The Agora

Volume 4, 2015

PLATO

Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization

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Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization

PLATO Vision

PLATO, the Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization, promotes opportunities for intellectual and cultural enrichment for the senior community.

PLATO Mission

PLATO is a member-directed participatory learning-in-retirement organization committed to develop and provide learning, teaching, and social opportunities for its members in association with the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and to provide scholarship support for returning adult students or such other charitable purposes as the Board of Directors may determine.

The Agora Mission

The Agora is a literary journal of arts and ideas created to share the artistic and scholarly talents of PLATO members in a periodic volume of original works of fiction, nonfiction (including scholarly articles), poetry, and the visual arts. Of particular interest is material that has a distinct point of view and is inspired by broadly humanistic values and the liberal arts tradition. *The Agora* is a juried publication created in cooperation with the University of Wisconsin–Madison Division of Continuing Studies.

Acknowledgments

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Dedication

The Agora Volume 4 is dedicated to Professor Barry Orton, soon-to-retire PLATO Liaison for UW-Madison's Division of Continuing Studies. For the past five years Barry has been comrade, advisor, guide, ever-willing foot soldier, and now fellow member of PLATO. We have become a better organization because of his tireless advocacy, and we acknowledge and pay tribute to him for the indelible mark he has made on PLATO.

We also dedicate this volume to the authors and artists who contributed their creative work, and to all their fellow PLATO members whose support makes this literary magazine possible.

Sponsors

We are grateful for the support of PLATO members through individual donations and participation in the Fall 2014 Agora Arts Café, and the generous support of our community sponsors.

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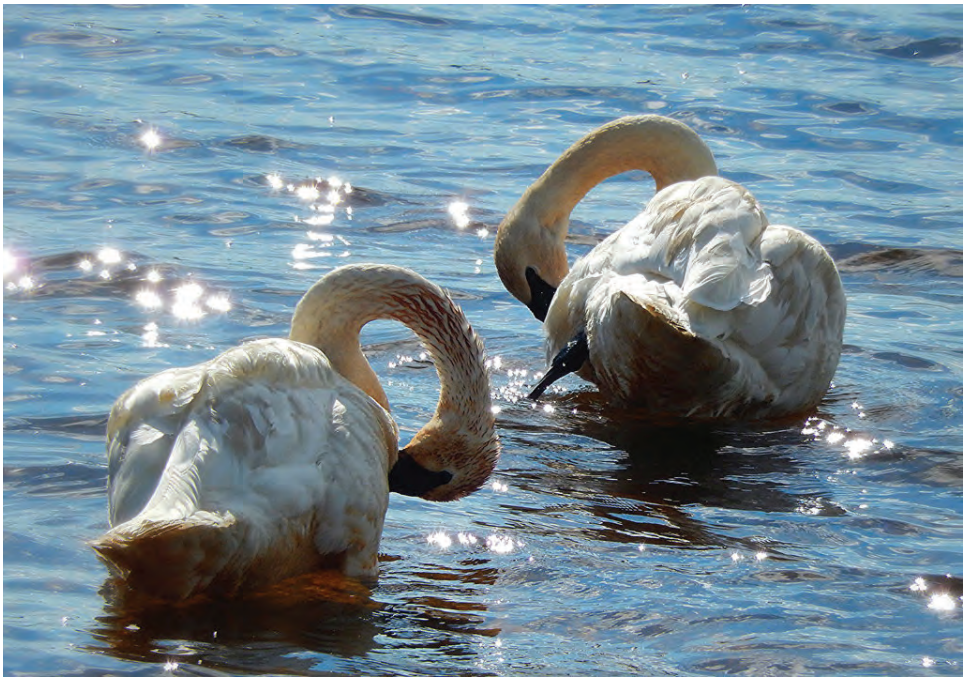

Trumpeter Swans Grooming, by Shelley Selle

A Conversation

by Janet Hays

As they walked along the wall,
the father said, “do you think we could build one better than this?”

The son said, “yes, I think we can.”
“But we will have to start yesterday.”

“Why yesterday?” said the father who was noticing some of the stones making this wall were crumbling or broken.

“Because some of our dreams have been broken too, and if we start earlier than today, our stories can be whole and perfect and complete,”
said the son.

“But only if we are very careful and use perfect judgment in our stone selection,” the son went on.

“Only if we make no mistakes,” the father added.

“Well then, since we can’t be perfect, meet me tomorrow,
and we will build a better wall using yesterday’s mended stones.”

Islands and Pies

by Dan Baker

I enjoy something of a charmed life. I say this because I have the good fortune to live a part of that life on an island. To become enchanted by an island is to open yourself to the unexpected, and sometimes to the uninvited. It's entirely possible that the preoccupations of your predictable, landlocked life will fall away, compelling you to think about who and what you are, and, what may have gone wrong.

My island, Washington Island, pop. 650, floats in Lake Michigan, six nautical miles or a half hour ferry ride off the northeasternmost point of Door County, Wisconsin. I first visited the Island almost 30 years ago. One thing led to another and I found myself building a little cottage, performing in the community theater, and writing clever little ditties for the island newspaper. Somewhere en route to obsession I fell unabashedly in love with the island and its inhabitants. At least it feels like love. My heart begins to beat a bit faster as I pass Bea's Ho-Made Pies and wind my way towards the Northport Ferry. Waiting to board I'm atwitter with a suitor's anticipation. By the time we cross Deaths Door I've slipped the grip of detached irony. Rolling off the other side I'm a decidedly nicer person and I think the same to be true of others. I begin to imagine that I have as yet unexplored creative potential and that perhaps my singing isn't all that bad. I'm sometimes taken with a curious, inexplicable desire to bring my Island friends pies.

Having to adhere to a ferry schedule to get from the mainland to my Island life frequently illuminates one of my long standing foibles. I'm always about 10 minutes late. In the remainder of my life this idiosyncrasy is simply rude and annoying to those who know me but it doesn't have much impact on me. I don't know why I've been unable to change this character flaw. You'd think that if I can consistently be 10 minutes late that I could make some kind of fundamental adjustment and be on time. I tried setting my watch ahead by 10 minutes, but I'm no dummy; I know when I'm being tricked. This little peculiarity often results in my missing the scheduled ferry I'd hoped to catch. When this occurs I will often pass the time till the next boat at Aunt Bea's Ho-Made Pies in Gills Rock. I like to look at pies in the same way that others like looking at Scandinavian knick-knacks. Of course I enjoy eating pies as well, but I'm usually happy just to look. I should add that I don't abide by cream pies, nor do I care to a la mode my pie. I also enjoy giving people pies. It seems a very civilized gesture. Nice, but not too much. I've given people pies for no reason whatsoever and for a host of complex reasons that were not

always clear to me at the time of the pie purchase. Recently I got to thinking about the uses I've found for a quality pie. I thought that sharing my evolving taxonomy of delicious gift pies might inspire others to think creatively about the functional uses they might have for a tasty pie.

The Everyday Pies

The Spouse Pie is intended to affirm to your sweetheart that despite the passage of years, and the rigors of parenthood, you haven't grown cavalier about her fondness for a good pie. It says in a way that mere words cannot, "I love you so I brought you a pie." Sticking with the time-tested traditional seems to make your point here. A basic apple, cherry, or a blueberry communicates that your eye will not be turned by some new tasty delicacy of the moment.

The Overture of Friendship Pie is a guileless pie intended only to communicate to its recipient that "gosh darn it, I like you so I brought you a pie." The Door County fruit medley is a good choice here. The friendship pie is an exploratory pie in that the purchaser is seeking to test the friendship waters. It's of course possible you'll learn that despite your pie level regard for the recipient, you're only a turnover level friendship prospect in his or her eyes. You learned this for less than $10.00.

The Appreciation Pie is a perfunctory pie that says a tasty "thank you" to whomever may have done you a good turn. Perhaps your neighbor fed your pets while you were away or possibly your hairstylist, through patient trial and error, discovered a product that will finally beat your pesky cowlick into submission.

The Apology Pie is a hat-in-hand, humble pie. It seeks to make amends for minor slights, gaffs, and boners. It makes no claim to righting truly egregious transgressions.

The Mother-In-Law Pie is a very fine pie, indeed. Aside from reminding Mom that her child chose well, you're very likely to be served up a piece of this pie. You should avoid pies like rhubarb or green apple that may contain even the faint hint of bitterness.

The Romantic Interest Pie. As a married man and a relative latecomer to the appreciation of pies, I have little experience with these pies. A strawberry/peach would, however, seem quite appropriate. I'm betting that a high end pie will prove a more successful tactic with today's woman than a slice of cyber confection dished up in a chatroom. You should, however, resist the temptation to foist this ploy on any of the lovely Island waitresses. They've seen it all before and you're clumsy effort is destined to end in embarrassment.

Special Interest Pies

The General Suck-Up Pie is an unabashedly guileful and manipulative pie purchased with the express purpose of endearing you to its recipient and gaining future favor. It's not a pie purchase to be proud of, yet, it may be a strategically wise pie. Being an obsequious pie, you should attempt to discern the preferred pie of the recipient while also offering to exchange it if your choice proves not to their liking.

The Hiring Pie is a sealing the deal, goodwill pie. It's a straightforward pie that signals your appreciation for the tradesman's skill and effort expended on your behalf. The hiring pie differs appreciably from the general suck-up pie, though it may well increase the possibility of your project receiving some attention from the recipient within the next six to nine months.

The Firing Pie is a rather cowardly, conflict avoidant pie. It's purchased when there is a need to

discontinue the services of the aforementioned tradesman who, though skilled, has for more than a year now chosen not to lavish his talent on your project. It's most effective when delivered with fork-in-hand along with a cheerful greeting; "I brought you a pie—here, try a big bite." When the recipient's eyes glaze over with pleasure, you quickly terminate the relationship while indicating your need to have been elsewhere 15 minutes ago.

The Darker Pies

The Spousal Redemption Pie is a sniveling pie, born of shame. It's purchased in the vain hope that it might prompt your spouse to recall something remotely redeeming about you. Possibly, for the umpteenth time, you've remained on the Island well past the time you'd promised to return home to shoulder your share of domestic responsibility. Or, perhaps your impulsive purchase of that vintage little skiff has come to light. You've exhausted all of your spousal credits and long ago run out of plausible verbiage. This pie will, of course, be rejected as way too little, way too late. It'll be recognized as the shamefully manipulative pie that it is. Buying your favorite pie with the foreknowledge that your spouse will reject your offering is, of course, beneath contempt and should cause you to immediately purchase the following pie.

The Personal Penance Pie is a pie purchased in the aftermath of a particularly shabby bit of personal behavior. It's a pie purchase intended to provide you the sound emotional thrashing you so richly deserve. The pie should be your favorite variety, fresh from the oven. After acquiring the still-warm pie you should allow the delicious aroma to waft into your nostrils while reminding yourself that you're not worthy of such a pie. That pie must then either be given as a gift, anonymously, to someone you particularly dislike or left in the back seat of your car to spoil.

Some of my favorite authors return again and again to islands. British writer Lawrence Durell coined the term "islomania" for that inexplicable and peculiar feeling that so often seizes his characters when they approach islands. The novelist John Fowles knows a thing or two about the power of islands. He returns time and again to islands as the settings for his stories. He does so, he contends, because "Islands are special places where the unconscious grows conscious, where possibilities mushroom, where imagination never sleeps." I share his view. In what other world would this delicately flakey taxonomy of gift pies seem so reasonable a subject for lengthy explication?

This Part of You I Give Away

by George Faunce

This part of you I give away without hesitation. No final words, no ritual.
No more remembering! I twist, then paw at the lid, until it gives.
Ashes spill haphazardly as I swing,
wielding the cylinder wildly—***like a baseball bat***.
With all the rage of wasted love, I swing,
a fumbling batter aiming for the stands.

(A crude, unnecessary image, I know; unkind to both of us, tasteless and mean.
But…there it is…That is me.)

I watch
as your ashes settle soft like summer pollen, on the grass;
alone on the edge of this silent field, your urn held rigid in my hand.
This field you used to walk with me each day
when we were young;
when we were loved each by the other, all those…*eons*…ago.
You needed that, I guess. To get away; to separate your worth
from what our union had become: residue both caustic and spare,
siphoned like these ashes from the real, the warm,
the *once-living-thing*…that was our love.
Accepting, with each halted breath, that you have won release from me at last.
Release from all I had become; from all the times, and every little way
I let you down.
Release from me…specifically, last week? And maybe principally me,
all those years before? Right up to the moment when they rushed to find you,
frantically, *so hurriedly* they swarmed upon you lying there. Sirens excoriating,
lights pulsating like rapid heartbeats,
faces masked, heads bowed, hands incessantly at work.

In a sterile room somehow *less* repressive than our home. (Somehow still less barren than my heart.)

Then, finally, they brought you out again and cautioned I should sit with you,
but *now*, urgently; and only for the briefest time. So clumsily
you reached across the sheets to grab my hand,
on that ugly, white, wired bed; in
that garish green light, the final evening
of your life…And you whispered,
*"Please, hon, hold me now, won't you?...**just that***…hon, please?...hold me…?"

AND I DIDN'T.

I *didn't.* I wanted to, but I couldn't...not yet…
I needed time to rise above my hurt; to overcome my anger; and my sulking,
and my *self.*
But then you died. Simply, softly, quietly…you died,
even as I sat there, my back to you, needing just a single moment more,
before I dared to turn around
and hold you in my arms.

Disappearing Windows

by Norman Leer

A gray morning rises from the snow. The sky is opaque, covered with ice. Even as the light expands, snow and sky are indistinguishable. Beneath the snow are rows of fallow fields. The rows are almost indistinct, a thin transparent shawl to hold the ground in place. A still dark farmhouse like a grazing horse rises in the window and is gone. And then an empty roadway and a crossing light, the two orbs of red for one thin moment flashing like pieces of candy sliding past the window.

I am 14 years old, riding on the B&O Columbian, an all-coach streamliner (my father doesn't want to pay for sleeper tickets, and I'm so fascinated by the landscape and the train that I probably wouldn't sleep anyway). I'm on my way to Chicago, coming home for the Christmas holidays from boarding school outside Philadelphia. We are crossing the Indiana farmland. In a few hours, my father will meet me at the station with a warm hug. He will look somewhat formal in his business hat. We will go to his office, where I will do errands for him and wait out the day, until he takes me to my aunt's house in Albany Park, where I will spend the holidays. Because of his divorce, he has no place to put me. He lives in a small rooming house on the South Side, and is shacked up with his girlfriend, who will soon become my stepmother.

Earlier the same night, we cross the Appalachians—mountains bent like lonely men, wooden houses tilting on the edge, fascinating disappearing names like Harper's Ferry, Martinsburg, Cumberland. The murky textures of these mountains, the rivers curving like dreams, the ancient stations wailing past like long freight trains in the other direction, will stay with me for years, turn up in poems, the unclear photographs of memory. Trains fascinated me, not as smoky drab machines but as the hope between realities, the open-ended nighttime moaning of the blues and bare-voiced ballads I already loved.

Then there is Pittsburgh, after other ballad names like McKeesport and Connellsville. It is somewhere near midnight. The lights squinting in the slipping darkness are the numbers on a clock. They too disappear. The steel mills billow blurring bursts of black and red, perhaps my father's patriarchal massiveness, perhaps the buried anger inside me. Silent bridges grope like hands across the river, the water seamless with splashes of lights. The names are poems: Monongahela, Allegheny. Through the window, they too disappear.

Through the years, these journeys have stayed with me, nudging like unwritten poems. I don't know if they are the longing for home, or what at least I thought was home, or the half-articulated freight-train cry I needed to make for not having one. Most likely, both. They may also evoke the opposite direction, the journey eastward. Manumit School near Philadelphia was a very liberal place, an experimental school where faculty and students together built the school, physically, from an old farm. It folded, partly because it charged parents whatever they wanted to pay, partly because it was harassed politically during the McCarthy years. Though I wanted to be home and didn't fully know this at the time, the school was the first place where I learned unconditional love, and it was where I began my artistic and political commitments. Perhaps I write about the landscapes because I want to go back there and rediscover my real roots.

But of course I can't, just as at that time I couldn't hold on to my father at the station or the imperfect home for which I always cried after the short vacations ended. On the trips back to Philadelphia, I learned to close my eyes, that if I did this long enough I could imagine the train was going backwards. It wasn't. I couldn't go backwards then, and I can't return now, except in fantasy and memory, and in writing that turns these into objects. It is only through my poems that I can reverse the train, only through my writing that I can know how this is both important and impossible.

Reflection, by Susan Young Hoffman

The Trophy

by Joanne Lee Storlie

Although the brief announcement appeared without undue embellishment on the back page of the school newspaper that brisk September day in 1965, she noticed it.

> WRITING CONTEST ANNOUNCED
>
> Students of Middletown High School are invited to submit original compositions of no more than two thousand words to Mr. Hughes in the English Department by November 30. Writings may include essays, fiction, nonfiction, and creative nonfiction. Certificates of Excellence will be given to the winner in each category and a Trophy will be given for the "Best in Show." Winner's names will be announced and prizes awarded at a school assembly on December 20.

Sylvia loved to write, and, what's more, she was not without a typical school girl's craving for a modicum of praise and attention. But this time, she wanted what she considered the right kind of attention. Tired of being seen as a "bit different" from the characteristic 12th-grader, she wanted to be noticeably unnoticeable. That is, she wouldn't mind being seen as someone who had a natural bent for writing, but she didn't want to be seen as a "gad-fly" (a term flung at her during an overheated homeroom discussion, which her social studies teacher later explained to her was what people considered Socrates to be); or a "hell-bent pursuer of causes" (a label she unintentionally earned when she offered commentary via the cafeteria suggestion box that an occasional fresh salad might be more nutritious than daily offerings of French fries, mac 'n' cheese, and corn dogs); or a "righteous bitch" (yes, she actually heard someone say that in the hallways after she suggested during a lively discussion in a Women's Studies class that religion has no place in the issue of abortion.)

So, yes, she would write something. But no, she would not write about anything in the least controversial. Rather, she would stifle her *authentic* self, summon mediocrity and write ably and enthusiastically about what other students, maybe most other students, considered interesting and noteworthy, such as why students and teachers alike were fanatical about the results of each football game even though good ole Middletown High hadn't won a regional championship in any sport for the last 10 years and the town's disappointed citizens had reacted by voting down a referendum that would have provided increased monetary support of the athletic department; or, perhaps,

the current fashions of the day—bell-bottom pants, pedal pushers, hip huggers, empire waist dresses, tie-dyed shirts, bikinis, knee socks; or what decor would be the "coolest" for the Saturday Night sock hop; or who the next prom king and queen might be. Most of all, she would not utter a word that could be considered righteous, snobbish, arrogant, controversial, debatable, or, heaven forbid, truly educational. Never again would she write a letter-to-the-editor of a popular teen magazine about the absurdity of making grade school students "practice the social graces" by forcing them to partner up with their opposite-sex classmates and dance for one miserable half-hour each week for a semester. Never again, after studying the Russian Revolution in her history class, would she write a heartfelt and passionate term paper on the merits of socialism. Never again, after encountering Darwin and his evolution theory in her world history class, would she argue vehemently in defense of its obvious truths with staid, righteous Christian classmates. And even though her propensity to take a stand on such issues had brought one positive result—an invitation to serve on the school's debate team—she, not wishing to attract further negative notice to herself, turned it down.

Although the submission deadline was still a month away, Sylvia found herself thinking about the contest every waking hour. And because some sixth sense told her that the particular topic she chose would be almost as important as keeping her comments noncontroversial, she turned down an invitation to roller skate with friends the next weekend and spent all day Saturday listing the ideas germinating in the enriched soil of her well-tended mind.

Her list included tracing the origins of the town in which their school was located, praising its natural beauty, its early settlers, its primary industries, its outstanding features. Wisely, she would make no mention of the horrendously bloody battles that were fought to wrest the territory from the indigenous peoples who had occupied it for millennia without destroying or desecrating it.

There was also the possibility of tracing the history of the Middletown High School football team's nickname, "the Middlemen." Surely there could be nothing controversial in this topic if she ignored the fact that the team's nickname blatantly excluded an entire gender from playing on the team or, even as enthusiastic supporters, boastfully telling others "We're Middlemen"—a situation that might have been avoided if an all-male school board in days gone by had selected a gender-neutral name as other more civilized school districts had done. Surely monikers like badgers, bobcats, bulldogs, broncos, cardinals, cougars, eagles, falcons, huskies, owls, and panthers would have diminished, or at least minimized, the fan's expectation of seeing nothing but testosterone-pumped, jock-strapped players on the field.

And so it went, possibility after possibility. In the end, after a flash of brilliant illumination, she settled on the subject of cars—a topic Mr. Hughes was known to be enthusiastic about, a topic he often suggested the reluctant, uninspired male students in his classroom write about. For the sake of meeting the contest's word requirement, she decided she would narrow it down to cars typically found in the Middletown High School parking lot, treasured, blemished chariots that the owners endlessly caressed, conversed about, bragged about, and outfitted with outrageous decor *ad nauseam*. They also rejoiced in equipping them with extraneous accoutrements—one of which so blatantly suggested a male body part that the principal herself, Ms.

Rosalie Connors, brandishing a sharp scissors, had deftly removed it with the precision of a skilled urologist. Ah, this topic would surely merit popular appeal.

She began the research for her composition by questioning her father who often spoke tenderly of his first beloved behemoth, a 1940 Plymouth four-door sedan, P-10 series, the back seat of which she always thought may have been the place of her conception. He didn't actually say that, but she could hardly believe that the look that glazed over his eyes when he talked about the "good old days," accompanied by the wink he gave her mother if she were in the room, could possibly be solely attributable to a chrome belt line molding that ran from the center of the car back to the deck lid, or the sealed beam headlights that delivered sixty-five percent more efficient lighting, or the all-weather air control system. Too, like most teens who were straining against irresistible sexual impulses and questioning the mores imposed by parents, church, and society, she had carefully calculated the number of days between the date of her birth and the date on her parent's marriage certificate and found the timing suspicious, if not damning.

Next, she approached the school librarian who miraculously found in storage brittle, yellowed 1950 copies of *Popular Mechanics*, *Motor Trend*, and *Hot Rod*. They covered everything anyone could possibly want to know about cars of the day.

Last, she prevailed upon the boys huddling over their treasured jalopies in the school parking lot. Feigning interest in their outdated models, she found that even with her limited knowledge of car exteriors and her complete ignorance of what lies under a hood, she could, with the right question, solicit a half-hour discourse on the most mundane subject. After several days of penetrating queries, posed with just the right amount of naiveté, and of responding to the answers she received with just the right amount of wonder, she found the boys lingering longer than necessary after the last school bell rang, hoping she would again appear to stroke their egos as they elegantly emoted on the subject most dear to their hearts.

Once her "boy and his car" testimonies were collected, she decided that rather than relate all the details she was entrusted with about each owner's revisions, she would end her piece with commentary about a *fictional* car, the likes of which was *not* in Middletown High School's parking lot, but one which would make an *ideal* addition. That she chose a 1956 Chevrolet Bel Air hard top—a make and model that Mr. Hughes was rumored to be working on at his small farm just outside of town—was purely coincidental. It would be the focal point of what she hoped would be a trophy-winning piece of literature, strictly factual, without provocative commentary. She would first praise the Bel Air's original features, then list the manipulations that any mechanically minded, exceedingly enterprising and bordering-on-genius "Prince of the Parking Lot" might utilize to transform it into a truly stunning piece of updated hardware—a veritable "Rajah of the Roadway," "Baron of the Beltway," "King of the Road."

It took her only two hours and two paragraphs to say that the Bel Air, lauded by trade magazines in the early fifties as being "revolutionary" and "entirely new through and through," received a face-lift in 1956 with a more conventional full-width grille, distinctive two-tone bodyside treatments, graceful front and rear wheel openings, a 3-speed manual, 2-speed Powerglide or 3-speed Turboglide transmission, and 195.6 inches of glamorous length. Customizing ideas

would include boring and stroking the motor; changing to two 4-barrels and a dual exhaust system, tucking and rolling the seat padding/interior, and putting in a full race cam shaft. The finishing touches? Performance tires, highly polished chrome, and two fuzzy dice hanging from the rear view mirror.

When she finally put her pen down, she couldn't help but imagine the accolades she would receive as Mr. Hughes handed her the trophy before the entire school assembly, thus putting an end to the reputation she had earned as being an irritating individual who examined too seriously, peered too closely, probed too deeply, and exposed too regularly flaws she saw in an issue, argument, or situation.

Those who won in each category as well as the person voted "Best in Show" were informed of their victory the week before the December 20 general assembly. At the same time Sylvia received the exhilarating news that her composition had been selected for the top prize, Mr. Hughes asked her to come to his office the next day.

She arrived, flushed with happiness at being chosen for this highest of honors, expecting to hear complimentary things about the topic she had chosen and the way she had portrayed as an Art—Art with a capital "A"—the redemption of passed-their-prime-cars for the joy and admiration of future generations. But she felt that an even greater personal victory had been achieved: her success in tamping down, for the sake of "fitting in," her natural inclination to set wrongs right, to bring attention to large and small injustices, and to stir up the hornet nests of a complacent society with observations about things that really mattered—all for the sake of making the world a better place, regardless of raised eyebrows and ruffled feathers.

Mr. Hughes, with abundant flattery, didn't disappoint, although it seemed to her that he praised more highly her *choice* of subject than *how* she wrote about it. He spoke profusely of the glory she had brought to the school and told her in confidence that the runner-up for "best in show" was Gordon Rasmussen, the school's star quarterback, who wrote a rather rambling piece about the joys of winning in any field of endeavor, particularly if a trophy, a lasting symbol of accomplishment that one could treasure for life, was given—particularly if the achievement brought praise to one's school. This last comment quite naturally led into the very subject Mr. Hughes had called the meeting for, and he, with little preamble, bluntly stated that since the school could not afford a trophy this year because of the failed referendum, Sylvia would be expected to pay for it. What's more, he added without hesitation, there was the expectation that the trophy would be kept in the display case near the school's entrance until such time that a replacement materialized—probably in the form of a football trophy—probably in no more than two or three years.

Stunned, Sylvia, for the sake of playing along, asked the cost. "A mere two hundred dollars!" Mr. Hughes replied.

"Ahem...Mr. Hughes...don't you see something rather obscene...I mean, strange...um, peculiar... in your asking, since the contest announcement said *a trophy will be given*?" Sylvia said in a quiet, controlled manner.

"Well, think it over, Sylvia. Talk to your parents. I'm sure they would like to see you up there on stage, in front of all the students and faculty, accepting a well-earned, majestic trophy with your name in one-inch letters on it. I'll order it today so it arrives in time for the ceremony. You

can take a couple of weeks to come up with the money. No rush."

In the days before the ceremony, Sylvia busied herself preparing "a few words to say" when she stepped forward to receive her prize, as Mr. Hughes had advised the winners to do. She also picked out the outfit she would wear, and, in a moment of bittersweet mirth, wondered if she should include a bulletproof vest. Time and time again, usually while she stood in the shower or her hands were immersed in dish water, phrases and adjectives that clearly and without ambiguity expressed her feelings about the writing contest and those who conducted it came vividly to mind. And as she wrote them down, this time in her *authentic* writer's voice without self-imposed restrictions or limits, she found herself aching for the Big Day.

The day arrived with assembly hall packed and atmosphere charged. First called were the Certificate winners. As they stepped forward to receive their prized rolled-up pieces of parchment, she wondered if they, too, had been "hit up" to pay for the privilege of having their names engraved upon them. Patiently she listened to their hesitant, somewhat awkward "I'd like to thank the Academy" words of gratitude, barely discernible amongst the squeaks and static of an outdated PA system. Patiently she waited, script in hand, to proclaim her Truth.

When a grinning, pumped-up Mr. Hughes again turned to the audience, this time with the trophy in hand, he called out, "And now for Best in Show, Sylvia de Solariis!" Amid cheers, whistles, feet stomping, and applause, she drew in a deep breath and walked on the stage like a poised "Maid of Orleans" upon a French battlefield. Redemption was at hand.

"Principal Connors, Mr. Hughes, Middletown faculty, and fellow students, I can hardly tell you what an honor it is to stand before you today, having had my composition, 'Cars, Their Owners, and Their Place in Middletown High Schoo1's History' judged 'Best in Show.' *So I won't.* To be praised for writing such an irrelevant piece of—well, you know what—about such an insignificant and inconsequential subject is no honor.

"Nor is it an honor to be given a barbaric symbol of accomplishment like a trophy—a tradition that preceded the giving of money and laurel wreaths at the Olympic Games in ancient, patriarchal Greece; spread throughout time to include sporting events, contests, and occasions of every imaginable kind; and now includes the giving of tiny plastic models to kindergarteners as they 'graduate' to the first grade—objects that will sit on shelves, idealized for a time, then forgotten, and dusted, year after year, probably by someone of the feminine gender.

"No. Receiving subtler forms of recognition from one's mentors and peers is better and enough. A cold statue can never replace a warm pat on the shoulder for a job well done; direct eye contact and an affirmative nod from an appreciative passerby; kindly words acknowledging that one's creation brought a pleasant or meaningful moment into another's life. These are the memories that one carries in her heart throughout the years and into her old age—rewards of *gratitude*, not *glory*. These are the *only things* that Middletown High can confer upon me that I will gratefully receive.

"I will not accept your trophy. Thank you."

A stunned silence spread over the audience as furtive glances were exchanged or eyes were

downcast to hide bewilderment or embarrassment. Mr. Hughes paled as he set the trophy down and lowered his shaken self into a chair. Then, from the front row, a piece of tightly wadded paper, enfolding a Bic Pen, sailed through the air from the front row seat of red-faced runner-up Gordon Rasmussen, accompanied by an impassioned wail of disbelief. "You cry baby! You spoiled brat! You Bernadette Arnold!"

It struck Sylvia on her jean-encased leg and dropped to the floor, where she casually ground it into the surface with her sturdy leather boot. Then, as if leading a gentle white steed bearing the colors of 15th-century France on its flanks, she strode off the stage into a political career that Middletowners would read about in their local newspaper for years to come.

In later years, comfortable in the public's eye and trained in public speaking, Sylvia dabbled in local theater. She eventually won the lead role in George Bernard Shaw's play *Saint Joan*, and when the heroine is asked by her inquisitors if she knew she was in God's grace, Sylvia delivered the cleverly contrived and much-quoted words that saved Joan from immediate execution: "If l am not, may God put me there; and if I am, may God so keep me," with assurance and compelling force.

Old Man River

by April Hoffman

The moment we entered the classroom and saw him, our boisterous behavior turned to stunned silence. Confused and unsure how to proceed, we stopped and stared at the floor. Sensing our discomfort, the new eighth grade English teacher gently invited us in to take our seats.

Middle aged and portly, with a deep voice and warm brown eyes, Taylor Thomas was the first African American teacher hired by the Urbana, Illinois Public Schools. He was also the first African American any of us had personally encountered. Before open housing laws, African Americans lived in a separate section of the city.

In 1955 the term "African American" hadn't entered the lexicon. At that time, to have called Mr. Thomas "Black" would have been hugely insulting. We respectfully referred to him as a "Negro," and saw him as "other" in every way.

Mr. Thomas' formality became apparent when he took roll. Reaching the end of the alphabet, he called, "Simon, Paul." We looked around the room bewildered. None of us knew a Paul Simon. Again Mr. Thomas called, "Simon, Paul." Suddenly, Jeep Simon, the smallest boy in the Junior High, blurted out, "Oh! Here. I mean, I'm here, but my name isn't Paul. No, I mean, it is Paul, but I go by 'Jeep'."

Mr. Thomas' 'mistake' allowed us to release some of our nervous tension. We began laughing. Our new teacher waited politely before saying, "Thank you, Mr. Simon, but in my class, you will go by 'Paul'." Looking startled, Jeep nodded. From then on we never doubted who was in charge. Mr. Thomas' formal dress and courtly manners kept us quiet.

As the semester proceeded, there were days when we almost forgot he was a Negro. This happened to me once. I had begun recounting a family story in which the punch line required Black dialect. When I neared that part of the story, I suddenly realized how awkward it would sound. I foundered, until unsure how to proceed, I simply stopped talking. Mr. Thomas smiled at me, nodding. He knew exactly where my story was headed. After a pause, he graciously thanked me for the story, which, without the ending, made no sense at all.

One day Mr. Thomas offhandedly mentioned his birthday. Once outside the classroom, we began planning his surprise party. A cake was mandatory,

but we decided to pool our money and buy him something substantial, such as apparel.

The next morning, Betsy Lyman told us that her mother had said we couldn't give Mr. Thomas clothes. Mrs. Lyman decreed that bestowing such a lavish gift was inappropriate and insensitive to the other teachers. Outraged, I asked why Betsy's mother had a right to dictate our party plans.

In fact, she had every right. A graduate of an elite Eastern women's college, she had accompanied her husband to the prairie when he joined the University of Illinois faculty. In the 1950s, before women could have careers, they channeled their intellectual energies into public service. Betsy's mother was the first woman on the Urbana school board, where she now served as president. Without her progressive agenda, Taylor Thomas would never have been hired.

We agreed to ignore Mrs. Lyman's edict. That night I called Mr. Thomas' wife to get his shirt size, and the next day, a cadre of us, led by Betsy, walked downtown to purchase his shirt and tie. His birthday finally arrived. When he entered the classroom, we started singing, "Happy Birthday." His face shone with surprise and pleasure. When he tried to begin the class, we yelled "There's more!" Betsy ran out to the hall and brought in the cake. When we gave him our carefully wrapped gift, tears covered his cheeks.

Finally able to compose himself, he said, "Because you have given me this wonderful gift, I will give you one in return." He walked to the middle of the front of the room, and in a beautiful bass voice, sang "Old Man River."

That classroom performance made Mr. Thomas famous. Betsy told her mother about it, and Mrs. Lyman saw Mr. Thomas' vocal talent as a way to introduce him to the Urbana parents. Although teachers never performed in the annual high school talent show, the next week Mr. Thomas did.

When he walked onto the stage, the shocked audience became resoundingly quiet. He sang "Old Man River," followed by a popular song about God, called simply, "He." It was the perfect choice. After this non-threatening performance, the gym reverberated with enthusiastic applause. From that night on, Mr. Thomas performed regularly at both school and city events.

The next fall Mr. Thomas transferred to the high school, where he taught until he retired. His farewell party was a citywide event. The mayor, the School Administration, and School Board joined his ex-students to wish him well.

After graciously thanking everyone, Mr. Thomas said that although he had enjoyed every class he'd taught, one in particular would always remain his favorite. That class was the first one he'd taught in Urbana, at the Junior High. That was our class, the one that had welcomed him so warmly.

Joy of Nature, by Gail McCoy

Chambered Nautilus

by Barbara Carson

Only rarely as when an oyster forms a lustrous sphere
Do the frigid waters seep into the deepest crevice of my brain
And rime the very edges of my heart.
Then I coil my body tightly and command my nails to grow
And join and spiral round me
And I become a Chambered Nautilus.
I juggle buoyancy and ballast within the chambers of my shell.
As artful as any aerial balloonist at his trade.
I catch an ocean river to a tropic coral reef
And cavort among the Mermaid hair and fern.
I dance with harlequin and clown fish.
I whirl about in my logarithmic spiral of a shell
And celebrate this Mardi Gras of life in turquoise hue.
If a predator appears, I feel no fear
For I am safe within my vault of sunset pink
And if another of my species floats within my view
I do not discriminate, I join with it
And if no lover nears yet hormones course within my cells
Then I become hermaphrodite to satisfy my needs.
In this Eden of the sea, I do not need your love or you
And feel no fear that you might die.

Two Boats Set Sail for Ararat

by George Faunce

There were two boats in sight of Ararat which came aground.
Two disparate cultures reaching from the prior world. The first, *Hebraic*, lodged its ark
upon the new-formed isle;
its occupants set loose in frightened pairs into the wild.
The land began to firm above the shrinking sea,
as Noah knelt down hard upon his swollen knees. There he cringed beside
his tilted ship, bowed his head, and wept a grateful prayer.

The second vessel landed safe within the week, catching
on a strand of glinting beach, several miles south of where the ark had been,
when finally the winds that raked their sails began to ease,
and let them land.
The priestess of this second ship made fervent oath, awed and humbled
that her Spirit-God had spared her clan; guiding them to safety on this distant coast.
A second chance, deserved by none—but given them.

Though histories will not tell it so, still *other* ships had launched at thunder's start.
For God had counseled *every* soul to gather life and wood—and *love*,
to build an ark.
Each tribe, each race, each nation will insist that they
are special in the eyes of God; the 'favored ones.'
In their retellings of the past, *their* faiths had been the true,
and all the moral victories won.

But on the day the rains began,
all mankind knew that ***none*** was first; that all
had done their wrongs. Everyone was weak, and starved for grace.
Survival from the Flood would need the hands of many who, at last,
did heed one salient fact:
God would not entrust so great a task…***salvation of the world itself***…
to *just one man*. To just *one* ravaged ark, aslant,
atop the rising pinnacle
of Ararat.

The Broken Doll

by Grethe Brix-J Leer

There was something broken about my birth from the very beginning. Something broken I didn't know anything about until the day when I was four and my mother lifted me up onto the cracked linoleum kitchen counter. Her eyes looking directly into mine, she told me for the first and only time that the man she had married and whom I knew as Far was not my real father. I can still feel my small legs dangling down the side of the dark green painted wood cabinet. Even as young as I was, I intuitively knew this was a significant moment. My only verbal response was that I thought it was strange that Far wasn't my real father, and that was that! She lifted me off the counter. I stood still for a moment, as if to absorb what had just happened. Aware mainly of the varnished wooden floorboards under my feet, I continued my day as if nothing had happened. But something had happened: a monumental shift that I couldn't yet comprehend.

I stayed quiet until I was 11, when one day I casually asked my mother for more details about my biological father. Feelings were rarely if ever expressed directly in our family, and emotions were kept tightly reined in. Like most Danes at the time, she was brought up to shoulder her burdens by herself, and was reluctant to share them or answer me. I couldn't help noticing how she cringed and looked very uncomfortable as I raised my questions. Maybe she had hoped that I'd forgotten all about it, which I never did. There just never was a good time to ask. At this awkward moment, she only told me his name, that he had been a German soldier and was married, and that was it.

Her emotional reticence and inability to tell me more left me with feelings of shame and guilt, as if I'd done something horrible. As a child, I couldn't afford to be angry at my mother. Instead, needing her so much, I took on her brokenness without knowing it and tucked away the forbidden anger and pain in the depths of my soul, where it stayed all my life and was finally named and released at the deepest level in a hospital bed sixty-five years later.

About five years ago, after my mother's death, I was able to obtain documents through the Danish government that helped me fill in my story. It began a year before I was born, in the borderland between Denmark and Germany during the Second World War, where my mother lived a secure upper-middle-class life with her parents in a small town where nothing ever happened. A company of young German soldiers was stationed on non-combat duty in a nearby town, and provided a bit of excitement for the local girls,

including my mother and her sister. They went together to the movies and afterward, going for a walk, became friendly with a group of soldiers. Later, my mother fell in love with one of them and he with her, and nine months later I arrived on this earth as a very inconvenient result of that relationship. Actually, it was a scandal because such things were not supposed to happen to the local mayor's daughter of all people! My mother was sent away to a cloister way up north, where the nuns would take care of things and make arrangements for the newborn infant to be adopted away. My mother could then return to her parents and the town from her "little vacation" as if nothing had happened, and respectability would once more be restored—except, against the strong disapproval of the nuns, she did the unthinkable and decided to keep me. She was called a "dumb girl" and told "you will regret this," and punished by being sent on her way on an unheated train, which had to stop many times because the tracks were minimally repaired after having been blown up. No diapers, no food; I was later told I screamed all the way home. All Mor could do was to hold herself and me together. Even if her parents were surprisingly accepting and loving, her life was forever changed. There was no way she could stay at home, and in a short time she married Far, who at the time was employed as a driver in my grandfather's mill.

A second time she moved north, as far away as she could, to a small rural community, to a farm, and now settled in to being a farmer's wife. Far adopted me, and everything once again looked proper and decent. I think Far might have been in love with Mor. I'm not sure about her feelings. Later, I know there was no love; but she was willing to pay a high price for her indiscretion. He became the only father I knew; and this farm is where I spent my first five years. I learned the smells and textures; I have strong memories of playing outside, in and around the barn, the garden and up the hill, where an old gazebo had held onto the sandy soil for ages, until one day the foundation loosened and the whole thing came crashing down in a jumble of old broken wood and a tremendous cloud of dust. Bedstefar, Far's father who lived with us, was a fundamentalist and firmly believed in God and the Devil. He was convinced that evil forces had something to do with the gazebo suddenly giving way. He wouldn't hear that it had been raining for two days straight and the foundation had weakened. He forgot how the sandy hill was barely held together by the thinnest layer of deceptively green and lush moss. Every night, he kneeled by his bedside and prayed hard to God. One time, I heard him crying in there and didn't understand, I thought only children cried.

One day I was playing in a barely used room inside the house. It was summer, and the airy lightness billowed through the white linen curtains in front of the half-open windows. A faint scent of elderberry flowers wafted through, along with the comforting small clucking of the chickens scraping away in the warm sand for bugs. I was aware of the delicately flowered wall paper almost mirroring the elderberry flowers outside. Everything seemed so very normal, until the moment my world stopped.

I was there alone, playing with a precious porcelain doll, whose eyes could open and close. Two white teeth showed between her lovely red lips, and her hair was real. The doll had been my grandmother's and now belonged to my mother, who had brought this treasure into her first home away as a married woman.

I played with the doll. I dropped it on the wooden floor. It fell out of my hands and broke. Not just two or three big pieces that might have

been glued together again; it broke into hundreds of small pieces, scattered all over the floor. I didn't move. I stood there, frozen in one spot while Mor, alarmed by the sudden noise, came rushing through the door into the room. The look on her face was too stunned for her to say anything. She saw what had happened. I just stood there, waiting—my four-year-old self feeling utterly alone. She didn't punish me. She didn't say anything. She didn't need to. I remember thinking unbecoming and unacceptable feelings such as why had she given this doll to me in the first place. Didn't she know I was too young, that it was too soon for me to play with a delicate rarity like this? But of course I couldn't say anything. I absorbed her anger, sadness, and distorted face. Typically, the incident was never talked about again. I put the broken doll away in a fearful corner of my young mind, the first of several dark experiences to be put in that place. Left with nowhere to go with the anger I didn't know I had, I had to resolve this unforgivable mess by myself. I tried my best to be a good girl, thinking I succeeded sometimes, but most times not. I went on with my childhood, and from the outside it wasn't a bad one at all: closeness to nature, animals, freedom to roam, and many friends. I grew up to become a fairly well-adjusted, reasonably happy adult.

"You're a bit of a perfectionist," the counselor began, "and you're obviously a successful couple"—now also including my husband Norm, whose work I'd mentioned. "Getting cancer was simply not part of your plan, and you're very angry." What she said hit my insides like an earthquake or a flood that bypassed all the intellectual constructs, going right to the bone. The Kleenex box appeared quickly. Norm moved to hold me as I shook uncontrollably, crying from a deep unknown place. Yes; anger, shame, pain, fear, guilt—all the feelings the helpless four-year-old had held in the forgotten secret comer of her soul and body for all those years from the day she broke the doll. And part of her had been the broken doll, and only now recognized her pain, anger, and bewilderment.

The entire episode lasted less than a minute, and as I gathered what was left of me, I began to piece together how my past connected perfectly with my present, and how my anger at and fear of the cancer paralleled the unexpressed emotions from so many years ago, finally opening the possibilities for a deeper, more comprehensive healing.

Today, well again, I can go back to that sunlit and billowing room from my childhood. The scared, stunned little girl is still standing there. She has been waiting for me all this time. I take her by the hand, and together we walk out, into the sunshine.

A Dialogue With My Corporeal Self

by Dan Baker

you and I my recalcitrant other
we've got lesions on our brain
you know this is true, we've seen the pictures
mysterious pale lacunae on the moonscape of our grey matter
the legacy of rogue antibodies
gnawing insatiably on our tender myelin

we'll be sixty five soon
an auspicious touchstone for us sentient beings
one denoting, I'm told, the official opening of the old season
I thought we might mark the occasion by, you know…taking stock..
nothing inappropriately confessional
just a little look-see at where we've been, where we're going

I recall that earlier on you and I
we'd sit gazing out the picture window
watching the endless stream of joggers trot by
we thought them a self-satisfied lot
oblivious to the extraordinary fact
that one leg rose to supplant the other
one foot pushed up as the other fell
and we'd say inanely clever things to ourself
like, mobility is so wasted on the able

It was churlish of me to curse you
when your fondness for physical comedy
would tip us ever so slightly beyond that point
the point from which righting one's self is no longer possible
and we'd tumble, suspended in time, arms flailing
so slowly that damage could be assessed at each point of impact
and the surprise I would feel
when there was no further to fall
and we weren't broken
perhaps just your reminder that progressive means just that

and when those antibodies inveigled their way
through your poorly defended barrier
I never meant to suggest
though it may have fleetingly crossed my mind
that you'd been remiss
or perhaps even unwittingly inclined to relax your vigilance
in the hope that I'd finally get my deserved comeuppance
should you harbor such ill will deep in our marrow and sinew
the fault is surely mine
I've been slow to acknowledge, slower still to make amends
for my shoddy owner upkeep
during those lost years

I know too, that you could have drug us down a dark rathole
a precipitous decline like our friend Hyde has endured
having his gruel spooned out for him
as he looks on in resigned sadness
why that for him and this for us
luck I'd guess…or maybe having health insurance, people who love us
and enough money to fend off panic…
but mostly I think, luck

so my corporeal friend
I propose that we soldier on into the old season
you shoulder yours and I'll mine
we'll swallow the pills it's advised that we swallow
take counsel from those in the business of offering counsel
be kinder to those kind enough to love us
and not whine more than we must about our consignment
to the proud ranks of the lame and the infirm

Chain Saw Misery

by Enid Simon

"CHAIN SAW WIELDING GRANNY TAKES OUT ORCHARD"

BOY! I sure would like to meet the Ace that wrote that headline! I'd give him a piece of my…mind and in a way that he wouldn't soon forget. I DO believe in "Freedom of the Press," but aren't they supposed to check the facts before writing the story? And 'specially the headlines! "Takes out orchard," indeed! Alright, alright, I admit that he got part of it right. I AM a grandmother—six times over, if truth be told, and I've always told the honest-to-God truth—and I have been known to use a saw. That's one of the three useful things my long-ago husband taught me to do, back in the days when we heated our house with wood. I brought that on myself too by opening my big mouth. He'd been cutting up wood for the winter, and I said that if I knew how to operate the chain saw I could maybe help him in my spare time. Of course with one young'un and half of another, I didn't have very many extra minutes on my hands, but Silas gave me one look and said "Cum'on here." At first I had trouble pulling the saw, but like my ma used to say, "don't give up 'til you're licked," so I kept trying and soon had that cutter purring like a tabby cat. My daddy had showed me how to swing an axe, and once I learned how to "muscle up" that saw, Silas decided that I could handle the whole shebang. From then on he would skid a few logs up near the house on nice sunny winter days, and it was my job to turn those logs into fuel and heat and food. There's one born ever' minute, isn't there?

But to say that I sawed down an orchard! That's a plain outright lie! I was just pruning and tidying up, and if some of the trees were sickly and needed taking out, that's what I did, thinking that Jake Moody would thank me in the spring. Well, the first thing I knew, there he was, screaming his fool head off and carrying on like I'd cut the legs off his favorite chair. (The one he sits in for about 26 hours out of every day, watching that humongous TV of his and keeping track of every body that moves for miles around.) Just a couple of weeks before I'd seen Jake in his window and stuck my head in at his door, just to be neighborly like. It's not a thing I do very often, but I was feeling good that day, being as how my daughter and her bunch of noisy, nosy kids had just left for home that morning. They'd been visiting (and freeloading) for the holidays and by my reckoning had outstayed their welcome by about a week and a half. My daughter and I have always rubbed each other's fur the wrong way, ever since at the age of nearly four she told me that I put too much baking powder into my biscuits. Things have been that way ever since.

She telling me what I should and shouldn't do and me doing things just the opposite. I 'spose I should have been a big-hearted mother and forgiven her time and time again, but I had mighty little time for such nonsense, and since she's got a large share of my stubbornness in her, we just barely managed not to kill each other in the years she lived in my house. (By then it was my house, Silas having been overtaken by galloping pneumonia a few years after our second son was born.)

All that's past history, just leading up to my stopping by to say "Howdy" to Jake on a fine winter morning, and to pass comment that his orchard up on the hill was looking in need of some expert attention and did he want me to take a saw up there some afternoon? Well of course he said "Sure, go ahead." Jake was always in favor of someone else doing his work, if it could possibly be so arranged, and he knew that I knew how to prune an apple tree as good as anyone in the area. We'd left it at that, with me kicking myself for opening my big mouth again and volunteering to do something for free for some lazy idiot who on his best days never cared a rap about his trees.

Well, time passed and when I finally remembered what I'd sort of promised to do to Jake's trees, it was getting on to Feb'rary, when the snow usually starts to pile up around here. If I was going to do any cutting, it had better be soon, so one morning when the sun came up clear and bright I tuned up the old saw, hauled it up Jake's hill and started work. Maybe I did get a mite carried away there towards the end, and I'd be the first to own up to it. Specially when I turned around and saw the piles of limbs and trunks I'd left behind me. That, of course, was when Jake got out of his chair and up the hill. But not before he'd phoned the sheriff and asked to have me arrested for "criminal trespass and wanton destruction." Those were his very words! Now I ask you, is that any way to talk about a neighbor who's offered to help you out? Anyway, the deputy wasn't far behind Jake, and he took me away down to the jail, along with the chain saw as evidence. Jake-the-Snake swore out a complaint and I had to telephone my good-for-little lawyer nephew and ask him—nicely, mind you!—to get me out of jail. Which, I'm bound to admit he did, and right promptly, too. But it really burned my britches to be obliged to listen to him lecture me—his own aunt!—about not leaving town and to NOT, under any circumstances, use my saw again or go anywhere near Jake Moody's property. As if I would! If nothing else, my relatives will have to admit that I DO have good common sense, at least most of the time. It sure was hard, though, to not march up to Jake's place and give him what-for. My nephew even went so far as to tell me that I couldn't phone him up and tell him what I thought of his "neighborliness."

So here I sit, reading about myself in the newspaper and wishing that I could at least rip into the idiot that wrote that headline. Oh, PIG MANURE! There's the dagblasted telephone. I don't want to talk to ANYBODY!

Well!!!! Now, that was a total surprise and confoundment! It was Jake Moody on the other end of the line, sounding all sweet and syrupy. He allowed as how he'd been up on the orchard hill again and the damage really wasn't as bad as he'd thought at first. In fact, George Hammond, who he'd taken along as a witness, pointed out that all but one of the trees I'd cut were—IN FACT—diseased and needed to be taken out. So Jake, in light of the true circumstances, said that he would be withdrawing the complaint and would so notify the sheriff and county officials. I have to admit, it was a load off my mind and I said so.

I really didn't want to go to my grave with a jail sentence on my record, a thing with which Jake agreed wholeheartedly.

And then I'll be darned if the old fool didn't go and ask me to dinner with him, down at the Lutheran Church where they were putting on a roast-pork-and-sauerkraut feed the next evening. It took me a time or two to get my mouth in working order again, but you can bet that then I said "Thank you kindly. I'd be honored to go with you." I dearly love kraut with all the trimmings.

The Life of the Party, by Susan Young Hoffman

Approaching Art with a Critical Eye
Landing in an Art Gallery on Your Feet

by Susan Young Hoffman

"The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act."
—Marcel Duchamps, *The Creative Act* (1957)

Art is the presentation of ideas visually. For the casual gallery visitor—or serious art lover—grasping those ideas should be a pleasant and an invigorating challenge.

Recognizing the interdependency between art and the viewer helps the viewer reap art's pleasures and purposes. Awareness of basic art elements and the scope of artistic expression helps the viewer make intelligent interpretations and evaluations. Intuition and personal taste, yes, are involved; but maintaining a mental framework for critically viewing art adds to one's enjoyment.

First Things First

When viewing an unfamiliar piece, **don't come to conclusions immediately**. As I approach an artwork, I do not read the title. I close my eyes, open them, and ask myself, "What is the first thing that I see?" I want simply to notice the subject matter as I understand it to be. After noting certain features that come to my attention first, I look for others that appear to be more subtle.

I am not ready yet to consider the choices the artist made or the "meaning" of the painting, photograph, sculpture, installation, or performance piece—or even how it makes me feel. I may ask myself if the work appears realistic or abstract or alludes to real-life sources. I continue to focus on subject matter, not style. I think about what is happening in front of me in terms of content only.

Back to Basics

An artist's lot is one of a decision-maker. Traditionally, those decisions involve the use of color and value, line, texture, and space. These elements form the rungs of a ladder up which the viewer climbs to reach a personal response to an artwork.

Color and Value. Some colors have authority; others submit gracefully. I ask, "What color do I see first? Is it in the object I saw first? How does that color make me feel?"

Some artists, like Ellsworth Kelley, are considered to have a perfect pitch for color. For him there is no one color red. Following his example, I look for the presence of various shades of the same color in the artwork. If a "black and white" photograph is in front of me, I search for those now infamous shades of grey.

One need not travel to a museum to experience the impact and subtlety of color. When consulting a clothing catalog I must choose from flint, quarry, charcoal, steel heather, wrought iron, fossil, gravel, slate blue, or pewter to make my fashion statement. This background that I bring to the gallery adds dimension to my experiences there.

A pot of paint is the perfect antidote to writer's block; feelings that seem difficult to express in writing can be put in a meaningful way through color on paper. I look for areas of color that seem to get along as well as areas that seem to push against each other. I search for what colors are included and question whether they seem vibrant, joyful, cool, or earthy. I notice the emotional effect of colors that bounce and move and play with the eye.

Value refers to lightness (white-added tints) and darkness (black-added shades). I think about how the artist uses saturated (pure, bold) colors in some areas or diluted (toned) colors for a desired emotional effect. "What does the light reveal?" I ponder. "What secrets are hidden in dark areas?"

Line. Following color, line ranks second in eliciting an emotional response. I scan the piece for lines of nervous energy or for smooth lines suggestive of fatigue or louche behavior. I look for loose lines that appear gestural and fat lines that seem assertive. Lines may suggest movement, anger, peacefulness, or pizzazz. I search for lines that may reveal the artist's attitude toward the subject.

Lines may direct attention somewhere or may create repetitive patterns for emphasis. I notice how my eyes have been directed around an image or sculpture by the artist's use of line. I pay attention to how lines divide the image into foreground and background as in a Japanese woodblock print.

I am aware of perspective, and how, as a viewer, I find myself standing in relation to the subject. I muse, "Has the artist distanced me from the subject? Am I looking down on it, or am I immersed within the activity? Is there something unnatural about the way images are presented? Does such positioning affect my feelings about what I see?"

Texture. Texture adds dimension and presence. The artist's choice of medium often impacts the viewer's sense of texture and awareness of the hand of the artist.

I sense the brushstrokes of the artist at work through the use of thick paint or energetic brushstrokes. Conversely, the smooth surfaces of Renaissance art and today's digital art shroud this awareness of the creator from the viewer. The polished surface of Michelangelo's *Pietà* directly speaks to the realm of things that are sublime; whereas the raw, unfinished edges of his *The Awakening Slave* masterfully reflect upon the struggles of *both* a human subject and the artist.

Contemporary artists frequently use found objects in collages or sculptural works. Their surfaces may be pitted and irregular. Observing this, I question whether the artistic choice of materials purposefully amplifies or detracts from the subject or implied intent. I wonder whether this surface is something I would like to touch—or would be repelled by.

Space and Form. The use of space, too, has an emotional impact. Shapes evolve from their borders with adjacent colors, space, and lines. I reflect, "Is the artwork filled with things, or are there empty spaces? If the spaces are either crowded or open, how do they make me feel? Is there a sense of isolation because of the use of space?"

"Do the shapes suggest natural objects, representative objects, or are they abstract? Is conspiracy or silence implied by dark forms? Do light areas imply well-being? Is there some psychological pull tapping at my subconscious, at my memory?"

Form pertains to weight. Some objects or movements may appear heavy. If a rock appears to be light in a surrealist's painting, I think I am viewing a dream.

Time is a consideration. Walking around a sculpture from one minute to the next changes one's point of view. Seeing Picasso's *Guernica* from one decade to the next may change one's viewpoint. An experimental video or a performance art piece connect both motion *and* time.

Images

The message is in the details. Armed with a knowledge of how the artist is using the elements of art, I now consider what images are present, emphasized, or worth a second look. For example, portrait artists and photographers often furnish their subjects with visual props (*attributes*) to indicate the sitter's employment or prestige.

If there are people in the artwork, I like to consider how they feel and whether they reflect or represent a social group or historical time. I speculate how I would feel in that situation.

The artwork may harbor numbers or text for the viewer to decipher. My own schema filters slogans or media images and puts them into personal context as my "conversation" with the artwork further develops. "Does this remind me of a previous experience, a news event, or a similar artwork that I have seen?" I speculate.

The appearance of a symbol—a vivid picture—alerts me to the possibility of an abstract idea. Snakes and caged birds are obvious, but I may need a guide to lead me through a cultural or temporal divide.

It is time for me to read. I know that I may not share the experience or vocabulary of the artist or the artistic movement represented. I look for a title and text to guide me. This context will help me decide how I evaluate the piece.

Gallery Space

My final assessment of artwork begins with a quick survey of its placement in the gallery. I note whether pieces are grouped chronologically or by theme. I am curious. "Does this piece end or begin the visitor's journey through a show? Is it representative of other pieces being shown? Has the curator set a stage with walls painted in desert tones or barriers between sections, for example? What has the curator implied by the placement of the piece I am considering?"

Purpose of the Artist

It is said of Leonardo da Vinci that he thought clearly because he saw clearly, and he saw clearly because he drew. Others practice their art following other intentions: to analyze, to express emotion, to decorate, to support or condemn social ideas, or to hold on to memories.

Without the artist present, I begin to try to answer "why" questions with the artist's possible

purpose in mind: "Why were the specific colors, lines, or textures used? Why has my focus been directed to certain areas? Why do I feel the way I do about this piece?"

Now I am interpreting this picture based on my observations, personal knowledge, and what I have learned.

Evaluation

It is the time of judgment. I realize that art does not have to be beautiful to be successful. I do not have to want it for my home to say that I like it. But I know that I have taken the time to contemplate what is before me and to make an intelligent, well-informed opinion about it.

My final assessment and appreciation depend on my answers to these questions:

- Is the artist trying to make a point about something? If so, what?
- Would the message have been successfully conveyed without the gallery's accompanying text—or does that matter?
- If I were to enter this piece, where would I physically stand? Has it inspired me in any way to create something similar or to engage in a discussion or cause?
- Are there clues, including the title, about how the artist feels about this subject?
- Was the subject apparent from first observation or do I now think that it stands for something else?

Finally, I ask myself, "How do I feel about the artwork? Has my opinion changed about it since I first saw it? Has it affected my beliefs? Why or why not do I like it?"

This mental journey has been a rewarding experience of discovery and interaction.

Carl Nielsen in the Rain

by Norman Leer

The rain is paper thin, the grayness
of the drum. Eighty students

dead in Norway; compassion
dead in Washington. Today,

the whole world seems to die.
Nielsen's Fifth is on the Danish

radio; it lets me cry. The clarinet
is falling rain, falters as it sings

in broken understated notes
against the drum and military lie.

With his clairvoyant ear, Nielsen
heard the drum before the occupying

boots, the deadly patter of the marching
rats, gnashing their teeth, daring

the clarinet. He also heard the stoic
horizontal farms, huddled in the winter

light, and the mustard yellow fields,
climbing in the summer sky. Landscape

was the seed of thought and art. Both
were more than drums. Inextinguishable.

After the clarinet, the music gathers
itself, swelling with resistance.

For a loud and unreal interlude,
the drum is overcome. But jarring

chords reiterate a world of endless
war. Sensing what would happen,

Nielsen tried heroically to finish
what he could not stop. The battered

farms and fields would never be
the same. But in the music, they survive

by weaving in and out and underneath
the antic drum. If thought and art

are inextinguishable, they are so
only by acknowledging their opposites,

their possible extinction. This knowing
is their triumph. They tell us

how we can last despite the drum,
gladly balancing laughter and dying.

My Coffeehouse

by Dan Baker

I tell myself that I have a restless nature, but it's entirely possible that I'm simply a chronic malcontent. Whatever be the truth of the matter, I usually have an itch to be somewhere other than where I am. As a result, I often find myself in unfamiliar surroundings. My shorthand strategy for taking the measure of someplace new is to find a coffeehouse. Not a Starbucks, but a genuine, independent coffeehouse. I've always believed that strong coffee topped the hierarchy of human needs and a couple of hours in a real coffeehouse usually tells me most of what I wish to know about a place. I suspect that should I someday find my perfect coffeehouse I'll of at last found my true place in the world.

I've had the good fortune to sip my coffee in some pretty terrific places, even had the opportunity to live in a few. In retrospect, all had their pluses and minuses. Growing up on the coast of Maine was as lovely as you might image, but more of a hard scrabble life than might be apparent to the seasonal Bar Harbor visitor. Florida had that big Mouse but seemed awash in serial murderers. Nashville had glorious autumns and troubadours aplenty, but I couldn't hardly walk in those pointy boots. New Orleans introduced me to a host of pleasures, but as Eric Burden so aptly crooned, "been the ruin of many a po' boy and God I know I'm one." Colorado had grand, inspiring vistas, but a person's worth in that lofty world seemed entirely dependent on the amount of Gore-Tex® and Velcro® displayed on their person.

Much of my adult life has been lived in the idyllic Midwestern hamlet of Madison, Wisconsin. Here it's possible for someone of my leanings to pass months without the necessity of speaking to a Republican. The down side to such enclaves, if there be one, is that they give rise to a certain constricted vision that only dawns on a person when they step outside. Most everyone who populates my Madison life is a mirror image of me. We're boomers with the same aesthetic preferences, the same world view. We talk incessantly about weighty matters, although the problems attendant to urine flow seem to have predominated in recent years. Most of us have a practiced command of detached irony as a way of relating, or not relating, to the hopeless world around us. Most of us are convinced that no matter how cynical we become we're just not keeping up. It's a good life.

On my very short list of favorite places is the tiny island community of Washington Island, Wisconsin. It floats in Lake Michigan, a 30-minute ferry

ride from the northern tip of Door County. I first visited the Island almost 30 years ago. My heart took up permanent residence there some years later. Before I could marshal my admittedly underdeveloped powers of reason I was building a small cottage in the woods and joining any group that would have me. Smarty pants friends from my Madison life speculated that there was surely a sound psychological explanation for my infatuation. I had constructed, they counseled, a hopelessly unrealistic and idealized view of all things Island that was certain to disappoint. They may turn out to be right, but so far my choice to affix rose colored glasses has left me much the better for the distorted view.

My very favorite place on Washington Island is the Red Cup Coffeehouse. Life cannot possibly get any sweeter than lazin' away an island afternoon on the Cup porch sippin' a steamin' cup o' joe and chatting it up with whomever happens by. It wasn't always so. In the early years of my island life my one disappointment, the one modest wrinkle in near Island perfection, was my inability to find a real cup of coffee. Oh, there was no shortage of tepid, low octane impostors, and I gratefully drank 'em. But the opening of the Red Cup Coffeehouse gilded my lily. Mike and Annie, bless their entrepreneurial hearts, did it just right. They cut no corners in brewing up as good a cup of Java as ever I've had the pleasure. What's more, they created a truly hospitable, aesthetically striking environment in which we may sip our nectar. Being a great coffeehouse is not solely determined by a good reverse osmosis system, fresh beans, and the application of the correct foot lb. pressure to the espresso. There is an ineffable ambiance to a great coffeehouse that emerges from the amalgam of sounds, scents, people, and surroundings. Such a place makes a person wish to linger, and then linger some more. The Red Cup is awash in ineffable ambiance. I generally linger until embarrassment compels me to leave. When a sufficient time has elapsed to suggest to others that I might have other interests, I return and linger some more. It works out well.

I suspect that being the proprietor of such a place has its down side. People like me come to rely on you. I'm always a bit crestfallen when I round the turn onto Detroit Harbor Road and find the Cup closed. As Spiderman understood, "with great power comes great responsibility," and Mike takes his responsibility seriously. On most days when the Cup is "officially" closed, Mike will come in at seven, make coffee and remain "unofficially" open for a couple of hours. He's concerned that the indolent among us have a proper start to our day. The Red Cup is particularly precious to those of us who drank up our lifetime allotment of intoxicants early on in life and consequently steer clear of the Island's convivial watering holes.

Should you find your way to the Red Cup, let me proffer some advice and a bit of caution. When lovely Annie pours you that first cup, you want to grip it with both hands, allow that robust steam to waft into your nostrils, and take a good look around. You're then faced with a decision. Do you wish to announce yourself available for conversation by sitting down on one of the several "visiting couches," or maybe mosey on out to the porch. The couch is an inviting place to gossip with friends, exchange pleasantries with strangers, or to learn things you didn't know you wished to know. On a recent morning I learned how to rid my cabin of ants, why people were falling off cruise ships, and a sinister conspiracy theory explaining the lake's low water levels. Conversation on the porch will usually afford you a glimpse into the somewhat impenetrable world of "real islanders." Sit there long enough

and you'll see most everyone you're interested in seeing. Stay a while longer and you'll see the rest of us. A Red Cup refill will sit you up ramrod straight in your chair and incline you towards the overuse of multi syllable words. A second refill and you're likely to start flat out lying.

A while after the Cup opened I sat on the porch and listened to a long time Islander muse about the impact of the place on island life. According to this fella, wasn't that long ago that people on the Island always ran a little bit late. More often than not, an Islander rushing to make the ferry would arrive just in time to exchange a shrug with the ferry man moving away across an ever widening stretch of open water. Come April 15th the Post Office parking lot would fill with anxious Islanders right after the postman had closed up and gone home. He lamented that back then, it wasn't unusual for the Island baseball team not to show up at the park until the third inning. He recalled that the notoriously pokey tourist conveyance, The Cherry Train, was the fastest moving vehicle on the Island. My friend conjectured that this was a malaise born of weak coffee. "Go down to the ferry dock now," he told me, "you'll see departing islanders pressed against the rail, teeth grittin', tracking that next ferry from the time it leaves Northport." According to this fella, there was only one conclusion a reasonable person could draw: "This Red Cup java gets you there on time!"

Now I suppose it's possible this fella was just figuring to have some fun with a Madison guy toting a shoulder bag, but I don't know, he sounded pretty sincere to me. Besides, I'm not one to question the transformative potential of a world class cup o' Joe.

Farmer's Delight

by William Ladewig

The old black man picked up the pail of peaches and walked with a slow gait toward the front of the porch attached to his home. It was a shotgun style house, common in this area of the South, and the surrounding landscape was meticulously taken care of, with immaculate grass and shrubs. Mr. Walters was 75 years old and had lived on the property all of his natural life, being born at home and raised as one of 10 children in the five rooms that made up the house. He had raised his own family within its confines and had seen all four girls and three sons graduate from the local college, which had originally adjoined his property.

"Daddy," said the middle-aged woman sitting in the chair on the porch waiting for him. "I'm not here for your peaches. I need to talk to you. The Dean called me into her office. She wanted me to know that they had received some complaints about you walking about the campus, and they claimed that you were looking in the windows where the girls were undressing. They were upset and said that you've got to stop doing that or they'll have to replace you as the night watchman."

He looked at her with amusement and pulled out a peach. He held it out to her and said, "You sure liked peaches when you was a girl. Look at the fuzz on these, best ones we've had for years. Best crop I think I've ever had." As he talked, he took out a jackknife to slice up the peach, plucked out the stone, and dropped it in the pail that he had put off to the side of the porch. He said, "You know, honey, that college got a pretty good deal from me when I traded this here land to them if they'd educate you kids and if they let me stay for the rest of my life on this place. I figured it was the only way I could send you all to college and it worked out real well for all of us. That night watchman job was kinda like frosting on the cake. It ain't very hard work and I kinda of enjoy it. Yeah, I'll admit that I might linger sometimes in front of those windows, but hell, it ain't like they got anything that I ain't seen before. They know I'm there and I know that they know. It's no big deal. I'm not dead and all I can do is look, so what are they complaining about?"

"Daddy, you're awful," she answered. "You know that those girls don't want some old black man watching 'em."

He responded, "Shucks, honey, if they didn't want black men to watch 'em they wouldn't be dressing like they do. They walk around with their underwear showing, which makes you almost want to pinch their little behinds,

and most of them just let their milk jugs hang out like it's time for the farmhand to stop by for milking."

She exclaimed, "Dad, stop that! I can't believe you. You're a grandfather. You can't act like that. The Dean told me that if they get another complaint about you looking at naked women, they are going to fire you. You do what you want, but I'm just telling you. I'm only an Assistant Dean up there and you've been warned. I told them you aren't senile, but you'd do what you wanted to do, so you better be ready to deal with the consequences."

"Oh relax, honey," he said. "I'm not going to make problems for your job or get in trouble myself. This is a beautiful place, now that the college owns it. Heck, it's like a resort. I got the large pond down the road and it's fixed up nice. There's picnic tables and horseshoe pits. Heck, I even have apple and peach trees, and I don't have to take care of them. A man would have to be crazy to lose all that. Now you go back to work and leave your daddy be. I'm going to take my afternoon nap." He reached over and gave her a quick hug and pushed her toward her car.

He watched as the car, one of those little foreign ones, went up the dusty road and back to the college. He then decided to go down to the pond to try a little fishing and to take his pail with him to bring back some fruit for dinner.

He found the pole and the pail, both by the side of the porch, and started down the road towards the pond. As he walked along, he heard a number of voices. Since it was getting around dusk, he suspected some of the kids from the school had come down to drink some beer and have a cookout. As he got closer to the pond, the voices became more distinct and he noticed the shrillness of the laughter. He went off the road to cut through the bushes for the shortcut to his favorite fishing hole. Dragging the fishpole and pail behind him, he burst through the last row of bushes that shielded the road from the lake. He saw before him a bunch of young girls skinny dipping in his pond.

Oh, oh, he said to himself. This is trouble. He knew he had to make the girls aware that he was there, so he banged the pail against the bark of one of the trees and gave a loud "hurrumph." The girls immediately all fled to the deep end of the pond, clutching together and looking up at him as if he were the boogeyman.

One of the young women, a cute redhead, yelled out at him, "We're not coming out until you leave! Get away!"

The old man chuckled to himself as he looked at the bras and panties interspersed among the scanty clothing lying on the ground. Thinking fast, he frowned and grumbled, "I didn't come down here to watch you ladies swim naked or make you get out of the pond naked." Holding the bucket up he said in a loud voice, "I'm here to feed the alligator."

Golden Cathedral, by Ellen Maurer

Trees

by Jean Wilcox

In botany class I learned the scientific classification of trees—life, domain, kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species. Trees to me, however, will always be more simply classified as climbers and non-climbers. As a child and longer into adulthood than was respectable, I loved climbing trees. My older brother Allen dubbed me "The Monkey." My tree climbing days are over, but I still look at trees and wistfully identify them as climbers and non-climbers.

The 40 acres where I grew up in Upstate New York were primarily forest, providing a multitude of trees to climb, and I attempted most. I did, however, have my favorites. There was a cedar right next to the patio that was dense with limbs. I could climb its branches, remain hidden, and observe the goings-on of my family in the backyard. It was here that I saw my father sneak a smoke, saw my sister kiss her boyfriend, and saw my brother "water" the shrubs. Another favorite was a grand old oak. Its branches were wide and provided inviting laps in which to nestle. I spent many hours reading the Little House series and writing in my journal while curled in its branches.

There was one tree, however, that stood in the back yard unclimbed: a challenge, my Mt. McKinley. It was a cottonwood, a tree my mother proclaimed "dirty," but which I saw as majestic. Its branches were perfect for climbing—if I could just get to them. The problem was that the first branch was about seven feet from the ground, and I was about four-and-a-half feet tall. I spent a great deal of time pondering this dilemma.

Late one afternoon as I sat observing my cottonwood, I came up with a solution. In my father's tool room were all the ingredients that I needed: a six-foot two-by-four, a saw, a hammer, and some nails. I sawed the two-by-four into three pieces and carried them along with the hammer and nails to the tree. Realizing that I was still too short to nail the last rung of my homemade ladder, I hauled an orange crate to the tree. When I was finished, I had nailed the three pieces of two-by-four to the trunk of the tree, thus providing the means to its inviting branches.

My homemade ladder was a success, and soon I was in heaven—figuratively and almost literally, as it was a very tall tree. I spent the rest of the afternoon exploring the cottonwood until I heard the dull tones of the cow bell that my mother rang to call us to dinner. Hungry, I scampered down the branches. As I placed my foot on the top rung of my makeshift ladder, I felt it slip. The

two-by-four fell to the ground, lying at the base of the cottonwood. I was stuck in the tree. All I could do was climb back up into the safety of the branches and wait.

Soon enough, my younger brother Dennis was sent out to find me. “Jeannie! Supper!” he called. For some strange reason which to this day I do not understand, I remained mute in the branches of that tree. After a while my father came out calling, “Jeannie!” Still I was silent. Then the whole family was in the back yard frantically looking and calling. I quietly watched this spectacle as if I were in the audience of some absurd play. After about 10 minutes Allen noticed the orange crate at the base of the cottonwood and came over. Looking up, he saw me sitting in the branches and declared, “You really are a monkey.” The rest of the family gathered around, and my mother gave me a look that, now that I am a mother, I recognize as the “I don’t know whether to shake you or hug you” look. As my father helped me down from the tree, I thought I heard him mumble something about “chopping down the darn cottonwood.”

Not much was said about my behavior, and for days after the incident I tried really hard to be good. My mother must have forgiven me because she took my sister and me to New York City for a long weekend. When we got home my father said, ”You might want to check out the back yard.” My first thought was that I had heard right on that fateful day, and he had chopped down the cottonwood. But as I ran outside, I saw my tree in its entire splendor. And I saw more. Making its way up the trunk was a proper ladder, its varnished two-by-fours securely nailed to the tree. And there in the boughs of my beloved tree was the most wonderful tree house that I have ever seen. I quickly scampered up the ladder and through the trap door. I was pleased to discover that once the trap door was lowered no one else could enter. The six-foot square floor was carpeted and poles at each corner held up a shingled roof. A low picket fence enclosed the house, making it safe. A sign written in the hand of my brother Allen was displayed on the fence declaring my treasure “The Monkey House.”

I spent many hours in “The Monkey House.” It was there where I read the entire Nancy Drew series; it was there where I discovered Jane Austen; it was there where I wrote my first poem. But mostly it was there where I lay on my back under a canopy of leaves and dreamed the dreams of who I would become.

God's Sacred Comma

by Donald Tubesing

We remain grateful that after each phrase of our lives,

God continues to insert a comma,

Demanding we recognize that our lives remain incomplete,

Challenging us to author a response to that which comes next,

Forcing us to accept the truth,

That we will receive only one period,

Which will be granted precisely,

At the end of this rambling life sentence.

Reflections on the United Church of Christ's motto
"God is still speaking—do not put a period where God intends a comma."

Resurrection-Revelation-Reburial

by Marv Beatty

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May 10, 700 BCE

The morning sun was beginning to lift the chill of the night as the 50 or so members of a clan of mammoth hunters trekked along the mountain valley in the greenness of spring. They surrounded the young mother who was carrying the remains of her infant son wrapped in a rabbit skin which was covered by another wrap of elk skin. She wept as she walked. Her partner held her arm and spoke softly to her, tears flowing down his face as he did so.

All but the youngest members of the clan carried skin packs on their backs. They kept their eyes on their goal, a modest hill with an overhanging cliff on one side that rose from the sloping valley. A few yards from the cliff a small stream burbled as it flowed down the valley. To their left and right snow-capped mountains created a tunnel for the wind that buffeted them as they walked. A pair of gray, long-legged cranes circled around them and uttered their resonant, rattling cries of alarm.

When they reached the cliff, the group gathered under the sheltering overhang. The eldest member of the clan held up her hand. When everyone was silent, she wiped away tears and spoke.

"Here is where we will leave Jobor, the child we love, to walk in the world of the spirits. The skin of Mother Earth will protect him. The great white sky stabbers that mark Sun's awakening and sleeping will watch over him. It is very hard, but we must have hope. Hope for his safe life with the spirits and hope for his rebirth as we leave him here." She wiped her face with both hands.

Women and men put down their packs and spears and started moving loose rocks aside at the base of the sandstone cliff, then used digging sticks made from elk antlers to loosen the soil between them and scooped it out with an elk shoulder bone. Soon there was a small depression at the base of the rock shelter.

One man left the group carrying his spear and began to stalk a beaver he'd spotted above a dam in the stream that skirted the cliff. When the grave was ready men and women opened their packs to reveal a huge assemblage of exquisitely crafted stone bifaces, spear points, scrapers, and drills. The elder's pack held a large mound of red ocher in a skin pouch tied with a thong and segments of bone that had been worked into foreshafts for spear throwers

by beveling the ends and incising diagonal hash marks in them. As she lifted one of the foreshafts she looked to the cloudless sky, wiped away more tears, and said:

"This goes with Jobor on his journey. It came from my mother, who got it from her mother, who got it from her mother. It is precious to me, but Jobor is my son's son and he will need it on his journey through the world of the spirits." She laid the foreshaft gently beside the open grave.

Members of the clan wiped away tears and began to chant a slow, haunting song. The parents of the infant then stepped to the grave the clan had dug and gently placed their burden into it. The elder sprinkled red ochre over the skin that covered the infant. Then the women and men who had been carrying the clans' treasures—the exquisite and laboriously crafted stone implements essential to their livelihood of hunting mammoths and other mega fauna—placed them reverently side by side on edge on the elk skin that covered the infant's body. Finally, the infant's grandmother, the revered elder of the clan, placed her precious bone shafts across the stone tools, reopened her pouch of red ocher and spread all of the powder it contained over the burial objects. The chanting increased to a crescendo, then faded away as women and men scraped and poured the loose soil over the burial and tugged big rocks over the grave. The elder faced the burial site and spoke once more.

"Jobor, have a safe journey through the spirit world. May Mother Earth protect you. May the gifts we have left with you show you how to make more tools and help you live in the spirit world. And, after Brother Sun has come to warm us and our children many times, may your spirit be revealed once again to enlighten our children's children. Now we must leave you and continue on our journey to the Sky Stabber of Good Stone." She pointed toward the snowcapped mountains to the west as she spoke.

The man who had been stalking beaver in the nearby pond yelled for help because he had speared one and needed help pulling its 200-pound carcass out of the water. When the beaver had been landed, skinned, and the meat divided for transport, the clan turned back the way they had come. The parents of the buried infant looked back at the cliff from time to time and cried as they walked. After a few miles they turned west, crossed the icy water of a small river and camped beside a grove of spruce that broke the never-ending wind. A man brought out the clan's fire carrier from his pack and started a fire from dry moss and spruce boughs. Two of the clan's best flint knappers started flaking pieces off cores of obsidian and chalcedony they had taken from their packs to create replacements for some of the vital tools the clan had given to Jobor. Some clan members speared beaver meat on green spruce boughs and placed it over the fire to cook. Next day, the clan climbed the valley of an east-flowing tributary of the river toward the pass through the snowcapped mountain, and camped again part way down the valley on the other side. The next day they continued to follow Brother Sun westward toward the Sky Stabber of Good Stone.

About 12,700 years later—May 1968 CE

"Hey Ben, take a look at what I found!" Cal Sarver held a red-coated stone object out to his co-worker as soon as Ben got out of the dump truck. "Sure ain't never seen nothin' like this before." Both men ignored the resonant, rattling cries of alarm from a pair of sandhill cranes that had risen from the nearby wet grassland along the creek and circled them, protesting the intrusion.

Ben Hargis stared at the red-coated stone spear point. Then he ran his finger along one of the edges and swore. "Damn, this thing is sharper'n a razor." A trickle of blood grew on his finger as he spoke. "Where'd you get it?"

Cal walked around the end loader to the place where he'd removed the last load of sandstone for the drain trench at the school in Wilsall, Montana. "Right about here." He pointed to the edge of the trench he'd dug with the loader and pulled out another red-coated stone. "Reckon we oughta move over to the other end of the cliff for the rest of what we need. An' then we better call Doc Anzick and tell him what we found. After all, it's his land."

The men moved their excavation activities to the opposite end of the cliff and kept working until they had dug out and hauled away enough loose sandstone to fill the trench beside the school in the village. That evening they called Dr. Mel Anzick to tell him what they'd discovered, and then returned to the cliff with their wives and some buckets to hold the stone tools they'd found. When the couples drove down the two-track trail from the highway toward the cliff, a pair of sandhill cranes rose into the air and protested their entry with loud, rattling cries of alarm. The couples ignored them and proceeded to dig out the red-coated stone implements and put them into the buckets they'd brought along.

"Would ya take a look at this? I'll be damned if it's not part of a skeleton!" Ben Hargis held a small, red-coated bone gingerly in his left hand and stared in disbelief.

His three companions gazed at his find in silence until finally Mrs. Hargis said, "Ben an' Cal, maybe you guys better let us dig. We'll go a little slower and look a little harder. This place is really somethin' special."

Ben placed the bone fragment carefully into an empty bucket and looked relieved to have it out of his hand. Then Mrs. Hargis and Mrs. Sarver began to probe the soil gently and push it aside as they did so. Mrs. Hargis' fingers touched something hard, and she slowly brushed the soil away to expose the skull of an infant, coated in red powder.

"Oh my goodness, just look at this," she said as she grasped it gently and lifted it from its resting place. After a minute she put the skull in the bucket beside the other piece of bone and crossed herself twice.

As soon as they were certain they'd recovered all of the red-tinted objects beside the cliff the Hargises and Sarvers drove south toward Livingston to show the Anzicks what they'd found. The pair of cranes escorted them back to the road, calling loudly all the way. When the couples arrived at the Anzick home they were greeted by Dr. and Mrs. Anzick and two-year-old Sarah. As the Anzicks were examining the stone tools and the skeleton, Sarah put her tiny hand on it.

Her mother admonished her, "Don't touch it, Sarah. It's precious." Sarah pulled her hand back and stared at their new possessions silently.

41 years later—May 2009 CE

Sarah Anzick laid down the scientific journal she had been reading, then took down the basket with the small bones from a shelf by her desk. When one of her colleagues in the laboratory walked by, Sarah said, "I just read an article by Dr. Wilkerslev, and it's time to write the email I've waited so long to send. I think they've got the tools to do it now." She put the basket back on the shelf, sat down at her computer, and began to type. As she did so her thoughts went back to her girlhood in southern Montana and

those special stone tools and bones that had always haunted her. She was tired of the burden of the controversy that surrounded them.

Her message was read by Eske Wilkerslev in Copenhagen, Denmark. He leaped up as soon as he read it and called to his lab colleagues to join him. "Look who is offering us the world's prime Clovis skeleton for DNA analysis and radiocarbon dating! It's Dr. Sarah Anzick from the States, the owner. And she's a genomics specialist. This is really extraordinary!"

4 years later—May 2013 CE

Sarah Anzick walked across the campus of Montana State University to Montana Hall and glanced over at the large white M on the mountainside behind the city. Then she hurried inside to the office of Professor Shane Dodge, whom she hoped to enlist in her quest.

"Professor Dodge, I'm Sarah Anzick, and I really need your help." She pushed back her blonde hair and smiled as she spoke. Her last name immediately caught Professor Dodge's attention. It was infamous among Native American people for the ancient burial found on the family property.

Then she placed a sheet of data on his desk. "Here are the results of DNA analyses and carbon dating of the skeleton I own and for another early skeleton analyzed by the same team of scientists in Copenhagen. They have tremendous implications for the Crows and all of the other Native American tribes. I've tried to enlist their support for years but they're so angry at us they won't listen to me. Since you're a member of the Crow tribe, I think maybe they 'll listen to you. Would you please help me?" His visitor paused to catch her breath.

Shane Dodge stared at the numbers on the paper but could not comprehend why his visitor was so excited. "Help me understand what these numbers mean. I'm no genetics expert." He pulled up a chair for her.

Dr. Anzick pointed to the first column of numbers. "These are for the boy that was dug up on our ranch. They show how many times a segment of genome is repeated in the individual being tested. They don't mean much unless they can be compared with test data for other individuals. And that's what is shown here." She pointed to the second column of numbers. "These are the repeat numbers from the skeleton of a boy buried near Lake Baikal, Siberia, that Dr. Eske Wilkerslev also analyzed. That boy was about 10,000 years older than the boy found on our ranch but the DNA sequences are a close match. It's absolutely amazing!" Dr. Anziick stopped for breath, and looked at Dodge hopefully.

"And there's more!" She pointed to numbers farther down on the sheet. "These data show that the relatives of the boy buried on our ranch were the ancestors of about 80% of Native Americans who live in North and Central America and who have had their DNA tested. This information will electrify the Paleo American archaeological community when it's published and will make a lot of news. I really want leaders of the tribes in this area to hear about it before it's published, just as you have now."

Sarah smiled at Dodge again and asked, "Could you possibly arrange to get these data to the leaders of the Crows, the Blackfeet, and maybe the Koutenai-Salish before this study gets published in the scientific journal, *Nature*? I can arrange for Dr. Wilkerslev, who led the study, to come here from Copenhagen to join you when you meet the tribal leaders to explain what an absolutely huge find this is, and to discuss reburial."

Dodge caught his breath. What he'd just learned made him feel like he'd been hit by a Mack truck. His mind raced back to stories he'd heard on the reservation when he was young about the ancient burial found on the Anzick ranch, and how deeply offended members of his tribe were that the remains were not immediately reburied. Then he remembered the prolonged and bitter court controversy over the disposition of the Native American skeleton called Kennewick man. Those memories made him shudder. This would be a tough sell. He wanted to say No.

But he glanced at his visitor and realized that Mack trucks, figuratively driven by enraged Indians, and hot-tempered and vitriolic archaeologists, had been buffeting her for decades. Dodge realized that reburial would be healing for both Native Americans and Euro Americans and changed his answer to her plea for help from No to Yes.

One year later—June 2014 CE

Rain, driven by wind, slanted across the Shields River valley from time to time as pickups, vans, and a truck with a broadcast antenna made their way down the muddy two-track from the highway to the cliff beside Flathead Creek. A pair of sandhill cranes circled and sent out their resonant, rattling cries of alarm as their territory was invaded by a small armada of people and vehicles. Completely outnumbered by the intruders, they finally landed and stalked around the perimeter of the assemblage, still calling loudly.

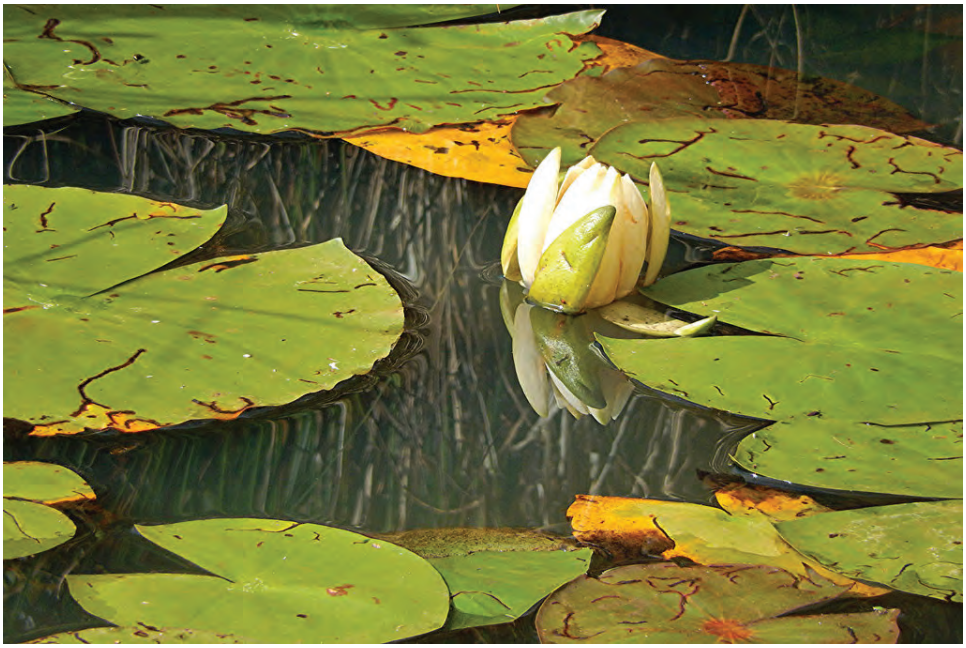
It was a mixed group of people who got out of the vehicles and made their way up the muddy slope to the open gravesite. Two of the elderly Native Americans wore blankets across their backs. Others wore Levis and large leather hats. When a blonde woman wearing a red dress jacket and a long black skirt and carrying a black metal box joined the group everyone fell silent.

Then one of the tribal elders lit some sagebrush leaves and offered a prayer as he turned in each of the four cardinal directions. The aroma of the sage permeated the air as he did so, but was blown down the valley by the wind. The elders of the other tribes spoke eloquently about how fitting it was to be reburying a person of their own ancestry who died long ago, even though the remains could be re-excavated after 50 years for new scientific analyses.

When the elders had finished speaking Sarah Anzick lifted the metal box she was carrying so all could see it clearly and said, "Child of long, long ago, in your time with us you have revealed much about yourself and your people. Now it is time for you to go back to Mother Earth to walk in the spirit world again. Thank you for what you've revealed to us, and have a safe journey." She stepped forward and placed her burden gently in the grave. She then sprinkled a handful of soil over it and moved back so that everyone else who cared to could do the same. She felt as if a huge load had been lifted from her back.

Armand Minthom, an elder of the Umatilla tribe in Oregon, stepped forward and presented Sarah with a blanket similar to the one he was wearing. As he placed it over her shoulders Sarah felt both relieved of a burden and warmed by Mr. Minthorn's gesture of friendship as they watched the sharing in the reburial continue until the grave was completely filled.

As the assemblage dispersed and vehicles drove back toward the highway, the cranes, that had a pair of young in the wetland nearby, walked alongside the departing intruders, still calling loudly.



Water Lily Reflecting, by Shelley Selle

In Praise of Incorrigible Gardens

by Shelley Selle

If you see my garden,
you'll see a garden that's
out
of
control.

The dandelions are sprouting,
the Charlie's creeping fast,
and the squirrels and the rabbits
dig and nip as I walk past.

The beetles and the aphids
crunch and munch upon my plants;
don't even get me started
on the mildew and the ants.

The flowers that I want to spread
just wither on the vine,
and those I'd like to keep contained
refuse to stay in line.

I don't know how my neighbors
clip and snip to such perfection,
but if I dwell too much on it,
I'll wallow in dejection.

My garden with its quirks and faults
gives beauty every day;
its serendipity and life
sends all my blues away.

It's ungainly and uncultured,
undisciplined and crude,
but I'll dig again tomorrow,
my heart filled with gratitude.

If you see my garden,
you'll see a garden that's
out
of
this
world.

To Thine Own Self Be True

by April Hoffman

In the blazing Mexican sun, a short, sturdy zinnia grew in the dry dust. Although she liked her orange color, she despised her pincushion shape and her stiff petals, which overlapped each other like armor. She grew close to the ground in a bed with dozens of other zinnias. Her squat body made movement difficult. She felt common and ugly.

Although her pungent odor attracted swarms of bees, this zinnia longed for a loftier environment. She wanted a slender, trumpet shaped body, a firm white throat and the ability to sway in the breeze, waving delicate tendrils. She wanted to be a blue morning glory.

One morning as she sat itching and twitching in the flower bed, the peasant woman who watered the zinnias noticed her unhappiness. "What is it you long for?" she asked. "I long to get out of this round little body and to leave this garden patch. I want to be a blue morning glory," the zinnia replied. "Blue?" remarked the woman, "You look nice in orange." "I know," said the zinnia, "but I long for the tranquility of blue."

The peasant woman called to the Flower Fairy, who, with a wave of pollen dust, transformed the zinnia into a stately blue morning glory. Suddenly, the zinnia felt herself waving gracefully above a lush green meadow. "Wow!" she started to exclaim, before realizing that such childish exuberance didn't fit her new persona. "What I meant was," she murmured demurely, "how delightful to have this slender body and to dance in the sky."

When she saw two butterflies floating toward her she could barely contain her joy. "How grand to have these beautiful creatures as friends, instead of incessantly buzzing bees," she thought. But the butterflies floated by her without a greeting. She realized that they hadn't noticed her because she'd lost her spicy odor. Without a scent, birds and insects might ignore her. "How lonely I might feel up here," she thought.

Next, she noticed that her fragile petals bruised easily. They even tore when the wind turned brisk. Still, she felt great happiness that now she could look down on others. She looked forward to enjoying the evening stars twinkle close about her.

But, as twilight deepened, she felt herself folding inward. "Wait!" she cried, "I need to stay open so that I can experience night from up here!" But her petals closed and she could say no more. She felt herself falling from the vine,

and knew that in the morning, another fresh and dewy morning glory would replace her.

The Flower Fairy had watched all this. She sprinkled more pollen dust, and the next morning, the zinnia found herself back in her flower bed amid her many friends. A multitude of chubby bees buzzed over to welcome her back. Soon the peasant woman lumbered over and peered down. "Well," she inquired, "how was it? Was feeling slender and majestic all that you had hoped for?" "It was an experience," answered the zinnia. "It taught me that life as a zinnia has its advantages, too. I may be short and stiff, but I'm a survivor, and I now know how much I need my friends. From now on, when I see morning glories waving in the breeze, I will admire them, but I will remember that zinnias have wonderful lives, too."

Support Group

by Judith Heilizer

"Sorry For Your Loss" is the
magnetized mantra
which holds this group together
our own, presumably tuneforking
with the losses of others,
promising easing the grief of it by co-owning

don't you know it is not "my" loss
that I did not participate in the losing,
that it was foisted upon me against my will or
participation and least of all agreement
in fact, against my flailing pointless opposition

after my turn my half humble smile
accepting thank you's
for my willingness
to slice my soul open for inspection

the pale skeleton of my grieving
picked bare of any semblance of flesh or sinew
or feeling, for that matter,
the anatomy lesson of what is
absence
offered up for dissection
under the microscope

it is named "sharing your journey"

when I fall silent
a flat dark shadow slides over the gurney
the sheet of mercy
when all else has failed to be
of meaning or understanding

after the polite stillness
and endless cycle of buzzwords
meant to empathize, soothe,
help me to heal,
if I can grow to
"make space," "accept," "welcome," "embrace"
and finally "let go"

that is just the point
I need to breathe life into my grief
hold it, keep it close, just as it is
in the deep spiney darkness inside of me
without my meddling
with its raucous rawness

for it and I belong together
and neither of us can be
without the other now…

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

by April Hoffman

An interesting feature of aging is that total strangers know you're old before you do. When my husband, John, and I reached our forties, new acquaintances smiled indulgently and asked if we had grandchildren. Later, we'd ask each other, "How did they know we're old enough to have grandchildren?" Then we'd peer into the mirror and say, "You don't look any older than when we met."

In our fifties we audited a university art class. A few weeks into the course a young classmate winked at us, saying, "I know where you two had dinner Friday night." Puzzled, we said, "Where?" "At the Elk's Club," she said.

When we told her we'd never been to the Elk's Club, she looked deflated. "But my roommate works there, and when she got home Friday night, she said, 'The cutest old couple came for dinner tonight.' So I told her, 'I know them! That was John and April!' "

Until recently, when engaged in conversation with people I assumed were peers, I noticed micro-expressions of astonishment cross their faces when I'd say, "People our age." I realized that I was old enough to have babysat for them. Strangely though, I have no trouble seeing signs of aging in our friends. Pondering this I began asking each of them, "Do you think you look younger than your peers?" Every one answered, "Yes."

Then there was the time I accompanied my aged mother to have cataract surgery. She confided that she feared the doctor would cut her eyelashes short. Amused by her vanity, I assured her that even if he did, no one would notice. Now that I'm old, my contempt has returned to haunt me. Lamenting that I can no longer see to apply eyeliner, I told our doctor-son that I wanted permanent liner tattooed on my eyelids. He said," Well, Mom, if it works you'll have prettier eyes, and if it doesn't you'll be a very rich old blind lady." I knew what he was thinking: "At your age no one notices anyway."

I know he's right from personal experience. Envying exotically colored coiffures, I had my hair dyed a kooky color. Exiting the salon, I wondered how people would react to seeing an old lady with turquoise hair. I needn't have worried. Not one person glanced my way. I have become invisible.

Our daughter understands my desire to look younger. Having worked as a make-up artist in New York City, she recently applied my make-up, telling

me what to buy and where to buy it. Armed with her detailed list, I found the make-up emporium she'd recommended.

As I entered the store, two ingénues greeted me with perky smiles. "How can we help you?" they asked. "I'm here to buy some serious make-up," I answered. Beaming, they said, "What do you want this make-up to do for you?" "I want it to make me look 20 years younger," I said.

Their heads jerked around in unison to stare at each other. "Just kidding," I said, laughing at their stricken expressions. After recovering, they helped me choose various bottles of ointments.

When John arrived to get me, I held up my small beribboned bag for his inspection. I said, "Guess how much this all cost." Studying the tiny package, he said, "Twelve dollars?" "Two hundred and sixty six," I said. "Huh," he commented, carefully noncommittal. His true feelings were revealed when we parked at a nearby cafe for lunch. After I'd parked, he said, "Don't forget to lock the car."

Has that expensive make-up made me look any younger? No, but John assures me that cosmetic companies sell dreams, and considering how big my dream was, that price was reasonable. Luckily, as we've aged, our eyesight has blurred. When we look in the mirror now, we both say, "You're as gorgeous as ever," and we can see that it's true.

Red Ants

by Bruce Meredith

I wiggled my fingers. Then I took the gold swivel-necked lamp next to my bed and aimed it at the wall. I told my friends to get ready. The bunnies were my favorite. Their ears were easy to make and they played funny tricks on each other. I didn't like the squirrels as much. Their tails were long and hard to make look right. Sometimes the squirrels got angry and chased each other into the dark places on the wall. One night a squirrel chased a boy and got close to him.

I closed my fingers and tilted my hand upward. My dad was a pilot. He had showed me how I could make my arm into an airplane wing. When I tilted my hand, my arm shot up and down. He said pilots did the same thing. I aimed my hand and the kid shot up in the air. The squirrel climbed a tree, but the boy flew high above him. He was safe. I was glad my dad taught me how to make things fly.

My animal plays began around midnight. I knew it was midnight because, when my mom came into the room to ask why I wasn't sleeping, she'd say the time. Sometimes my mom wanted to see my plays. I only let her see the ones with the bunnies. My dad never watched my plays. My mom said he needed his sleep.

The plays started after the army told my dad he had to fight again. We moved from St. Louis to Texas. It was hot and there were no big trees. Then we moved to a desert in California. It was even hotter and there were no trees at all. I knew my dad was important in California because everyone saluted him and said "Yes, Sir." In St. Louis, everyone just called him Herb.

My dad told me that before I was born, he flew planes to help the people in China fight Japan. Now he'd have to fight the Chinese in Korea. They were Communists and might bomb us.

My dad got stricter at the second army base. We had inspections and had to make sure the house was clean and our clothes were pressed. My mom and dad had parties with other pilots, but I had to stay in my room. I'd tried to listen in. They talked a lot about the war and who had died. I didn't understand much.

I liked it when my dad took me to the pilots' area and showed me the weather maps and told me where the pilots shouldn't fly. One day he wore his pistol. My dad had to go to a hospital for a week. The doctors said he had

ulcers. After that my mom cooked our eggs a different way.

I didn't like the desert. It was very hot and there wasn't much to do. There were only a few funny looking bunnies and no squirrels. My parents sent me to kindergarten. I didn't like school. All we did was color and cut out paper animals. I couldn't stay within the lines when I colored and my animals had cuts by their ears and tails. The teacher didn't like the animals to talk to each other in class.

What I hated most about the desert were the red ants. They were everywhere, sometimes in our house. They would bite us. My friend John had a big magnifying glass and showed me how to aim the glass and fry the red ants. Our game was to see how high we could hold the magnifying glass and still get the ants to pop open. It took just a few seconds if you got them right.

Sometimes John and I just grazed the ants to see what would happen. The ants looked confused and didn't know where to run. After we smoked an ant, other ants would come and carry away what was left of the body. At first I felt sorry for the ants. John said I shouldn't feel bad because the ants bit people.

One day a small lizard ran by John's foot. John took out a brown and gold cub scout knife that his brother gave him. John reached down and cut off the lizard's tail. The tail wiggled a lot. It acted like it wanted to find its body. The rest of the lizard pushed itself under a small bush. John said his brother told him that lizards would grow another tail. I didn't believe his brother. I didn't see how a lizard could live after it lost so much of his body.

I didn't like what John did to the lizard, but I acted like it didn't bother me. I didn't want to be called a sissy. One day John stepped on a lizard. He handed me the cub scout knife and told me to cut off its tail. I didn't want to but John was my only friend so I did. Some blood squirted into the sand.

I told my parents about the lizards and the red ants. They said I shouldn't have cut the lizard's tail. I never did it again. After I told my parents what we did, John didn't play with me as much. One day my mother and dad told me my dad was leaving the army and we could go back to St. Louis. My mom and I were happy, but my dad said he'd miss flying.

I liked St. Louis better. It wasn't so hot and there were lots of trees. And there weren't any red ants. Just black ones. They were fun to watch. They liked each other and didn't bite. We didn't have many inspections. But my dad polished his shoes so bright that I could see my face in them, just like when we were in the desert.

I got to spend more time with my dad. He'd played baseball in high school and tried to teach me to catch but my glove kept falling off. My dad bought me a book with pictures of clouds. When we played outside my dad would point to the sky and tell me their names and which were the good ones and which ones made it storm. Some nights I still thought about the desert and the red ants. I would put on a play with my animal friends. After my play was over, I would fall asleep.

One night my mother told me to stop putting on my plays. She said I was a big boy now. But I liked my plays. They were more fun than anything else I did. One hot day we got into my dad's car and my mother took me to a woman doctor who smiled a lot. After my mother left the room, the doctor asked me about my plays. I told her that I liked my plays because I could

make the animals do anything I wanted. The animals were happy and no one got hurt.

I didn't see the nice lady again. After our meeting, my mother didn't come into my room to watch my plays. Some nights I could hear her outside my door. On those nights, my animals whispered to each other. One night the animals told me they didn't want to be in my plays anymore. They wanted to play in the grass and jump through the trees like the other animals. I got mad at them, but I told them they could go if they wanted. Even though I was mad at them, I never did mean things to my animals like I did to the red ants.

We bought a nice house near a school. My mom said I wouldn't have to color all day. I went to the school and a nun gave me some tests. After the nun looked at my tests, she said I couldn't go to first grade. The nun told my mom that I hadn't learned anything in the desert.

Return to Israel

by Lorna Kniaz

The ocean ends. I return,
carrying with me 2,000 years of generations
who prayed for winter rains and spring harvests,
for a land they never saw.
But remembered for me.

The elements of those ancestors have long ago
been transformed into olive trees and poppies
and the dust that settles on my shoes.

I see my family's features,
my body's shape, and curly hair
on children, who could have been my children,
passing me on the streets of Jerusalem,
translated into other colors.

I hear a language based on prayers
I heard since childhood. I didn't understand that
they were telling my history.

Words which were spoken
before the Romans climbed the heights
and scattered us among the nations.

My passport says USA;
but I return to Israel
carrying the genes and memories
of generations, who remembered
Israel in their prayers,
for me.

Soul, in Indiana limestone, by Donald Tubesing

Contributors

Dan Baker and his wife spend as much time as possible on Washington Island. He occasionally tells his wife that he intends to write a sentimental, comedic memoir with a hint of pathos. Beyond his questionable aptitude, laziness, and massive disorganization, she envisions few impediments to his literary success. "I'm a lucky guy."

Marv Beatty is happy for the opportunity to share some insights about the lives and customs of the first humans to live in what is now North America. He's also pleased to share a bit about the controversy over their origins and its resolution.

Grethe Brix-J. Leer has exhibited her visual art in her native Denmark and America. She has been writing for most of her life. Grethe taught memoir writing and art to older adults in Chicago for several years, and has coordinated a women's writing class for PLATO for five years.

Barbara Carson dreamed of going to college and being a writer, but the realities of life dictated a different path. She became a nurse, wife, and mother. Her life has taken a beautiful and rewarding path and writing has been an enjoyable avocation.

George Faunce and his wife Maggie moved to the Madison area from New Jersey six years ago. This winter they did a daily temperature comparison between Madison and Moscow. On the whole, Moscow proved warmer.

Janet Hays discovered, going through decades of papers and old notebooks, that she had been writing and collecting poetry for years. Taking Lewis Bosworth's poetry class just widened the door for her. She has had a lifelong interest in all of the arts, especially music (jazz, blues, opera), painting, and indie movies.

Judith Heilizer is a clinical psychologist in private practice, a parent to many children, and grandparent to even more. She began to write as a young child and has continued to find delight in reading as well as in writing poetry and observational essays on life and its many hues and shapes.

April Hoffman—Writing book reviews as a children's librarian trained April to write concisely. She thanks her husband, John, for his encouragement, her children and grandchildren for reading her compositions, and her writing teachers for helping her pen stories acceptable for publication in *The Agora*.

Susan Young Hoffman, a retired reading specialist, spends time promoting literacy, offering tours at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, and gardening. Pretending to be an artist, she uses her camera for inspiration. Her work in acrylic and oil paints ranges from abstract art to realistic portraits.

Lorna Kniaz was motivated by the women's movement to return to school and earn a law degree from UW-Madison. Poetry runs in the family—her mother was a poet—and words have always been important to her. "Sometimes they run away and will not stay in line, but I always enjoy the ride."

William Ladewig is a former gandy dancer, Division one football player, Army captain, attorney, publisher, author, and Jade ring winner. He is married to the author and scholar, Paula Dail. They live in Wyoming Valley with their dog, Tennesee Ernie Beagle.

Bruce Meredith is a St. Louis native and a graduate of Northwestern University and the UW-Madison Law School. He spent much of his legal career as counsel for the Wisconsin Education Association Council, retiring in 2007. Bruce is a member of a local veterans' writing group, the Deadly Writers Patrol.

Norman Leer is professor emeritus of English at Roosevelt University, Chicago, and has published three books of poetry, a critical study of Ford Madox Ford, and articles and poems published in several magazines. In 1990 he received the Illinois Significant Poet's Award from State Poet Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks.

Ellen Maurer retired from the University of Wisconsin–Madison as senior university relations specialist in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. She leads PLATO's morning Reminiscence Writing Group. She and her husband Ken Pippert enjoy a little lake cottage in northern Wisconsin where they hike, bike, canoe, and kayak.

Gail McCoy creates watercolors and collages. Cranes are a symbol of hope and healing and are often the subject of her artwork. Through her artistic expression, healing emotion reaches out to you. It is her hope that this collage invites you to sense the tranquility and mystery nature brings as it heals.

Shelley Selle is a former librarian whose interest in writing poetry again was sparked by Lewis Bosworth's PLATO class. Besides creating gardens, she enjoys long walks with her husband Norman in natural settings, taking photos along the way. "There is beauty everywhere you look."

Enid Simon has lived her entire life in Wisconsin. She worked in the Wisconsin State Classified Service and at the Engineering Library (now Kurt F. Wendt Library) until her retirement in 1998. During those years she earned a bachelor's degree in history and psychology, and a master's in library science, both from the UW.

Joanne Storlie writes for self enjoyment and self expression and is grateful to PLATO for the opportunity to share her work. She delights in the artistic endeavors of other PLATO members and believes the *The Agora* fulfills in a unique way PLATO's mission to provide intellectual, cultural, and social enrichment for its members.

Donald Tubesing is a lifelong educator who has authored books on stress management, founded two award-winning publishing companies, and served as president of the Independent Book Publishers Association. He publishes a book series, *Wisdom from the Elders*, creates life-sized marble sculptures, and conducts courses on book publishing and stone sculpting.

Jean Wilcox retired and moved with her husband to Madison after raising three children and counseling students at UW-Eau Claire. At age seven her Grandma Zoe gave her a journal, and since then she has filled hundreds of journals with random memories, stories, and poems.

Ordering Information

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Donald Tubesing

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