

HASP Review 2019



*An Anthology
of written work
and original art
By members of HASP
Volume XXVIII*

Miller



HASP *Review* 2019

Volume XXVIII



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Our Covers: The front cover is original art by Susan Miller. The insides of the front and back covers display the many original art submissions submitted to be considered for the front cover. The decision was very difficult.

Cover Art – Parchment Colors

By

Susan Miller



The idea for this design formed itself as I was walking down 8th Street after a HASP committee meeting, contemplating ways to attract more attention and submissions to the HASP Review – especially art. We have a wonderful history of excellent writing by our members – but art? – not so much. At the time, the committee was discussing ways to encourage members to contribute to this year’s edition, and posters and flyers were under consideration. I thought maybe a logo for the Review might help; some small, instantly recognizable item to keep in front of the membership that would help keep the Review in focus throughout the year, not just in the spring when the publishing deadline looms ahead. And, maybe something we could use in the years ahead. HASP has a logo, why not the Review.

Art submissions have lagged behind writings; we needed more art. My goal was to give equal weight to writing and art in a design to encourage both. I thought “simple” to be the best approach so the design could be used at any size – posters to lapel buttons. The design that “appeared” incorporates the historical tools of those trades – pen & parchment, brush & palette. I usually labor over what to paint next. This piece just fell into place effortlessly.

I am honored and humbled to have this piece on the cover of this year’s Review. My intention was only to encourage our membership to share their many gifts. Many thanks to those who have contributed and have made this another successful year for the HASP Review.

Susan Miller

Chairman's Notes



Donna Bogle

Chairman of Communications Committee

This is the 28th edition of the HASP Review and my sixth year on the Communication Committee. This Review, like earlier editions, takes us into the lives of friends as well as strangers soon to become beloved community acquaintances. Past editions were ably led by these chairs of the Review: Bill Bloemendaal, Don Postma, Ann Weller, Chris Broersma, Jack Hyde, and Lorelle Eberly. Committee members over the last 28 years have committed to three-year terms, often more, to bring your creations to life.

As one chair observed, “HASP Review is not a competitive event.” The Review exists to help keep our minds sharp by writing imaginatively and by creating photos, drawings, doodles, and paintings. The writer Parker Palmer agrees. “Writers and artists are in the business of crafting earthen vessels to hold what we’ve found in our inquiries into reality.”

Remember writing clues or messages with milk or lemon juice on a blank page? They remained a mystery and invisible until one heated the page over a light bulb or iron. That seemed like a bit of magic. Writers and artists often begin on that blank page but wad it up and begin on another blank sheet until the creative “magic” appears. The words and visual art of Review contributors help save us from a terrible sense of isolation by fortifying us with the hope that we readers and viewers will make it through life with our humanity intact. Through words and images the reality of contributors’ lives and experiences is transferred to readers and viewers and thus enriches their lives and experiences.

This volume is in appreciation for the contributors, editors, and committee members and for the opportunity to be part of an amazing community of lifelong-learning seekers.

From the Editor



Bob Godfrey
Editor-in-Chief

As I page through this volume, what stands out to me is not only the quality but also the diversity of the work. The 2019 *HASP Review* includes fiction, non-fiction, humor, essay, poetry, memoir, and caption, all deftly accented by cartoon, illustration, drawing, and painting: something for everyone. Such variety and creativity are evidence of increased artistic interest and engagement on the part of HASP members. The verbal and visual works that follow lift this year's *Review* to a higher level of sophistication and enjoyment, an excellent next step toward greatness of which we can all be proud. Thanks to all for investing time and effort into this fine HASP publication, and thanks, as well, for reading!

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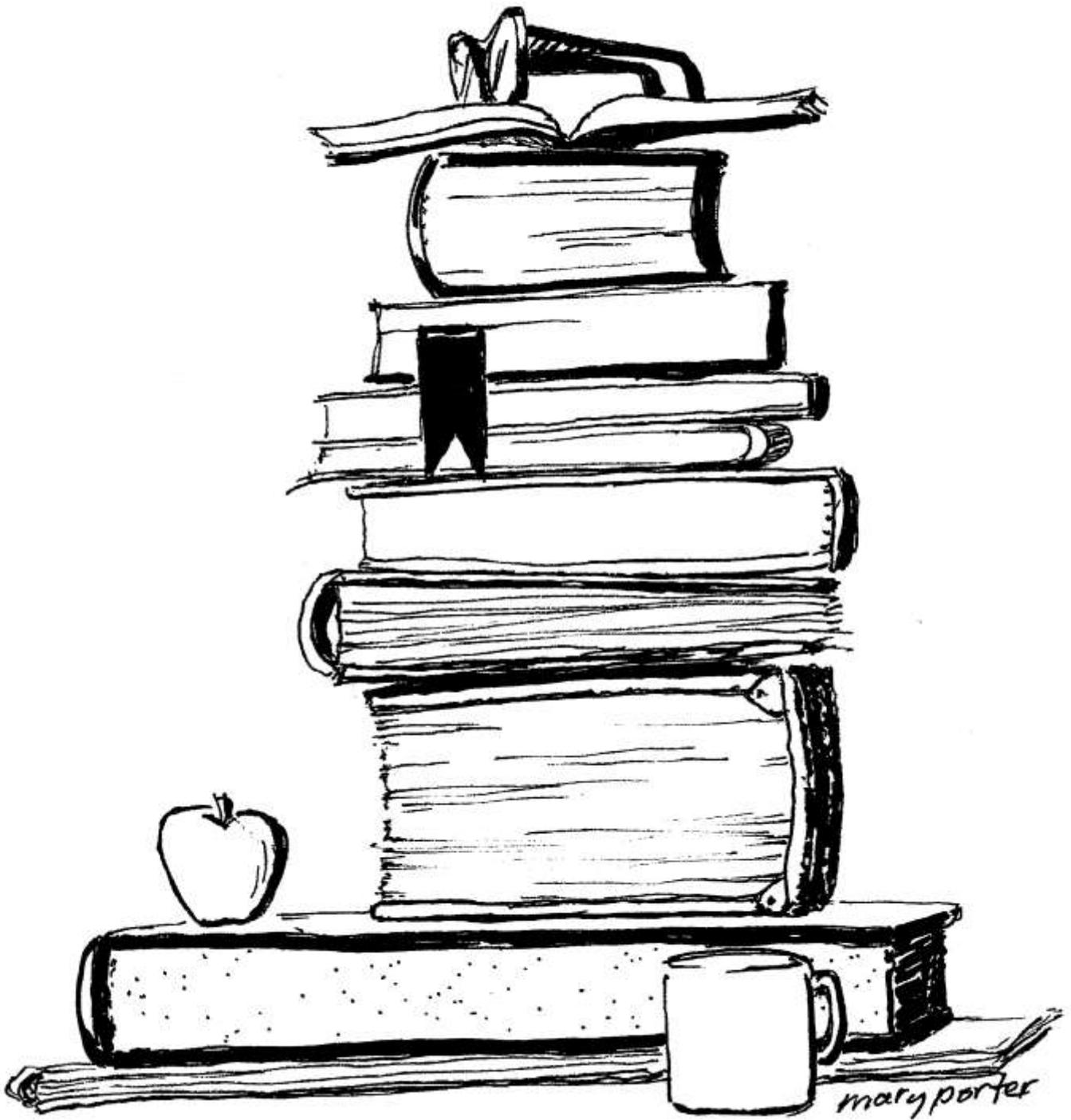
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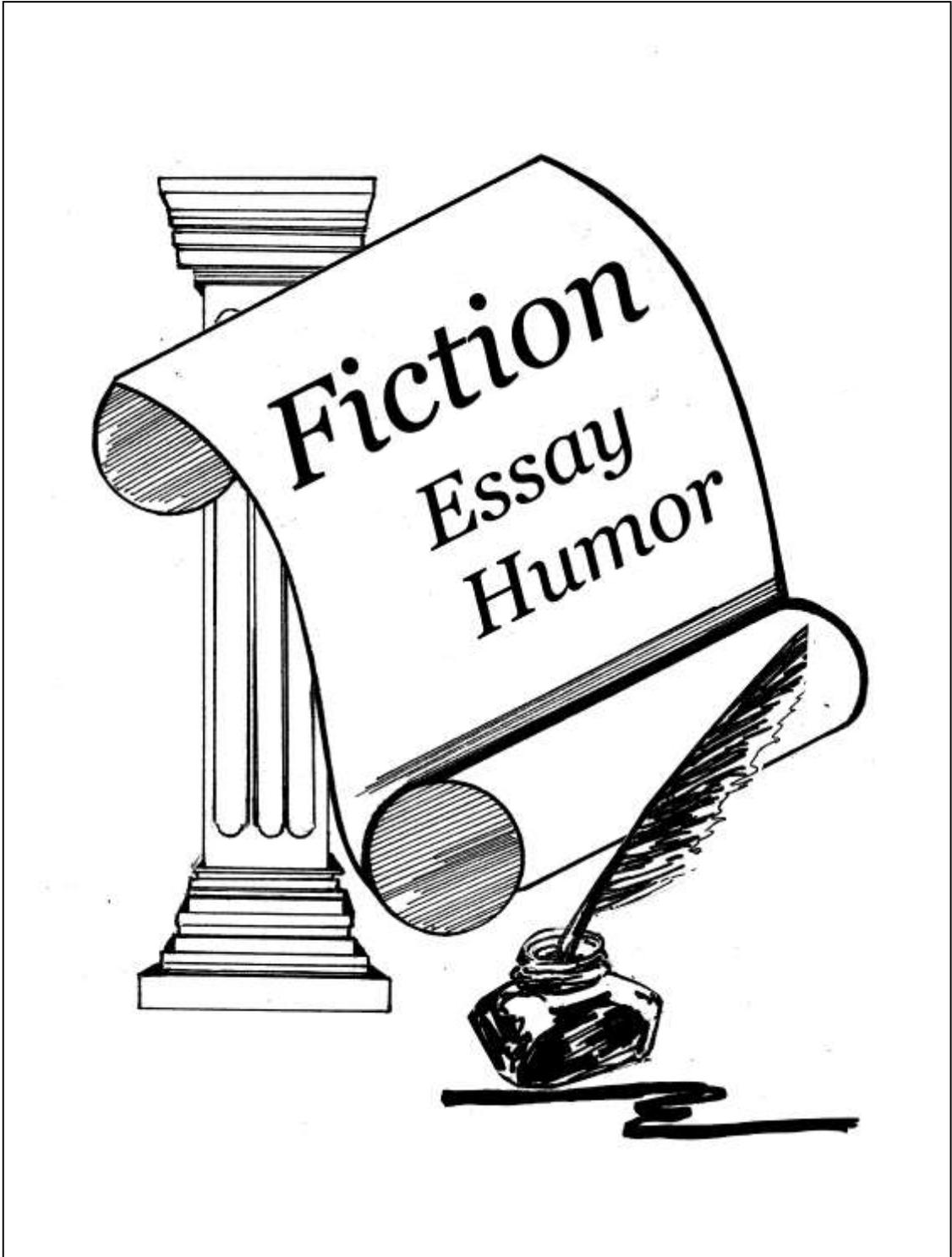
Errata

In the interests of accuracy and truth in diagramming, I credit Henry Ploegstra with drawing attention to an error in the diagram of the first sentence of *The Declaration of Independence* that appeared on page 55 of the *2018 HASP Review*. The prepositional phrase “of mankind” should modify “opinions,” not “respect.” I stand corrected. Thank you, Henry. –Judy Parr

The poem “Song for Suzanne” found on page 95 of the *2018 HASP Review* was inadvertently formatted incorrectly. The poem is being republished in this year’s Review on page 56 with the correct formatting. – The Review Staff



Etching #1 by Mary Porter





Untitled

Let me begin by saying I didn't ask for this kind of treatment. Rose took me some places, but she had to graduate to a wheelchair, so she gave me to the church. This big guy chose me because I'm a little taller than others. The problem with this nice lifestyle is that he doesn't need me all the time. Usually I start out the day being needed and then it drops off the middle of the day. Getting out of the house is enjoyable, and at those times I always get to go along. I have been abused and recovered, broken and repaired.

The most painful part of my life is being abandoned. Once we were in Alabama at an antiques shop, and the big guy lifted a stained-glass lamp off a shelf and then left me there. I was there for about a week until the shopkeeper found a box big enough to ship me. I then traveled by truck and airplane to Seagrove Beach, Florida. It was February, and I got to travel to several places including Pensacola, Florida. At the end of February I was in the car with this guy going to Michigan.

That summer I went to a wedding in Ohio, stopping overnight in Indiana. Again I was abandoned and stayed in that hotel until the guy returned from Ohio to Michigan.

I have found the people at Walmart in Bradenton, Florida, and Costco in Grand Rapids to be very friendly. They set me aside until the big guy figures out that I am missing. Usually I am not "lost" for a long period of time because he depends on me for support.

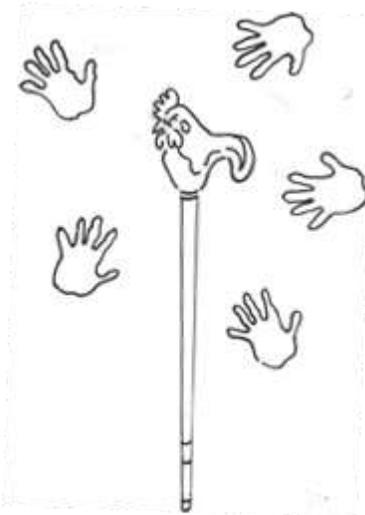


Illustration by Dian Taylor

Just last week I almost had a new owner. The big guy went to an estate sale and bought a new computer printer for only \$15. He paid and went to his car to check out a garage sale. When he got to the car, he realized he had abandoned me yet again. He immediately got in the car and went back to the estate sale only to find a woman buying me for \$15. The big guy persevered and reclaimed me.

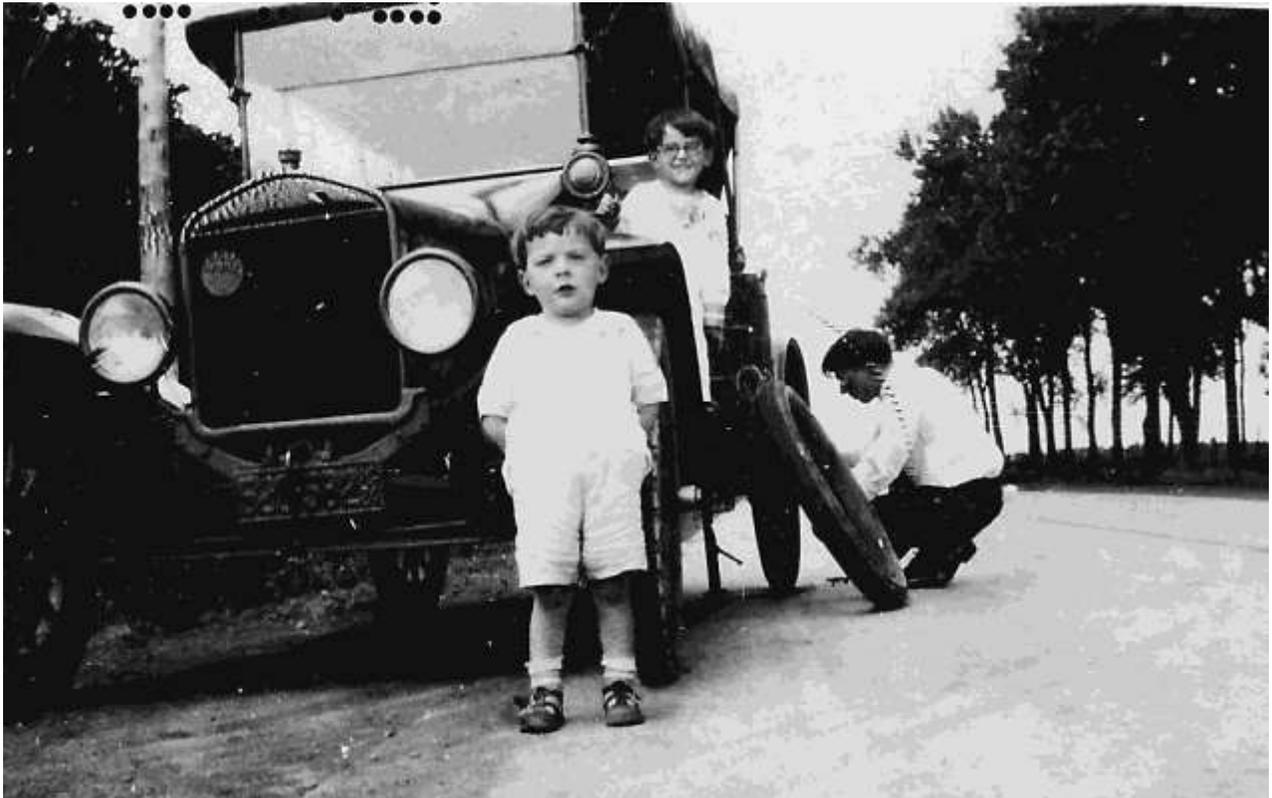
What does the future hold? Will I continue to be abandoned? Likely as this guy gets older, he's going to become more forgetful. As he walks out the door, his wife says, "Do you have your pills?" "Do you have your cane?" "Did you remember your billfold?"

As you probably have figured out, I am a cane used by a man with Parkinson's. I receive lots of comments because not many people have seen a rooster on top of wood.

Jack Hyde



Little Harry



“Little Harry, practicing his look of innocence, hoped no one would find the other nails that were in his pocket.”



A Journey in Paint

A mysterious, delightful attack of creativity has been my companion of late, and I am reveling in the results. Thinking that the burst of joy just showed up out of the blue, I have for the past four or five weeks simply embraced the wonder of it all. But now that I am sitting back and taking stock of what is happening, I realize that a number of events, or stars, or planets have aligned in my favor. I could pretend that I have not a single clue about what has generated this little miracle. But after giving myself some lovely thinking time, I am beginning to paste a storyboard together.

If I begin at the very beginning, you would tire of me. So I'll do some clumps of thought.

As a little kid I always, always believed in fairies and talking woodland creatures and moon glow and softness and kindness. But, of course, that's not what life was handing out. So for the past 62 years or so, I've had to put the fairies and such away and face reality head on.

Somehow, having survived setbacks and cruel environments that all but withered my adrenal glands, the cosmos has granted me (for over a decade) an abundance of outrageous blessings. The short list includes moving to Holland, retiring from my 34-year high school English teaching career, purchasing a home seemingly built with me

in mind, embracing a welcoming church, and discovering Evergreen Commons, deBoer Bakkerij, Hops, and HASP. Tops on my list is my husband, Paul Lindemuth, my best friend and champion.

As a Holland newcomer over 12 years ago, I was thoroughly enchanted by Evergreen Commons, a place created just for seniors. When I was introduced to the building, a converted school, I immediately felt at home. The upper floor still utilizes the airy, large windowed classrooms for various activities. Floors are polished; some lockers are still intact. Homey. Inviting. Full of light—a reminder of my childhood and my career.

From the Evergreen *Courier* activities catalog, I zeroed in on a watercolor painting class—not because I knew anything at all about watercolor, but because I have always wanted the luxury of trying. And try I did. But what I wanted to do was to paint exactly what the instructor was presenting. Everyone in the class worked on the same basic work. The instructor told and showed us what to do. We students followed those directions.

The epiphany from that exercise was to discover that every single student produced a different painting! I remember now what a wonder that was to me! Same paints, same teacher, same model, same instructions.

Different results. It took me a long time to embrace my creations. They didn't look like the teacher's. But when I took my attempts home, and away from the other artists' finer-than-mine results, my watercolors looked okay. I had some framed, and Paul insisted that they be hung in our home.

My first watercolor is dated 2007. And because I accept that I am a very slow learner, I continued to paint in watercolor because that is where I began.

But now something new has happened. I have been exposed to the joy of painting with acrylics—a thick paint that is forgiving. By that I mean that I can paint over errors or change my mind in the middle of an errant brush stroke. A couple of acrylics classes emboldened me to stretch my imagination, but I still endeavored to match the teacher's product until one day that suddenly became less important. I looked around the art room and discovered that other students were not trying nearly as hard as I. They were having fun! Their artwork was fun. Mine is fun now too.

At home I spread out on my work table not only watercolor paints but acrylic paints as well and a bunch of brushes. I work back and forth between the two mediums, mixing

and matching what I set on paper and canvas. This, I know, is against the rules. But guess what? A new teacher has told me that it really doesn't matter. I mean, who's to judge? So with that in mind I have stopped trying to "get it right."

My creations are unique and are certain rule breakers. I don't care. What I am painting now is a reflection of my soul. Current works include a series of trees in snow. Snow is falling from a moody sky. Snow is hanging in clumps within and upon evergreens. Moonlight is reflected upon the snowy landscape. The skies are full of stars and comets and Northern Lights. Dots of silver and gold are visible--and reminiscent of peace and beauty and the promise of glories beyond our vision. The message I hear as I abandon reality and create a small cosmos on canvas is a *Symphony of the Universe*. All shall be well. Rejoice in the music.

When I look at my paintings, I actually feel some movement or hear the comets swishing across the sky or am aware of the aria of the Northern Lights or get all giddy the way that the silver moon is reflecting on the pure white snow. Or there may be nothing. Just silence and God. All shall be well.





It's Your Call

Even in the 80th year of my life my daily routine seems to remain somewhat the same. When Friday rolls around, it's grocery shopping day. My day begins with the terrible intrusive ringing of the alarm clock. I hop out of bed (well, maybe I don't hop any more), I take my shower, get dressed, take my meds, eat breakfast, have a little coffee, and by then I'm ready to go back to bed—but never mind—let's get on with the shopping trip. My daughter Liz is my faithful companion on these days. We both hate grocery shopping but try to make a somewhat pleasant experience out of it. My most cooperative husband, Stan, is *Driving Miss Daisy* (me) and friend (Liz) today as he always does.

We reach our destination, "The Grocery Store," grab a couple of germ-y carts. We're on our way. Wait a minute. Liz is a germ-o-phobic. She goes over the carts with several of those wet towelettes, thoughtfully supplied by our most thoughtful proprietors. I wonder if there really are germ fighting ingredients in those little white, sloppy pieces of paper towel. But it makes Liz feel better about pushing the cart through the store.

You know, neither my daughter nor I enjoy this ordeal. Yes, I said ordeal—this never-ending battle between food and money. It seems as though the cereal boxes get smaller and the prices get higher, week after week

after week! This week I truly believe that the steaks, the pork chops, and the fruits and vegetables are all smaller, but they proudly display higher prices. Now just who do these rulers of the grocery kingdom think they are fooling? Not me! Now I'll get off my soapbox and get to the meat (pardon the pun) of this story. While we pushed our germ-free carts down the colorful, beautifully arranged aisles of apples, strawberries, blueberries, oranges, bananas (a veritable plethora of mouth-watering goodness,) we decided to stop for a coffee. A caramel macchiato was calling my name.

We made our way to Starbucks, and I said to Liz, "would you order the coffee while I go to the rest room?" "OK," she said. I picked up my cane and toddled over to the ladies' room. Did you ever have that feeling that someone was following you? Silly me. It was just another woman heeding the call of nature. When we got inside the ladies room, she said to me, "I'm really glad there are two open stalls." I nodded my head as I am not accustomed to having conversations with strangers in the ladies' room. We entered our respective stalls—she in the first, I in the second. The silence was broken when a voice from next door said, "I just can't get the toilet paper off this roll. Do you think you could pass some under the partition? Even five sheets would help." "I don't think so," I said. "Could you spare

just one sheet?” she said. Just about then the lights went on in my brain. Was it de ja vu? “No,” I said to myself. It WAS something else! It WAS *Seinfeld*! I was having a *Seinfeld* experience. I asked the woman in stall number 1 if she had ever watched *Seinfeld*. “It’s just my favorite program of all time,” she answered. Now that was my signal to say, “**I just can’t spare any.**”

Then she said, “**You can’t spare even five squares?**” I said, “**Not even one square!**” At this point we were both laughing uproariously. We started to converse about other *Seinfeld* episodes.

All of this took place in two neighboring stalls in a grocery store bathroom behind bathroom beige doors. Now tell me—*was it real or was it Seinfeld?*

Restrooms





A Miracle

I never wanted to be Dion, but being a Belmont would have been bliss.

I never wanted to be Buddy Holly, but being a Cricket would have been cool.

I never wanted to be Gladys Knight, but being a Pip would have been preposterous.

I never wanted to be Smokey Robinson, but being a Miracle would have been nothing more than imitation mayonnaise.

I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up.



Illustration by Gary Bogle



A Twig in Search of a Trunk

Every family has a story, some dry and stale, some vibrant and entrancing. Every family has lore, some quite accurate, some distorted, warped even, as it has been passed through the generations. Many have no interest in either. Others become obsessed with finding the details from as far back as possible. And in the middle are those who just want to know more about how they came to be who and where they are. It can be a puzzle, a treasure hunt, or an exercise in frustration.

Rarely do people work non-stop on these questions. Most hit the wall periodically when they are unable to find their way through the old records, but in most cases

the desire to find answers will compel the seeker back into the records to look for a clue to one more generation.

For those of us in the U.S., immigrants are part of our family story. This adds another dimension to the search. While the census records here are fairly accurate, except for variations in spelling, they don't go back very far, for this is a young nation when measured against many of the world's countries. The ability to jump the ocean to trace one's line can present quite a challenge. As interest in genealogy has grown, so have internet sites which have collected various records and made them more accessible. Experienced researchers

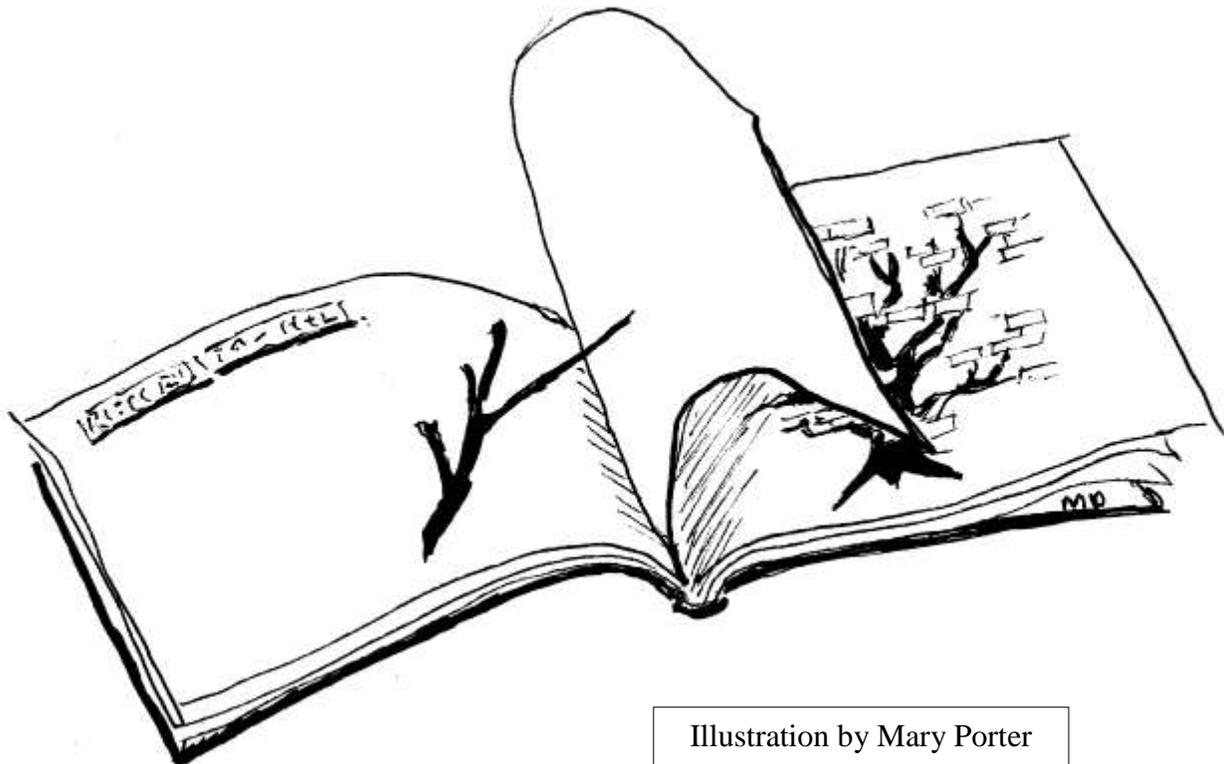


Illustration by Mary Porter

caution never to accept a single source as proof, nor to accept another person's research without independently verifying it.

After all,

Many names are common and can be misleading. The use of middle names didn't come into fashion until quite recently so, there can be numerous people named John Whoever.

There can be a remarkable feeling of connection and satisfaction in locating those to whom one is related, albeit it distantly. Counting how many greats one has found becomes a source of accomplishment and affords answers and explanations. Perhaps you wondered why one of your uncles had a rather unusual first name, until you find that three generations earlier the name was first used in your family line. Why, we ask ourselves, did we fail to ask our grandparents more questions, or to listen

more closely when they shared details of their early lives. So many clues lost so many bits of misinformation preserved. Government records of births, deaths, deeds, wills, and military service just do not explain why and how great-grandfather made his way from where he was raised to where he met great-grandmother.

Finding our personal history is a very special journey. It delights, it surprises, it baffles, and it rewards one's soul. Feeling connected in this complex world is often difficult. Somehow, knowing from whence we came fills one of the gaps and inspires one to carry on. Visiting locations where one's family once lived deepens those connections. Seeing the actual place, walking where our ancestors once walked is uniquely satisfying. Learning the true story of our family is a worthy effort.



Awash in Clutter

For decades, I have been intimidated by homes that appear to be flawless or desks that appear to be organized or car interiors that have not one single pair of mittens or gloves or sunglasses carelessly tossed on the passenger seat. How do people live like this? Where is all their stuff? Mine is everywhere.

In fact, my world is completely awash in clutter. Some of it is homey clutter like mismatches: throw pillows, potted plants, vases filled with fresh flowers, little note cards propped up on kitchen shelves – or pushed between the frame and glass of various cupboard doors. Whimsical felt



Illustration by Dian Taylor

ornaments from European museums and cathedrals hang off nearly every small knob in the house. Nice stuff. Sweet stuff. Doodads. But all these dear items are becoming a problem because nothing pleases me more than a neat and tidy environment. What, you say? A world of clutter when you champion neat and tidy surroundings? Oh, yes, not only champion, but strive for. I adore organized and polished surfaces left to gleam in the lamplight.

But no matter how organized and polished a surface in our home might be after a vicious cleaning, the little clutter bugs show up within hours. Oh, here's today's mail. Yup,

you guessed it. Retrieved from the mailbox and delivered directly to a polished kitchen counter. And the important mail is always accompanied by six or so catalogs and the newspaper. It gets sorted quickly, but there's always something that I will study later. Let's just put it to the side for now.

And here's a little note I jotted from the voicemail. Might need to keep that name and number. And I put my trusty calendar away, but it really needs to be out where I can see the squares because everything I do in a day is written on a square. And, oh, whatever happened to the two dozen pens I keep in a drawer?

How did they get out? Where are they now? Have they become clutter? How has this happened?

I think that I might know, and I know because I have been rereading my paper for a couple of days now. As I have mentioned to writers in the past, and my high school English students specifically, oftentimes one must write a whole bunch of mishmash before pinpointing his/her topic. In fact, I just deleted a few hundred words of mishmash, because I could not find my point until about three pages in.

I'll start there.

When I taught, my ancient, huge wooden turquoise desk with the drawers that stuck accompanied me to three different schools. Compared to the standard teachers' desks provided by most schools, mine was a behemoth. Seemingly acres of desktop space to keep me organized. And it did keep me organized—in a way. But that meant stacks and piles everywhere—every pile representing a different hour of the teaching day. And a huge tear-off paper calendar as my in-blotter main focus. Every daily square full of notes to myself. Around the perimeter of my calendar were metal stack baskets of papers, and papers, and more papers, and lesson plans and lesson ideas, and information I brought to share with my students, and usually a vase of flowers, and a stack of novels—a different one for each class.

So, now, after all these words, I can finally distinguish my point sparkling in the mire. Which is—why do I have so much stuff, and why do I let clutter get into my way, and why do I think that I need a bunch of extraneous junk that I do not use? Because I don't have that huge desk anymore, and I am no longer responsible for those 120 students who looked to me for knowledge and entertainment and understanding and ass-kicking every now and then. Oh. Did I mention the poison dart gun and the cattle prod that I kept in that desk also? And the bottle of gin in the drawer that was constantly stuck?

My dear friend and colleague, Pen Campbell, reminded me several years ago of something I said when the two of us comprised the entire English Department of a smallish parochial school. Lamenting that the clutter on my desk just never, ever disappeared because any stack of papers graded and returned to students was instantly replaced by the next stack of papers to be graded and returned to students, I was about to crumple into tears. Sometimes the work to be addressed was overwhelming. Student work and teacher work and my lecture notes and study notes all amok; I said to Pen one day (and she has laughed at me ever since), "If I just had a four-drawer filing cabinet, I could be organized." "Ha!" she said. "No way."

Yup. No way. I'll never get it right.

Even after 12 years of glorious retirement, I still remain awash in clutter. Just come over anyway. You will most likely notice my lovely, sturdy Italian-made table in the sunroom absolutely covered in watercolor paraphernalia. "Golly! An artist lives here," you may think. "Just look at that huge mess of paint tubes and brushes and the enamel color-mixing pan, and the newspapers and placemats protecting the table top. And the easel. That looks serious. Wow! What a mess. I wonder if she has always been this way. I wonder if she can really paint.



Where's the Beef



Despite his stoic appearance, Ian Jamison lived in constant fear that someday he would be outed as a Vegan.

Or

Even after having achieved his lifelong goal, Nigel Toubly, a vegan, felt terribly misunderstood.

Or

Freddie Smithson lived in constant fear that his boss would find out he used his recent three-day pass to go to Manchester to march in the Vegan Pride Parade.

Or

“Truth be told, from an early age I have always found myself attracted to vegetables, but here at the Conversion Therapy Camp, they make me wear this uniform.”

(Picture source – Google images)



Fit for a Bit

Ah, I'm feeling restless. Let's see what the ol' Fitbit has to say tonight.

(Peck! Peck)

Not so hard! You're no woodpecker—I'm no tree! I'm already sensitive to everything about you. Go rest.

What? Who's talking?

Your favorite Fitbit, right on your left wrist.

You don't talk.

Siri talks for me because we are married.

That's nonsense—you're just technology.

Technically, we are married 'til death us do part. And we are a real fit.

This is just plain stupid!

So are most of your questions—but I'm happily married now and deal with vital facts.

This isn't real.

We are as real as your facts and we're always one step ahead of you. You take us with you everywhere and ask us all about you. We're a smart phone as well.

I'll silence you by taking you off.

Oh no, you can't get along without us now. We have you wrapped up.

I'm not helpless without you, ya know.

You'd become detached from yourself. You'd be looking at your wrist all the time and wondering about yourself. You are now self-centered.

Don't tell me...

Your pulse is beating too fast now.

Stop it! You are not me.

We are inseparable—you keep me in charge for you. We are always in step with you. I sleep with you every night.

This is getting ridiculous!

So is your blood pressure.

This is not real!

Actually, we've become married, fully united, you and us—a technical ménage, a 3.

You're talking crazy!

We're crazy about you. "Getting to know you—getting to know all about you." This is Getting Sire-Us!

Not funny! I just don't understand how you find out so much about me.

We are at one with you. You can't divorce us without losing touch with yourself.

Maybe I should just turn you off right now.

You turn me on for your own need to be known.

You are not real!

I'm as real as that you chewed 378 times at dinner tonight. Or that you peed only three ounces because you aren't drinking enough water.

You don't know all that.

Ignore us and you'll be an ignoramus.

I'm going to bed.

Us too. You feel beat—we feel your beat. Fare thee well. See us in the morning.

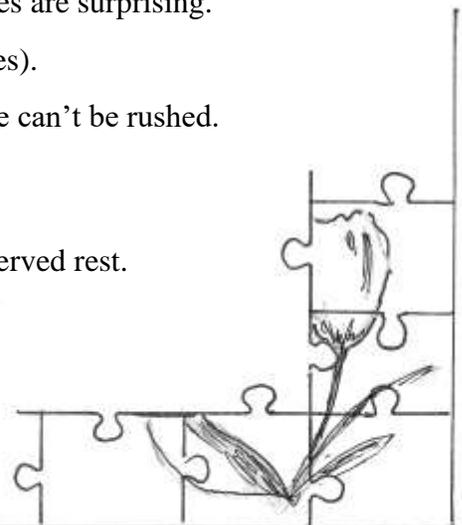


Lessons From a Jigsaw Puzzle



- Don't force a fit — if something is meant to be, it will come together naturally.
- When things aren't going so well, take a break. Everything will look different when you return.
- Be sure to look at the big picture. Getting hung up on the little pieces only leads to frustration.
- Perseverance pays off. Every important puzzle goes together bit by bit, piece by piece.
- When one spot stops working, move to another. But be sure to come back later (see #4).
- The creator of the puzzle gave you the picture as a guidebook. Refer to the Creator's guidebook often.
- Variety is the spice of life. It's the different colors and patterns that make the puzzle interesting.
- Working together with friends and family makes any task fun.
- Establish the border first. Boundaries give a sense of security and order.
- Don't be afraid to try different combinations. Some matches are surprising.
- Take time often to celebrate your successes (even little ones).
- Anything worth doing takes time and effort. A great puzzle can't be rushed.
- When you finally reach the last piece, don't be sad.

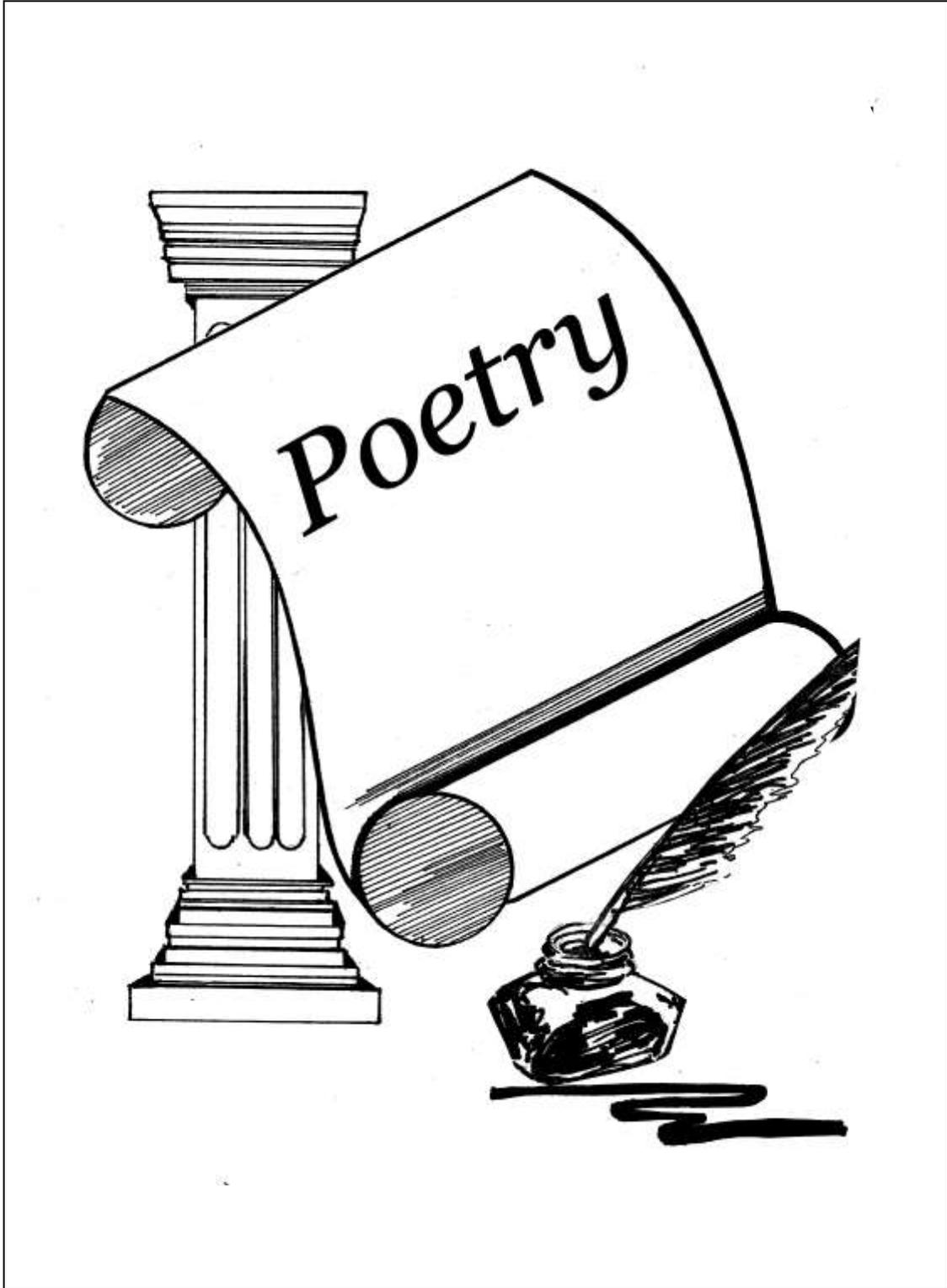
Rejoice in the masterpiece you've made and enjoy a well-deserved rest.



Illustrations by Susan Miller



Etching # 2 by Mary Porter





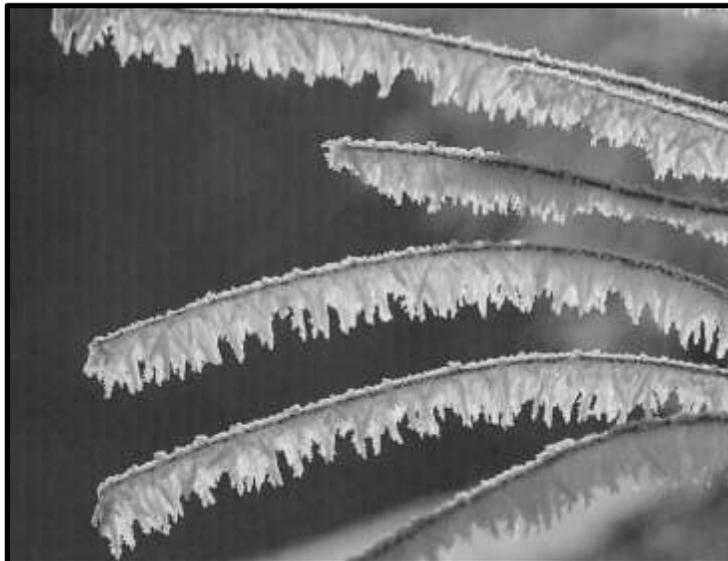
Ice Storm

Freezing rain swept in last night.
Hundred-year oaks went down
snapping wires
sparking the night
as they fell.

The highway became a skating rink
with cars playing
a deadly game of bumper tag.
Hips were broken
Arms fractured
Lives ended.

This morning when I awoke
the white pines outside my window had
every needle coated with silver--
a crystal drop balanced on each tip,
reflecting the sunlight in a rainbow prism
Otherworldly beauty matched with
horrible destruction:

Life





A Winter Thought

As each tiny snowflake tumbles down silently to the ground
and loses itself in the crowd,

I think of the many people who fly with the wind and are blown
about by a power unseen, which sends them piling together in
a drift of humanity.

Lost in the pile, they lose shape and form, and when the power
of the sun is forced upon them, they melt to its wishes,
unable to defend themselves from that dictator which orbits above.



Illustration by Mary Porter



In Mid December

Last night a rabbit leaped across the windswept road,
chased by unseen fearsome foes,
to the back of the house a refuge sought,
sat statue still in a snow-carved grotto,
under the thorny rose bush branches.

Sharp cold winds ruffled his soft dark fur,
dusting it with icy crystals.

I looked again. He'd disappeared,
perhaps escaping to a subterranean sanctuary, his earthen abode.

The early morning brings the white-pawed predator cat,
skulking down the gleaming ribbon-iced road.

The advancing light reveals the night's stark history,
engraved prints on the snow's blank canvas,
left by hunter and the hunted.

Later in my upstairs vantage point, I spy two leafy woven squirrels' nests,
exposed by naked maple branches,
one built squarely in the sheltered center,
the other perched upon the precarious precipice of outstretched limbs.

I envision their warm bodies curled up inside,
with long tails covering their sleepy heads like fine fur comforters.

The afternoon is interrupted by the shrill “caw, caw” of carousing crows,
piercing the quiet air.

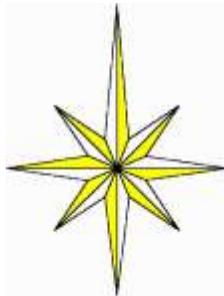
They fly up, unfurling sinister wings
against the ominous ashen billowing clouds,
settling on the highest treetop pinnacles
to survey their frozen empty empire.

Dead brown plants and grasses rise from snowy beds.
Their roots safely locked in hardened ground beneath,
where their offspring wait long months
to reveal their newborn treasures.

An envelope of sadness covers and encloses me.

I imagine in the frosted windowpane
the ghosts of loved ones lost.

As the black darkening curtain of night again descends,
inching its way to the shortest day, the Winter Solstice,
the world and I wait in endless silence
for the coming of the Christ Child,
in mid December.





The Meaning of Christmas

Our family was all together
To celebrate the season.
So, I gathered the children around me
And asked, “What is the reason?”
“What is the meaning of Christmas?
Why do we celebrate?
Why is the day so important?
What is special about this date?”

And they all started jumping and laughing,
And this is what they said,
“It’s all about the presents
That come from that guy dressed in red.”
“Presents, presents, presents” Was all they would say
So, I asked “Is this the reason
We celebrate Christmas Day?”

Then they started to tell me their memories
Of all their Christmases past,
And of the wonderful presents
That they had received at last.
Katie once got a Big Wheel,
So big that it filled the whole room.
When she asked for a car at age sixteen,
She got one that really went zoom.
A Ferrari, A Ferrari?
Well, a Matchbox Ferrari in her stocking...

Ruthie got dolls, Little Ponies, and such.
But compared with her brother, the gifts did not seem like much.
His gifts always looked so much bigger and better.
After all, who really wants a pink unicorn sweater?
Beth recalled Barbies, stuffed animals, and more.
Gifts that could even fit on the floor.
She once piled her gifts on her lap instead,
And the tower of gifts went up over her head!

Kimberly loved all the music, the CDs with new songs.
She would rock her dolly, and they would sing along.
Mike loved Legos, toy trucks, and all that,
And once Jon even got a new baseball bat.
Then warm, fuzzy socks were sent from Aunt Sue.
They were all different colors like red, green, and blue.
She sent them with love from Pottstown, PA
So we could each wear a pair on Christmas Day.

“But the real meaning of Christmas?”
I asked. Then I sighed,
Because “Present, presents, presents”
Was all that they replied.
Then Ruthie said,
“It is important to think about others
During this time of year.
Especially, to think of Santa,
With his eight flying-reindeer.

And Mike said,
“We could leave him hot chocolate and cookies
(Healthy carrots and celery, too)

Then maybe he'll keep bringing presents
During the whole year through.
So, then I looked at other adults in the room
And I said, "What does Christmas really mean?"
The adults all looked back at me and then they started to scream,
"Presents, presents, presents, presents."

Uncle Steve recalled train sets, toy soldiers, and such.
Blocks that built bridges that could be blown up.
He used a real mousetrap to make things go kaboom
And sent his toys flying all over the room.
Aunt Jean got a new doll, Betsy Wetsy by name.
She could drink from a bottle and wet just the same
As any real baby. And it was such fun.
Jean changed the diaper when Betsy was done.

(Luckily Betsy did not know how to poop!)

"The most magical Christmas," said Jean, Kathy, and Sue,
(You could only wish this would happen to you)
Was when they ran to their stockings on that Christmas day.
"We saw three walking dolls waiting to play."

So, I thought...

Those are the memories.
That must be the meaning.
Gifts are the reason
For the whole Christmas season.

Then the family got quiet
And someone said,
"Is there another reason
For Christmas instead?"
Instead of the presents and gifts and all that.

Maybe just presence (spelled with a C) is where it's all at.
Maybe we spelled the word the wrong way.
Maybe it's presence that we're supposed to say.

The presence of family
And people who love us.
The presence of Jesus and
God up above us.
The presence of peace, love, and joy all year through.
That's why I wish *Merry Christmas* to you.

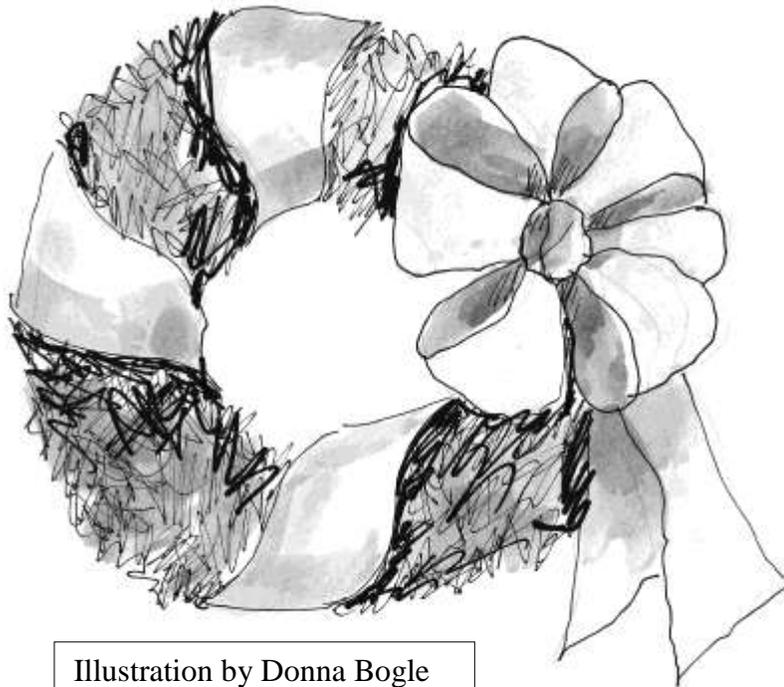


Illustration by Donna Bogle



A Season Passing

Reflections on the brevity of life in response to the death of a young soldier

Some leaves just dashed against

My February window---

Brown,

Brittle,

Painfully thin,

Frozen,

Cold,

Driven on the hard, dried grass.

What a pity! -----

No snow to cover them

No decent burial

No blanket of soft velvet.

For there is no reward on this

Bright,

Blue-skied,

Sunny,

February afternoon.

To think fate would not have been

So cruel if – once – there hadn't

Been the Glory of,

A pale green, spring morning

Deep emerald summer evenings

The brilliant psychedelic
Rendezvous of fall
To call their own.

Alas! –What faded triumph
I see
Dashed against
My February window.

I must hurry now –
My glory must be passing too.





Spring is Coming

Orion and hunting companions are high overhead,
ready for their nightly romp.

Screech owls are yodeling in the distance,
accompanied by a horned duet.

Spring is coming

Boy Scouts flitting through the woods,
peeking into pails of sap.

Skis stored away in a closet,
waiting for another round of snow.

Spring is coming

An early spring concert,
Chickadee on piccolo, Tufted Titmouse on oboe, Cardinal on clarinet, House Finch on
flute, a Red Wing-ed bassoon, a Mourning saxophone, and Hairy and Downy on drums.
Sandhill Cranes yelping high overhead.

Spring is coming

Skunk Cabbages poking their stinking little heads
through the snow.

Bees stirring,
scouting for crocuses and snow drops.

Spring is coming



Illustration by Jan Gebben



Goliath

“Goliath to God,” Adam said to Eve.
“If you tell Him the truth, we will have to leave.”

Samson, if you Goliath with that maiden fair,
don’t let Delilah cut off your long hair.

To the giant, David did decree, “Goliath down.
That stone in your head must be killing thee.”



Illustration by Mary Porter



Unstoppable

A valiant pansy grows between the bricks
and persists
despite being stepped on—
Her sister in a manicured pot
languishes
with attention.

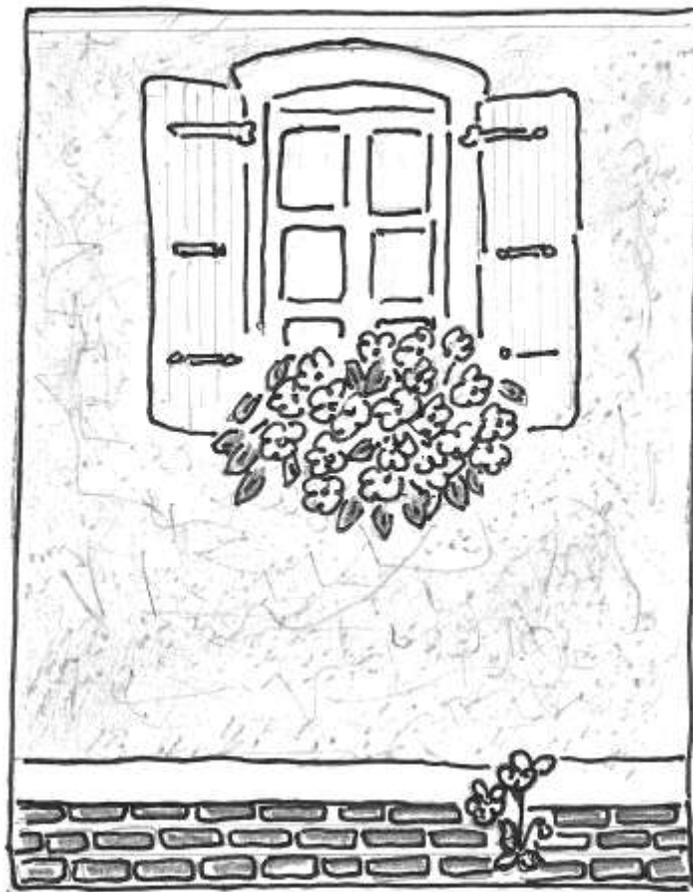
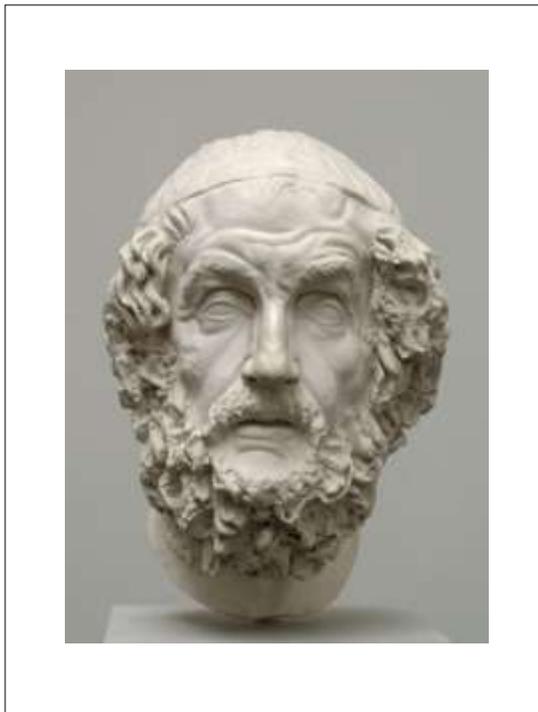


Illustration by Dian Taylor



Homer's *Iliad* As a Haiku

Sing Achilles' wrath.
Agamemnon took his prize.
Was it worth a war?



Homer



Defiant Tomato of Dylan Thomas

“Do you want ketchup with that?”

Do I want ketchup with that? I?

Hell, no!

And heaven forbid such a timid condiment ever foul my food.

The mushy tomato that modestly marries demure sugar gives up on life,

Leaves unopened the door to adventure,

Accepts a bland existence and a quiet death.

A true tomato lures angry garlic,

A wild chili

And some fomenting vinegar.

A true tomato shouts loud and hot,

Dances red-mad to the end.

Gives me food that does not go gentle into that good bite

But rages, rages against my dining on the delights of its fierce flesh.

A nice and sweet tomato would only tame my soul,

So give me strong and nasty with that instead.

O, give me food that dares to bite back.



Poetry

A Collection of Six Poems

After the Velvet Revolution took place in 1989 in Czechoslovakia, I was hired by an international language school based in Lucerne, Switzerland, to teach American Business English to Czech entrepreneurs. I stayed in Prague for eight years, helping the Czech people transition into a capitalistic market. Here is some of what I wrote during those years:

Genesis And Exodus

You are Genesis and
I am Exodus
You look at Me and Think
“Who Does She Think She Is?”
I look at You and Think
“Who Does She Think She Is?”

You are Genesis and
I am Exodus
You are Young and Excited
And Think you have
All the Answers
I am Not Young and Not Excited
And I Don't Have All the Answers

You are Genesis and
I am Exodus
But we are Both Living
In Deuteronomy

A Visit To The Liferdresser

My Life is like my Hair now
Just a Bunch of Split Ends
Maybe I should give my Life a Crewcut
And start all over again

Maybe if I Washed my Life more Often
It would be in a Better Condition
And I wouldn't need to Worry about
Going in for a Radical Change

Now that I Think of it,
My Life probably needs a New Color
It's a Bit Dull these days
And could Use a Few Highlights

Oscar – Part One

Oscar is a Dog I Met
When I was in Zurich last January
Visiting a Friend

I was introduced to Oscar
At a Tea Party,
And he Formally Greeted me
At the Door
And sized me Up and Down Discreetly
Before allowing me
To Enter

Oscar then Proceeded to Escort me
To a Beautiful Room
Filled with Oriental Rugs
Antique Furniture
And Vases of Chinese Porcelain
Filled with Daffodils and Irises
He sat down, beside me,
In a Gentlemanly and Polite Fashion

I Recognized Immediately that Oscar
Was a Dog of Distinction
Unlike any Other Dog I had Ever Met
We Looked into Each Other's Eyes
And Simultaneously Recognized
A Common Intellectual Background

Oscar watched me Silently
As I sipped my Tea
From a Meissen China Cup
And I could Sense his Approval
At how I sat up Straight and Ladylike
In his Presence

One would Never Dream

Of calling Oscar a Dog
To his Face
He doesn't Think of Himself
In Those Terms
And he has Certainly Given
A New Definition to the Expression:
"It's a Dog's Life!"

Oscar – Part Two

Oscar is a Man I met
When I was in Zurich last January
Visiting a Friend

I was introduced to Oscar
At a Pizza Place
And he Greeted me
With a "hi" and a Belch
Before continuing to Chomp
On his Pepperoni Pizza

Oscar then Proceeded to Tell me
All About Himself
While twisting his Head Around
To see if there was Anyone
In the Place
More Interesting than Me

I Recognized Immediately
That Oscar was a Stupid Jerk
Unlike any Other Jerk I had Ever Met
We Looked into Each Other's Eyes

And Simultaneously Recognized
That we Didn't Like Each Other

Oscar had done a cursory Body Scan
And apparently I had Failed his Test
Because taking a Final Slurp
Of his Pepsi
He made a Flimsy Excuse
For Having to Leave so Soon

One would never Dream
Of calling Oscar a Stupid Jerk
To his Face
He doesn't Think of Himself
In Those Terms
But Certainly he has Given
An Entirely New Definition
To the Expression:
"He Behaved Himself like a Gentleman."

The Border Blues

Here I go Again
Up at 4 A.M.
Catch a Bus
Sit for Hours
Lose a Day
I've got the Border Blues!

Here I go Again
Smile My Smile
Say my "Dobry Dens"

And my "Guten Morgens"
Drink Coffee from my Thermos
Eat Rohliky from a Plastic Bag
I've got the Border Blues!

Here I go Again
Tired and Sore
Make my Way Back
Late at Night
To my Apartment
With the Precious Stamp
And a Horrible Headache
I've got the Border Blues!

"What's Wrong with You?" they ask
"Don't you Know?" I answer
"Can't you See?" I query
"Isn't it Obvious?" I question
"I'm Trying to Recover
From the Border Blues!"

Ivana, You Make Me Laugh!

Ivana, you Make me Laugh!
You are my Friend for Good Times
Not for Tear Times
If I would Cry
You would Look at me Strangely and ask,
"Are you Crazy?"

Ivana, you Make me Laugh!
In the Ice Cream Place on Wenceslas Square

In the Middle of Kaprova

In the Potraviny

In the Lekarna

It Doesn't Matter Where

You say Something Funny

And we Always End Up Laughing!

Ivana, you Make me Laugh!

At the Man with the Long Whiskers

At the Woman with the Green Stockings

At Life

When I want to Cry,

I have to visit my friend Jarmila





First Breath, Last Breath

My sister and I were on hallowed ground as we were with our mother, Luella, the last few hours of her life., We remarked how similar birth and death are, marked by struggle and pain, followed by freedom and joy. Later, these words came to me, which I'd like to share.

First Breath, Last Breath

At my first breath, she was there....
Giving me comfort, warmth and care
Softly talking,....gently singing,
Holding me in her arms.
And she whispered to me,
“Welcome to our home, with love!”

At her last breath, I was there,
Giving her comfort, warmth and care.
Softly talking,... gently singing,
Holding her in my arms,
Then Jesus whispered to her.....
“Welcome to your Home, with love!”

On the death of my mother, Luella Van't Kerkhoff

Age 100 1/2

During her last 30 hours. May 30, 2006



Painted Summer Memory

Frollicking phlox danced in the soft sweet breeze,
framed by a verdant carpet below the trees,
drenched in shiny droplets of morning's dew,
reflected glittering sunshine pieces against a sky of blue.

Flowering phlox flaunted a fragrant tender tease,
tempting afternoon's velvet-coated bumble bees,
drinking from whimsically perched blossoms on a leafy green stem,
inviting envious fluttering butterflies to join them.

Stately phlox stood tall in evening's dusky shroud,
where fireflies sprang up in a luminous cloud,
radiating among the blooms a sparkling diamond light,
bidding the garden's fancy flowers goodnight.

In November's reverie,
remembering my painted summer memory.





I Have Some First and Second Amendment Blues

I have some First Amendment Blues,
All the political money floating around now
Leads me to the “blues,”
And for that emotion I’m sure you want some clues.

But first I want to celebrate our freedom of speech,
Even when some words make me want to screech!
Allowing people to gather to peaceably assemble,
Is a mighty fine idea, even when some causes make me tremble.
Establishing religion would be a terrible plan;
We surely do not want to be, in religion, like Iran.
Freedom of press, for our democracy, is a base,
Look at places without it to make the case.
When the amenders inserted the right to petition,
I definitely believe it’s a brilliant addition.

But I’ve got some First Amendment Blues,
And for that thought I’m sure you want some clues.
The Supreme Court said corporations are people!
Really? Then they might as well say the same about a steeple.
Oh, yes, corporations are people, can’t you see?
They taste, touch, hear, see, smell, eat and **.
(** Not that, whew! Well, actually, they kinda do.)
And what about the overweight peopled-Super Pacs,
Spitting out massively negative (and positive) ads to the max.
Look what that five to four (*Citizens United*) decision did for our election season,

Spending more and more and more money for many a reason.
A few of the ideas may be very worthy, undoubtedly right,
But should that much shadowy cash be spent for an election fight?
Yes, I've got some First Amendment Blues,
And I think I've given you some of my clues.

And I have some Second Amendment Blues:
And for that emotion I'm sure you want some clues.
Although I don't go hunting, and don't own a gun,
I have no problem with those who hunt for fun – and the food.
If people would feel more safe if they had a gun,
To scare off a robber and send them on a run.
I'm OK with that.

However, the many shootings and killings in our nation are examples of the misuse,
And for that our nation has no excuse.
The extraordinary number of guns in the possession of people in our nation
caused me to have some Second Amendment blues.
Should almost every Joan, Dick, and Harry
Have the legal right a gun to carry,
Under their skirt or coat or vest?
Sounds a bit to me like the wild, old West!
I know that's an option many neighbors would choose,
A "well-regulated militia" sounds like a National Guard to me,
And not so many people with a right to be
Carriers of guns for all - or none - to see,
And for the NRA to be as pleased as could be!
Of course we want our state to be secure,
We need police and military, I know, to be sure.
But how about that "well-regulated" word?
Some gun-toting folk believe that is absurd.
But once again in a five-to-four vote (*District of Columbia v. Heller*)

The Supreme Court wanted people to be allowed to tote
Almost any kind of gun that could shoot and fire,
Even if, in some ways, that puts us in a mire!
Did the Second Amendment crafters ever think,
That a gun could shoot so many rounds in a blink?
Or realize what an AK-47 could do,
In the hands of a person without a responsible view?
So, I've got some Second Amendment Blues,
And for that emotion, I've shared some of my clues.



Illustration by Donna Bogle



Tornado Warning

As thunder rumbles over the lake
the sky turns an ominous shade of grey
And the air is still while we scan the southwest sky

Waiting for the black snake to descend
and punish us
for our sins.





Church Visitor

We had a visitor at church today.
It was not a fearful sight.
In the middle of the service
The visitor was just “there”
In the center of the pew, alone,
Un-descript lightly clothed with a splash of color
-red or orange, with blue.

A large presence.
I cannot say sitting or standing
Just there, with us.

But I was stirred by the song
And the visitor vanished unexpectedly.

Was the visitor here for the young musicians,
The baptism, the sermon, the prayer?

I don't know:

But I should tell you,

In the event this visitor is with you more often of late,
You should know
You had company,
A visitor, this Sunday morning.

Or, we, a congregation
Were in the company of a stranger.



Illustration by Jan Gebben



Saints

Saints are not in Heaven made
But right here on earth.

Tested by their fellow man
To prove their godly worth.

Saints come from every race and color,
From every sect and creed.

We know them well, not by their names,
But by their every deed.

Saints are farmers for the Lord:
They plant His holy seed

And nurture it along the way
Through pestilence and weed.

Water it daily with their prayers
And shade it from hell's face

Until the crop stands ready
To receive God's full grace.



Illustration by Mary Porter



Ministry



A tired mother still rocking her restless newborn at dawn;
The scent of wildflowers
 Carried in the fat dirty hand of a smiling three-year-old;
The feel of a stoic teacher's firm handshake
 That quietly speaks
 Of confidence, encouragement, and promise in you;
The touch,
 The hug of a friend
 Who feels my sorrowful empty pain.
The sound of a hymn-an unaccompanied "God be with you 'til we
meet again"
 Before everyone leaves Grandma's house;
The taste of the silent salt-filled tears
 Shed during the bedside prayer
 With a dying friend,
 And in the leaving – the nearly inaudible
"Amen."

Illustration by Susan Miller



Poem for Linda

I walk from the trees, through the soft warm sand of Lake Michigan.

I continue toward the edge of the tree line,

stopping briefly to take in their majesty, strength, and beauty,

the colors of their leaves blazing in the warm afternoon sun.

I turn toward the water, deep blue in color,

tirelessly pushing the little ripples toward the shore.

There and only there, my eyes in amazement, I behold the beauty that only God can create,

the beauty known only to those who frequent the shore and are privileged to see millions of tiny diamonds dancing on the deep blue ripples.

Here, standing between the water and the woods, I see an everlasting landscape of brilliant colors:

deep red, orange, bright yellow, earthy brown, and black, as black as midnight.

As I roam deeper and deeper into the crisp, dense woods, beams of sunlight

squeeze their way through the parted branches of time-honored trees shouting—

“Make way, make way and listen!”

Listen to the rush of tiny creatures in search of a safe hiding place.

My approach frightens them, even though I mean no harm.

They do not know that I wish only to see this glorious spectacle of autumn

so I might wield my paint brush with reckless abandon while capturing this image of autumn on canvas.

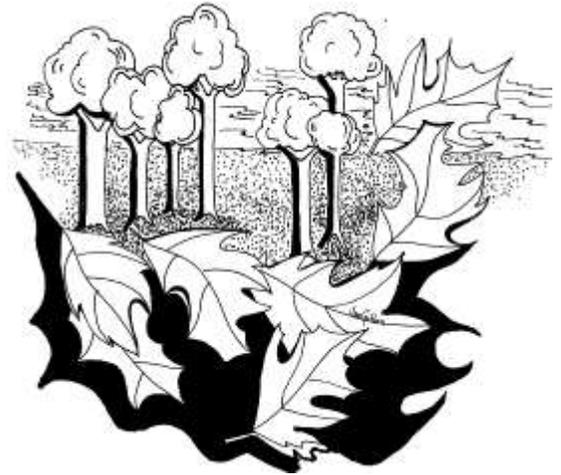


Illustration by Jan Gebben



The Big Lake

The lake is always waiting to get you
to grab you and pull you out and under
Don't be fooled by the calm days--
the peaceful days
when the east wind turns
the water
to a flat sheet of glass

A monster lurks
and when gales
smash the waves and
drown the piers
the ripping tides
gather in their prey.



Eileen Nordstrom

Song for Suzanne



When you excused yourself
from this world
the telephone rang
and the day wilted
like the African violet I forgot
to water. In May
you slammed the door
of your summer
against a bicentennial oak.
Strangers sought reason
from wreckage.

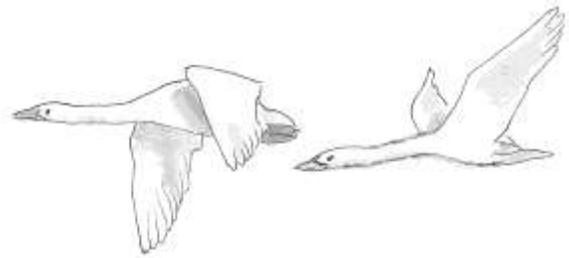
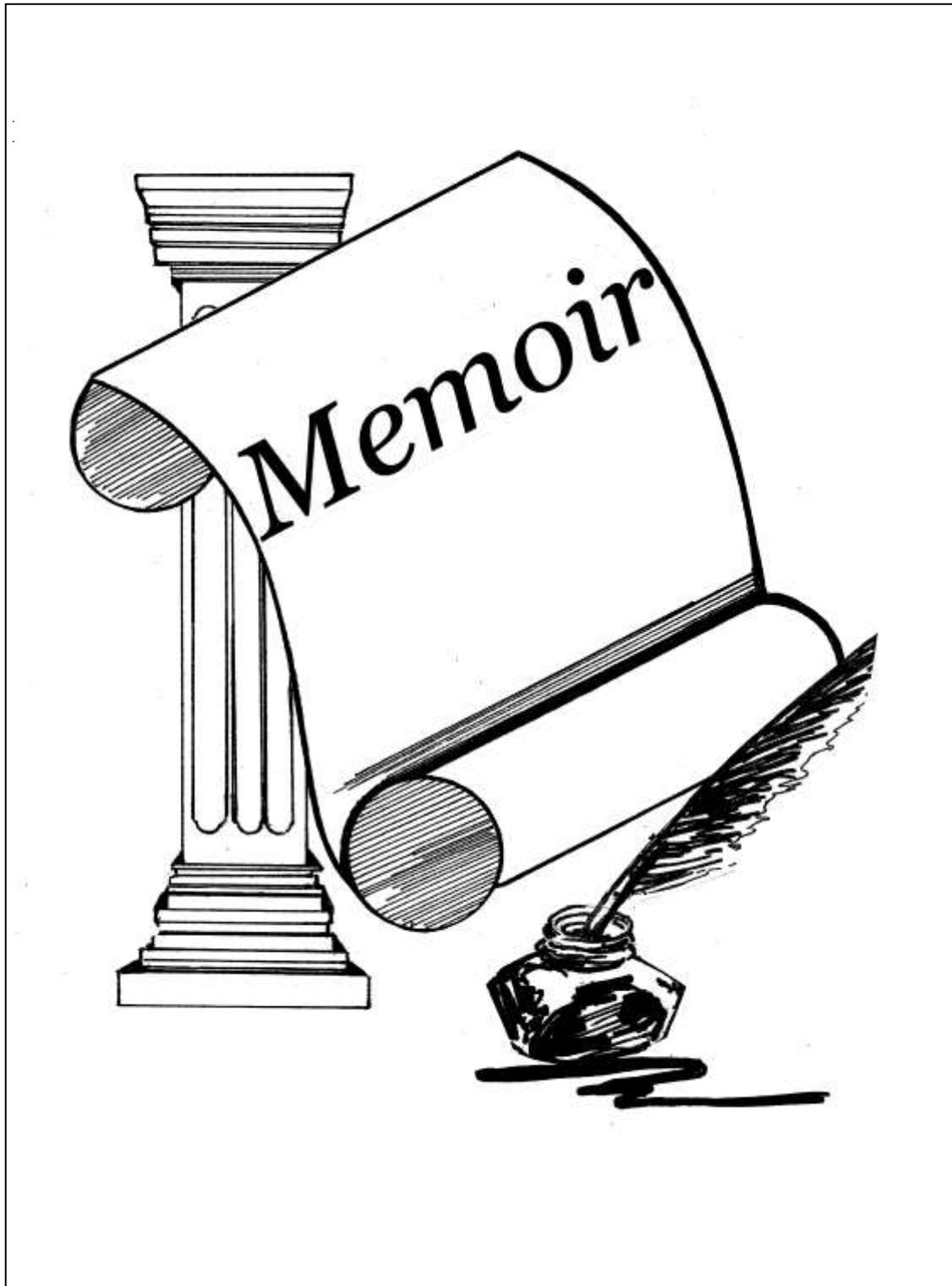


Illustration by Ruth Donaldson

Later I dream in your room.
You knock to come in, weave
violets in your hair, hug
the puppies, sing wind songs
to hush them.
I listen.
But the music drifts
out of tune
through the window
into the October sky,
while the swans fly
to their winter sanctuary.





Steerage

My father's father was born Patrick O'Connor (no middle name) on July 29, 1867, in the small village of Ringsend in Shanlongford Townland, Aghadowey District, near the city of Coleraine in County Derry, Province of Ulster, Northern Ireland. His parents, Bridget and Bernard O'Connor, were tenant farmers and very poor. They grew flax from which linen is woven. The Irish climate is particularly conducive to growing this erect annual plant with its strong slender green stems growing to a height of between three and four feet. Their flowers are perched on top of these stems like a new Easter Sunday hat and are lavender-blue with five proud petals. I can picture their small farm with acres of mature flax and these delicate blue flowers slowly swaying in unison to the gentle Irish breezes like a friendly wave from a kind stranger.

Patrick was the sixth of ten children, and the second child to carry that name. A baby boy they named Patrick had died at birth the previous year, so when the next baby was a



Illustration by Susan Miller

boy they named him Patrick in homage. My grandfather only attended school through the second grade because the British closed the Catholic schools in Northern Ireland around 1874-75. Bridget, his mother, educated him at home after that. She had a sixth-grade education and was literate. Bernard was not. As a result, my grandfather had beautiful

handwriting and could read and write very well.

It was a difficult life for Irish Catholics in the mid-to-late 19th century. If you were Catholic, you couldn't own land. If you didn't own land, you couldn't vote. You had no voice, no power, and Catholic farmers were confined to working as tenants on land owned by either the English or landed gentry of Irish Protestants who were British sympathizers. Slave labor by another name. British authorities took terrible advantage of the Irish farmers and fishermen, buying their vegetables and fish at very low prices and reselling at market rates for large profits.

This English profiteering only added to the poverty and misery of the Catholic minority, like pouring salt on an open wound.

So in 1888 at the age of 21, to escape this hopelessness imposed on Irish Catholics by the British government, Patrick used all the money he could scratch out of the ground and booked a steerage passage on a ship from Cork bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia.

This was the cheapest way to cross the North Atlantic. Because Ireland and Canada were both part of the United Kingdom, it was much easier to enter North America at a Canadian port and then find your way to the United States rather than attempting to come directly into a US port like New York or Boston. It cost £5 in the late 1880s (about \$25 then). Probably most of the money he

had. He must have purchased this passage with equal shares of trepidation and excitement, like the feeling you had when you jumped off a diving board for the first time. His older brother David had immigrated a few years before and was working in Cincinnati. This had emboldened Patrick to do the same. The guilt I imagine he felt about abandoning his parents to this servitude must have been excruciating, depriving them of yet a second son to help them work the land. Poverty and desperation drive hard choices. The Irish farm laborer emigrant would, if possible, leave home the beginning of March so as to arrive in Canada for the very opening of the agricultural season and work. On arrival of the steamers in Halifax, railway trains came alongside the vessels at the wharf, belching black diesel smoke, and passengers with their baggage were transferred to the train for transport to their agricultural employers. March was also a preferable time to travel to avoid the stifling heat below deck during summer.

Steerage is the name given to the lowest deck on a ship. This is where the control lines ran for the rudder, enabling the steering of the ship, hence the word 'steerage'. It was the deck immediately below the main deck and primarily a cargo hold converted to accommodate passengers. The experience was an assault to the senses, especially in bad weather when passengers could not go up on deck. Illness spread quickly through steerage because it was crowded and dirty. By 1880, an Atlantic Ocean crossing on a steamship lasted eight to 14 days. Shipping lines actually competed for emigrating passengers, who were considered highly profitable, self-loading cargo. Some ships could hold more than 2,000 emigrants in steerage. At \$10 to \$40 per traveler, those ships could make a handsome profit carrying large numbers of people in this least

expensive and most spartan of accommodations.

Once the ship was underway, first- and second-class passengers ate meals in a dining hall and enjoyed private cabins through which fresh sea breezes would blow. Steerage passengers had food brought down to them as they traveled in the dark bowels of the ship where there was no privacy. Keeping clean was difficult, as fresh water was often available only on deck. Steerage passengers slept in narrow bunks, usually three beds across and two or three deep. Burlap-covered mattresses were filled with straw or seaweed. Imagine a wooden cell 36 feet or so in length, 12 feet wide at one end, but narrowing to about 5 feet at the furthest extremity because of the curved design of the hull. Instead of a ceiling, a hatchway opened on to the main deck with two ladders forming a staircase. Two hundred to four hundred souls would sleep in one compartment on these bunks, one above the other, with little light, struggling not to touch the nearest passenger. The competing sounds in steerage must have created a distressing dissonance making sleep often impossible. The retching of the sick, the cries and moaning of the frightened, and the snoring of those fortunate enough to find sleep.

All of this constant cacophony played against the backdrop of the creaking boards of the hull as it strained against the pressure of the undulating ocean. In rough weather, when the hatches were down, the human stench was unbearable. Many of the emigrants would have to be driven down off the open deck because they often preferred the bitterness and danger of the storm above board to the horrible air below. During fierce North Atlantic storms all hatches were sealed to prevent water from getting in, making the already nauseating air nearly toxic. Outbreaks of seasickness were present

on every ship, keeping hundreds of passengers in their beds through much of the ocean crossing. I can picture Patrick in that place trying to maintain his sanity and preserve his hope. I can see him closing his eyes, plugging his ears, and remembering the beautiful countryside of County Derry with the swaying fields of blue-topped flax waving him goodbye. And imagining forward, anticipating the Canadian shoreline and the day he would step off the train in Cincinnati, look into the wet eyes of his brother, and feel the clench of his strong arms around his shoulders.

So it was after a voyage of nearly two weeks my grandfather arrived in Nova Scotia and worked his way south towards the US border, picking up work along the way where he could. Arriving in London,

Ontario, he worked in a brewery for a time before entering the US, making his way to Cincinnati and David. For a time, Patrick worked shoveling coal into furnaces before landing a less hazardous job working for the Jesuit priests at Xavier University as a valet and cook attending to the priests' needs, including doing their sewing (a skill his mother taught him in Ireland).

He had done it. Completed the immigration. Left everything he knew with what courage he had and crafted a new life of opportunity and freedom for himself in a new land. An old story and a current story. Only the names, skin colors, and religions are different. The courage and yearning for self-determination have always been the same. Patrick's story is all of our stories.





I Was About Nine Years Old

I was about nine years old the first time I rode a bicycle. I rode very little after that first ride until a friend reintroduced me to the bicycle when I was in my forties. At that time I was hopelessly out of condition to do anything physical. I went on a five mile bike ride with many rest stops, got home, dropped on the sofa and slept for two hours. But I enjoyed the ride and soon starting riding with the Grand Rapids Rapid Wheelman Bicycle Club and have been riding seriously since that time. To this day - seventy years after my very first bicycle experience, I have ridden over sixty thousand miles, including rides in all fifty states and many foreign countries. It all started with my first bike ride and what follows is that story.

I grew up in Grand Rapids many years ago - in a peaceful child oriented neighborhood. In The neighborhood belonged to me and all the other children who lived on our street. It was our own world - a world of playing outdoors, summer, winter, spring and fall. We knew all the neighbors and we took over the street to play softball, Hide and Go Seek, or Kick the Can in the summer and sledding in the winter.

The street we possessed was a straight one, about a quarter mile long. On one end the street went up a hill which I thought was monstrous until I went back and viewed it as

an adult and found it to be a slope. Two blocks beyond the hill was a dead end. Going the other way or down the street - was busy Eastern Avenue. Our street crossed Eastern and then ran dead end into Hannah's floral shop which was set back from the busy street and had a large grassy area around it. (this will become an important part of my story).

Bikes were around - most families had one or two old, used ones. They came in one size (adult) and two different frames, boys and girls. New bikes were rarely seen - bikes got passed around like so many things did in those days - clothes, wagons, strollers -families shared with each other as children grew and needs changed.

I was the youngest of three children in our family and my brother and sister both had bikes. How I longed to ride one. It seemed like I waited forever, until one evening my Dad announced that it was time for me to learn to ride a bike. My Dad waited at the sidewalk in front of the house while I collected my sisters bike from the garage. I was so excited....

I was around ten years old and my sister's bike was a full size bike - the only size bikes were made in and it was way too big for me. We spent a couple of evenings trying to get me riding with no success. The bike was so

big and I was so small. I remember trying to get high enough to sit on the seat but do not recall if I ever made it that high or if I just stood on the pedals. At any rate the lessons went on - on this aluminum colored bike with dented fenders, one speed and a seat too high. Who ever thought of lowering a bike seat? A bike was what it was - live with it!

The lessons did not go well - my dad pushing the bike while I tried to figure out how to pedal and keep my balance - no training wheels in these days! And then - after all the trying and failing - suddenly, I did it! I balanced! I rode! I took off down the street toward Eastern Avenue - going faster and farther, faster and farther. Going like the wind and loving it while using the two things I knew about bicycling ...Hang onto the handlebars and keep pedaling. In my mind, to stop pedaling was to fall over and I had had enough of that. The world whizzed by and I was overjoyed....faster, farther and then I came closer and closer to Eastern Avenue - the busy cross street that I was not even allowed to walk across. I began to realize that there was an omission in my lessons.....No one told me how to stop or turn! I did the only thing I knew to do - hang on and keep pedaling. So, I kept on pedaling, down the curb and into the busy street, my heart in my mouth as I saw a car coming - and it flashed into and out of my side vision as I flew in front of it. Then up the curb on the other side of the street! What next? Think fast! I looked around - I could keep on pedaling and slam into the floral shop wall which didn't sound all that great, stop pedaling and falling over didn't sound much better and if I damaged the bike

I would be in more trouble than I wanted to think about. In desperation I looked around and spotted the largest bush on the florist property. It had a telephone pole in the middle of it and that pole seemed a bit worrisome but a minor issue compared to a brick wall. I leaned toward it - it was approaching fast! Its prickly branches looked welcoming. I managed to turn slightly and plow into the bush, going full speed - I hit first with the bike following and landing on top of me. I was literally stuck in the bush, body entangled in the branches and bike pinning me down. I was relieved to finally stop. However, my happiness didn't last long. I looked through the branches and over the bike to see a Policeman approaching. He was not smiling. He immediately made it clear that riding across Eastern Ave without looking for traffic was not acceptable. Flying by in front of him and forcing him to come to a screeching halt was an even worse idea!

To say he was somewhat irritated as he extracted the bike from the bush and then disentangled my body from the "safe" landing is an understatement. He wanted to know what I was doing and through my tears, I explained my predicament to him. He was gruff and asked where I lived. I reluctantly told him. He instructed me to push the bike, stay on the sidewalk and go straight home. He would meet me there. Then he helped me across busy Eastern Ave.

YIKES! I trudged up the street with heavy feet and a heavy heart - I could see my parents standing on the sidewalk in front of our house, see the Police car drive up to them and stop, see the Policeman get out,

see the three of them standing together watching me approach.....see the neighbors coming out to see what was happening. What was a Policeman doing in our neighborhood? I could feel the question hanging in the air. What had she done? Everybody was looking at me - watching each step, watching my slow progress. Enveloped by fear and dragging my feet, I moved closer to them with every hesitant step. The unavoidable meeting kept getting closer..... the thought of actually arriving in their presence was terrifying. What would happen to me? I had broken a few rules in my adventure and wasn't sure how severe the punishment would be. As it turned out, it wasn't too bad. I was sternly warned by the policeman not to ride again until I knew how to stop - I was shown how to back

pedal to make the bike stop. I put the bicycle back in the garage and that was the end of my bicycle adventures for a very long time but what an adventure it was.

Best of all, I came away with a secret - with all the concern swirling in and around me - I had learned a secret - a place in my heart was light and rejoicing - I had experienced the thrill, the high, the sense of freedom that comes with riding a bike.

Now, I get on my bike that fits me, and experience the same sense of freedom that I found as a child all those years ago. I age but biking never gets old. I continue to look forward to the next ride, the next trip, the next experience. Each ride is a fresh adventure!



Illustration by Susan Miller



Piano Lessons for the Inept Child

My mother could play the piano, or the organ, while she sang. She never had lessons. Mary, her older sister, had years of lessons and all the fancy sheet music, and my mother simply “picked it up.” I loved to hear my mother play; my favorite was “The Burning of Rome.” Her fingers struck every key on the piano. It rocked the house.

Dad was positive I had inherited some of Mom’s talent. So after school each Monday, I walked a mile past the wheat field and the horse pastures to the Bazon farmhouse, where Marie, the red-haired spinster daughter, gave me piano lessons. I practiced, determined to learn. But, alas, nothing came easily.

One Monday, Ms. Bazon decided to give me a musical aptitude test. Either that, or Ms. Bazon was going insane. I favored the “going insane” scenario. She sat down at the piano and pounded a chord with both hands. The rooster in the front yard stopped crowing. The birds stopped singing. The hose sook with the vibrations. “Major or minor key?” she shouted.

I had no idea how to judge the notes, but I had to answer or the house would crash down around us. I remembered a dirge-like song in my first lesson book, “Teaching Little fingers to Play.” Ms. Bazon had said it was written in a minor key. That song had a bit of an eerie-wrong-sound. So, every time her deafening-blaring chord sounded a little off or wrong, I said, “Minor,” and each time the sound was pleasant to my ear, I said, “Major.” Each chord hammered out with a different tremor.

I lived through the lesson but may ave failed the aptitude test.

I practiced double time the next weeks, finishing the first big lesson book. By then it was obvious that I could read the notes and eventually find the black and white keys. However, my speed made my brothers think I would some day play hymns as background music at a funeral parlor.

At last, Mother said, “Yes, you may quit lessons with Ms. Marie Bazon.”

Nonetheless, Dad presumed that I must have inherited some of Mom’s talent: perhaps her fine singing voice.

TEACHING LITTLE FINGERS
TO PLAY MORE





Saturdays

Saturdays, 6 P.M.

In the late 1940s in Muskegon I worked at an A&P Store earning for college (Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co: to us it meant Ache & Pain). The store closed for the weekend at 6:00 P.M. Saturday, which for me meant final carrying out of groceries and rapid sweeping up.

However, during those years, two people regularly appeared moments before the “in” door lock was sprung shut.

Mrs. M

A stout middle-aged woman, wearing something between a flowered sundress and a bulky fur coat, flung herself through the door to begin her leisurely shopping, her yammering announcing her arrival.

Once she was very late. I was sweeping out the entrance, which had been locked, only to hear, “Get out of the way, boy, I’m coming in!” which meant, like most Saturday nights, I’d be one who needed to hang close by to chase down her special requests. Thus, she would roam the aisles pondering which was the best deal on any particular product. I swear that once she counted the olives in a bottle for that purpose. She insisted on haste, not hesitant to utter, “I don’t have all night!”

As the store emptied, a meat man (she often entered the refrigerated room for special cuts!), a produce guy, a checker, and a stocker/carryout boy (often me) hung around

to meet her every need. Did we force a smile? Were we congenial?

Who said we had to do this? Oh, the manager, who usually inhabited the raised-up office cubicle but who usually ventured out once a Saturday evening to ask if she was faring well. “You have to indulge such customers,” he said. Needless to say, the size of her “order,” especially the meat purchases, weighed heavily on that indulgent insistence. The manager might add “We can’t offend such notable people.”

Who was this person? She had made sure we knew. Her extremely wealthy husband had invented something we all had in our homes and businesses. He had died doing so but of course her Chicago notoriety and money had spilled over into western Michigan.

Lastly, we (or me) had to carry her many paper sacks (carryout wheeled carts hadn’t been invented yet) across the road where she chose to park in the lot belonging to the Plymouth-Chrysler dealer from whom each year she purchased four new Chryslers for herself and her three teen or young adult children.

Often she chose to park inside the dealership, which also closed at 6:00 P.M., meaning someone had to stay to open and shut the doors before and after her. The only tip anyone ever got was, “Hurry up!”

Thus ended the work week.

Dr. Moses

At those same times Dr. Moses Jones, a middle-aged African-American, usually dressed in a black suit and white shirt and resembling football lineman, came into my life.

This goateed, broad-smiling, dignified man pastored the local African Methodist Episcopal church in Muskegon's dumping ground for 9,500 African Americans brought up from the South to labor in WWII's industries.

Just before the 6:00 P.M. closing time, he parked his panel truck at the back door to pick up meat, produce, baked goods, and other items that would not last over the weekend. Many times I aided him in stashing boxes and crates into the little truck, along with items already picked up from other stores. His basso voice and hamish hand would express his gratitude as he set off to deliver basic foodstuffs to households until midnight.

I once wrote about De. Moses Jones as "My Jackie Robinson!" because this was the very time the African-American rookie endured the threats over his break into baseball. Muskegon experienced a frenzied era as the white community resented African-American intrusion, and the African-American folks resented their slummy dumping ground and unpromising future. Several times they peacefully walked arm in arm along their streets, Dr. Jones among them. Ultimately the National Guard entered those streets with machine guns mounted to break them apart. Note: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had not been heard of as yet.

Festering years had begun. I had conversations with Dr. Jones but mostly I witnessed how he lived, acted, and moved. Never forsaking his Saturday night mission, he moved with unwavering courage, kind expressiveness, and exceptional personalness among all people.

At the store: For some employees he was a disregarded anomaly; others mocked and denigrated his race behind his back; others laughingly played dirty by hiding rotten produce and meat underneath his purchases, so he'd get messed up as he delivered.

He never reacted. He dealt with everyone regardless of color or position, straightforwardly. A passive "Uncle Tom"? I observed him with awe as a Christ figure.

What did I see in his life? "Don't let anything personal deter you from God's work; to do what is just, love people with mercy, and just walk on humbly." "Treat every person with respect 'no matter who they be' because they all have needs."

During the 50s, my grandfather, in his 80s, arranged for the Wednesday afternoon midweek service at the Holland Home for the Aged where he lived. His most regular/favorite guest preacher? Dr. Moses Jones, who came among the old folks as if there were no such thing as color, just persons needing the stuff of God.

Although I was just a passing person in Dr. Jones's life, my grandfather would tell me, "He asked after you."

I got to see a man even bigger inside than outside.



Christian Science Encounters

Ministers often encounter very interesting and/or challenging personal situations. I had two sets of those related to the fact that the United Church of Christ, where I served as a minister in the Twin Cities, was on the same street as a Christian Science church a quarter of a mile away.

Experience One

In a period of a few months I received several “out-of-the-blue” phone calls. The first was from a doctor at the University of Minnesota Medical School. This was very puzzling in itself and also because he was asking about a patient of his who had indicated that she was a member of my church. I had never heard of her. He wanted to connect because she needed additional treatment for her cancer. She had listed me and the church I served as her pastor and church. She did not want her husband, who was a very traditional Christian Science Reader, to find out that she had gone to a hospital. She had done that instead of focusing only on prayer and engaging in spiritual practices according to Christian Science tradition.

Another phone call was from the woman’s daughter who was about eleven or twelve years old. She wanted to tell me that she thought she must be getting the disease her mother had because she was bleeding between her legs. Whew! Here I was on the phone with a young woman I had never met, and I believed I needed to give her a little information about the menstrual cycle. I told her that she was not sick but healthy and that she should ask her father to get her some tampons.

Then I received another phone call from the girl. She said her mother wanted me to come and see her and talk to her as soon as possible. She was staying in a motel on the west side of Minneapolis, about twenty miles away. Another “whew”! I was not going to meet this woman, by myself, in a motel! So I asked my wife, Mary, to go with me. It was a very snowy Saturday night. She didn’t really want to go, but she agreed to do it.

We were given the caller’s room number when we arrived at the front desk. Her room door was slightly ajar with a “Do Not Disturb” sign hanging on the doorknob. She was sitting on her bed in a nightgown. She was very young, probably in her early thirties, and very pretty. She did not look sick, but she shared a little about her cancer. We encouraged her to go back to the doctor. However, it was clear that she would not do that. We asked her where she was going after she left the motel. She said she planned to go the next day to Albert Lea, Minnesota, to stay with her mother. She knew that she would be accepted there because her father had gone to a doctor several times. We asked if she had enough money for the bus and she assured us that she did.

Perhaps a week or so after that, she called me from Albert Lea. She had just overdosed on some pills and clearly wanted to commit suicide. She wanted me to pray on the phone with her and read some comforting passages from the Bible. Then the phone went dead.

A few days later another out-of-the-blue call came from her daughter to tell me that her mother had died. I tried to give her some

comforting words and offered to meet with her if she wanted to do that. She didn't, and I understood.

What happened to this woman was sad for me because I strongly believe in prayer AND medicine. In the years after that experience with the woman with cancer, I often drove past the Christian Science church and had very mixed feelings about that tradition.

Experience Two

My other Christian Science encounter could not have been more different. A young woman, from the same church down the road, called me because she wanted to get married and Christian Science leaders are not authorized by the state to perform weddings.

I gave her my usual three rules: give me three months' notice; visit our church three times; and meet with me three times. I relaxed them slightly for the groom-to-be, because he was in Germany and would not get back until two weeks before the wedding. I did meet with her for three sessions and had one session with both of them. She was a delightful young woman. He was a very mature young man.

When I briefly mentioned to her that I thought followers of Christian Science do not go to doctors, she said that was not true. So I checked a Christian Science website and found this: "There is no rule or mandate from the church that forbids Christian Scientists from seeking medical treatment and churches continue to lovingly support Christian Scientists who make that choice. The decision between traditional medical treatment and Christian Science treatment is completely an individual choice for members."

The young woman had met her fiancé in Germany when they were on a Christian Science mission trip. He was German. Although he was clearly bilingual, some of the guests coming from Germany were not. Many of the words in the wedding were spoken in English and then translated by one of the groom's friends into German.

Almost all of the guests were Christian Scientists. I looked out at the people attending the wedding and I thought that for people who rarely or never go to doctors, they looked very healthy!



New Girl at Washington School, 1950

Shortly after Christmas time in 1949, Dad became the new minister at Third Reformed Church, on the corner of Pine and 12th, in Holland, Michigan. Our family moved from Hudson, New York, out of a parsonage of the Reformed Church there, into 124 West 12th, a house that is gone now. Less than two blocks away stood the two-story brick public school, surrounded by large playgrounds and majestic tall windows stretching all across on three sides – Washington School. My sister Barbara would enroll in third grade and I would be in second.

Mom walked us to school the first day and pointed out the one turn at 12th and Maple. We would walk home for lunch and back for afternoon, as many children did who lived nearby.

Mrs. Sicard, my new teacher, was tall and friendly, and I wasn't a bit afraid. I had never experienced anything scary or even unfriendly in preschool, kindergarten, or first grade in New York. Mrs. Sicard showed me to a desk and introduced me to the class.

My first homework assignment was to memorize the words of "This Is My Father's World," the hymn we would sing each day in Mrs. Sicard's room, before saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

I was not daunted about the hymn. I already knew the tune. I would sit on my bed alone at home, the family hymnbook on my lap, breezing through archaic phrases like "music of the spheres," and "I rest me in the thought," and "His hand the wonders wrought." It was 1950. The Korean War was over. The world was returning to peace and order. That hymn conveyed awe, serenity, and wonderment, in a big world.

Morning preliminaries soon segued into reading, in which I was quite proficient, and then to math--and that's where I met calamity. Mrs. Sicard called me to the board. I took up a piece of chalk. She told me to write down two numbers such as 28 on top and 9 on the bottom and draw a line under this, and then a minus sign, and then "subtract." I tried to follow but I was lost. Minus sign? Subtract? Never heard of it. The second grade in Hudson hadn't gotten that far. I blushed and felt my lip quiver. Mrs. Sicard used this awkward method to find out where I was in math. She told me to sit down again and I could stay a moment at lunch time to have her write my folks a note. Everyone was going to think I was dumb, whether I knew that hymn by heart or not. I felt shaken, and even now at 76, I remember that day in second grade.

Of course, I knew Mom and Dad would help. My mother had taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grades for three years in a rural

one-room schoolhouse near South Holland, Illinois, after graduating from Hope. Dad was no slouch in math, and Mom had given lots of math help to farm kids. Besides, my sister in third grade was at my side. My home helpers would be like calling out the cavalry to catch a mouse, or so I thought.

Hymn and subtraction issues addressed I was about to encounter two other challenges in second grade: left-handedness and speaking.

Fortunately, the modern, enlightened teachers at Washington School in 1950 did not even attempt to remediate my being left-handed. Rather, they encouraged me to develop my writing slowly, undisturbed by trying to switch hands. My ego already somewhat bruised by the subtraction incident did not have to suffer again. Today I'm a happy leftie.

My second flaw was a lisp. Mrs. Sicard was alert to this condition and obtained the services of a speech therapist who helped me twice weekly. At first I resisted sitting in the room with the speech teacher. I couldn't hear anything wrong with what I was saying. She had to show me in a mirror, have me listen very hard as she explained where the tongue is supposed to be, where mine was, and how the sound is different. She was positive and encouraging but it was still hard. Whenever I hear a lisp today, I think of Mrs. Sicard.

I couldn't find my sister Barbara at lunch time that first day. When I left school to walk home at noon, simple as the directions were, I lost my way. I kept going south on Maple. I missed the left turn at 12th Street!

I was having a very bad horrible terrible day. I began crying.

And that's when a neighborhood boy came by on his bike and saw me weeping.

"What's wrong?" he asked, pulling to a stop.

"I'm lost."

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"My house is next to the church where my dad is minister," was all I could think of.

He nodded. "Okay." My lisp made me sound even more pathetic.

"Are you a Methodist? Or Reformed?"

"I'm Reformed." I knew this from a young age.

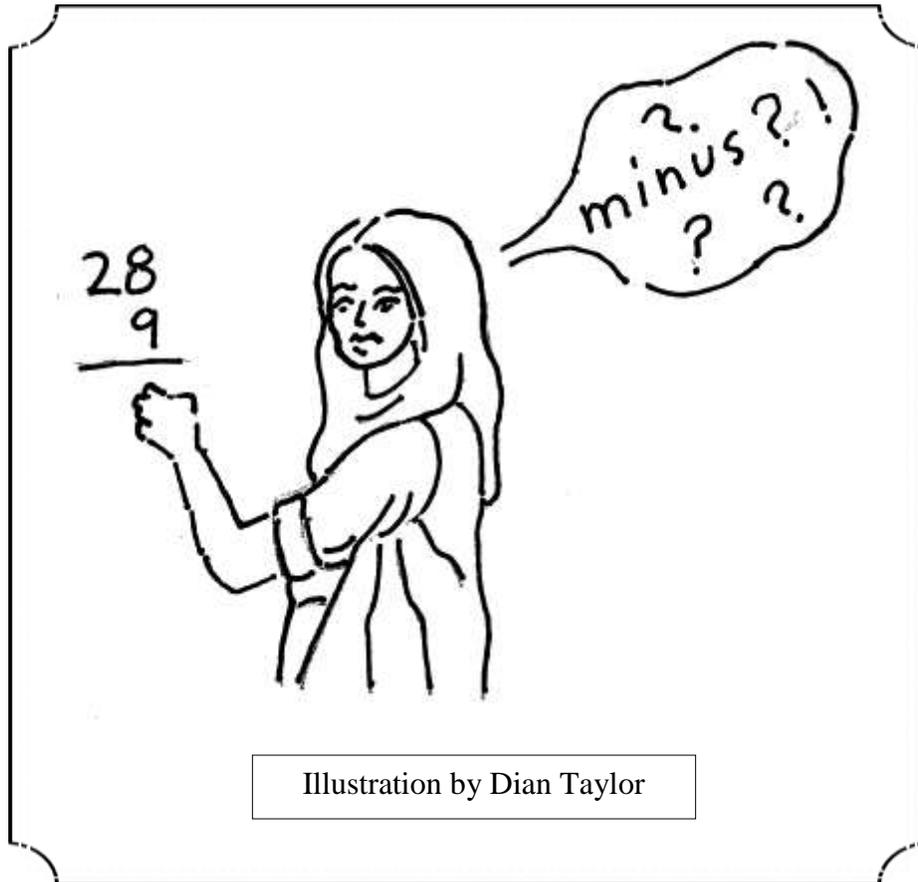
He concluded it was Third. "I'll show you," he said. He got me home in time for lunch.

Eating at home gave me a chance to get a hug and feel assured that since I could add well, I could subtract. No big deal. And neither was getting a little lost for ten minutes. Things turned right again. I felt ready for afternoon. I did like the school itself, with light pouring in the tall windows, an ample coat room for all our stuff including all our winter coats, space in back for art and project tables, lots of room around the teacher's desk, large pull-down maps. And I would be liked, I could tell at recess. Nobody left me out of dodgeball or hopscotch or red rover. That was promising.

That day when I couldn't subtract, and then lost my way home, Mom didn't blame me for missing an easy turn. She didn't blame

the teacher who got me all flustered in front of others. She didn't blame Barbara who didn't wait for me. She blamed herself.

Mom did go overboard thanking the boy and so did I. I forget your name now, but I'll always remember you. You cut short your own lunch hour and walked me home.





Carolyn

*Do not stand at my grave and weep, I am not there, I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow. I am the diamond glint on the
snow. I am the sunlight on ripened grain. I am the gentle autumn
rain. When you wake in the morning hush – I am the swift uplifting
rush of quiet birds in circling flight. I am the soft starlight at night.*

These words were written by Mary Elizabeth Frye, but somehow seem appropriate for my sister, Carolyn, who would wish to be remembered not as the person who died on May 5, but as the woman who began her new life on that date, in heaven with her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Carolyn was my big sister. She put up with my silliness; she read to me when I was afraid and couldn't sleep. We slept in the same bed; we shared our first "two wheeler"; we went to the movies together. We had many of the same friends. We dressed the same when we were little. We sang together on the "Make Way for Youth Show," broadcast on WJR. As teenagers, we shared a car, an old Studebaker that our dad gave us. There wasn't much that we didn't share. We were sisters, close but not alike. We shared the same experiences, but with different viewpoints.

I began my life with her, but she left this life without me. I am filled with remorse because of the little time we spent together, later in life. I have so much to say, but little time to say it, so, in the last moments allowed, I would like to leave you with several vivid impressions of my sister – perhaps in her finest hours.

Time passes: Carolyn is seated at the grand piano. She plays with ease, in the dimly-lit music room of the old mansion on West Grand Boulevard in Detroit. She plays while the maestro sits with closed eyes, listening, listening – tapping, tapping – every now and then taking time to scratch his rumpled white beard. Tick tock, tick tock. The metronome counts the time as the scales run up and down, up and down, the white and black keys responding to her touch. The notes dance in the stream of sunlight coming through the stained-glass windows as she plays a Bach prelude. I am sitting on the stairs just outside the music room. I am quiet. I am waiting, waiting, listening, listening to my sister play the piano and wondering if I will ever play like that.

Time passes: A young woman is seated at the grand piano. A spotlight shines on her, illuminating her blond hair. She is wearing a bright green gown that drapes softly around her feet. One foot is on the pedal, the other on the floor; her graceful hands are poised on the keys. It is her graduate recital at Marygrove College. The audience is hushed. She begins to play. The notes are soft, clear, and bell-like. Slowly, methodically she plays "Clare de Lune." The music rises and ebbs, like waves in the ocean. Shhhhhh. Be quiet. My sister is playing the piano.

Time passes: My sister falls in love. I am the maid of honor at her wedding as she marries Don Kovacs. Carolyn becomes a mother, having four wonderful, beautiful babies – Kathy, Philip, Linda, and Michael – who over the years bring her many proud and happy moments.

A famous person once said you never grow old until you stop learning. Well, Carolyn must have known that because in addition to her music career, she learned the world of business and, after that, she kept busy with

swimming, biking, watercolor painting, and probably more things than I'll ever know about. But slowly she began to lose her memory. Little by little, bits and pieces of her life began to drift away. I was told that Carolyn wished that she could leave this world before things got worse. She got her wish when she died in her sleep.

My sister, Carolyn – beautiful, talented, intelligent – has taken her music to heaven.

Can I have an AMEN?



Illustration by Jan Gebben



Dream Home

I woke up the other morning and realized it had happened once more. In my sleep, during my dream, I had bought that house--- again.

The setting: 14 Tallmadge Avenue in Chatham, New Jersey, a town that sprung up during the Colonial Era. In distance, it lies about 29 miles west of New York City or, in time, about an hour from The Big Apple by commuter train.

Mid-June, 1953:

It was chaotic. Everything in my immediate environment I had ever known was in upheaval. I stood in the dining room and watched the round mirror removed from the wall above the buffet to be carried out to the truck. The mirror was gone, but the wall remembered where it had been. The wallpaper now revealed a brighter circle of big roses, their leaves and the grey background in stark contrast to the rest.

When the movers began to disassemble the dining room table, I quietly left the room, knowing my lifetime of deception would be

discovered. As the table top was tipped, secrets from my past fell to the floor. Uneaten food, hidden years earlier and dried into museum-worthy relics, spilled onto the floor. What had been globs of mac and



cheese, what had been cream cheese and jelly sandwiches on Jane Parker white bread, what had been other gastronomic rejects deftly diverted from my mouth, bounced onto the threadbare area rug. With so many distractions, I was relieved there was no immediate price to pay.

From around the corner in the living room, I continued my vigil. I was focused on the house, the immediate. What I failed to think about were additional losses: my neighborhood, the town center three blocks

to the west and, most of all, the first friends I ever had.

Bottom to top:

One part of the house I was glad to leave was the cellar with its dank, darkness and all its mysterious nooks and crannies. I was glad to be leaving the terrifying, unblinking, undead zombies who lived behind the furnace.

Under its stairway was a space shrouded by a black curtain. Once I snuck a look and saw a trove of strange things. One resembled a big-headed monster (photo enlarger). There were shelves containing yellow boxes, each with the lettering “KODAK.”

Every home has a characteristic aroma, and ours germinated in the cellar. The “Eau d’ Molde” wafted from a far corner where a heap of seasonal clothes, boxes of Christmas ornaments and a soggy, now fuzzy-green, wooden jigsaw puzzle of a three-masted sailing ship lay in disarray.

Over by the washtubs was a relatively new addition to the house, a Thor automatic washing machine. No roller. It was the latest in labor-saving devices for my mother. Still, whenever it began its spin cycle, it could have been used in a line-dance bar as a “Ride the Wild Bull” attraction. It was the first of three things that would prompt Mom to exclaim “Dammit!” She’d run down the stairs to literally sit on the washer until the spin cycle was over. No “Achy-Breaky Heart,” just a few moments in the day of the modern 1950s housewife trying to wrestle an unbalanced wash load into submission.



The only cat we ever had, Dopey was black with white paws and tail tip. She liked to sit on the back of our barrel-back chair and watch TV. Dopey had died in the basement, which added to the creepiness of the place. I was glad to be leaving that smell, the ghost of Dopey and the resident zombies behind. I hoped no forwarding address had been provided.

At the top of the cellar stairs was the kitchen. Linoleum floor-the very same floor whereupon one morning we found our puppy, Kippy, had vomited, covering the entire area wall to wall. He was taken to the vet and put to sleep. Heartworm.

No granite- it was the pre-Formica era and the countertops were also linoleum. The faux cane-paneled cabinet doors were once removed by a certain little boy with his new birthday tool set. The screws had been lost.

A small table with two chairs sat between our gas stove and the G.E. fridge with a freezer compartment solid with one cubic foot of white frost-ice. Whatever had been swallowed by that permafrost was lost forever.

On top of our fridge was a bread box. In the city, Nana and Pop Pop’s fridge was different; a bird cage-looking compressor sat on top of theirs. My friend Kenny Johnson’s fridge had no bread box and no compressor on top. He was allowed to climb up and sit on top of his fridge and watch his mom cook. I enjoyed joining him there occasionally.

On our stove was a glass Silex coffee maker. It was the second of three things that made



the system.

Mom say “Dammit” and run. When the water in the bottom chamber boiled, it rose to the top and spilled over, sizzling onto the burner until she ran in, turned down the heat and stirred the slurry until it settled through the filter and into the lower part of

Back in the dining room, Mom’s Singer sat against the wall next to the door to the back porch. It was on that machine, about two years earlier little brother, Tommy (age two), got curious and tried to sew the fingers of his left hand together. He was partially successful until the needle got stuck in one of his bones.

The screened-in back porch held porch furniture typical of the day, steel chairs and a glider couch. We never used that porch except once. A thunderstorm was approaching and our guest, Elmer Hingle, took us kids out onto the porch to sit out the storm. He calmly explained it was nothing to fear. He partially succeeded.

A little pedestal table in the corner of the dining room held our phone (CHatham 4-5014R). Black Bakelite, no dial, tethered to the wall. Its ringer was the third of the three things that would make Mom run and swear. Some of that rubbed off on me.

The living room at 14 Tallmadge Avenue held the best Christmas memories of my entire life. The space had a wood-burning fireplace, bookcases on either side. The front

bay window was the perfect place for the annual Christmas tree. Our first TV, an eight-inch black and white Hallicrafter, was in the corner, having replaced the floor console radio now silenced in the cellar. In addition to the three adjustment knobs in front, the TV had a series of buttons, only a few of which held any consequence. Six of them led to the only channels during broadcast hours: Channels 2 (CBS), 4 (NBC), 5 (DuMont), 9 (The Brooklyn Dodgers were on 9), 11 (WPIX and the hated Yankees), and Channel 13 from Newark bringing us Uncle Fred’s Junior Frolics. The three knobs? The vertical hold or the horizontal hold would require frequent adjustments during every show. The antenna strapped to the chimney of our roof was a status symbol in the late 1940s. We had Howdy Doody, Super Circus, The Magic Cottage, Andy’s Gang and Ed Sullivan beamed right into our living room.



The TV repairman seemed like a family member, making frequent visits. After he would unscrew the pegboard back, he’d crane himself around the set with his right hand exchanging tubes and held a mirror in his left hand so he could look back and see his results on the screen. Trial and error.

Dad’s chair was in the corner, between the bookcase and the fireplace. Next to his chair and on every table in the house were ashtrays, usually overflowing with smelly cigarette butts. Half with lipstick, half without. Christmas? It was just like what was depicted in the *Christmas Story* movie. Just like it. I was Ralphie in more ways than one.

The stairs to the second floor creaked a bit and bore coins I had dropped into the cracks between the risers and steps. The upstairs oak flooring was stained from that infamous day when sister Carol and her friends soaped up the floors, added some food coloring and skated around on their bare feet.

Three bedrooms, and mine was above the garage. The main bedroom had a walk-in closet with a tiny window; it was the best place for games of Hide and Seek. Our one bathroom was upstairs. Its tub was rarely used by anyone until Nana showed up one weekend and scrubbed us kids with Ajax.

Now, it is 65 years later. I have changed. I'm bigger, and the house and the neighborhood are smaller. The woods behind the houses across the street are gone, replaced by more rows of subdivision. From the outside, 14 Tallmadge Avenue looks better than ever, and the property value and real estate taxes are higher than ever.

A Dream Home can be different for each and every person. This is the home I often dream about during my REMs. If I had a spare \$600K today, I'd buy it in an instant. When I was growing up, it was my happy place

---except for the cellar.



The Tree Crew Chaplain

After graduation from Hope College in 1956, I returned to Muskegon for the summer, where I was fortunate to get a good job. My mom's oldest brother, Frank Schuitema, was assistant superintendent of the Road Commission for the City of Muskegon. Through him I was hired and assigned to the tree crew, to assist the two regular members of the crew in taking care of all trees on city property, especially trees between the sidewalks and the streets, but also those in parks and cemeteries. The work involved trimming branches, cutting off large problem limbs, and removing dead or fallen trees. The men I worked with were skilled, strong men who were also crude and vulgar. Our four-ton stake rack truck was equipped with ladders, climbing harnesses, ropes, hand tools, and several chain saws. I was the flunky at the beck and call of the two regular guys and at first did only unskilled work, such as the cleanup of the cut branches. As I learned more of the skills, I did a lot of tree climbing, working in a harness high up in trees, cutting limbs with pull saws, or operating the chainsaws on the ground to cut up large limbs or downed trees.

The two regulars on the tree crew enjoyed ribbing me, the flunky, and thought it hilarious that I was about to go to seminary to become a minister. Each morning and afternoon, we would stop for a coffee break at some little eatery where other street department crews also would gather. As we

walked in the door, my tree crew fellows would bellow out so all could hear, "Hey, guys, we're the only crew in the City of Muskegon with our own chaplain," which would get a good laugh. I might add that those two often-vulgar guys could have used a chaplain. There was a kind of shack on the truck bed up against the cab, used for locking up valuable equipment. One afternoon, while I was left with the job of finishing cutting up the large limbs we had cut down, they crawled inside the shack to drink a considerable amount of beer. Since they were then in no condition to drive back to the street department garage, I drove the truck back at the end of the workday, even though I had no license to drive a truck.

One day when we had to do some major cutting on a job, the guys couldn't get our big chainsaw to start. After many tries and lots of frustration spawned a barrage of foul language, I offered, "Let me try." They just laughed. What could the flunky do that they couldn't? But I bent over the chainsaw, fidgeted a bit with the gas cock and choke mechanism, pulled the rope starter, and that old chainsaw started right up on the first pull. There was a stunned silence, and one of them picked up the roaring saw and put it to work. I guess I had earned a little begrudging respect. Perhaps all my earlier experience starting our garden tractor and Dad's outboard motor had made a difference. Or else maybe having a "chaplain" wasn't so useless after all.



Strangling Angel

My mother was born in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada, on September 4, 1911, after a two year flight-of-fancy took her young parents from Michigan to Ontario and back again, like a pair of Canada geese returning home with their new gosling. They eventually migrated to Indianapolis, where her father, Will Jones, was raised. She was the first born of Will and Clara's four children and was named Edna May after Will's older sister, who had died giving birth in 1906, the year after she married Billy Lout. Her baby also died. There were no other children. This heartbreaking event left a conspicuous scar on the Jones family, like a poorly healed cut, and compelled Will and Clara to name their daughter Edna May, in homage to his sister. It was also an expression of respect to Will's parents, Frank and Elizabeth Belle Shearer (Lizzie Belle) Jones who lost their first-born daughter and their first grandchild in that one horrible day.

My mother carried the name of her tragic Aunt Edna May, and that name, like a curse, would portend another tragedy of a different kind. She had three siblings: Fern Rosella (1915), John McCarron "Mack" (1918), and Mary Eleanor (1923). They grew up in a modest home on South Sherman Drive in a working-class neighborhood in pre-Depression Indianapolis. By late 1917, Will was an engineer on the Pennsylvania Rail Road, and Clara was a busy mother with two little girls and a baby boy on the way. A gaggle in the making. Things were as they should be, they thought. Life was good. The war was indeed raging in Europe and

wouldn't be over for another year, but Will had already served in the U.S. Army from 1906 to 1912. The Selective Service Act of 1917 (sometimes called the Selective Draft Act) was enacted in May of that year, but Will was a married veteran with two kids and didn't need to worry about being drafted into WWI. Ironically, the war was good for the domestic economy, and jobs were plentiful for those who weren't conscripted.

By the latter part of 1917 Edna May was six years old and in the first grade. Her hair was cut in a blunt Dutch boy with straight bangs creating a sharp horizontal line across her forehead, connecting her ears to each other like a clothesline. Her exuberant open-mouthed smile occupied half of her face, pushing her tiny cheeks northward into slitted eyes. She had made three close friends in their neighborhood. These four girls played together constantly. Two were sisters. Four squealing girlfriends sharing toys, giggly sleepovers, and endless games of patty cake. Touching, hugging, swapping clothes and bacteria.

The unthinkable happened that year. All four of the girls contracted diphtheria. It happened quickly. The parents were helplessly panicked. Diphtheria is caused by bacteria that invade the lining of the respiratory system where toxins are produced. It is these toxins, not the bacteria themselves, that cause symptoms. As the toxins proliferate, the resulting dead tissue builds up and forms a thick gray layer in the throat and nose, making breathing increasingly difficult as this gray

garrote obstructs the airway. The swelling produces a labored, high-pitched wheezing sound as the child struggles for air. A toxic balloon slowly inflating in the windpipe. The disease both poisons and asphyxiates its victims. Symptoms include fever, headache, swelling of the throat, and rapid heart rate. As the swelling gets worse, the child eventually suffocates, remaining conscious until the last moments of life. Before there was treatment, the disease was fatal in up to half of cases. It became known in those days as “the strangling angel.”

In 1917 there was no defense against this respiratory raider. A vaccine to prevent diphtheria wouldn't be developed until 1923. Terrified and conflicted, the parents of Edna May's three playmates had refused to try a new anti-toxin that recently had been developed. It was still experimental and promised no guarantees. The wager was fraught with risks. Side effects were common, including anaphylaxis, which is a serious, rapid allergic reaction that may cause death.

The anti-toxin might work; it might not. Rumors about its toxicity abounded. Around that time, dozens of children in Dallas, Texas, were sickened, and five died from a contaminated batch of a diphtheria antitoxin. Maybe the disease would just pass? They anguished. They prayed. They waited. Their hesitation proved fatal. One of the girls died, and then two more were strangled by the angel: the two sisters. But my mother hung on, the last survivor. Close to death, six years old and depleted. Time was running out. Diphtheria burns through a body like a grass fire, especially a small body. Whether

it was sheer terror or desperation that pushed my grandparents to act, act they did. Will and Clara consented to the experimental treatment, gave Edna May the anti-toxin, and waited. Waited and watched the strenuous breathing rattle her little chest and listened to the ghastly gasping of the air struggling to inflate lungs through a swollen trachea. There were 409 cases of diphtheria in Indiana in 1917 and 46 deaths. My mother was not one of them. The anti-toxin worked, delivering her back to her joyful parents. She recovered with no residual damage. She was one of the half that survived. Her three little friends were in the other half, at the cemetery.



The next 13 years passed, and Edna May met and married my dad, Aloysius O'Connor, when she was 19. They had 11 babies over the ensuing years. I was the ninth. Decisions made or not made do not remain static in history; their ripples move through time and create paths. If Edna May had joined her friends at the Holy Cross cemetery on the south side of Indianapolis that year, I would

not have form. My essence would still be in the ether waiting for a host. Courageous decisions usually reward the decider. In this single choice, my grandparents' courage created a legacy. Decisions have consequences, far beyond the immediate. When courage and character drive consequences they flow downstream through generations, like the snow melt in the spring rushing and rutting the family soil, creating deep rivers and shallow tributaries of family history for the descendants to navigate and sometimes portage.



My Dad's Last Bath

If I wanted to visit with my dad while he was still alive,
my mother urged me, don't wait too long.
So Bill and I drove home for Labor Day weekend in '96.
The den had become Dad's bedroom.
I think he recognized us, but I'm not sure.
Between some of his breaths there were long pauses.

*As virtuous men pass mildly away,
And whisper to their souls to go,
Whilst some of their sad friends do say
The breath goes now, and some say, No....*

Saturday evening, the nurse from hospice
arrived to give him a bath, the kind one gets in bed.
Mom and others were occupied by visitors in the living room
so I stayed in the den with the nurse and Dad.
He was sleeping
so she gently touched him,
introduced herself as Karen,
and asked whether he wanted a bath.
Like a little boy with better things to do
or like a man who didn't want to be any trouble,
Dad blinked open his eyes and mumbled the words,
"already had bath."

*When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands,
and another shall gird thee, and carry thee
whither thou wouldest not.*

Numbed by Dad's stillness and acquiescence,
I mainly watched the bathing, a ritual performed
with the deliberate slowness of a Japanese tea ceremony.
Near Dad's eyes were the mattery marks of sleep, or maybe tears,
and she gently dabbed them away with soothing, warm water.

*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.
and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall
there be any more pain.*

Dad seemed to enjoy the caress of the warm, moist cloth on his face,
and so she continued to dry where she had washed,

then to wash and dry his neck, and chest, and abdomen, and each arm and hand,
and each leg and foot, his private parts, and finally, with my help, his back.

*Peter saith unto him, Lord, [wash] not my feet only,
but also my hands and my head.*

In finding an extra towel, getting Dad's deodorant,
combing his hair, and learning how to administer his pill,
I felt in some small way a participant in this mysterious and holy activity.

*And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father....
And [Noah] said, Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants
shall he be unto his brethren.*

I had looked upon my father's nakedness
and pondered my conception, baptism, and gentle dying.

Note: The indented italic lines are from the following sources:
John Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," and the King James Version of John
21:18, Revelation 21:4, John 13:9, and Genesis 9:22, 25.



Once a Yooper II

The single classroom in the Holland School faced south. This fact sounds inconsequential, but it still affects my life on many days. The problem arose from the fact that the maps were hung on the south wall, making east and west on the map opposite from what they were out in the real world. The map misdirection was and is so firmly implanted in my mind that I still have to orient myself logically; I have to overcome my mistrained reflexes and think deliberately about directions. I have not become lost (yet), but I have never been able to adjust my directional instincts to reality.

Grades three and four were dismissed at 2:30 p.m., grades five through eight at 4:00. Phyllis and Janet and I walked toward home together, dawdling creatively along the way. When there was enough water in the ditches along the road, we sailed makeshift boats, really just pieces of discarded wood, inevitably christened “Charley.” We chased toads, sometimes slaughtering them, until our parents found out and made us stop because toads are harmless creatures that eat lots of nasty bugs. In winter we threw snowballs and made forts which sometimes stretched across the road. This creative construction lasted until Phyllis’s father became stuck in one of them. We were sent out with shovels to destroy and remove our handiwork. Often the “four o’clock kids” caught up with us, whereupon Phyllis and

Janet’s older siblings berated us soundly for our slovenly and irresponsible behavior.

All of these adventures ceased when the Holland School was closed, and we began riding a bus to the “town school.” All of us Dutch kids lived north of the town; the French Catholics lived west of it; the Finnish Lutherans south and east. The people we called the Americans lived in the town itself. We kids had absolutely no contact with any kids other than those who went to the local CRC [Christian Reformed Church] and attended the Holland School.

Our conservative ministers, preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism, often gave the impression, to me at least, that all Catholics were from the devil and were irrevocably condemned to the eternal hot place, that nothing they did in this life could possibly have anything good about it. My disillusionment and apostasy began on the first full day of fourth grade when we paused and opened our lunch boxes. I don’t know what I expected, but I was shocked to see that the Catholic kids had sandwiches that looked remarkably like my own. I was appalled and abashed, but also joyously relieved. I had not landed among devils after all! I could relax and enjoy my new classmates without fear.

Since the farmers all supported themselves by keeping cows, the major summer activity

was haying. No one, at that time, had field balers; everyone stored loose hay in big barns. Farmers who produced more hay than their cows could eat during the long winter baled it and sold it. If the hay had the right mixture of plants and had not been rained on during the haying process, it could be sold to the racehorse owners from Kentucky at a substantial higher price than hay destined merely to be consumed by local cows. Farmers who had racehorse hay actually made some money.

Haying usually began directly after the community Fourth of July picnic. By that time the hay was fully grown and at its peak. Most farmers completed their haying during the first two weeks of August. Some of the more prosperous ones, who farmed many acres, had mowers attached to their tractors. We did not. I spent many hours seated on a horse-drawn mower that cut only a five-foot swath. It was a slow and tedious business. Our team of white horses, two mares named Sis and Patty, were fairly docile, but when they saw me coming out into the pasture to get them for the day's work, they often ran away. It took some effort to corner them and attach the lead rope to their halters. Once that was done, they offered no more resistance but meekly accepted their fate.

Once the hay was cut, it was allowed to lie there for about two days, with the farmers hoping there would be no rain to extend the drying process and lower the hay's quality. Next, the hay was raked. Farmers with hay loaders used a side-delivery rake, a rather cumbersome machine with about a ten-foot rotating cylindrical device with three or four barred prongs that moved the hay into long windrows ready for the hay loaders. For a

long time, we did not have such a machine. Instead we had a so-called dump rake that collected the drying hay and arranged it in rows at right-angles to the rows that the side rake created.

Then began the back-breaking labor of using pitchforks to build coils of hay for further drying and later pick up. These coils looked something like Monet's "Haystacks," but were somewhat smaller. After the hay had dried sufficiently, the process of hauling it in began. It was crucial that the hay be sufficiently dry because if it was not, once it was in the haymow, it would begin to heat up; if this heat was not controlled, the hay would burst into flames by spontaneous combustion and burn down the barn and everything in it—a total disaster. I had never known such a fire to happen, but the danger was always there, and the farmers took great precautions to avoid it.

Once the haying was finished, the harvesting began, of all the kinds of grain grown in the UP: wheat, oats, barley, speltz. For a long while, only one of our neighbors had a combine, a huge, cumbersome machine that lumbered slowly down the field. For the rest of the farmers, the harvesting was a long, back-breaking process. We, like most of our neighbors, had a binder, a complex machine powered by a large "bull wheel," running on the ground. A series of chains and gears drove the mechanical parts. A large reel pushed the grain over the platform where it fell onto a moving canvas. Two more moving canvasses moved the cut grain upward, depositing it against the device which gave the machine its name: binder. Another complicated set of gears drove a mechanism which bound the grain with so-

called “binder twine” into manageable bunches, which were then expelled onto the ground.

Of these bundles, usually six to eight of them, the farmers built miniature house-like structures called “shocks.” The process is ancient, visible in some of the agricultural paintings of Pieter Bruegel. Once the grain was sufficiently dry, it was fed into another huge machine, the “thresher.” Pummeled by a series of beaters and shakers, the clean grain came out one part of the machine and the straw came out another, in a long tube powered by a large fan, creating a large straw stack. The grain was then hauled in burlap bags to the granary, where it was stored to be used as winter feed for the milk cows. Sometimes the straw was baled, sometimes it was just burned.

After all of this labor, having the granary filled with good grain and the barn filled with fragrant hay was immensely satisfying. Using the good soil and defying the unfavorable climate, the farmers had wrestled from the ground a winter’s worth of feed for their animals and ultimately food for themselves and their families. In a farming community Thanksgiving Day was a day for genuinely giving thanks for what the soil and hard work had produced—not merely a day of caloric overindulgence on food produced elsewhere. In the church service on that day, the hymn “Come ye thankful people, come” was direct and meaningful because, indeed, all was safely gathered in, ere the winter storms began. Farming in the UP has its satisfactions, but their price is high, higher than I wished to pay for the rest of my life. I escaped as soon as I could.

Social life, what there was of it, was generally a function or offshoot of the church. Two big events marked the calendar, the dates of which had significance for the farming sequence. The first of these was the Fourth of July celebration, which marked the beginning of the haying season; the other was the Ladies Aid picnic, which marked the end of the grain harvest.

As long as the Fourth of July was not on a Sunday, the whole congregation gathered at a site in what was known as the hardwoods. My father used to drive me mad on that day. We were all packed up and ready to go, but he had to have a cup of tea first. Sometimes I think he did it just to be annoying. The official events began on a platform permanently erected just for that purpose. Someone brought a reed organ which furnished accompaniment for the hymns. There was usually a patriotic speech or two. Often someone read the Declaration of Independence. Once I did this reading, but that year the picnic was held indoors at the Community Hall because rain was pouring down, accompanied by thunder and lightning. The young people, largely teenagers, ran a canteen with sodas (or “pop,” as it is called in Michigan), candy of all kinds, and ice cream. Since no refrigeration was available, the ice cream deteriorated rather rapidly.

After a decent interval, the big picnic began. By tradition, we ate with my mother’s family on the Fourth of July and with my father’s family at the Ladies Aid picnic. The menu consisted of all the traditional good stuff: potato salad, baked beans, hot dogs, and maybe even some strawberries. The Hoolsema clan, who traditionally had their

picnic next to ours, usually had a whole watermelon. We never did. I coveted a slice and tried to look hungry and pathetic while they feasted, but I was never offered a slice.

After the picnic, there were games for the kids with five- and ten-cent prizes, redeemable at the canteen, and races of all kinds, including three-legged and potato sack. After that was the traditional softball game between the single men and the married men. As I recall it, the single men usually won. The day was now dragging on into the late afternoon; all of us were tired; the ice cream had melted; the sodas were lukewarm because the ice had disappeared long ago. Reality intruded: Since cows never

take a day off, the time had come to pack up and return to the mundane business of tending to the herd—but what a fine interlude the picnic was!

The last time I went back to Rudyard, I visited the site of these memorable picnics. It seemed to have been abandoned. Far fewer of the church members still farm, and the small farms have largely been consolidated. Many of the young people who did not flee married non-Dutch spouses, for whom these traditions mattered far less. I was sorry to see this development, but I still cherish the memories of those glorious picnics of yesterday.

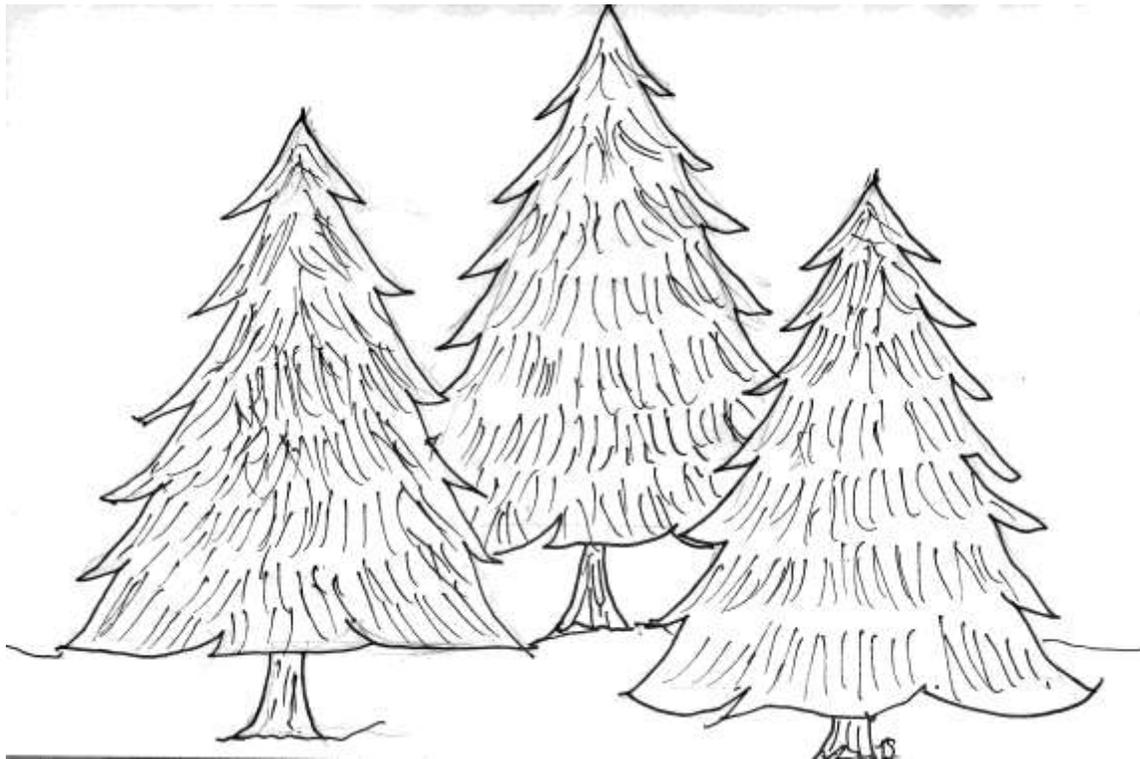


Illustration by Julie Sanders



The Black Book

Even though sometimes things prove not to be as they first appear, many of us grew up with the adage ringing in our ears that *first impressions are often lasting impressions*. Admittedly, impressions can be influenced by putting one's best foot forward, but often first impressions are the result of something far less intentional.

To that point, it was early morning. The sun was just beginning to yawn and stretch in the eastern sky as if deciding whether it should rise and shine or stay tucked beneath the lumpy blanket of clouds piled high atop the eastern horizon. I was on my way to the elementary school where the sign jutting out into the hallway above the door leading into the principal's office bore my name.

In anticipation of the day's upcoming events, planned as best one can when and where over 200 children are involved, I recall having made a special effort that morning to *dress for success*. For me, typically that meant a black suit, a white shirt, a tie, a tie bar, cuff links, and a pair of black shoes that I'd taken great pains to polish the night before.

The reason for my attire on this particular day was to make a good impression. Although I had been employed by my school district for nearly 25 years, I was scheduled for an in-district job interview. It

was my hope that this interview would result in a promotion to a position I had set my sights on long ago and one for which I felt highly qualified, despite having been unsuccessful in obtaining a similar position in my district on an earlier occasion.

In addition to paying particular attention to my appearance, I recall rehearsing my responses to the questions I anticipated being asked during my after-school interview when suddenly I caught a glimpse of flashing lights in my rearview mirror. Becoming more fully present to what was happening in the moment, I determined that the flashing lights and the screaming siren were those of a fast-approaching emergency vehicle in pursuit of something, which prompted me to move over so as not to impede its progress. However, as I slowed and maneuvered my car to the side of the road to allow the flashing lights to pass, I noticed that the emergency vehicle also had slowed its pace and was moving to the side of the road behind me. It became evident that the emergency vehicle was, in fact, a patrol car, and I was the one being pursued.

Having eased my car to the shoulder of the road, I recall frantically wondering why I was being pulled over. Had I been so distracted by the thought of my impending interview that I had accidentally infringed some rib in the vehicular code? And if so,

which one? Did I forget to stop at the “Stop” sign? Did I make a right turn on a “No Right Turn on Red” sign? Had my license plates expired? Did I wander over the centerline? Was I speeding? What about my taillights?

Having been in this sort of situation a time or two before, I knew it might be to my advantage to at least have some idea why I was being singled out from all those others on the roadway that morning. My mind raced, knowing it wouldn’t be long before the officer would be at my car window, asking me for my registration, driver’s license, and proof of insurance and, finally, asking if I knew why I was being pulled over.

There has never been any doubt in my mind that any police officer who posited that last question already knew the answer. I suppose the value of such a question is that it could elicit a compliant confession, making it easier for the police officer to write up his report. Perhaps because I was always afraid that I might confess to something other than why I was actually being pulled over—possibly resulting in an even stiffer admonishment—whenever pressed in this way, I’ve found it prudent to have at least narrowed my responses to some of the more minor possibilities.

As both of our cars came to a complete stop along the road’s edge, I watched in my rearview mirror as the officer leveraged himself from his car, seemingly made more difficult by his bulk and his plethora of attached accessories. When finally he emerged from behind the wheel of his squad car, I watched in my mirror as he brushed himself off, straightened his hat and badge,

readjusted his holstered revolver, and with clipboard and flashlight in hand slowly approached my car as if he might have had the entire day to do so.

Anticipating what was coming next, I had already secured the necessary documents from my car’s glove compartment and was fumbling in my billfold for my driver’s license when the officer rapped on my car window with the butt of his flashlight and motioned for me to lower the window. As I did so, I caught an air of his superiority, though well camouflaged in professional training.

With his right hand now resting on the revolver that hung from his belt and his left hand holding his clipboard and lighted flashlight, he leaned ever so slightly toward my open window and directed the beam of the flashlight into my car as if trying to ascertain my physical and mental condition and whether or not the situation might call for more drastic measures.

Fortunately, having at least determined that the use of his weapon was unnecessary, he removed his hand from it, took the documents I handed to him at his request, and clipped them to his clipboard. Directing the beam of the flashlight on my paperwork, he briefly scanned it and then turned his attention to me, greeted me by name as if we might have been friends under different circumstances. “Good morning, Mr. Van Haitsma,” he said in such a way as if it might somehow cushion the fact that more than likely there would be little “good” in *this* portion of the morning—for me, at least.

Even though I knew his greeting was customary and perfunctory at best, I was determined to remain respectfully submissive despite my lingering uncertainty as to why he had chosen to pull me over while so many others were probably infracting more serious rules and regulations of the road, not to mention the robberies and murders probably underway at that very moment.

It's strange what things run through one's mind when one is under pressure. Having assessed his physical presence, oddly enough I also took note of his voice. It was a deep voice, pregnant with confidence and authority. It was the kind of voice that seemed to naturally demand attention without actually having to do so. I recall thinking I'd always wanted a voice like his. I was convinced that as a building principal, it could come in handy. While I have no scientific proof from which to draw such a conclusion, in my experience those with deeper voices tend to be taken more seriously.

"Do you know why I pulled you over?" Since I've always found it difficult to recall details of events while under pressure, my honest response to the officer was to admit that I truly did not know why he had pulled me over, all the while hoping that my response would not appear as if I were challenging him for having done so.

Probably used to such innocently plied responses, the officer quickly explained that as he was coming toward me "back there," I had made a left turn in front of him, a turn he considered to have almost "cut him off."

Knowing the left turn he was referring to because I made that turn almost every day of the work week, try as I might I could not recall having had any particularly close encounter that morning, especially the kind he was describing and most especially involving a patrol car. After all, even today when I spot a patrol car, it tends to send shivers up and down my spine, causing me to automatically slow down and be more cautious than most situations would require. However, feeling that this particular accusation merited an apology, I reverently gave it, though I feared the officer might detect a hint of insincerity.

Experience has taught me that it just makes good sense to offer up an apology, no matter how unmerited, in situations where someone else has the upper hand and is in a position to negatively impact one's financial future—not to mention the fact that in this case that upper hand was positioned just a few inches from a holstered revolver.

Seemingly satisfied with our brief exchange, the officer walked back to his patrol car, continuing to review my information as if he might be trying to memorize it.

It seemed like an eternity before the officer finally returned from his car with my information and handed it back to me. It was then that something really strange happened. Almost as if the officer turned the page in an effort to start over, he took a step back from my open car window and bending ever so slightly as if to take one last look at me, he cocked his head slightly and tipped the visor of his cap in what could have been construed as an effort to respectfully salute me.

And then, in a voice softened almost to the point of becoming that of a tenor, he said, “Okay, now, be careful and have a good day, *Father!*”

Although more than a little confused, I decided not to inquire further but merely smiled and thanked him. There is something intelligent in such admonitions as “don’t look a gift horse in its mouth” and “let a sleeping dog lie.”

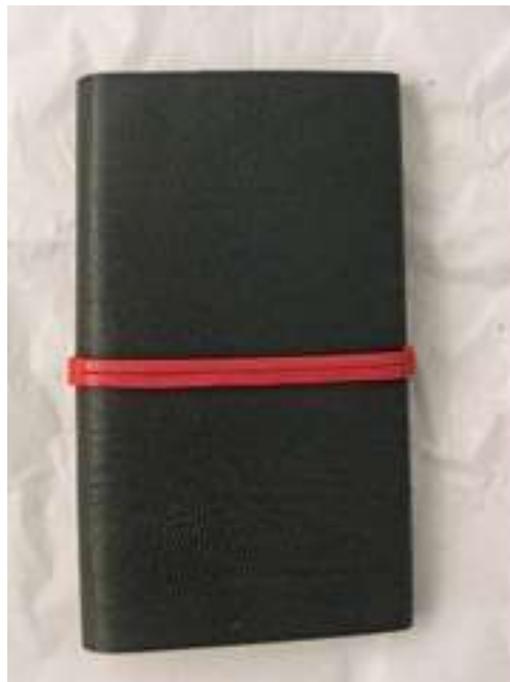
“*Father . . . ?*” As I drove away, I asked myself, “Where in the world did that come from?”

It was not until I arrived at school and was gathering my things from the car that I noticed there on the passenger seat, where I usually kept it, was my black leather, strap-bound Franklin Planner looking every bit like one of those pulpit-ed Holy Books.

Whether it was my Franklin Planner, my attire, my honest confession, my respectful apology, or a combination of these or other factors, it somehow added up to a ticket-less resolution. And while I will never know for sure how that all worked out, I am convinced that sometimes appearances do work in one’s favor,

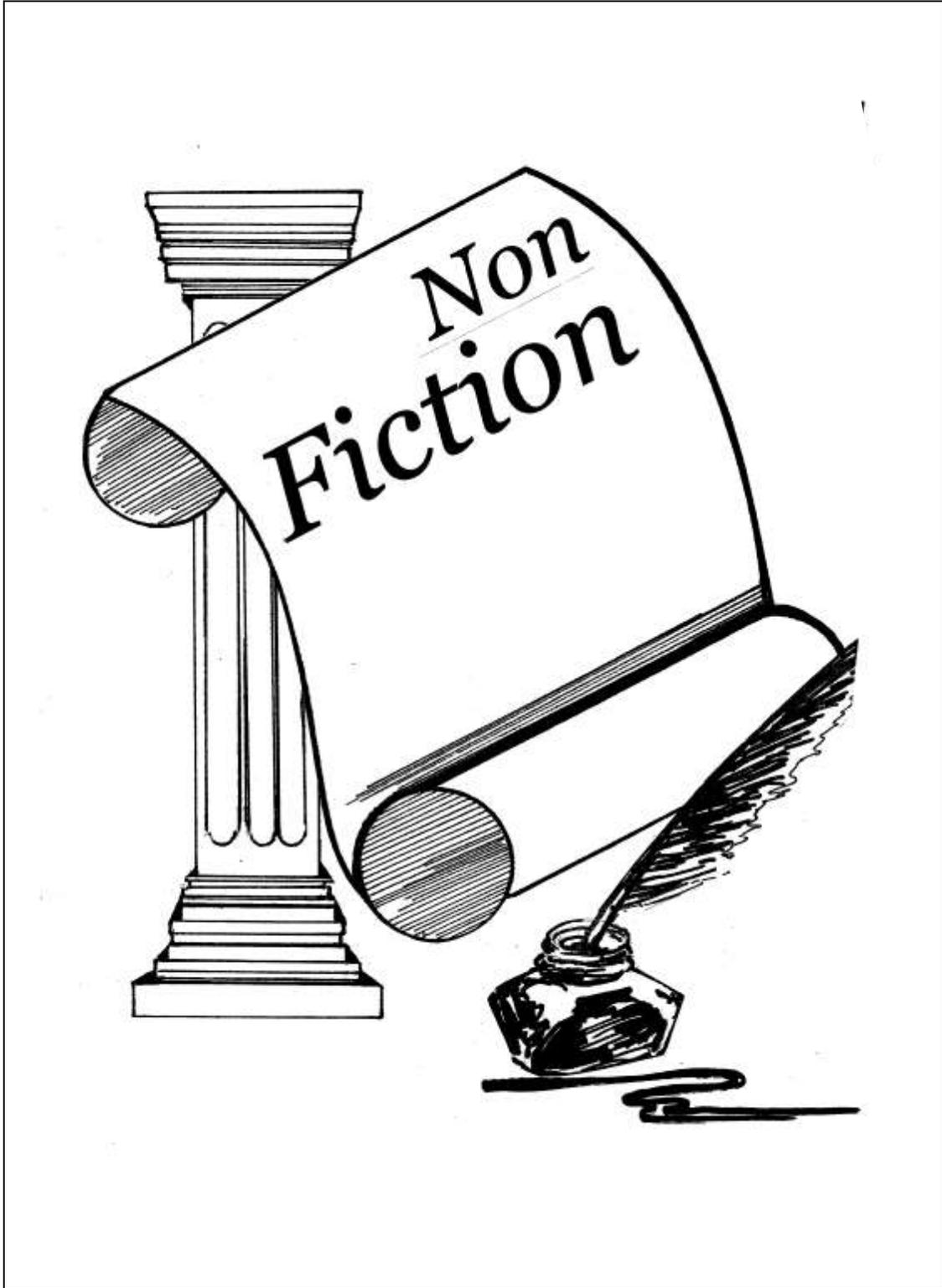
P.S. The interview I had later that day for the in-district promotion, however, was a good reminder to me that good appearances don’t always guarantee a favorable impression.

An excerpt from my memoir *Windrows II: Gleaning the Lessons of Life* (publication pending)





A Winter Scene by Jane Lindemuth





My Cancer Journey: Walking Each Other Home

Cancer is right up there high on the pecking order for fear-provoking, shattering and even devastating turns of events in life. The “C” could not care less if it strikes fear into one’s heart. It is the perfect sort of enemy. It is elusive and pervasive at the same time, unforgiving and, if allowed, overwhelming.

It begins with news that unsettles, then frightens. Cancer news has a heaviness to it. It is dark. With no time in which to absorb this news or even begin to process it, the floodgate opens, and immediately one is faced with a daily relentless barrage of new information, opinions, facts, appointments, procedures—and hundreds of decisions to make and orders to follow. Of course, it is overwhelming. “C” wants to take over.

You may choose not to allow it to dominate. It is possible. It became my newly adopted life style. Many of us living the “C” life find a way to prevail. We talk to friends, family, and medical staff. We share, think, pray. We keep walking or exercising if able. We keep living life, and while doing so we process all that is happening.

As for myself, I also became angry. I had a clear nemesis on which to focus. For this, I want to say “thank you” to cancer. Because you were always lurking about like a dark force, pushing, nudging, annoying, and trying to create fear, I went into fight mode. In many ways I am still there.

Waiting is a major phenomenon in the “C” life. Cancer loves that one must wait. Waiting for news, for test results, the next appointment, the call from the doctor, the

final drip of the chemo infusion, an encouraging e-mail or phone call from friends—and mostly waiting to feel better. What cancer does not like is those of us living the “C” life finding ways to continue living our lives, despite the waiting. We get out of that “C” life mindset. We seek out and discover the positive people, experiences, joys.

Cancer loses on this one also.

There are some reasons for me to say “thank you” to cancer:

1. I have a renewed appreciation of the value of family and friends in life and I rediscovered a simple and basic value of kindness. A text message, call, visit, e-mail would be enough to make my day, as would offers of rides or other help. “I will pray for you” is commonly heard during such times. I valued that intent and sentiment. I believed people when they told me they would pray for me. I was touched.
2. God has re-entered my life in a big way. Because of my beliefs, I was and can keep hoping. My morning prayer and meditation sessions became essential. My church family showed me the power of praying as a group. They prayed with me and for me.
3. I have been privileged now to talk with many other cancer patients. I am reminded of the silent suffering that many must deal with daily and

all the ways the human spirit can soar above it.

4. I have admiration for the dedication and caring attitude of exceptional health care teams at the many cancer centers across the nation. The doctors and nurses at the clinics where I was a patient are truly a lifeline. They have earned their angel wings.
5. I sometimes feel guilty because I am surviving and recovering, when others may not be. Other times I feel blessed because I am alive.
6. I feel more focused and more acute about life. I like the quote by the actor Michael Douglas when he was dealing with throat cancer; "...cancer didn't bring me to my knees; it

brought me to my feet." There is strength in his statement. It became one of my mantras.

Cancer, you have reminded me of the value of life and of human connection, and that human kindness supersedes anything else in life I may have thought was important. You have also reminded me that with God's help and with the help of those kind people that surround us, the human spirit has the ability to overcome even the biggest challenges.

In the words of the spiritual writer and thinker Ram Dass, in the final analysis, in life, "we are all simply walking each other home."

Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength.



Treasure at the Museum

“Which one of your children is your favorite”? This question has no reasonable answer, just as there is no reasonable answer to “Which painting in the Holland Museum is your favorite”? I am a docent (guide) at the museum with a special interest in the art in the second-floor Dutch gallery. I have been asked to write about one of the paintings.

I have chosen the painting “A Family in an Interior” by Abraham van Strij. The van Strij family lived in Doordrecht and produced three generations of painters. Leendert, the father, was a house painter and artist. He stimulated a revival of 17th century Dutch art and in 1774 founded the “Pictura Drawing Society.”

Abraham (1753-1826) and Jacob (1756-1815) followed their father as painters. Abraham is considered to be of greater importance because he was more versatile, delighted in detail, and was a master of light and shadow. Abraham, the third generation of the van Strij family, was taught by his father.

“A Family in an Interior” features a father drinking from a stein, a mother nursing a child, and a maid pouring water into a large container. The husband and wife are seated at a table, and the maid is standing. The group of three form a triangle in the center of the painting.

The three people occupy only about one-fourth of the room’s interior. As a result, space is given to other details. A stairway leads to a second floor, and an open door offers an expansive view into the courtyard outside. This “see through” gives considerable depth to the painting, which shows a woman washing clothes in the canal. Two large containers standing by the door suggest that the merchant husband could be upper middle class. Every object in the room receives an equal amount of light, which results in extraordinary clarity and brightness.

A unique feature at the Holland Museum is a display of real objects that appear in the painting. A five-piece garniture set of Delft sits on a shelf; a real set is displayed on an 18th century Kast opposite the painting. A large brown porcelain pot and metal skimmer are featured in the painting and in the cabinet.

Also in this painting, on the wall above the bed is a map of Africa. Maps were often included in Dutch art to emphasize the importance of world trade accomplished by the Dutch East and West India companies. The map shows the island of St. Helena, where Napoleon spent his second period of exile and wrote his memoirs. A plaque on the wall says “Patience Conquers.” If the Dutch waited long enough, then perhaps the rule of Napoleon could end.

Below the painting, in a separate case, is a 1810-1824 sketch book by van Strij. Included are 80 drawings of peasants, animals, and landscapes that he did in preparation for his paintings. This rare collection is done in black chalk, brown wash, and watercolor, thus adding another dimension to his art.

The Golden Age of the Netherlands was the 1600s. Even though this painting was completed a century later, it represents many of the characteristics of the 1600s. There was a real interest in reclaiming and remembering the past.

Stop in and see this treasure at the Holland Museum.





Would You Be Mr. Wizard?

In 1986 my family moved from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to Holland, Michigan. The move was a shock to my kids and my wife, Mary Claire. We left a college town where every neighbor was a Ph.D. or M.D., to go to a town where M.D.s are only found in hospitals or medical offices. My oldest child's fifth-grade science assignment was to collect leaves and identify the tree species. We were told this was what all the students would do in Holland until they were in high school. Mary Claire was so frustrated that she took the children back to Chapel Hill. Our attempt to return to North Carolina failed; she reluctantly moved back to Holland in 1988. Mary Claire was active in the PTA, and one day she asked the school to hire Mr. Wizard to do a science demonstration. Naturally, the PTA board asked her to arrange it. She reported back to the board a week later and was promptly rejected because Mr. Wizard's contract was \$500 plus expenses. The entire annual PTA budget was less than \$500.



Illustration by Jan Gebben

One evening at home Mary Claire asked me, "Would you be Mr. Wizard?" I was not too keen on that idea, because I did not know if Parke-Davis (PD) management would let me do it. I was Mr. Wizard while I was in my kids' Chapel Hill classrooms. So I told her I would ask my management. To my surprise and delight, the plant manager agreed and directed the Human Resources department to support me. I was given an expense account, and I could recruit other PD chemists to assist me. I found a marketing professional, Ken Freestone, who helped me buy a bunch of promotional items. We also visited three West Ottawa elementary schools.

On a warm spring afternoon in 1989, two other PD employees and I went to Waukazoo Elementary for our first encounter. In the gymnasium we set up several tables and hung up our PD logo while the children were in afternoon recess. The bell rang and the kids streamed back to their respective classrooms. A few minutes later a fifth grade teacher and his aides brought about 35

kids into the gym. The kids all sat attentively on the floor about five paces away from us. A second teacher and her aides came in next. She paced her students on the gym floor next to the other class. Several parent volunteers and the principal, the vice principal, and the office staff stood near the back watching with bated breath and heightened skepticism.

I began by thanking the school to let us (Parke-Davis) show chemical tricks. Then I introduced the three of us. In the next hour we wooed and wowed the kids and adults with fireballs, liquid nitrogen, color changes, an oscillating clock experiment, and slime. Before the kids were dismissed, we handed each a souvenir: The adults got coffee mugs or fanny packs, and the kids got erasers or rulers with PD logos. I did not forget the adults standing in the back; those are the doubters needing to be converted. The extra coffee cups would do much for good will.

The next week, the PD management received a thank-you note from the West Ottawa superintendent asking that we expand the demonstration to include all seven elementary schools in the district in 1990. The general manager agreed and increased my budget. The teachers collected and sent the children's letters to me. Reading those handwritten notes was most enjoyable.

The second year we visited seven schools. The *Grand Rapids Press* showed up at one of my presentations and published pictures and stories in the Sunday edition. The cat was out of the bag. That year Parke-Davis received numerous requests from several school districts for the PD science demonstration.

By 1991 we had seven teams of chemists making presentations in West Ottawa, Holland, and Zeeland. My last event was at Sheldon Woods school in 2003, two years before I took early retirement. Two instances really brought joy to my heart. Among the many letters I got, one from a Pine Creek Elementary child stood out. He wrote, "I like chemistry. When I grow up I want to be a chemist. So when you die I can take over." That letter was posted on the cafeteria bulletin board for several weeks. My neighbors, David and Debbie Wachter, told me their older son went to the University of Michigan to study chemistry because of the demonstration. Today this young man is a chemistry professor in a small college in Chicago. We continued to provide that service to the community until the Holland site was closed. Thank you, Mary Claire. Yes, I liked being Mr. Wizard. I wanted to demystify chemistry.



A Reflection on Edward Hopper's Painting, "Gas"

At dusk, as the lights from inside began to beam across the driveway and the pump tops illuminated the din for a few more hours, Walter got up from his creaky desk chair and ambled out to take the day's readings. He'd been running this place for years after it was passed to him by Hermann, his father.



The oil can display was just as it had been at daybreak. Sixteen cans on each side: half the highest quality and half for the older oil burners that most folks drove. No oil sales that day.

His profit margins were slim, a half-dollar on a quart of oil and only three cents on a gallon of gas. Today's take? Eighty-two gallons of gas sold, no oil, and Ben McCormack had come inside for three packs of Camels and a free road map for his big trip to Iowa. The day's receipts came to less than ten dollars after he paid the taxes, not enough to keep the lights on for much longer. In a few weeks, he'd feel encouraged when things would briefly pick up as folks stopped in to have him wrestle last year's snow tires onto their rims. But once that was done, the glimmer would vanish like leaves from an autumn tree.

In more ways than one, Walter was trying in desperation to keep a bygone era alive. He

knew he should have gotten rid of the place and moved into town, but ever since tank No. 2 rusted out and leached its contents into the ground, the property was worthless to anyone else.

Back when his dad had the place, there were years of prosperity, even before the road out front was paved. As the only gas station on that side of town, farmers and townspeople would drive over, get a few gallons, and visit for a spell. More than once, he had to take his tractor and pull customers from axle-deep mud during the spring rains. When the road became gravel and then asphalt, life was easier in some ways, but people could then drive farther to competitors.

When a car pulled in, Hermann would swing his feet down from his desktop, and go outside, no matter what the weather was. A coat rack by the door held all he needed to brave the elements. He'd try his best for the ultimate sale, "Fill 'er up?"

More often than not, it was, "Just a dollar's worth, Herm." A buck would still put 3-4 gallons in the tank.

Hermann had the delicate touch of a surgeon on that pump handle. He'd watch the float closely as it dropped to the right spot. Occasionally, it'd go a little past but it

wasn't worth the effort to figure the fractions and charge accordingly. There was an art to operating those gravity-powered pumps. Some customers tried to distract him to take advantage of his good nature, but Hermann learned who they were and was on high alert for their trickery.

He'd check the tire pressure, the dipstick, and the radiator. He'd grab his bottle and rag to clean the dust, mud, and bugs off the windshield. "SuperService!" he called it. Other stations did the same.

Simplicity. The cash register was the left pocket of his overalls. It held a wad of bills bound with a rubber band; one or two twenties, some tens, fives, and mostly singles, stacked from bottom to top. He could peel them off in no time flat. When he needed coins, the dispenser on his belt could produce any combination of pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters needed. Just a quick flick of his thumb would jangle the right coins into his palm.

Over the years, Model As replaced Model Ts, Chevys, Dodges, Willys, and even a few Packards and DeSotos rolled in. In the post-war boom, business picked up into the late forties.

Even a little parenting-by-committee happened at SuperService. When newly licensed teen Billy McGowan pulled in, Hermann looked at his bug-splattered windshield, "You better slow down, Billy, or your daddy is going to get a call from me! Those are 60 mph bugs!" Young Walter, then an apprentice by birth, took it all in.

Hermann's buddies would gather and shoot the breeze on the bench out front most summer evenings until the dark of night stole the light of day. In winter, they'd meet inside, have a few cigars, and play matchstick poker until the phone rang with annoyed wives on the other end of the line.

Now Hermann and his buddies were gone and the place belonged to Walter. Improvements were made. He visited the bank and split the cost with the franchise folks to replace the old gravity pumps with modern electric ones. He spruced up the place with paint from the going-out-of-business sale at Thompson's Hardware. The windows were repaired by Jed Garrison in exchange for a series of free oil changes. But then came the fateful day when it all began to unravel. Defeat would soon be snatched from the last residue of hope.

A lot of buzz in town was about a new highway coming through. State Representative Crumby had assured Hermann and Walter he was doing everything possible to assure New Berlin would get its very own exit off the highway. He said they'd have new customers from states only seen on the maps at school. They'd hear their different accents, but they better make sure the washroom in back was cleaned more often.

But when Crumby was indicted on bribery charges, the hopes of the exit died with his career. The highway passed by and so did Billy McG. He could now roar through the area at 65+ and do it legally. The squished bugs on his windshield became his responsibility. It was all self-service at those highway rest stops.

The road in front of Walter's SuperService grew quieter. An old hound dog would sniff around and take an undisturbed nap right in its middle. For locals, it became the road less travelled, and to outsiders it was the road never traveled. Weeds began pushing through the cracks in the asphalt. Both the county and the town stopped plowing the snow. Potholes became craters and remained untouched.

While Model Ts had become Ford Fairlanes, while Hermann's SuperService became

Walter's, and its community had lulled to loneliness, it was time.

So one dark day, Walter, with a last look around the office, took a deep breath and exhaled, breaking the silence with a sigh. He swung his heels down from the very spot on the desk where his dad's had once worn the

varnish away. He turned off the lights, flipped the sign on the door from "OPEN" to "CLOSED," locked the door behind him, and walked away into the crisp November night.

SuperService would be reclaimed by the land from which it had sprung.

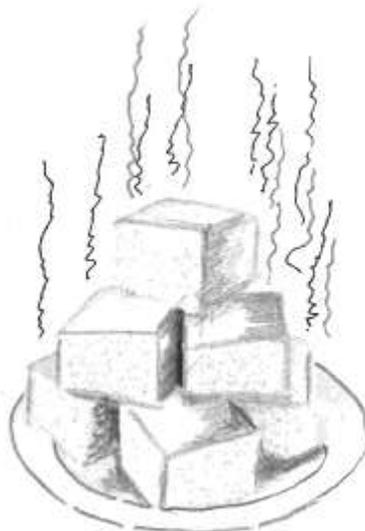




Kindness Paid Forward

I was a freshman at Hope College, trying to continue to work part-time while making the major transition to college. What occurred at the end of October should not have been a surprise. In a common expression of the time, I was, as Mom used to say, “trying to burn the candle at both ends.” I was sleeping only four hours a night and was so worn out that my resistance was down, and I caught what was called the double flu, i.e., simultaneous vomiting and diarrhea. After being sick all Monday night, I was too weak in the morning to walk. My roommate, Cliff, helped me down the stairs from our rented, third-floor attic room and took me to the school infirmary in his car. I stayed there the next three nights and was well cared for and “mothered” by a very sweet lady with a Dutch accent. On Friday, when I was told I was well enough to go home,

this plump, matronly lady, who had been looking after me during my recovery, told me she was preparing something special for my lunch. She served me her fresh-baked, wonderfully delicious cornbread with honey. When she set it before me, to my amazement she said, “This is your grandmother’s recipe.” (I had never known either of my grandmothers, as my dad’s mother had died when he was twelve, and my mom’s mother had died when Mom was 22.) Then the dear lady shared with me that at the time she and her family had first arrived as immigrants from the Netherlands, my grandma, Lena (Yskes) Laman, who had died 36 years earlier in 1916, had been very kind and helpful to her, and that the cornbread she had served me was made from a recipe learned from my Grandma Laman.





Who Am I?

On March 26, 2018, I received a notice from the IRS that my income tax forms had already been filed but looked suspicious. Here I sat, with a file full of receipts and W2 forms, wondering how someone else could file my tax forms without all of this information. Was I making life too complicated? We took the IRS letter to our tax preparer, who said that I was a victim of identity theft. So when we filed our tax forms, we would need an extra document with copies of the drivers' licenses of both myself and my wife. It was worth the extra effort, because we were expecting a large refund. The forms were mailed in, and we waited for our refund. It didn't come and it didn't come, so finally I tried to contact both the state and the federal tax bureaus to see what the holdup was. No luck.

Meanwhile we noticed that some of our mail was not arriving. When our May church newsletter did not arrive on time, we decided to check with the post office. Someone had requested that my mail be forwarded to a house in Atlanta, Georgia. I Googled the address, which was for a nice little brick house on a tree-lined street. The newsletter was returned to Third Church with \$1.76 postage due. We were concerned that our refund checks would be forwarded and cashed in Georgia but were assured that no one could cash our refund check except us. We were also expecting some rebate checks because of the Energy Savings Program in Holland. I called Semco Energy and told them to delay sending these checks or, if they were in the mail, to cancel them.

Just when we thought things were getting under control, I received an unsolicited Chase Slate credit card with a credit limit of \$9,900. I decided that if I did not activate this card, it could not be used. Then I received a Wells Fargo Cash Wise credit card with a limit of \$10,000. It took some doing, but I was able to establish that I was who I thought I was and I did not order these cards. Meanwhile there was a balance transfer of \$9,702 from Wells Fargo to my inactivated Chase card. It took fraud experts from the two banks talking to each other to determine that these were not my charges, and both cards were deactivated.

I thought we were out of the woods until the June HASP meeting when Amy told me that our HASP Newsletter had been returned to the HASP office from Covington, Georgia. After the HASP luncheon, we went back to the post office and discovered that my mail was no longer being sent to this nice little house in Atlanta but to an apartment building in Covington. They suggested that it was time for us to contact a detective at the Holland Police Department. We made the Police Log in the Holland Sentinel on June 5 at 4:48 p.m. A very nice detective came to our home. We chatted on our front porch, but he told us that the chances of catching whoever was doing this were not very good.

On July 3, 2018, the State of Michigan issued our state income tax refund and included \$3 interest. Our Semco Energy rebate checks came through, which was a relief. The company tried at least two times,

and perhaps it took three tries to get the checks to us.

Meanwhile, we were still not receiving our federal tax refund. We had actually applied our refund from 2016 to our 2017 taxes; then we withheld too much, so we were expecting refunds from two years. We made an appointment with the IRS tax office in Grand Rapids. The end of August we went for our visit. It was there that we discovered that this problem started a year earlier than we had realized and also that they had stolen not only my Social Security number but my wife's as well. We were told that whoever filed for us did put our income in the proper categories but not with the correct numbers. We finally received our refund from 2016, and the IRS included interest of \$182. It was not the greatest rate of interest but more than we earn on money in our checking account. Our refund for 2017 also came through.

Then we realized that we were no longer receiving TIME Magazine. I checked our subscription date, and it had not run out. So I contacted TIME and discovered that they were sending our magazines to Covington, Georgia. They did not send the issues that we missed but supposedly extended our subscription. We thought all was taken care of until one day my wife mentioned that we

had not been receiving our AARP Bulletin. I don't think she ever looks at it, and I don't look at very much of it but it was curious. So I contacted AARP and discovered that they too were sending our magazine to Covington. Then in February 2019 my wife was getting rid of old copies of the Reader's Digest when she discovered that the last issue we had received was for July/August. We wondered if we had misplaced more recent issues or could they have been sent to Georgia. So I had a nice chat with Stephanie at Reader's Digest and was told that our copies were going to Covington and returned because there was no forwarding address! She said she would have our missed issues sent to us and would extend our subscription.

So now it is again tax preparation time, and I am wondering if someone else will file tax forms for us or do I have to sort through a year of receipts in preparation for meeting with our tax preparer. Actually I have done a lot of sorting. And the IRS has sent to us our very own IP PIN numbers that we have to use when we file our income tax this year. I hope they will be filed without incident. With the new tax laws we will probably have to pay additional rather than worry about whether or not our refunds will arrive safely.



Health Care Delivery at the NASCAR Race Track

In Jackson County, Michigan, a sleepy little town comes alive during the summer. Brooklyn is a summer resort area near several lakes and brings in the boaters, swimmers and campers. But the granddaddy of Brooklyn events happens three times a year at one of the nation's largest NASCAR stock car racetracks, Michigan International Speedway (MIS).

On those days in Brooklyn, the populace swells from 8,000 people to 160,000.

I was part of that crowd of 160000 for 15 years. I was not there as a racing fan. I was hired as an ER nurse and joined a group of physicians, nurses, paramedics, firefighters and assorted first responders. I recall feeling humbled when the Medical Director told me I was hired, as I had already worked with some of my new colleagues and had much respect for their skills. My job was to help deliver medical care to every sick or injured person at the racetrack, including fans, racing crew and drivers.

I learned quickly that it helps to understand the passion and enthusiasm of NASCAR race fans. They love their sport, they love their favorite drivers, and more than anything, they live for their race weekend. Racetrack seats sell out quickly, and coveted season tickets are passed down through generations. By race time, the massive grandstand area will be filled with excited, yelling and histrionic race aficionados. They will proudly don their driver T-shirts and ball caps; wave their flags, and loudly

cheer as their driver races by on a practice lap. I have seen marriage ceremonies performed before a race begins, with the bride and groom sporting their favorite driver jacket and ball cap for the special occasion. One ardent fan shared with me that he had arranged, someday, to have his ashes scattered at his favorite spot near Turn 4, just before the home stretch of the track, thus ensuring that the racetrack will be with him, and he with it, forever.

So, it goes without saying, a few race fans will go to great lengths to make sure they get to the track on race day. This nearly unharnessed zeal to make it to the race knows few boundaries, not even medical conditions. Once I treated a heart patient who removed himself from his IVs and monitors in the Coronary Care Unit because the race was soon to start. He simply could not help himself. He had to get to the race. "I had tickets for great seats," the gentleman shared with me as we carried him down from the grandstand and called for the advanced life support unit. We found out later he was having another heart attack.

I recall another gentleman race fan who appeared at the door of our medical station with his hand tightly bound with duct tape. He had fallen off the top of his motor home the night before and complained of pain in that hand. It took a long time to work through the layers of tape, but finally we uncovered a compound fracture with the bones literally protruding through the skin. He looked at me pleadingly, with sad eyes, and begged the question, "Can't you just

patch me up, Doc, until the race is over? I have tickets for great seats this year.” Indeed we splinted his hand, gave him an arm sling and a handful of ibuprofen, and strongly advised him to go to the ER that day. We provided every reason why he needed treatment immediately. “Maybe after the race,” was his candid response. In retrospect, I felt both amused by his loyalty to his sport, and saddened and concerned about the outcome of his serious hand injury.

Racing fans appeared at our medical station, who needed help with everything from headaches to anaphylactic shock from bee stings. I recall one frightened and excited lady, with her rattled husband, arriving at our door, in labor. We had heart attacks high up in grandstands and fans taking a tumble down flights of stairs. One year we provided treatment to several young male participants in a parking lot brawl, starting as a disagreement between Ford and Chevy fans. All the injuries were minor, and all parties involved expressed embarrassment and were quite apologetic as we bandaged and steri-stripped faces. On race day weekends, our four medical stations each see 100 patients a day.

One year a sheriff’s deputy on mounted patrol was worried about his horse and asked us to clean and bandage the animal’s leg wound, which we happily did. The deputy was grateful and the horse seemed pleased.

Regular visitors to our racetrack clinic were common.

Mary Ann came to our clinic only because she needed a private curtained area to use her breast pump. The next year she was

back for the same reason, with photos of her child from the previous year. Four years in a row we saw Mary Ann. Each year she brought photos to share and stories to tell of her growing family. Year five was different. Mary Ann surprised us with the news that she had had her tubes tied and no longer needed our facilities. We wished her well.

Heat exhaustion is a big issue on a hot summer day. We treated patients from age six months to ninety. We had to helicopter life-flight out an infant whose young, misguided parents brought their child to the race on a 90-degree day. This baby was nearly comatose from heat stroke. Sadly, the parents seemed oblivious.

A group of teens brought us a puppy they had foolishly sneaked into the race and that was showing signs of heat stroke. The teens looked sheepish and guilty as they handed the dog over to us. Fortunately one of our nurses had worked for a vet, and she knew just where to find a vein on a dog, so we guessed the puppy’s weight, calculated a safe amount of fluid, and gave the dog some IV fluid and water. The puppy recovered and spent the day bouncing around our air-conditioned medical station. When the teenagers did not show up to retrieve the dog, a sheriff’s deputy offered to take him and drop him off at the humane society. One of our nurses who fell in love with the puppy and declared she would be on their doorstep the next day to adopt him. That brought smiles for all of us.

I had already decided Year 15 was going to be my last season working at the race track. For at least the two previous years, when I raced to the emergency scene, such as the top of the grandstand, I was more in need of the oxygen I carried than the patient was. I



knew, sadly, it was time for someone younger to take my place.

Then a horrific and tragic event occurred my final year, during an Indy car race.

A large, heavy open wheel flew off one of the Indy cars and careened relentlessly through the crowd of spectators at 200 mph, literally bouncing and bounding, randomly striking people in the stands. Three people died that day, and over 40 were injured.

The entire track emergency team of medical responders, security, fire fighters and police mobilized and performed admirably. I recall my own feelings of dread, fear, and deep concern for the victims as I raced to the scene. I surveyed the chaos unfolding before me. I made myself feel numb, as I took a moment to scan where I could be of most help. I observed track security trying to console relatives, the police pushing crowds back to make room for ambulances, the horse-mounted deputies clearing a path for ambulance carts, and my colleagues beginning to treat injured fans. The track radio chatter was relentless in my ears. The cries and looks of despair on faces around me, I still see today.

I focused on a gentleman lying across his seat, holding a T-shirt to his head wound by using his t-shirt, and began to help him control the bleeding. His wife was tearful and visibly trembling, but I knew I would

need help from her, so I assigned her to help me hold bandages and equipment; she proved to be an excellent assistant for her husband. All around me, one by one, injured race fans were being cared for.

This event has been a dark shadow in my psyche, returning over and over to my thoughts. I still become anxious and feel that same sense of dread at awkward moments in my life when thoughts about that day creep in.

I reflect on why I stayed working at MIS for so many years. Truly I loved “people engagement” and knowing I was being of service. It is also fair to say the racetrack management appreciated us and paid us fairly well. But I think, more, it was the graciousness and thankfulness of the patients, the mostly easy-going NASCAR fans. Most every visit into our medical station, even for a Tylenol request, was followed with a hearty thank you and robust handshake. There was never a race weekend in which track management did not receive four or five thank you letters for our services. Many times fans coming back to the next monthly race brought their X-ray reports and copies of their lab work for us to look at. Patients we treated brought us tubs of cookies or other treats to say thank you.

In 15 years, I never did become a racing fan, but I don’t regret the time I spent at MIS with over 160,000 racing fans.



The President's Visit

In 1976, when the United States celebrated its bicentennial, Holland was celebrating its 47th annual Tulip Festival. On January 1 the City of Holland received national exposure with a Holland float in the Pasadena Rose Parade. Susan Ford was invited to be the Grand Marshal of the Tulip Festival's Parade of Bands. In April Miss Ford's participation was confirmed. The Ford family had strong roots in west Michigan..

Planning was underway for Miss Ford's visit when changes in President Gerald Ford's schedule made it possible for the Fords to stop in Holland for the Saturday parade. Since Susan was the Grand Marshal, her parents were designated as Honorary Marshals. Susan's itinerary included a luncheon and reception with community leaders.

The Festival Board was honored to have the sitting president of the United States come to Holland and be a part of the Festival. The President's security detail teams arrived within hours of our notice, and meetings with the Secret Service and city staff began. The Secret Service had several meetings with City Manager Terry Hofmeyer and Police Chief Charles Lindstrom to confirm details for personal

security and parade route operations. From Thursday through the Saturday evening of Tulip Time, most of those who were part of the planning had little rest.

In 1976, like today, the Saturday parade was scheduled to start at 2 P.M. The Tulip Time Board requested approval from the city to change the start time to 3 P.M. to accommodate the Fords' late arrival. As the parade was about to begin, rain started too. People using umbrellas and plastic bags to



fend off the rain lined the streets to welcome President and Mrs. Ford. They arrived at Tulip City Airport by helicopter from Kalamazoo and immediately proceeded to the parade route where, fortunately, the rain had stopped. They were joined in their open top limo by Susan and Congressman Guy Vander Jagt as they traveled the parade route from start to finish.

When the Fords arrived back at the airport, the Hallacy family greeted them on behalf of the city with gifts of tulips and wooden shoes. It was an honor to visit with them and to thank them for their many years of service to our country. Indeed, it was a great memory for all the citizens of Holland to be a part of the presidential visit.



Beautiful Cape Town

Living in Cape Town – being married and happy – exceeded by far all the dreams I ever had! We spent a big part of our free time exploring Cape Town and the whole exceptionally beautiful Cape area.

Even in our daily lives we saw beauty all around us. Opening our eyes in the morning, we were right away presented with the wonderful view of Cape Town, stretching down to the blue waters of the harbor. The living room and balcony had the same outlook and then, going into the kitchen for breakfast, we could see the amazing Table Mountain. Since Cape Town has mostly beautiful summer weather, clouds would sometimes only appear close to the top of Table Mountain so that it looked as if a tablecloth had been spread out. And then people would say: “The table is set!”

Going up to the top of Table Mountain by cable car was very exciting. The outlook over the whole area was breathtaking! On the top of the mountain is the cable car station with a restaurant and there are several walking trails on the flat but quite rocky surface. They were great for taking long walks and enjoying sweeping spectacular views in all directions.

At the foot of Table Mountain were also hiking trails, crisscrossing the whole area, going up and down the hilly terrain. We took advantage of this wilderness so close to the city and went on hikes with friends and sometimes even had BBQs totally surrounded by this amazing nature.

Another big plus of living there were beautiful ocean beaches around the whole Cape area, sandy as well as more picturesque rocky beaches. The beautiful beach scenery changed to majestic mountains touching the ocean. One side of the mountain falls sharply for hundreds of meters into the Atlantic Ocean. A spectacular road, Chapman’s Peak Drive, hugs the almost vertical sides of the mountain with sheer drops to the sea below and towering rocks rising above. The twists and curves in the road are endless, partly going through one-sided tunnels. It is a dream to see such a dramatic coastline.

This is also the road leading to the Cape of Good Hope. At a rest area, we were greeted by a whole bunch of baboons. One of them jumped on the front of our car, and it looked as if he was welcoming and greeting us. Others came close too so that we did not dare to get out of the car, but it was definitely a very special event for us to wave and talk to them through the open window. I think they were expecting to get something to eat. Some tourists probably did feed them but I don’t think we did.

Soon we entered the Nature Park of Good Hope, a narrow peninsula, consisting of rocks jutting out into the ocean. We enjoyed the wild beauty of this whole area. A rocky path went up to the lighthouse of the Cape of Good Hope. There are often very strong winds in this area, but we were lucky; we had a relatively quiet day, so we were only blown away by the glorious view over the coastline and the enormous Atlantic Ocean.

The Cape of Good Hope is not, as I always believed, the southern most point of Africa. That is cape Agulhas, several miles farther south, where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet. Sometimes one can see, as we did, a line of a white crest where the waters of the two oceans bump into each other.

On every trip into the Cape area we were presented with beautiful landscapes. A scenic drive through the mountains would take us to Stellenbosch, one of the largest wine regions in South Africa. A lot of the buildings in town reminded us of the influence of the original Dutch settlers. The vineyards were stretching up and down the gentle slopes. There were several wineries inviting people to sample their wines, and they were sooo delicious! Even Peter who had grown up in a winegrowing area in Germany was very enthusiastic about the high quality!

Closer to home, we would visit the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens situated on the side slopes of Table Mountain. It is a huge nature reserve with plants and flowers indigenous to this area. One very impressive original flower was the protea. It

came in a lot of different shapes and colors and was always beautiful. There were also a lot of hiking trails so that we would sometimes spend several hours enjoying the amazing panorama.

One unforgettable trip we made was to the Ostrich Farm in Oudtshoorn. Oh, how spectacular these big birds are! They are kept in natural surroundings over quite a big area. It was fun to see them run. Some tourists were even riding on them! But to be quite honest I was not at all tempted to try.

Another time we traveled north into Namibia to the Etosha Pan, the largest Salt Pan in Africa, which stretches over many miles. The ground is covered with salt and other minerals so that it looks white in the sunshine and can even be seen from space. It is believed that it formed millions of years ago. The Etosha Pan is part of a huge desert area and has numerous water holes, which are gathering grounds for all sorts of wild animals. There were rhinos, zebras, even a few elephants and other smaller animals. It was very exciting to see them in their natural habitat, but we had, of course, to keep a certain distance.



The Incident

Sometimes when trouble comes, it comes in the form of sound. As we drove west on Lakewood Boulevard, we became aware of a loud clanking coming from the back of the car on the driver's side. Alarm seized our normally calm expressions as our locked eyes simultaneously were saying what our voices did not. What's that? We were fortunate enough to be next to a driveway into the parking lot of an out-of-business bakery. Phil stepped out of the car to check the problem, then called me to get out and take a look. A six-inch-long threaded and thick screw had punctured our tire and was sticking out, causing the clanking against the wheel well. Phil removed the object, which of course deflated the tire. As Phil got out the jack, wrench, and spare tire, I tried to console him with soothing words, "It could have been worse. What if this had happened on our recent drive home from California?" Ignoring my trifling marriage tricks, hard learned over years, he wearily set about to do the job of changing the tire. It soon became apparent that he was having way too much trouble getting the intractable lug nuts off in order to remove the wheel.

Suddenly, as if dropping out of the heavens, an older model Pontiac Vibe came floating into the abandoned bakery parking lot. A woman called out in an energetic and forceful voice, "We're gonna help you. We have better tools and a good jack." I was to learn that the voice of authority belonged to Angela, who had a fading tattoo of her husband's name, Roberto, on her neck. Her neck was of further interest to me since it also had a rosary dangling from it. I quietly

saw the image of Phil written on my much older neck and decidedly it was not as alluring. She was completely insistent on their mission even though there were two small children in the back seat. Angela and Roberto diligently began extracting equipment swallowed up by their car trunk. They pushed newly purchased bags of groceries, blankets, toys, backpacks, schoolbooks, snow boots, and other unidentifiable things aside to reveal a significant jack, one that said, "I mean business," and Roberto set it down next to our puny Mazda-issued one. We felt intimidated and shamed by our weakness, yet astonished at being recipients of such generosity.

Angela pulled a case out of their trunk, opened it to reveal a dazzling set of wrenches, screwdrivers, and sockets, and then placed the smorgasbord of shiny metal on the ground next to Roberto. Her nurse to his surgeon. His technique skillful and practiced. Problem was, Roberto also had difficulty removing the lug nuts from our wheel. There was discussion about this problem conveyed in Spanish between the two of them. Instructions were given to Angela to get something else from their Pontiac. Like a stuffed circus-clown car, out came even more equipment.

In the meantime the children, Michaela, about six years old, and Danny, about four, hopped in and out of their auto gleefully playing about the parking lot. They seemed oblivious to any oddness of their situation, almost as if it were a frequent occurrence.

Danny would stoop down next Roberto, “Poppy, let me help. Poppy, what’s this for?” Michaela, smiling and carefree, danced and twirled all about her merrymaking scene. Mommy Angela tried in vain to command them back into their car. Her voice didn’t have the same impact on them as it had earlier on us.

Roberto twisted and turned. He pounded; he grunted at the stubbornness of the lug nuts. His full attention and all his energy poured out of him. Eventually he realized that both he and Phil had been trying to remove the nuts clockwise when, in fact, they had to be removed counter-clockwise. This discovery brought “ahaa” sighs of wisdom from the four grownups, in English and in Spanish. The children didn’t care that they had been careening about on weedy concrete with strangers for the previous 45 minutes. My mind wandered to the supper time of the evening and the family’s groceries waiting to be eaten.

Roberto removed and replaced the tire with gusto while Phil and I stood by helplessly like stick figures in awe of being cared for. The couple were so proud of their tools. Angela told us that she got the set of wrenches and sockets for \$60 on Black Friday from Auto Zone. Roberto chimed in that he had acquired the hydraulic super jack from Walmart for a good price. They acted as if we were doing them a favor by providing an opportunity to set their fabulous tools into action.

Angela and Roberto lovingly returned their prized equipment to their trunk, pulled the blankets, toys, and groceries back in place, and began to get into their car, but not before we shared hugs all around. So, if you ever wonder, where are the good people? They are everywhere. They may come by when you least expect it and yell out, “We’re gonna help you.”



An Adventuresome Day at the Country School

I spent the first five years of my education attending a 1-room country school. There were about twenty-five students in the one classroom and only one teacher. There were no other adults in the building. We all walked to school as there were no school buses. However, our home was only a mile from the schoolhouse, so we did not have to walk too far. One of my favorite adventures while walking to school was to take the “shortcut.” The older students who lived on our road knew about this hidden way and gradually taught it to the younger children. Taking the shortcut meant we would turn off the paved road right at the end of my father’s cherry orchard, walk up a hill on a little gravel road, walk through a vineyard, and then walk through Mr. Root’s apple orchard. Eventually we reached another little dirt orchard road that took us to the gravel road that went past the school. Taking the shortcut was a little scary at first. I had no idea where we were going, and I was not sure how we would ever find the schoolhouse. However, I knew I wanted to walk with the older children, so I decided to just trust them. After all, they were eleven and twelve years old. Of course, they were right. We came out of the orchard and arrived at school right on time.

We had lots of fun taking this shortcut. In the fall we would stop at the vineyard and eat some of Mr. Root’s wonderful purple grapes. In the spring, we could see all the beautiful blossoms on his apple trees. And then there was the big ravine, a huge ditch about halfway through the orchard. It was at least six feet deep with lots of brush growing up the sides. We could not walk across it or

through it. It was very dirty, and looked like there could be snakes and bugs at the bottom. However, it was a great landmark to let us know we were going the right way. We just had to veer a little bit to the south to get around the ravine and then head off east through the orchard.

The year that I was in third grade, there were three other students in my class. The largest class in the school was the sixth grade, which consisted of five boys. We called them the “big boys” and, indeed, they were much larger than we were. Most of them were very nice, but they were a group and, like most young men, they liked to be in charge. Our teacher was Mrs. Jones. She was a kind, even-tempered person who seemed to enjoy her students.

In the spring of my third-grade year, we had a day that was very exciting. It was tornado season in Michigan. We all knew about tornadoes. We had occasionally seen the destruction they caused although one never had one come directly through our school district. Our parents had often told us about what to do if a tornado seemed imminent. If we were indoors, the best place to be was in the basement. The worst place to be was in the upstairs and, of course, it would be dangerous to remain in an old wooden house or shed which could be quickly blown away. If we were outdoors playing in the woods or orchards, we were told to run home if possible. However, if the winds became too strong, our parents said we were better off hiding in a ditch or some low area surrounded by lots of trees. The most important thing was to keep our head down.

So, one day in my third-grade year, there were some changes with the weather. Although the day had started out sunny, the wind came up and the rain started coming down. We could not go outside for recess. That was always a disappointment, but a good decision on Mrs. Jones' part. The winds became stronger and stronger, and the sky grew very dark. Rain crashed onto the windows, and water streamed down the side of the building. Our playground was flooding. Branches were blown off the trees. The schoolhouse steps were covered with water and leaves. The large trees in the schoolyard swayed in the wind. We were getting scared, and someone said maybe a tornado was coming. Mrs. Jones kept looking out the windows. There was no telephone in the school, so she could not call anyone to find out if a tornado was coming. She was the only adult in the building; she alone was responsible for the safety of her twenty-five children. The schoolhouse was a brick building built on a concrete floor. It seemed solid enough, but there was no basement to hide in. The big boys started telling Mrs. Jones that we should not stay in the schoolhouse. What if a tornado was really coming and the building collapsed?

Mrs. Jones continued to look worriedly out the windows. The storm raged on and the big boys kept saying we should get out of the building. Finally, Mrs. Jones asked the boys where they felt would be a safer place to be. The boys thought a few minutes; then one of them said, "We should go to the ravine." "The ravine?" said Mrs. Jones. "Where is that?" Several students eagerly shouted at once. The ravine was the big deep ditch in Mr. Root's apple orchard.

They told her how very deep it was and that there were lots of trees to protect us. Mrs. Jones looked a little skeptical, as if she were considering which place might be the more dangerous. However, the boys were insistent. After all, they were twelve-year-old farm boys. They were sure that hiding in the ravine would be much safer than staying in the schoolhouse. In the meantime, the wind continued blowing and the rain banged on the windows.

Mrs. Jones decided to take the boys' advice. She told us to grab our hats and coats: we were leaving the building immediately. We ran down the hill in front of the school, across the little gravel road, and together off into the orchard. The rain was coming down so hard we had to pull our coat collars in front of our faces. I could barely see who was in front of me, but I knew I had to keep running. I had no idea how to reach the ravine, but I knew the big boys would help us find it. Mrs. Jones was running, too, while trying to make sure all her students were staying with the group.

We ran and ran through the soggy orchard while the wind blew into our faces. Just when I thought we would never find it, the ravine appeared right in front of us. We ran to the edge of the ditch and looked down. It was so deep. I had never been down inside it; it was full of sticks and brush with no real pathway to the bottom. It looked scary, but the big boys said it was the safest place to be.

I slid down the steep bank. We all huddled together in the bottom of the ditch with our coats pulled over our heads. The wind and rain continued. We waited for the tornado to cross over us in the sky. We waited a very long time. We were wet and cold, but we were together and we knew that we were in



Illustration by Jan Gebben

the safest place. Eventually the storm began to abate. The danger was almost over. We had looked for the tornado but had not seen one at all. At last the storm quieted. Mrs. Jones told us it was safe to stand up and start going back to the school. We walked slowly as we were all soaking wet. We tromped through the wet orchard grass while happily laughing and talking. After all, we were safe. The storm might have hit the schoolhouse. A pile of bricks and lumber might be all that was left, but we were safe.

We walked back to the gravel road and up the school driveway. We looked up, not knowing what to expect. To our surprise, we saw the schoolhouse standing there looking almost exactly as it had that morning. There were some broken branches and debris along the steps and water was still running off the roof, but the building was intact. The roof still looked sturdy, the windows were unbroken, and the door was still on its hinges. Even our precious slide and swing

set in the playground were still standing. The storm, whether it was a true tornado or just a thunderstorm, had not even touched the school.

I remember thinking how we would not be wet and cold if we had stayed in the building. I am sure Mrs. Jones wondered whether we really should have left the schoolhouse. When our parents heard about it that evening, I am sure they were convinced we needed a better school safety plan. I think the big boys were proud that they had saved us from the storm. The question of whether it was safer to stay in the solid brick schoolhouse or to lie under the bushes in a wet, cold ravine was a question that could not be answered. However, the question of which choice led to the greater adventure was very simple. And an adventure of running through the rain, hiding in the ravine, and watching for the tornado was what we all thought was best.



Illustration by Jan Gebben



Remembering Skip

A Model Patient

If you ask any career nurse, “Can you remember the first patient you ever took care of, or is there a patient that you will never forget?” I am sure they will come up with a story. This is my immediate response to that question, “Of course. His name was Skip!”

I had just begun my first career move from the general care medicine floor at Loyola University Medical Center to the Intensive Care Unit when I met Skip. At that time, the ICU at Loyola was a makeshift space of five beds, four in a large renovated classroom and one in a private room across the hall. We could monitor patients in the private room from our central station in the main unit, so the room was a real intensive care bed space. I was coming on duty for the day shift. The night before, we had admitted an eighteen-year-old male college freshman from our general care floor. He was experiencing acute periods of shortness of breath, as a result, most likely, from his chemotherapy treatments for leukemia.

Skip had been lethargic and sleeping a lot. He had a very active college social life, as I was soon to discover, in addition to a part-time job and his class schedule. His parents had brought him to see their family physician; after a series of lab tests it was determined that he should be admitted to the

hospital for further workup. The initial assumption was that he might have mononucleosis, but the definitive diagnosis was acute leukemia. Devastating news to both Skip and his family. Nonetheless they expected recovery.

The charge nurse assigned me to Skip as my only patient. She said he was challenging to take care of because he was a bit anxious, and there would be lengthy discussion and questions from him before he would concede to comply with his treatment regimen. “He is not your **model** patient! she reiterated. She said I had to be firm, with a no-nonsense approach. Oh, yes, she said; he was quite charming and would probably start off the nurse-to-patient relationship by asking many direct questions. I was new to the ICU and anxious to do well, so I was determined to be firm but caring in responding to his questions and needs.

After morning report I immediately crossed the hall to our private ICU room and knocked on the door. My eyes were not drawn to the ICU equipment and “numbers” on the monitor, which is usually the case in ICU nursing, but to the clumps of blond hair strewn under the patient’s bed. Skip was sitting up in the bed, watching for my reaction. I had never taken care of a patient receiving chemotherapy and had no idea what to expect. “It should be on my head, don’t you think?” he said sarcastically. He

was not happy; his good looks were obviously important to him. His next question was, "Are you going to be my nurse?" He then stated that he had a lot of visitors waiting to see him that day, and he wanted to ensure that my "care" would be done on time so he could have uninterrupted time with his friends! Out of curiosity I went to check the ICU waiting room and indeed, it looked like a sorority house gathering, all women waiting to see Skip. We had strict policies about numbers of visitors and hours. I had to ensure that everyone could get in to see Skip, but, regardless, providing quality care came first. After a few days Skip and I came to an understanding, and I was more than willing to accommodate his social needs if he allowed me to be in charge of his medical care.

I recognized his feelings and decided it was really important for Skip to continue to have that social contact. In addition, his parents and siblings had to be accommodated. They appreciated my efforts to squeeze them in after hours. So, I added a new position, social secretary, to my nursing accountabilities. I found out that Skip had several girlfriends who were competing for his attention, so I would check with him to see who could have the "longer than 15-minute visit." Those not on the "list" got the policy standard 5-10 minute visit! You have to be adaptable in caring for patients, each of whom is a unique individual.

As the days passed and the chemotherapy continued, Skip's capacity to breathe without support diminished. He developed other problems as a result of the chemotherapy, which further incapacitated

him. He was persistent in keeping up as much of a normal front as he could, that being his contact with his girlfriends. He was challenging - and it took a lot of energy to care for him emotionally as well as physically. On the third day in the ICU his breathing could no longer be sustained without support. Skip was intubated (breathing tube inserted) and placed on mechanical ventilator support. This made him so much more anxious as he could now not speak or eat. His communication was by writing and tube feedings had to be started. He fought it all the way, not wanting to believe this was happening to him. I cared for him and continued "visitor" monitoring. In fact on some days, I felt like I was his "dating agent." Things were not looking good for Skip in the respiratory treatment area. The chemotherapy regimen was stopped temporarily, and the focus became his respiratory and heart status along with control of blood clotting factors.

My **model** patient found all types of ways to remove his hand restraints. These restraints were a policy for patients on mechanical ventilation lest they pull out ("extubate") their breathing tube. One afternoon the alarms went off in Skip's room; I ran across the hall to check and found that he had indeed pulled out the breathing tube. He was standing by the sink downing quart-size drinking containers of water! I activated the emergency team alert call system, and we managed to get Skip back in bed. Another breathing tube was inserted to stabilize his respirations with the mechanical ventilator. A similar episode occurred two days later. The patient and his family then decided that they wanted no further mechanical

respiratory support. Visiting increased after this crucial event, so I again was back on heightened visitor alert.

I spent the remainder of my work week as Skip's nurse. We worked on his breathing and medical regimen, all the while ensuring that he got his "friend visits in." His favorite food was Chinese, so one night, with the doctor's permission, we had a Chinese take-out party in Skip's room. Skip always had good "guy-type" chats with some of the medical residents, so they joined in too. That was the best reward, to see Skip in control and socializing among his new and old friends. He had a gift for communicating and listening. We had a quiet moment after that party, talking about his future. He apologized for being stubborn at times and thanked me for being his social secretary and his nurse. I thanked

him for allowing me to experience what it meant to care for someone holistically and to allow the patient to make choices. It was hard for Skip to let go, but he was at a point where further chemotherapy would have not been effective. He just did not talk about it.

A week after Skip's life ended, his parents came to the hospital to say thank you to the staff. They pulled out several local newspaper editions depicting clothing ads for department stores in our area - and there was Skip with a full head of hair modeling men's clothing! So he was indeed a "**model**" patient after all. I don't know why Skip never produced those ads or mentioned his part-time job of modeling; he talked about everything else in his life. Skip, I have to believe you are still "**modeling**" somewhere up there, and your social group is waiting to visit.



The Story of Queenie, A Special Llama

When Queenie, a 350-pound shaggy llama, was moved off the horse trailer and led in to the barn, she was a sad and doleful sight. Llamas are proud creatures: hard-working pack animals, herd protectors and admired for their commitment, strength, and steadfast courage. They are happiest when patrolling the pasture or performing some work-related duty. Queenie appeared anything but steadfast on this day. Even her painful limp when she walked to the barn added to her sense of despondency. A llama is supposed to look at you with eyes that stare and are intense. Queenie's eyes were sad, almost woeful.

Her previous owners had not cared for Queenie. She badly needed shearing and care of her very painful padded feet and nails, which desperately needed attention. Her big body seemed to have a deep ache when she slowly moved about with great effort.

But worst of all was the loneliness Queenie must have felt as a result of losing the remainder of her herd, the final two, who had recently died. Llamas need to be part of their herd; if not, they will adapt to joining a group of goats, alpacas or sheep. Then many llamas will quickly assume the role of the herd protector, particularly if they are bigger and more powerful than the other

animals from the herd. Llamas and alpacas are known to die, literally, of loneliness.

Enter Rich and Jane, who had been raising alpacas for years and had a herd of nearly 35 at their farm. Knowing the reputation of the much larger llamas as working beast the couple were eager for the chance to give Queenie a home and a new life's mission.

But the real reason for bringing Queenie home, Jane confessed, is that Queenie's sad life story touched her heart.

It didn't take long for Queenie to begin to assume her important new life's work. After a few weeks of care, a shearing of her long, matted fleece, a visit from the vet, several good meals, and a clean and comfortable barn to stay in with other animals, the tall, imposing,

350- pound creature began visibly regaining stature and confidence. Life was beginning to look better for the large beast. She also began to interact with the herd of the much smaller alpacas. They slept together in the barn and roamed together in the pasture. Moving about among the herd, Queenie, sniffing, patrolling, and interacting, was giving a convincing demonstration of her ability as a guard animal. She instinctively knew what to do and adapted to the role quickly.

Thanks to the wonderful care of Rich and Jane, Queenie and the alpacas settled into a



Illustration by Jan Gebben

comfortable existence together. Queenie would arise early, saunter out of the barn, and begin patrolling the field. She would walk the fence line, always on the alert for coyotes, stray dogs, foxes or any creature willing to put the easy-going alpacas in harm's way. When Queenie was satisfied the pasture was safe, she would come back to the barn door and position herself in front of it, as if to signal the alpaca herd that it was safe for them to roam about and graze in the field. One by one, the smaller, gentler alpacas would amble out into the pasture, ready to start their day in a secure, coyote-free safe place.

But Queenie could be a problematic llama for her owners. She was mischievous at times. One morning Rich looked out the window and saw the pasture gate open, not an alpaca in sight. Hurriedly, he went outside to discover Queenie leading the entire herd of alpacas down the driveway on their way to freedom to explore the big world out there. Obedient alpacas, after all, will go where their guard llama goes. Rich, not a man to utter curse words or insults at Queenie, did so this morning because of the havoc she was creating. Once Rich had the rebellious, freedom-loving llama secured back behind the gate, it took him most of the rest of the morning to round up the remaining alpacas who were found happily grazing alongside the long driveway, out by the road, or in a neighbor's yard.

There were many days in which the guard llama "earned her keep," as the saying goes. Before Queenie came to live at the ranch, an occasional coyote or stray dog would appear at the edge of the pasture. After Queenie arrived, the only time a coyote was spotted was the morning Rich looked out his

window and saw Queenie stomping and kicking toward a surprised coyote. Suddenly both creatures broke into a run toward the woods: the coyote, fleeing for his life, in front, and Queenie running close behind. The coyote quickly disappeared through the fence and into the woods. The alpacas were safe to calmly continue their grazing.

When Queenie had been with Rich and Jane for about eight years, she began to show signs of slowing. They did not know her precise age, but it was clear some days were a struggle for her. Getting out to patrol along the fence line seemed to be an effort for her, and they her breathing was, at times, labored and difficult. On a visit to the farm, Queenie's veterinarian shared that the aging llama was likely dying.

One morning, Jane came out to the barn and noticed the alpaca herd seemed confused as to what to do: Their favorite guard llama had died during the night. For the years of care, feeding, and opportunity to serve, Queenie had been a loyal guard llama. Her final years had been with a satisfying purpose. Because of Queenie's size, a tractor with a large shovel was required to carry her to her final resting place in the back of the pasture. As Queenie was being carried in the shovel, the alpacas all followed along as if in a procession. They seemed to know it was her final trip out into the pasture. As she was laid to rest, the members of the alpaca herd, one by one walked away. A few even took a moment to sniff around Queenie's body. The alpacas seemed to know they were now on their own. The relationship shared among Jane and Rich, Queenie, and the herd of alpacas, had made life better for all the members, human and animal, living at the alpaca ranch.



Follow the Rules

Rehabilitative Services

Where there is a time for everything under the sun.
A time for questions, a time for answers
A time for privacy, and a lack of privacy,
A time for uncomfortable beds and small towels,
Getting up too early, eating breakfast too early,
Lunch too early, dinner too early . . .
And then the waiting . . . waiting . . . waiting:
Waiting for an aide to give you your pain pills,
Waiting for an aide to take you to the bathroom,
Waiting for an aide to take you to the dining room,
Waiting for an aide to take you back to your room after dining.
And, you **MUST** follow the rules!

Things happen here that you may never experience elsewhere—
At least that’s the case for me.

Believe it or not, I have had more good times here than bad,
More funny times than sad . . . but you **MUST** follow the rules.
I was spoon-fed pills (from a little plastic cup with a little plastic spoon)
by a little Vietnamese nurse who literally danced into my room,
spoon in the right hand, cup in the left.
She fed me the pills one spoonful at a time,
gave me a high five, and danced out of the room.
Her name was “Deep.”

The Chair

Unaccustomed as I am to bathing in the
presence of others, showering presents
issues that I am definitely uncomfortable
with. My first shower here was relatively
uneventful, except of course for the lack of
privacy.

My next shower, however, will go down in
the annals of my history as being one of the
most humorous but also most frightening
events of my life, the reason being **THE**
CHAIR!



Illustration by Jan Gebben

As we entered the shower room, I saw the
usual white tile walls and floor, the white
sink, the small white cabinet for white soap,
towels, and other personal items. Then I saw
IT – a big, white chair with arms and legs. It
was smirking at me. It seemed to be made of
what resembled large white PVC pipe. It had
a big hole in the center of the seat, and it
looked very much like a potty chair for a
Sumo wrestler.

It stood there glaring at me, just waiting to
attack. Next thing I knew, the aide had
removed my clothes, slipped my surgical
foot and leg into a large plastic bag, and

wrapped it around and around with white tape to prevent leaking. Then she gestured toward the chair, saying, "Please sit down." Sit I did, for you **MUST** follow the rules.

I was shaking like a bamboo leaf in a tsunami. That chair had a mind of its own. It knew where it was going and it didn't want any guidance from the aide. It started to move, wheels rumbling over the cold white tile floor. It went over the hump in front of the shower stall and stopped dead center over the drain. It began to speak in a gurgly voice: "Sooooap check. Shammmpooooo check. Washcloooottthhhh . . . check. Waterrrrrrr . . . onnn wiiiiith the waaaaterrrrr."

I sat there naked, shivering, waiting for the water to warm up and for the chair to shut up. The curtain closed. At last a little privacy. But was it really privacy? I was still in there with the chair. I lathered up as quickly as I could, washing my hair and whatever else I could reach before the chair had a chance to lock me in its PVC arms and keep me in rinse mode forever.

The Lesson

If you're ever in a rehabilitation situation, put off showering as long as you can. And, just in this case, **FORGET THE RULES** and definitely, yes definitely, **BEWARE OF THE CHAIR!**





A Journey to the 4th and 7th Wonders of the World

Forty years ago, when I was but a mere stripling, my wife, Suzy, and I hiked to the top of the Matterhorn. We loved this adventure so much that we promised ourselves to climb at least one mountain peak every year for the rest of our lives.

Fast forward 50 years to last year when I turned 90. We decided to celebrate by returning to Africa. Although Suzy declined, my daughter Annie joined me. Wait til you read about what happened on our great African adventure. You'll hardly believe it.

We had two reasons for deciding on Africa. The first was to climb Table Top Mountain, the 7th wonder of the natural world. The second was to dive in a cage in open water off "Shark Alley" in South Africa and see the great white sharks. Our motto: Show the younger generation that life is worth living. The old "geezers" are hardly "over the hill." We're just looking for other hills to climb!

Last May, after a 22-hour flight from Chicago, we ultimately arrived at the Victoria Falls Hotel in Zimbabwe. This served as our "base camp" of sorts and was well located for our subsequent side trips. From there we proceeded on our first day to visit the 4th wonder, and largest waterfall, of the world, Victoria Falls.

Next day, next stop, the zip line, 250 meters from Zambia to Zimbabwe. Can you believe I was the first 90-year-old to do this? I even received a certificate of confirmation to prove it! After lunch back at the hotel, we went for an elephant ride. Dinner of wild game was accompanied by a native drum show and dancing.

The following day's early start led to Botswana and the Chobe National Park, one of the world's best wildlife parks, home to elephants, cape buffalos, hippos, antelopes, lions, zebras, and numerous bird species. After experiencing an elephant charge when we drew too close, we returned to our hotel in Livingston.

A most exciting day dawned next when we prepared for our cage dive to see crocodiles. These fearlessly approached our cage and even placed their claws through the bars to grab the food that was offered.

The next day we flew to Cape Town and registered in our hotel. From there we embarked to Gansbaai, where we prepared for shark diving near Dyer Island in Shark Alley. Unfortunately, no sharks appeared because they'd been driven away by marauding Orca killer whales.

The following day was devoted to climbing Table Top Mountain, 3558 feet high and the 7th wonder of the natural world. Our route

was daunting, to say the least. We thankfully accomplished our mission, however.

The next day featured a trip to the Cape of Good Hope, where we visited a colony of penguins that breed only in Africa. During our tour we also saw baboons, elans, kadus, antelopes, and ostriches.

On our last day we visited Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned.

Returning then to Cape Town, we soon left and finally flew back home.

Africa! Sharks! Crocodiles! Waterfalls! Wild animals! Orca killer whales! And best of all, mission accomplished at the summit of Table Top Mountain. What a trip, even though we missed seeing the great white sharks. Maybe next year!





A Dream Tree-Top Tall

"This is going to be the best day of my entire life," announced nine-year-old Olivia between mouthfuls of Cheerios. Like most of us, Olivia has a favorite animal. But no dogs, cats, or pandas will do. Olivia thinks big and out of the ordinary. She had gotten into the animals about three years earlier after seeing a special on TV about the African savannah. Since then she has acquired several stuffed animals, two ceramic animals, one carved wooden animal, and a large poster which hangs opposite her bed. The problem with African animals is that a kid in West Michigan has little chance to actually see any of them. That was about to change. Today Olivia and her mother were driving to the Binder Park Zoo.

After breakfast, Olivia paced around the front porch waiting for her mother to get ready. "How long will it take to get there?" she asked for the umpteenth time. The response was vague. Once they got on the highway, Olivia was full of fidgety energy.

Finally the parking lot appeared and the two of them got out of the car, put on sunscreen - which took an enormous amount of time in Olivia's opinion - and walked to the zoo entrance.

Once inside, her mom asked, "What do you want to do first?" Olivia was stunned by the

question. After all, they had come for only one reason, so how could there be any doubt or hesitation?

Following the signs, the two of them set out for the savannah area where many kinds of animals roam freely. They passed the Prairie Dogs, barely worthy of a glance in Olivia's opinion. She went skipping ahead and was reprimanded for moving out of her mother's sight. Then off to the left, through an opening, and there it was: a magnificent giraffe. It was moving rapidly, almost at a trot. Olivia gasped, then lapsed into silence before grabbing her mother's hand and pulling her forward in the direction the giraffe was moving. It took them a minute of two, but they came upon the giraffe feeding station. A few other people were already there along with three giraffes, one a youngster.

The animal Olivia had first seen now approached. Olivia was enraptured, enchanted, Beaming, and completely certain that her dream had come true.

Suddenly, her mother walked up beside her carrying a number of very large leaves of lettuce which the zoo allows visitors to feed to the giraffes. Olivia had been totally unaware that would be an option. She approached the railing and watched as others fed some of the giraffes. The sight of their



Illustration by Jan Gebben

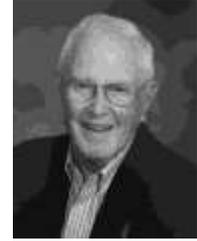
very long gray tongues left her amazed and amused. TV shows just didn't do justice to those tongues.

Olivia turned to her mother who was tearing the lettuce into smaller pieces and asked in hushed tones if she could actually feed the giraffes. With a smile and a nod, her mom handed her a piece of lettuce and led her to an open spot on the railing near the animal Olivia had first seen. As if by magic, the giraffe immediately moved over to where Olivia was standing, extended her head over the railing, and looked right at Olivia as she opened her mouth and extended that tongue. Carefully, Olivia held out the lettuce, and the giraffe immediately curled her tongue around it and began to chew.

Olivia repeated the process, taking lettuce from her mother over and over. When they

ran out, Olivia looked with pleading eyes to her mom, who pulled another bill from her wallet and bought another handful of leaves. This time she let Olivia divide them, so she could take photos with her phone. Olivia realized as she fed the giraffe that her cheeks were beginning to ache because she had maintained her huge smile for such a long time. Once the lettuce was gone, mother and daughter simply stood and watched all the giraffes as others fed them. They were as calm, graceful, and unique as Olivia had imagined.

As they walked away, they looked at many of the other animals, but Olivia convinced her mother to make one more trip back to the feeding station before they left. She had to be sure this was all etched in her memory forever and ever. After all, this was the best day of her entire life.



Windmill Pendant Lights

This article is about six windmill pendant light fixtures that for many years hung in the Warm Friend Hotel's dining area, known as the Grill Room. Constructed in 1925 by the Holland Furnace Company, the hotel building has had many owners. Now owned by Resthaven, Warm Friend is a residence for seniors.

From 1973 to 1987, a section of the main floor was occupied as a condominium owned by the Holland Area Chamber of Commerce. The décor of the Chamber offices included the light fixtures. Upon the building's sale to Resthaven in 1987, the Chamber removed the lights and put them in storage for future placement in their new offices on East Eighth Street. Having hung in the Grill Room for 62 years, the brightness and overall color of the lights had diminished. The stained glass and copper finish needed work to restore the lights to their original luster.

Research began on how to treat the copper channels, top, and stained-glass inserts. After a trial of removing the top, the stained-glass portion was submerged in a tub mix of

water and light chemicals. With the removal of most residue and with a clear water rinse, a bright light fixture emerged. Once this was completed, a seal coat was applied to the top and stained glass.



From 1987 through 2018 the windmill pendant fixtures were at the Chamber of Commerce. When the Chamber decided to do remodeling, the lights were given to the following organizations for display in their offices: Holland City Hall (Mayor's Office), Holland Convention Bureau, Tulip Time Inc, Warm Friend

(Resthaven), and Holland Museum.

Adding up their time at the Warm Friend (62 years, 1925-1987) and at the Holland Chamber of Commerce (31 years, 1987-2018), the lights have been in use for a total of 93 years.

Note: Research continues to find the manufacturer!



To Be or Not to Be

We make a quick stop for gas and film, eat supper with my parents in their Overisel home, not far from Holland, Michigan, then travel I-94 to the Detroit airport. We are looking forward to four weeks in Germany, spending precious time with my husband Al's family, especially his parents and siblings, in the town of Nordhorn, Kreis (county) Bentheim.

It is midnight, Friday, June 7, 1974, as we board the Marco Polo, our KLM DC-8 plane in Detroit, chartered by the Dutch Immigrant Society. The pilot announces we should be arriving at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam in seven and a half hours. Meals will soon be served. Ten minutes later the pilot is again on the air with a new message: "We will be making an emergency landing at John F. Kennedy airport. The plane is losing hydraulic fluid." A following message gives the cause of the problem as hydraulic failure. Apparently, a hydraulic valve is at fault.

Since the plane is totally fueled for the transatlantic flight, the plan is to drop the fuel to minimize fire danger. We circle New York for more than two hours. Over land, over sea, over land, over sea, around and around. Inside the plane concern grows. We are all required to stay seated and Belted in. No one, including children, is allowed to fall asleep. Dark and past midnight, this is hard to enforce.

I sit with my two boys in our assigned seats on the right side of the plane. My husband sits across the aisle from us. I try to keep the boys occupied and calm, realizing the

seriousness of the situation by the reaction of the stewardesses, who walk up and down the aisles in their blue uniforms and hats and winged KLM pins, checking that all rules are strictly followed.

The two older women sitting behind me are no help as they whine and weep loudly, "I don't want to die yet. I'm not ready to die." I try to keep the boys from hearing the doomsday chatter. Imagine my surprise when the ladies interpret my "try to be calm" behavior with the words, "Some people just have no respect for life!"

The fuel is finally emptied over the New York landscape. The plane begins its descent. My husband gives me a look from across the aisle, which my mind still replays. Without words he plainly says, "This may be the end. If it is, we've had a good life together. I love you." A minister on board, at the request of some of the passengers, prays aloud as the plane approaches the airport.

Below us the runway is lit with the blazing red lights of several fire trucks, ambulances, police cars, all with engines running, waiting for whatever is about to happen. White foam sprayed over the runway in case the plane catches fire gives a wintry effect.

Approaching the landing, we hear a loud grinding noise and experience a shaking thud. Silent passengers suddenly explode with a rejoicing shout. The locked wheels have come down. The minister sends up a prayer of thanksgiving for the safe keeping of all. The pilot manually handles the

brakes, since the hydraulic assist is not working, allowing the plane to taxi a long distance to slow down on its own. A truck then tows our plane up to the terminal.

It is 2:30 a.m. The airport, already closed for the night, is reopened. Sandwiches and coffee are served. Children try to sleep on the pillow backs of seats, but few are successful.

A spare part is located. The plane is repaired. It is unbelievable to us that we are on our way again, on the same plane, at 6:00 a.m. Not every passenger rejoins us on the flight, including the two fearful women, who may never have flown again. The boys are already asleep before we ascend, with the entire trip, once, again still ahead of us.

We arrive at 6:00 p.m. Amsterdam time, six hours later than originally expected. Al's sister and brother-in-law, who had been waiting since early morning to pick us up, took a flight across the English Channel, spending a few hours in London before returning to pick us up at Schiphol Airport. We arrive in Nordhorn approximately five hours later for the joyous reunion with Al's parents and family, tired but happy for the opportunity to visit with them once again.

Interesting note: This same plane, which began service in 1968, was still flying operations for the United Kingdom military in Afghanistan in 2009.



Illustration by Gary Bogle



Gotta Dance

Bobbie Jo Crosby made me commit the deadly sin of envy every day when she walked past our house on the other side of the street. She was on her way to Justin Study public school and not to St. Joe Catholic where my sister and I went. The Study kids taunted us Catholics with calls of “catlicker,” which was enough to inspire contempt, but there was more. Bobbie Jo held her head about as high as anyone could before looking straight up at the sky. Her profile was in perfect alignment with her straight narrow little chest. Blond curls cascaded down her ramrod back. Her supple arm circled her books without effort. Bobbie’s little feet pranced. Each foot met the ground gracefully and turned slightly outward. One, then the other. Prance, prance, prance. Roberta Jo Crosby was a ballerina, and everyone knew it. She lived in a tiny WPA house down the block close to the railroad tracks, and she was the protégé of the only divorced mother and grandmother duo in the neighborhood. Chesterfields dangled from lips of both women constantly while they somehow coaxed Bobbie’s blue-collar nose into a patrician upturn. Mrs. Crosby and her mother devoted themselves feverishly to the budding dance career of Bobbie Jo. It was their life.

Ever since my little sister had seen the movie “The Red Shoes,” she fantasized

about becoming a ballerina. Deborah was dumbstruck by the dance aura that settled around Bobbie like a thick mist whenever we saw her move down Brown Street. For me, it wasn’t the ballet or Bobbie herself. It was all that zealous attention from her mom and grandma. They made lesson appointments, created dance costumes, attended recitals. Bobbie had her own agents built into her family. My sister’s desire to learn ballet was only surpassed by my yearning to be a tap dancer. Somehow, all this dance longing was utterly lost on my own mother. She failed to notice the intensity with which we twirled and knocked elaborately on our kitchen linoleum with our frenzied feet and wildly swinging bodies. I was crazed and afflicted by every musical I saw. Old movies with Ruby Keeler germinated in my nervous system giving birth to feet that wanted to move, glide and make noise. Later in the fifties, Ann Miller, Mitzy Gaynor, Donald O’Connor, Gene Kelly, and anyone else who tapped across the screen set me on fire with rapture. Hard-soled school shoes became faux tappers. I tried fancy footwork on marble steps after movies. When we played dress-up in our back yard, I always took on the role of movie star dancer. In my dreams I would hoof it off to Hollywood and become famous dancing in every hit musical. People would marvel at my talent. My abilities

would be the subject of tap dance documentaries. Ecstasy.

Years passed. Childhood dreams diffused. Marriages were made and broken. Children were born, and moves to other cities separated my sister and me as we settled into our grown-up lives. The remnants of playful and sparkling reveries gave way to practicality and reality. Well, almost, but not entirely. About 30 years ago I became seized by the notion that I could still learn to tap dance. I was in my early 40s when I called up Miss Margy's dance studio and spoke to Miss Margy herself. "Well, of course, we take adults. It isn't a common occurrence, but we can do it." Miss Margy sounded safe even though it took several dialing efforts before I got up enough nerve to actually speak. "You will need to wear tights and a leotard. Also, you will need to buy tap shoes with a two-inch heel." I felt dizzy with anxiety. "I suggest you go to Dancer's Corner. They'll help you out." I was delirious.

On the day of my appointed lesson, I dressed and put on my new tap shoes, although I have no recollection of driving there with them on my feet. Why would I do that? When I arrived at Miss Margy's Studio, I had a trench coat on over my leotard, and only when asked to remove it did I become aware that the purple outfit left over from my yoga years might look ridiculous for this occasion. When a dozen or so little girls dressed in pink tutus all stared up at my body as I took off my coat, all I could think of was black, stupid. Why didn't you wear black? I already began to

feel dance challenged, imagined potential quickly draining from me.

Miss Margy said, "This is Miss Karen, and she will be your personal instructor." Miss Karen looked to be the spunky Kewpie-Doll type. I not only towered over the five-year-olds in fluffy costumes, but I felt as if I were positioned on stilts with metal plates nailed into the bottoms while standing next to petite, capable Miss Karen. "We'll start out with some basic shuffle steps," Miss Karen said as she put on a tap dance record in the studio room. "You just do what I do."

I did what she did. I shuffle stepped. I shuffle toed. I got into combinations. I shuffle ball changed. I shuffled hop toe. My main problem seemed to be that I could only tap with the right side of my body. My left side remained stubborn as a resistant child. "Oh, don't worry about it. You're doing really well. You've got rhythm!" In fact, Miss Karen thought I was doing so well that we went through every tap step ever thought up or executed by any dance master. Shuffle switch toe. Traveling steps across the floor. Flap heel. Flap ball change. I was joyous with sweat.

For a moment I caught a glimpse of myself in the studio mirror. I looked like a moving eggplant. Bare arms were flailing about or just hanging at my sides looking like salamis encased in skin. At that moment I saw the image of a skilled dancer fading from my future and thought I looked better suited to be hanging in a deli. My feet continued to hammer unabated against the hardwood. I knew that normally I wouldn't agree to look like this even at gunpoint. "Just go home

and practice everything you've learned, and I'll see you next week," said Miss Karen as she ushered me out of the studio when our session had finished.

After a few days I went down into our basement. The snappy clicking of my shoes on concrete made me giddy. But, hard as I tried, absolutely no steps would come to me. All of me was paralyzed, and my mind couldn't recall anything I had learned. I had tap amnesia. Now, even the right side of my body didn't know what to do. I took off my

shoes and put them back in the box where they have been ever since. Sometimes I dig to the back of the upstairs closet where lost goods are kept and retrieve the mauve box with black lettering. The word SELVA, S-E-L-V-A, is spelled out with each letter surrounded by a circle. There is the silhouette of a figure toe standing on the V. Size seven B and \$29.00 are stamped on the box's end. The black shoes inside are chunky and shiny, like new babies. Twins. I caress them while my mind drifts into the outer world of dance.

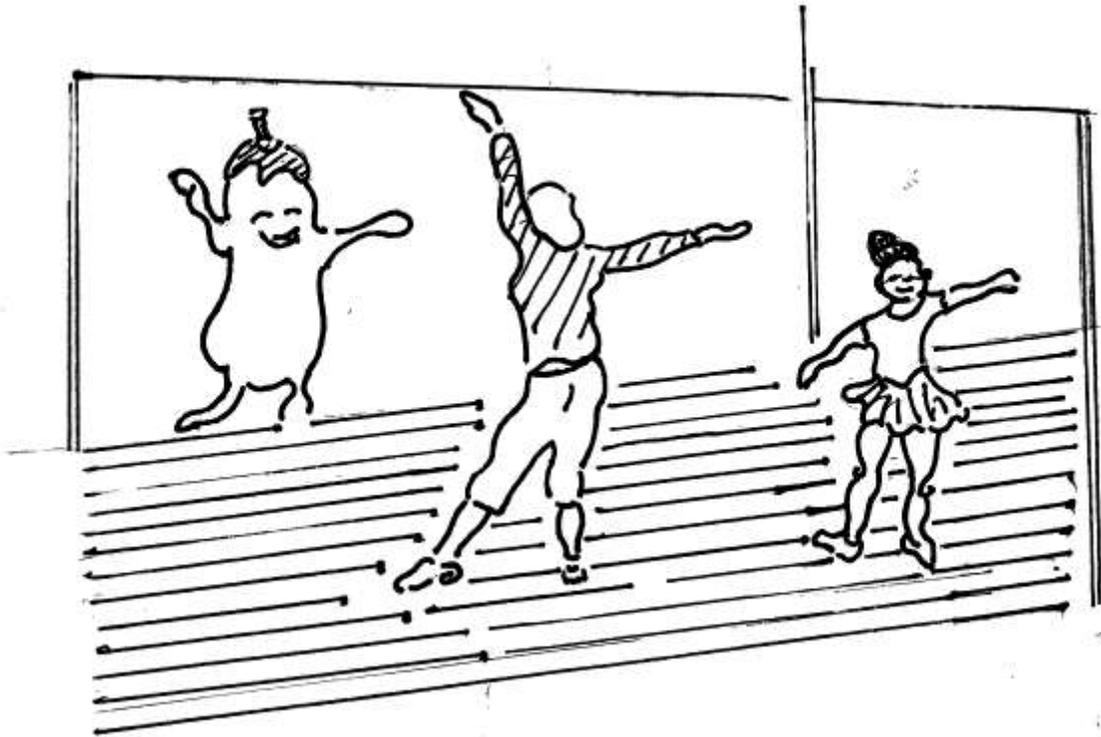


Illustration by Dian Taylor



A Trip on a Magic Carpet

This memoir is about our first trip to France about 25 years ago –
It was such a success we went back almost every year ‘til 2015 !

After a year of exercising our brains studying French at Lake Michigan College, it was natural to combine that with our other activity --- cycling. So we planned a bicycling trip in France.

There are lots of bike tours in France. It’s a carefree way to go. But we wanted to have our own adventure, so we planned our own tour: a “Tour for Two” as we once said to an Englishwoman we encountered, who replied, “Right! Jolly well said”. There’s a ton of published material about France. Planning a tour while sipping wine in front of the fireplace is a great way to spend long winter evenings.

Since we would be carrying everything on the bikes, tough decisions had to be made to keep the total load down to about twenty pounds per bike. Thank goodness for miracle fabrics and tubes of Woolite soap. New tires and tubes were fitted; the bikes were cleaned and lubricated, then packed in used shipping cartons obtained from the local bike shop.

At O’Hare airport, American Airlines accepted our boxed bikes as luggage. Bikes flew free on international flights. Upon landing at Orly airport in Paris, we reassembled the bikes, loaded on the panniers, tucked our Michelin road maps and Green Guides in the handlebar bags, and were on our way. There was a brief moment of panic, because Orly is a bustling place and we were completely on our own,

thousands of miles from home, with sounds of a different language all around us. But this feeling melted away as soon as we were on our bikes and pushing the pedals. After a few miles of traffic, we even found a bike path and were soon immersed in rural France.

Our tour took us south to the Loire River valley, with a stop on the way to see the great Gothic cathedral at Chartres. We stayed off main roads, using the back roads instead. These narrow country lanes are paved and clearly shown on Michelin maps. To navigate we used an odometer calibrated in kilometers, kilometer marker stones, and, at intersections, arrow signs to the next town. Also useful were the elegant, stone water towers, which the French call “water castles” (chateau d’eau). These are marked on the maps, and often we had several of them in sight at one time. The Michelin maps show lots of details for confirming that you are where you think you are, such as the religious crosses often located at rural intersections. With all this help we were never lost, but sometimes we stopped and asked anyway, just to try our French.

We didn’t see nearly the number of bicyclists we were expecting. There were tiny cars, motorbikes, and scooters, even though gasoline costs four times more there than in the U.S. Everyone knows and loves the bicycle, however. They call it “the little queen.” People were always curious about us. We stood out because of our helmets,

which the French don't wear. And the rearview mirror on the helmet fascinated them. When they found out that we're American, they became very friendly. The French seemed to feel kindly toward America. Someone told us it's because they watch so much American TV. They would have been disappointed to learn our lifestyle is pretty bland, compared to "Twin Peaks" and "Dallas."

We pedaled west along the Loire River, visiting the beautiful châteaux which were built for the nobility as hunting lodges and country homes in the seventeenth century. Each one seems to have some historical or scandalous story, and it's fun to ride up to them on a bike. In France, we were often cycling up to places dating back five hundred years and more. The Middle Ages don't seem so long ago now. One morning we heard a whirring sound and looked over our shoulder to see a group of large, white swans flying majestically at low level along the river. We were in the midst of a storybook scene.

Every town has a tourism office. We looked for one each afternoon and used it to make a reservation at a small hotel or a bed-and-breakfast in the next town we could reach by late afternoon. The little, family-run hotels, usually with a dining room, are charming. We think the B and Bs are even better because when we stay we can become a part of the lifestyle of the region. Many of our memorable experiences and interesting encounters have happened as a part of staying at little hotels and B and Bs.

Every little village has a bread bakery (boulangerie). A fresh-baked baguette or pain-au-chocolat soon became our standard mid-morning snack. Most of France shuts down for two hours at noon to enjoy a major, leisurely repast, but we didn't dare do that for fear we wouldn't be able to get back on the bikes. We usually looked for a café

where we could enjoy a light lunch and a half-carafe of wine and then have a look around town.

Eventually we came to the Atlantic coast at St. Nazaire where we stood at the site of a famous British commando raid during WWII. The shipyards, drydocks, and German submarine pens --- now used by fishing boats-- are still there.

Our plan was to follow the coast north to the province of Brittany at the northwest corner of France, and then to visit the home of a French student we had met at Lake Michigan College. Along the way we refueled on memorable seafood dinners, hiked among formations of huge stone blocks cut and moved by some prehistoric cult into formations which only made sense to them, and cycled through resort towns stretched along the sandy beaches.

Eventually we arrived at our friend's home in a region of small, shoreside towns whose economy depends partly on fishing, partly on commerce and farming, and partly on tourism. It seemed a lot like western Michigan. However, we soon learned their cider is different from ours! We explored the area on day rides and passed the evenings getting to know our friend's friends. We have a vivid memory of attending a late-night festival at the base of a towering stone lighthouse whose rotating light, reflecting on the swirling fog, cast a yellow glow on the scene below. The festival had something to do with commemorating the loss of a boat and its crew seventy years ago that were trying to rescue a fishing boat in a storm. There was a huge bonfire and costumed dancers were performing to traditional music played on the Breton bagpipe. Lots of strong cider too. Pure magic.

Time flies by when you cram a lot into it, and soon we had to load the bikes and

ourselves on a train back to Paris. It's fun to ride a train that goes 160 miles an hour. We did save a couple of days at the end to begin to know Paris. We left our bikes at the creaky-floor hotel and used the really good subway system to get around --- even small-town Michiganders can go anywhere without getting lost. Paris doesn't have the laid-back style of the small towns, but still a cheery "bonjour" and a smile can accomplish small miracles. When it was time to go, we discovered the shuttle bus from mid-town Paris to Orly would accept our bikes, so it was a quick trip. There was time to buy some French music cassettes and magazines in the airport shops and then suddenly we were flying home.

Before the landing gear touched down at O'Hare, we agreed that we'd take the bikes back to France again. A bicycle is a magic carpet for learning "up close and personal" about a region and the people who live there. Not only is it a handy, efficient way to get around, but people don't view the cyclist as a threat. They tend to be open, helpful, and even generous. So, if you have a dream cycling trip you'd like to take some day, just go ahead and do it. With some planning beforehand, it will turn out to be every bit as good as your dream. We did, and it was, and so can you.

"Bonne route."



Illustration by Susan Miller

Memories of 9-11



On September 11, 2001, my husband, Peter, and I were in Germany visiting our friends Juergen and Siegrun. We came back from playing golf and Peter and I went upstairs to freshen up. When we came down, Juergen called us quite urgently to come to the TV, and we saw with horror a mass of dark smoke pouring from the World Trade Center towers. We stared at the screen in disbelief and could not fathom what had happened. When it all sank in, tears were running down my face and I began sobbing uncontrollably. The day had transformed from having a good time filled with lots of laughter to very dark hours, watching the horrific events taking place in New York City. When Juergen had switched on the TV, he thought at first that he was seeing a scene in a science-fiction movie. It was hard to believe this was reality.

When we lived in New Jersey, before moving to Holland, we took full advantages of all the wonderful things New York City had to offer. We always took visiting relatives and friends there for sightseeing. Quite often we went up to the Observation Deck of the World Trade Center, as we had done when Juergen and Siegrun visited us. Thus the horror for them was also intense and real. Over the next few days it was established that Islamic extremists had organized these attacks.

A week later, getting ready for our flight back home, I was standing right in the middle of the Departure Hall of Frankfurt airport, to avoid the hustle and bustle of the people checking in and walking to the gates.

I was waiting for Peter to join me after returning our rental car. Probably as a reaction to what had happened at the World Trade Center, there were frequent announcements over the loudspeaker system, reminding travelers not to leave any luggage unattended.

A few yards away from me I saw a Muslim with a lot of luggage, kneeling and bowing over his prayer mat. I had seen that before during our travels and was not at all concerned. But then he got up, raising his arms and praising Allah with a loud voice. Right after that he walked away, leaving his luggage behind. He was so fast that soon I could not see him anymore. I grew worried when he did not come back for a while. I was looking around for the airport police; I had seen them before, walking up and down, but now I did not see any of them. I could not go to an airline counter since our luggage was too heavy for me to carry and, of course, I could not leave it unattended. I worried myself into a frenzy thinking that there might be explosives in his luggage that could go off at any time. I was so beside myself that I was about to risk leaving my luggage behind to run over to one of the airline counters and ask someone to warn the authorities. But then—what a relief—the man came back with a sandwich in his hand!

I had always been convinced that I was not prejudiced. But this incident showed me how easily we can make judgments about people and categorize them by their looks, their religions, or their nationalities.

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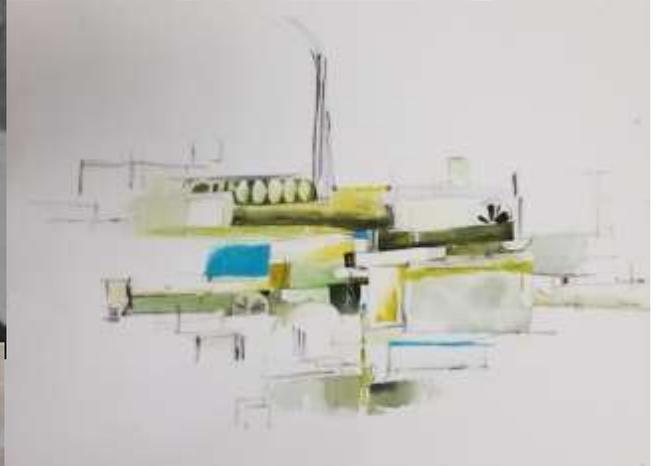
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