside jokes,
Shelley Berman, Spike Jones...
And a shared love of music.
Even now,
At her 96 to my 81,
I am still "the baby."
Age matters less.
No more idols.
Of all our cousins,
Only we two remain.
Bound by love, history, secret skeletons.
Rememberings
Which sustain our souls.*

Peggy Beauvois

*Maxine Sees Something
watercolor, Sharon Rabb*



Grandma, It's Cold Outside
pastel, Gail Kramer

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watercolor, Paula Murphy

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